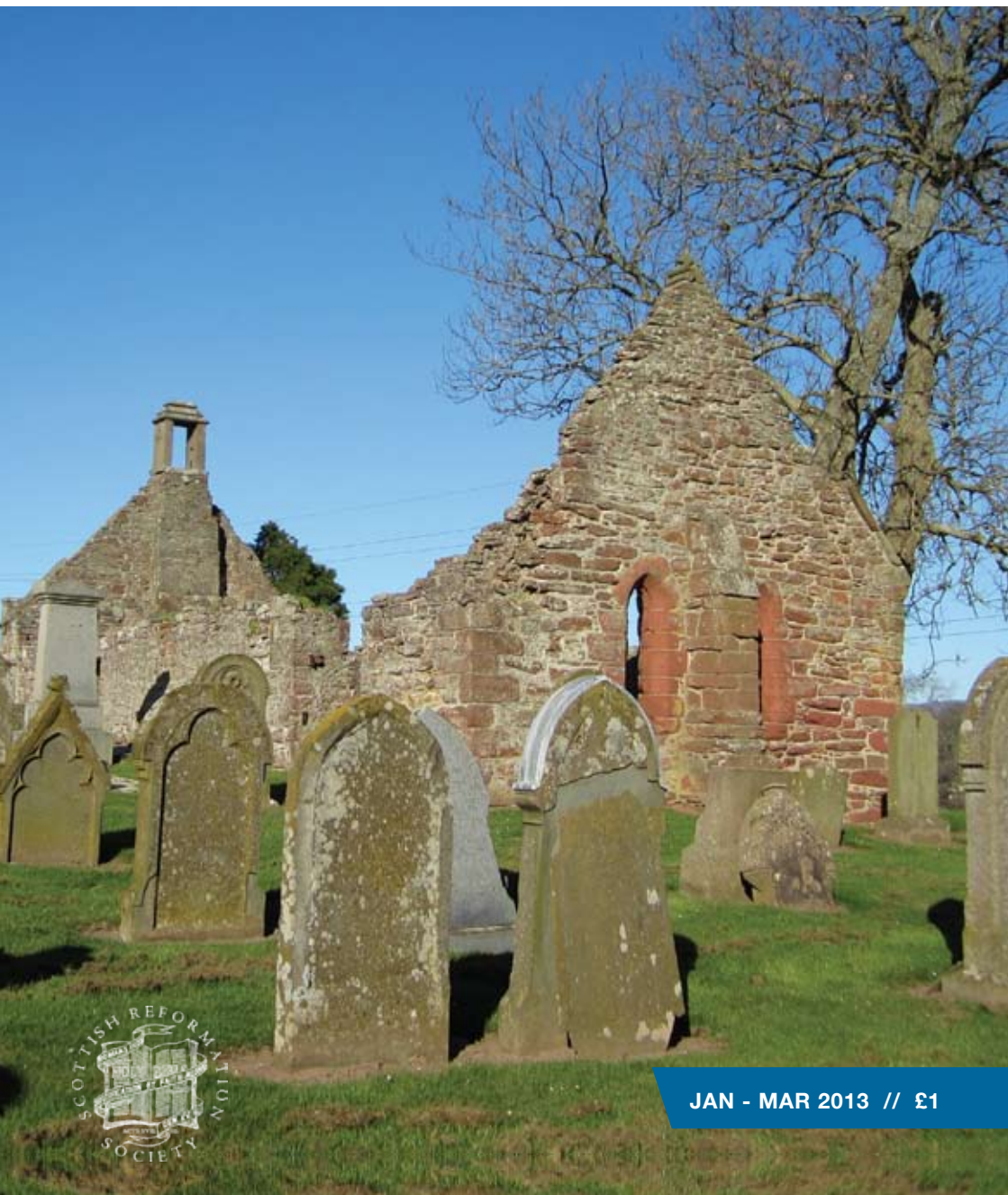


# THE BULWARK

MAGAZINE OF THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION SOCIETY



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## OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

(a) To propagate the evangelical Protestant faith and those principles held in common by those Churches and organisations adhering to the Reformation;

(b) To diffuse sound and Scriptural teaching on the distinctive tenets of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism;

(c) To carry on missionary work among adherents of the latter faith with a view to winning them to the doctrines of grace and to the fellowship of the true Gospel;

(d) To produce and distribute evangelistic, religious and other literature in connection with the promotion of the Protestant religion;

(e) To promote the associating together of men and women, and especially young people, for systematic Bible Study and holding of meetings for the above specified purposes.

# JOHN ERSKINE OF DUN (1509-1591)

Charlie Webster

Mr Webster is an elder in St James Parish Church, Broughty Ferry

*Thomas McCrie wrote in The Story of the Scottish Church, 'It is a great mistake to suppose that the Scottish Reformation originated with the common people, or in the spirit of rebellion. It would be much nearer the truth to say that Scotland was reformed by her noblemen and gentlemen.' Probably the most influential among these noblemen was John Erskine.*

## I. NOBLE REFORMER

John Erskine was born in 1509 at Dun Castle in the County of Angus, close to the present-day eighteenth century House of Dun. His father was of the family of Mar and his mother was the daughter of William, 1st Lord Ruthven. Tragedy struck the Erskines in 1513 when John's father and grandfather were both killed at the Battle of Flodden: he became the ward of his uncle, Sir Thomas Erskine, who was Chief Secretary to King James V. The young John inherited not only wealth but also responsibility for a prosperous estate, a large number of retainers and considerable political power; the family effectively controlled the nearby Royal Burghs of Montrose and Brechin. John's education and early life is obscure but he probably attended either King's College, Aberdeen or St Salvator's College, St Andrews before continuing his studies abroad. He may have studied for a time at Basel under the noted New Testament scholar and friend of Erasmus, Johannes Oecolampadius.

In 1522, John married Lady Elizabeth Lindsay, who was the daughter of the Earl of Crawford, a major landowner in the County of Angus. In 1530, John was responsible—probably by accident—for the death of William Forster, the priest of Montrose. Some accounts state that Erskine killed him during a brawl in the bell tower. 'Haunted by fear and burdened by grief,' Erskine was forced to flee to the Continent. He was still fascinated by the 'new learning' of the Renaissance, but his quest now had a more spiritual focus; John sought opportunities to sit under the preaching of the leading Reformers. John Calvin was the same age as the young Scotsman and the two may possibly have met in 1533, when Erskine was resident in Paris.

By the time he felt safe to go home, Erskine seems to have come to a saving knowledge of Christ. He brought with him the French scholar Pierre de Marsilliers whom he installed as teacher of Greek at the Montrose



Grammar School. By some accounts, this was the first time the language of the New Testament was taught in Scotland. Certainly, Greek was almost unknown and anyone having an acquaintance with it was suspected of being a heretic. Nevertheless Erskine was willing to take risks for the sake of Christ; he also invited many Biblical scholars and evangelists to stay at Dun which became a centre for the propagation of Protestantism. Although Bibles were banned by the Roman Church, hundreds of copies of Tyndale's New Testament were brought from the Low Countries to east coast ports such as Leith, Dundee, and Montrose. The powerful Sir Thomas was able to shield his nephew from persecution. After his first wife died in 1538, he married an aristocratic Frenchwoman, Barbara de Bierle, a native of Picardy who originally came to Scotland with Mary of Guise, the mother of Mary Queen of Scots.

Erskine was regularly elected Provost of Montrose, as well as being a county administrator, commanding the militia and occasionally attending Parliament. He was responsible for erecting the triple-arched Upper Northwater Bridge (now bypassed by the modern A90) and was an enthusiast for planting trees on his estate. Though he was probably uncomfortable with the war with Protestant England, he was too much of a patriot to endure the devastations committed upon his native country by the English. His biographers have dwelt with pride upon an incident in 1547 in which Erskine led a small party in an attack on a band of English troops which had landed near Montrose for the purpose of laying waste the surrounding country—including Erskine's own estate. Out of ninety invaders, less than thirty made it back to their ships. John Erskine was one of a relatively small

number of people who, notwithstanding the persecuting tendencies of King James V, had embraced Protestantism. 'Far from being led by mercenary motives, as many were in later years, Erskine and his friends were inspired solely with a love of what they considered the Truth.' The Roman clergy who surrounded James promised him the title of Defender of the Faith— forfeited by his uncle Henry VIII of England—if he was successful in crushing heresy. When the king died in December 1542, Cardinal Beaton's attempt to seize power was foiled. Had he succeeded, the ruthless prelate intended to extirpate Protestantism with a bloodbath.

## II. SOME OF ERSKINE'S FRIENDS

The Straitons of Lauriston were the major landowners in the parish of St. Cyrus, just up the coast from Montrose. As the second son of the laird, David Straiton inherited the small property of Whitstoun (now Woodstone). Much of his income was from salmon netting at the mouth of the River North Esk. Trouble broke out when the local priest, acting as factor for Patrick Hepburn, the dissolute Prior of St. Andrews, demanded a tenth of all the fish caught there. Straiton was a headstrong and impulsive man of the world who would bow the knee to no one. Despite the pleading of his more cautious elder brother, he angrily instructed his men to throw every tenth fish back into the North Sea for the Prior to collect personally. Straiton's defiance led to his being put under 'process of cursing' and charged with heresy, which was punishable by death. David Straiton, who had had no interest in religion up to this point, realised that he was in not in a fit state to leave this world. He started studying the Scriptures with godly men, particularly with his young nephew George and with John Erskine.



House of Dun





Church at St Cyrus

He was converted, and his stand against Rome became inspired by the love of Christ. Following a trial before the king at Edinburgh, Straiton was burned on 27th August 1534. The fire was lit by the shore at Leith, 'that the inhabitants of Fife, seeing the fire, might be struck with terror and fear and not fall into like heresies'.

George Wishart, a son of the Laird of Pitarrow (just north of Laurencekirk) was born in 1513. He was academically gifted and was appointed as an assistant master at Montrose Grammar School in 1534. After being accused of heresy he fled to England and later went to Switzerland where he met Bullinger, Farel, and Calvin and translated the First Helvetic Confession (1536) into Scots. Wishart was a gifted speaker and upon returning home in 1543 he began to address open air religious meetings in the town. Although Erskine counselled him to confine his activities to the Montrose area,

where he could protect him, he felt no fear and travelled widely. The Church authorities feeling increasingly threatened by Wishart's popularity, he was 'marked out as a sacrifice to Papal tyranny' and there were numerous attempts to assassinate or capture him.

During a serious outbreak of the plague in Dundee in 1545, Wishart hastened to the town as fast as most people were trying to get away. He addressed the crowds from the top of the Eastgate allowing both the inhabitants and the victims, who were shut out of the town, to hear him. His text was Psalm 107:20 'He sent His Word and healed them'. John Knox records, 'by the which sermon he raised up the hearts of all that heard him, that they soon regardit not death, but judgit thame mair happie that sould depairt, than sic as sould remain behind.' Eventually, he was burned at St. Andrews on 1st March 1546. He is commemorated both by the Martyrs'

monument in St Andrews and also by a tall granite column in front of Fordoun Parish Church, Auchenblae. His older brother, Sir John Wishart, member of parliament for the Mearns, was regarded as an ultra-Protestant, "a man mervilous wyse, discryte and godly, withowte spotte or wryncle". Sir John was a leading officer in the forces of the Congregation and was one of the nobles who ratified the Scots Confession. Because of his opposition to Mary Queen of Scots' marriage to Lord Darnley, he was declared a rebel.

In 1538, Walter Mille, the priest of Lunan, just south of Montrose, was accused of having ceased to say Mass; he actually had abandoned the practice long before then. Mille subsequently fled to Germany where he travelled extensively and married. After returning to his native land in 1556 his fearless preaching made him an obvious target for the Romanists. The frail eighty-

two year old was dragged before an ecclesiastical court and when he was burned, on 28th April 1558, "his great age and tottering steps deeply stirred the multitude of onlookers". In truth his murder proved to be the death knell of Romanism in Scotland. Mille's testimony was reprinted in the *Bulwark* (April 2012).

In later life Erskine was an encourager of Andrew Melville (1545-1622) who was a laird's son from Baldovie on the south side of the Montrose Basin. Melville South Church in Montrose is named in his honour. After the death of Knox, Melville would take over leadership of the Kirk; his brother Richard was later minister of Maryton.

It is no exaggeration to say that the area around Montrose was a veritable cradle of the Reformed Faith at a time when the cities of Scotland were still enshrouded in spiritual darkness and superstition.



Pitarrow



The Parish of Dun from Baldovie

### III. THE REFORMATION STRUGGLE

In his very first public sermon, preached in the parish church of St. Andrews in 1547, the redoubtable John Knox stated his view of Romanism in no uncertain terms. Preaching on Daniel 7:24-25, he said that the Church of Rome is the church of Antichrist and the Mass is idolatry. He insisted that there could be no compromise between 'the immaculate spouse of Jesus' and 'the synagogue of Satan' ruled by the Pope, 'the Man of Sin'. Arguing that the Papal Church was that Empire which would devour the saints of God predicted by Daniel, Knox went on to condemn all unscriptural practices in worship.

Erskine first encountered Knox when the great Reformer briefly returned to Scotland from Geneva towards the end of 1555. Knox was residing with James Syme, a burgess of Edinburgh and a friend of the truth, whose home was a regular meeting place for Protestants. Erskine is said to have been deeply moved by the forceful

preaching of Knox which was completely different to anything he had heard before. He promptly made his own Edinburgh residence available to Knox who was soon preaching there several times each day. Such were the crowds desirous of hearing him that he often continued late into the evening.

At this time, Knox criticised the inconsistency of people who, in spite of being spiritually awakened and seeking the Saviour, retained their connection with the Church of Rome and even continued to attend Mass. Knox was responsible for persuading John Erskine finally to break his connection with the Church of Rome.

It was indeed a time of trouble, with fear of persecution everywhere. In spite of this, Erskine began to invite many leading noblemen to join him for supper at his residence in the Capital, in order to present the Gospel to them. On one such occasion, William Maitland of Lethington was present. He was an intelligent young man who later

became Secretary of State to both Mary of Guise (widow of James V and Regent) and their daughter Mary Queen of Scots. During the meal, Maitland debated the pros and cons of the Mass with John Knox, in the end admitting defeat on account of Knox's powerful reasoning.

Upon leaving Edinburgh, Erskine took Knox with him to Dun. For a month or so, Knox resided there, spending the time visiting and preaching in the vicinity. He contacted local gentlemen of standing who could be helpful in advancing the Gospel. Having listened to Knox, not only Erskine but most of the local gentry were fully persuaded that they could no longer participate in the idolatrous ceremonies of the unreformed church and realised that their duty lay in organising separate ordinances and in praying for the downfall of the Papacy.

Following this notable success, Knox travelled to Calder House, Midlothian, the home of Sir James Sandilands. In the early weeks of 1556, along with Erskine, Knox was in Kyle (Ayrshire) which was the ancient stronghold of the Lollards. After administering Communion on several occasions, the pair returned to the House of Dun.

During this second visit Knox preached more widely and openly than previously. By then, most of the gentlemen of the Mearns were on the side of Reform and undertook 'to refuse all society with idolatry and bound themselves, to the uttermost of their powers, to maintain the true preaching of the Evangel of Jesus Christ'. Meanwhile, Erskine's increasing political prominence was evident when on 26th June 1558 Parliament appointed him as Commissioner to France to witness the marriage between

Mary Queen of Scots and the Dauphin, later King Francis II. On his homeward journey, Erskine escaped what appears to have been an assassination attempt when four of his companions were fatally poisoned in Dieppe.

Erskine was in France when the elderly Walter Mille was martyred. Soon after this the Protestants started to hold public worship in burghs such as Ayr and Dundee. The following year Mary of Guise issued a proclamation summoning the Protestant preachers to appear at Stirling on 10th May 1559, to be tried as heretics and schismatics. The Protestant nobles with their followers mustered at Perth to protect them. Erskine was appointed to negotiate with the Queen and returned with a promise that the ministers would not be tried. But Mary's word was worthless; when they failed to appear for trial they were declared rebels. The result was the civil war which ended with the death of Mary of Guise and the overthrow of Romanism.

Erskine initially took up his armour to fight, having perhaps been urged to do so by Knox, but later decided that he would be more useful as a preacher than an officer. There is no doubt that he was eminently qualified, for the great Reformer described him as 'one whom God in those days had marvellously illuminated'. Knox deeply respected Erskine, even though the laird's mildness and flexibility sometimes frustrated his more impulsive colleague.

### IV. APPOINTMENT AS A SUPERINTENDENT

Following the triumph of the Reformation in 1560, the Scottish Church resolved to ordain ten or twelve Superintendents to





House of Dun

‘plant and erect kirks where none now are, to set, order and appoint ministers, so that all who have never heard Jesus Christ truly preached shall come to some knowledge’. Owing to inadequate funds and political instability, only five were appointed, including John Erskine, who was given charge of Angus and the Mearns. The arguments for introducing Superintendents were practical rather than theological. Confronted with an emergency situation, and with the aim of evangelising ‘all the inhabitants of the realm’, the Reformers decided that rather than restricting the ablest ministers to individual congregations they should be distributed across the whole country.

At the first General Assembly which met in December 1560, Erskine’s appointment was formally ratified and he was declared to be ‘apt and able to minister’. His responsibilities were diverse including regular preaching, the examination and admission of ministers,

consideration of their stipends, provision of their manse and glebes, visitation of congregations, upkeep of the fabric of churches, liaising with the Courts of the Church and oversight of church discipline. Considering all these responsibilities, it is no surprise that on 24th November 1574 the Privy Council passed an Act indemnifying Erskine for failing to carry out his duties at the Sheriff Court in the past and exempting him for as long as he remained Superintendent. While he was criticised for admitting as readers many poorly qualified conforming priests, he had little choice if public worship was to be maintained. Bardgett comments, ‘Examination of the extent of the Reformed Kirk’s success in achieving a parochial Reformation...in Angus and the Mearns from 1560 to 1590 is inseparable from assessment of the career of the Laird of Dun’.

In his book *Patterns of Reform*, James Kirk says, ‘The Superintendent was an

office which the Reformers introduced almost as an afterthought to the First Book of Discipline, designed to remedy the shortage of ministers and to further the work of evangelisation throughout the land. Repudiating the traditional ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Reformers placed great emphasis on the pastoral ministry which they considered might be exercised within the context of a congregation or more widely over a whole district.’ In short, superintendence was to be exercised not by a distinct order or degree of bishops but by ministers who received a commission from the Church to exercise supervisory duties for a longer or shorter period (though not for life). Kirk emphasises that the office was free from traditional concepts of superiority and lordship and he argues that the idea was unique to Scotland. Not only were they accountable to the graded series of Church Courts, but were expected to act collegially where practicable and to reside in the chief towns of their provinces.

Whenever possible, Erskine believed in conciliatory measures and made good use of his natural tact and diplomacy, so much so that even sworn opponents of the Gospel respected him. The young Queen’s determination to marry Lord Darnley led to her famous interview with Knox which brought tears to Mary’s eyes. While the stern and unrelenting Reformer looked on, Erskine endeavoured, with characteristic gentleness, to calm a very stormy and tense situation. Indeed he appears to have made a very favourable impression upon his staunchly Roman Catholic Queen.

She resolved to extend the hand of friendship to the Protestants in the hope of obtaining support for her marriage and sent for the Superintendents of Fife, Lothian, Glasgow

and Angus, explaining that while she was not yet persuaded of the truth of the new religion, she was happy to attend debates on doctrinal issues and was willing to listen to some of their sermons. In particular, Mary would gladly hear Erskine, ‘for he was a mild and sweet-natured man, with true honesty and uprightness’.

Erskine’s leadership qualities, likeable personality, and faithfulness in his duties were recognised by his election as Moderator of the General Assembly on no fewer than five occasions. At the Coronation of James VI at Stirling in 1567, Erskine, together with the Earl of Morton, took the Oath on behalf of the infant king.

#### V. LATER YEARS

In 1571, after only a decade of Presbyterianism, there was an attempt to reinstate an active episcopate in the Church. In response, Erskine wrote a long letter in a ‘clear, forcible style’, to the Regent, the Earl of Mar. Among other things, he stated, ‘A greater offence or contempt of God and His kirk can no prince do, than to set up by his authority men in spiritual offices’; and he argued, ‘They may be called bishops but are not bishops, but idols’ (a reference to Zechariah 11:17, ‘Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock’). The superintendent had no real issue with the term bishop, which he regarded as equivalent to superintendent, but strongly objected to the State making appointments to the post without the approval of the Church.

As the elder statesmen of the Erskine family, the Superintendent exercised considerable influence during the regencies of his relatives the Earls of Mar and Morton. The Laird of Dun also remained active in Church

matters: for instance he helped to compile the Second Book of Discipline (1579) which remains a standard compendium of Scottish church law. In 1583 he solemnly warned James VI that if he persisted in his Erastian policy, 'he will be the last of his name that will reign in that realm'. Having played an important part in the eventful Reformation period, Erskine died peacefully in 1591.

Erskine's theology may initially have been Lutheran, though there is little evidence to support this suggestion. From the time of his association with George Wishart he appears to have been Reformed. Erskine's decisive break with Romanism came in 1555 when Knox's arguments convinced him that Christians should avoid hearing Mass. After the Reformation, his commitment to

the Reformed faith and his preaching and organisational abilities won him a national reputation. Bardgett describes him as 'spiritual, principled, yet practical and able to compromise, whose influence exceeded even that of Knox'. He was the architect of a provincial Reformed Church suited to Scottish society, 'a godly preacher and shire laird'. Spottiswood wrote, 'He governed [his province] with great authority, giving no way to the [in]novations introduced, nor suffering them to take place within the bounds of his charge while he lived. He was a man famous for services performed for prince and country. A baron he was of good rank, true, learned, liberal and of singular courage, who for diverse resemblances might well be said to have been another Ambrose'.

Montrose High Street with Old Parish Church



# FOLLOWING MARTIN LUTHER'S FOOTSTEPS

## A PROPOSED TOUR OF SITES AT THE CRADLE OF THE REFORMATION

2-10 SEPTEMBER 2013



This is a great opportunity to visit the major Reformation sites associated with Martin Luther and learn about the history of the early Reformation. Dr Robert Dickie (Stornoway) led a highly appreciated tour of these sites in 2011 and has planned a further nine-day tour from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 2013.

The itinerary includes Worms cathedral and Reformation monument, Eisenach and the Wartburg Fortress, the Luther family church at Möhra, the site of Luther's abduction at Steinbach, the Augustinian cloister and cathedral at Erfurt, sites associated with Luther's birth and death at Eisleben and Mansfeld, the convent at Nimbschen where Luther's wife was a nun, and of course the major scenes of Luther's witness at Wittenberg. The museums at Wartburg, Eisleben and Wittenberg are excellent.

### How much does the tour cost?

The cost for the tour within Germany (coach, hotel, and arranged meals) will be approximately £830 per person for twin/double accommodation. There will be a supplement for single occupancy. A non-refundable deposit must be paid before the end of January.

### What's included?

Coach transport throughout Germany and eight nights in hotels (3 star or higher), including breakfast. Three course evening meals in hotels, with the exception of two evenings where you are free to make your own arrangements. All meals on Sabbath.

### What's the pace like?

The tour will be at a fairly leisurely pace. Most walking is for short distances (less than a mile). Please note: some sites involve stairs with no lift access. There will be free time every evening. The lunch break on Saturday will be in the town of Colditz and there will be an opportunity to visit the famous castle which housed 'incorrigible' Allied officer POWs during WWII (not included in tour price).

### What additional costs will there be?

Your flights between UK and Germany. Daytime refreshments. Evening meals on two days. Guided tours (in English) at the Wartburg Fortress and the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt and admission charges to museums in Eisenach, Eisleben and Wittenberg. Transport to and from Wartburg Fortress and Eisenach town. Optional English-language tour of Colditz Castle and its POW museum. Small 'tourist taxes' in a couple of the towns – these are payable directly to the hotel, usually a couple of Euros per night.



**The trip is limited to 30 participants and numbers must be finalised at the end of January. Please contact Dr Dickie as soon as possible for further information (without obligation) or for details on how to make a reservation. Email: robertdickie@doctors.org.uk**



# JOHN ERSKINE ON THE KIRK OF GOD

*Part of a letter written to 'ane faithful brother' by John Erskine of Dun in December 1571. Here he describes the Church and importance of the work of the ministry. In the second part of the letter, he uses these as reasons why corrupt men should not be admitted into the ministry.*

The kirk of God is a thing most precious in his sight; he loves it as he does love his only Son, and with ane perpetual love does he love it. He did create all things for it, and in favour of it does he order all things. The heavenly hosts serve it; the earth and elements minister unto it. The offices and powers of the world are appointed for it, and the angels of God serve to the comfort of it. The kirk of God has the honour and pre-eminence above all things; it is free about all creatures, and all things are subdued unto it. It is the body of Christ and spouse of the Almighty. It is the inheritance of the Lord, his proper possession and kingdom. It is the city and habitation wherein the Lord delights to dwell. In it is reposed and continued the heavenly treasure. In it is light without mirkness (darkness), joy without heaviness, and peace without inquietation: all things in it are perfect, and the glory of it endures for ever.

To be participant of this kirk is more to be esteemed than all the riches, glory, and honour of the world. This kirk is the congregation of the faithful, whom God of his mercy hath chosen in his son Christ to be partakers of his glory. This kirk he has

purified in the blood of his dear son. This kirk he has illuminated by his Holy Spirit. This kirk he has redeemed from all servitude. This kirk he has justified, and sanctified, and opened to it the true knowledge of himself. In this kirk God reigns. This kirk he governs, preserves, and defends; he fights against the enemies of it, and destroys all power that seeks the hurt of it. To this kirk God has given his eternal Word. To this kirk he has given the gifts of his Holy Spirit. And to this kirk has he given the ministration of the heavenly mysteries, by the which ministry he quickens the dead, regenerates his elect, and nourishes his faithful. It is the power of God to work salvation. It is the wisdom of God expelling ignorance. It is the justice of God to execute death and damnation.

By this holy ministry of the kirk sins are remitted, men are reconciled to God, and made sons and heirs of the Highest. This holy ministry is placed in the kirk as a mother to bring forth and to nourish children unto God. Of whose fruitful womb are born, and by her breasts nourished all the true members of Christ's kirk. These holy mysteries are given into the hands of men to be ministered, and men bear the name



House of Dun

of that most excellent power which they minister, in respect of the office joined to that person, and of that mind does the Apostle Paul call him father of the Corinthians, affirming himself to have begotten them to Christ, and the like manner of speech uses he to the Galatians, where he says he travaills in birth, etc; and of the same meaning writes he to Philemon saying, that thou owest unto me even thine own self. So the ministers of the kirk, in respect of their ministry, are counted parents unto that spiritual birth, whereby the children of God are regenerated and nourished.

God has so appointed that he calls his elect unto salvation by the ministry of men; and therefore, says the Apostle, he has committed unto us the word of reconciliation, now are we ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you through us. As God did send his apostles and prophets in time past, so sends he presently and shall send unto the last day his messengers, ministers of his holy evangel, for the comfort and nourishment of his kirk, as it is written, he gave some

to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the gathering together of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edification of the body of Christ, till we all meet together in the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, grow unto the perfect man, and unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.

By the hands of men called to the ministration of the holy mysteries is all perfection and comfort wrought of God to his people. Therefore they are called the light of the world and the salt of the earth, for without the ministry nothing can be among men but mirkness (darkness) and corruption. To them is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to open, to steik (close), to bind, to lose, to remit and retain sins: he that hears them hears Christ: he that despises them despises Christ. As these offices are most honourable so are they most necessary, for God works the full salvation of man by his Spirit in that holy ministry, and therefore the Apostle calls it the ministration of the spirit of righteousness, of life, and of salvation.

Howbeit that all faithful persons are members of the kirk, yet all faithful are not placed in office of the holy ministry, for as says Paul, all are not apostles, all are not teachers, but every member has their own office to the edifying of the whole body. The true and lively members of Christ, according to the gifts given to them, serve the comfort one of another to the profit of all, and depend most diligently to receive strength and comfort from the hands of such as are placed in the holy ministry. Howbeit all men confesses themselves members of the kirk, yet many there be that bear that name falsely: they may be known by their fruits.



# A REFORMED VIEW OF SCOTLAND'S PARISH SYSTEM

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Rev. Michael Ives

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## 1. REFORMATIONS – REJECTING AND RETAINING

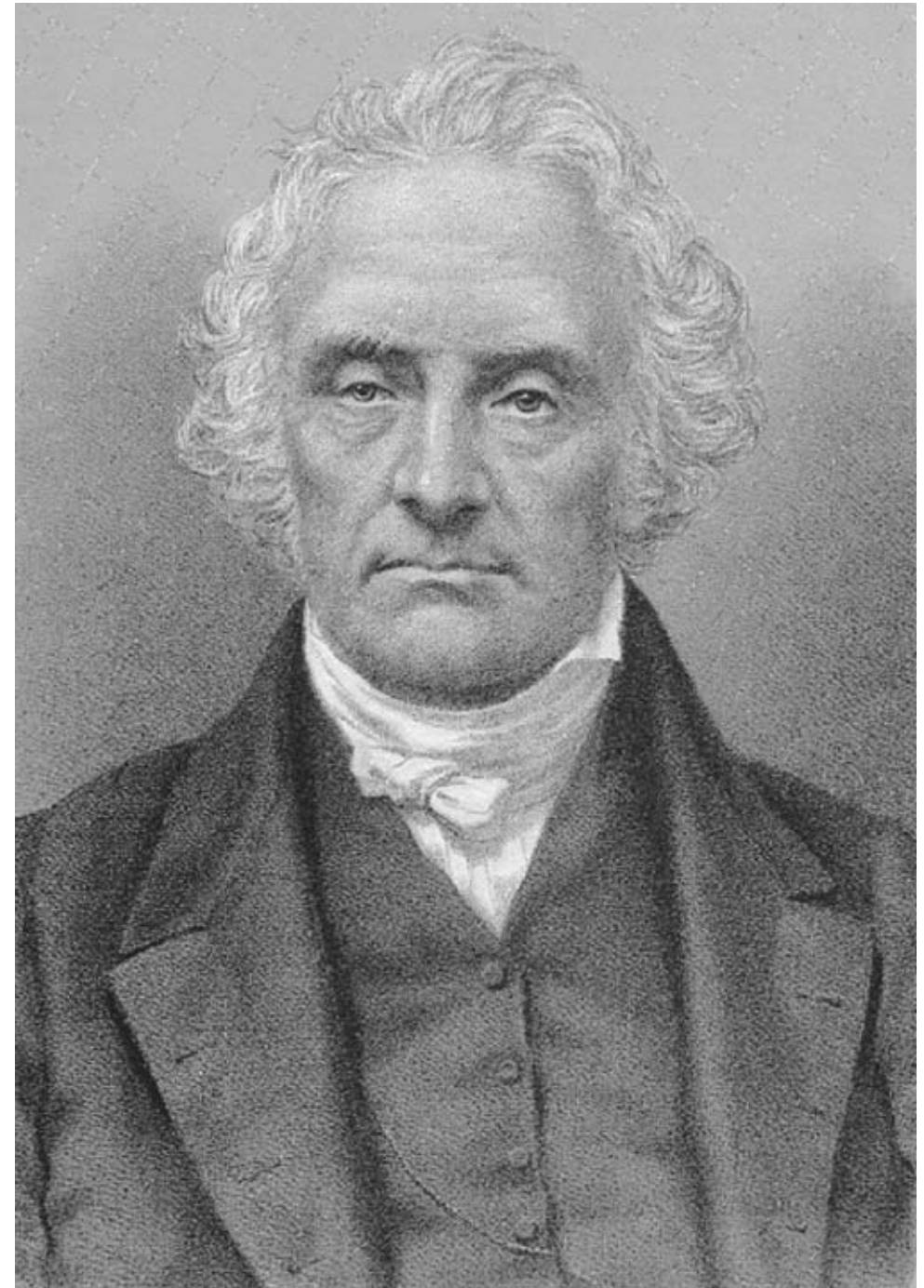
Reformations are unsettling. They always involve a critique of the old order, a prophetic protest against wrong. And when those protests give way to action, things change. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was no different. So when it reached the shores of Scotland, there was quite a shaking up. The temple of God was cleansed of its idolatry. Simonizing money-changers were expelled from its holy courts. The axe was laid at the roots of the Romish hierarchy, and the Kirk was freed from its oppression.

But reformations also retain. One does not attempt to salvage the unredeemable. Reformations see what is good, what is right, what is pure beneath the accumulated layers of perversion. Their prophetic eye is not only fixed on a future ideal, but a present good, however obscured and deranged. That too was the Scottish Reformation. There was continuity as well as discontinuity.

We would suggest that this explains in part why the magisterial Reformers retained the parish system of Scotland. While much was dismantled and destroyed, yet it is noteworthy that the parish system was not. Now they certainly would have known that the model had its historical origins, not in the apostolic or even in the patristic era, but during the 12th and 13th centuries. Yet, together with such monuments as cathedrals and universities, the parish system did not suffer the fate that it might have at the hands of the Anabaptist radicals. Our fathers evidently saw what was redeemable in the *auld parish*. So they reformed and redeployed it.

## 2. THE PARISH SYSTEM, REFORMED

With the establishment of Protestantism in 1560, a process was set in motion to take the model of Geneva and apply it nationally in Scotland. The fathers of the Kirk, now supported by the civil



Thomas Chalmers

magistrate, were faced with the daunting task of spreading the reformed faith throughout the nation. The parish system, together with its existing 'fabrics', was seen as the natural channel – an infrastructure ready at hand. The great question was how to staff these parish churches with true servants of God. But eventually, by God's grace, they succeeded; and within not many years of the Reformation most of the parishes were provided with a Reformed minister or reader. The sound of the Master's trumpet could be heard throughout the land.

What is more, these preachers were stationed throughout the country to do more than just preach. They also had to do the work of an evangelist. Their Presbyteries did not charge them merely to care for a gathered congregation of believers, but to *gather* a congregation out of their parish. We might consider, then, the old pastoral charge as quite missionary in its character. Through a process of diligent preaching, visitation, and catechising, these pastors sought to 'man-fish', as Thomas Boston put it, in the waters of their assigned parishes.

### 3. DECLINE AND REVIVAL

After the First and Second Reformations, Scotland suffered a marked religious decline. Moderatism grew and gained the ascendancy, and this of course affected spiritual life on the parish level. No longer could one view the parish as the local extension of a national ministry, fully committed to the robust evangelicalism of the Westminster Standards. There were of course faithful servants of God who diligently preached and shepherded in their assigned charges. But hirelings abounded.

This situation only compromised the value of parish boundaries for the faithful, and, as some contend, drove some of the Kirk's own sons and daughters into Secession and Dissent.

Happily, new life began to rise in the Established Church in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. And with it came a revived appreciation for the old parish. Chief among the examples of this movement in the Kirk was Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847). He had entered the ministry as an unconverted Moderate. For him, the parish was a sinecure to support him in the pursuit of his *real* passion – mathematics. But when in 1812 the Lord opened his eyes, he began to view his parish in Kilmany as the inheritance of his fathers and the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made him an overseer. It was not long before he was making his rounds with each household in the district and preaching the everlasting Gospel to saint and sinner.

### 4. FROM KILMANY TO EDINBURGH

As Chalmers laboured pastorally, he became captivated by the romance of the old Scottish parish and ministry. But more than this, he began to perceive its untapped potential. The Kilmany parish was like a long-abandoned mine. As he rediscovered its practical wealth, he cast his eyes abroad. Could not modern, industrialising Scotland retrieve this old heritage? If he could convince the rising generation of evangelicals in the Kirk, could not Scotland again be Christianised?

An extremely gifted preacher, Chalmers was eventually called to the Tron Kirk in Glasgow. In that city teeming with the poor working its factories, he set out to

rejuvenate the parochial system both as a spiritual agency for the Gospel and as a vehicle for sound benevolence through the revived office of the deacon. A new parish was formed, free from the compulsory legal assessment for poor relief, and he eventually hailed it as a success. In his *Christian and Economic Polity of a Nation* (1821-26), he sought to promote the parish principle both for churchmen as well as for civic and private philanthropists throughout Britain.

His rising star eventually drew him into larger spheres of usefulness, and he soon assumed posts in the education of the ministry. First in St. Andrews and then at the University of Edinburgh, he furthered the evangelical cause in the Kirk. And as he did so, he captivated the hearts and minds of many with the idea of a revived parish. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the Bonars, and James Begg all adopted and applied the principle, both before and after the Disruption. The office of deacon had died out in the Established Church but was reintroduced in the Free Kirk after the Disruption of 1843. While the Disruption dealt a blow to the revived parish system under the evangelicals, yet Chalmers and others continued to adhere both to their establishmentarian principles and the viability of the parish plan under a Free Kirk.

### 5. THE WEST PORT EXPERIMENT AND BEYOND

At the end of Chalmers' career he again turned to the practical 'experimentation' of his beloved parochial plan for mission and diaconal care. He spearheaded an effort in the Free Church by organizing a 'territorial' or parochially-organized mission church

in the worst slum of Edinburgh, the West Port (not far from the Magdalen Chapel). This district had the notorious distinction of being the scene of the gory Burke and Hare murders. Together with his assistant, William Tasker, he supervised the formation of a congregation and the development of a healthy diaconal system. The success was now a tribute to the parish scheme in a way that the earlier St. John's experiment could not have been. The Free Church, while severed from the state, would resist the forces of a voluntary congregationalism. It would hold up the old banner of a Church for the people, aggressively bringing the gospel to all the districts of the land. The West Port was held out as an earnest of good things to come.

Others followed course, and soon the Free Church saw many 'territorial missions' blossoming throughout the land. Robert Buchanan, author of *The Ten Years' Conflict*, pioneered an effort in the Wynds district of Glasgow, a population of around 12,000 living in extreme poverty.

Sadly, the initial energy eventually waned in the Free Church. One may also suggest that her receding from original principles was an incubus to vigorous, territorial missions. Functional voluntarism soon gave way to actual voluntarism, as the Declaratory Act of 1892 and the merger with the United Presbyterian Church some years later bear witness. That is, it could be said that the Free Church had retreated from its position as the heir of the national Kirk, with a keen sense of a national responsibility to evangelize. Instead, it became a bunker for the gathered faithful, holding out against the onslaught of secularism. But of course, voluntarism was not the only theological problem of the late-19th century Free



Church. Consequently, it is not surprising that confessional or denominational boundaries came more and more to supersede parochial ones.

#### 6. ENDURING PRINCIPLES: CHRIST'S LORDSHIP

While this situation has only worsened with even more accelerated defection, the following principles yet endure and remain worthy of the serious consideration of those carrying the mantle of confessional fidelity. We would suggest that in the Reformed parish system, there are three core principles.

First, the parish system under a reformed Church government operates on the premise that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords and that His Father has bequeathed to Him all the kingdoms of the earth. This mediatorial kingship of Christ does not supplant the civil magistrate by any means. While Christ Jesus is sole Head of the Church, yet He has also ordained that men should rule in the political sphere. Yet whether or not they acknowledge the Lordship of Christ is immaterial for the obligation of the Church. She is to obey her Sovereign in all things spiritual, which includes His mandate to 'compel' the nations to 'come in'. The parochial plan is simply an orderly and efficient way of fulfilling this charge. It is the principle of dividing and conquering as well as of retaining and administering territory gained in the onward march of the Kingdom.

#### 7. SECOND PRINCIPLE: PATERNAL RESPONSIBILITY

The second principle, intimately related to this, is that the Church and State have a

paternal responsibility for their respective peoples and nations. Why? Because He who is the 'everlasting Father and prince of peace' has made them fathers (*Larger Catechism*, Q.124 with proofs). The fact that the civic fathers may at times not recognize the ecclesiastical fathers neither 'un-fathers' them nor releases them from their paternal responsibilities. The same may be said of popular opinion. Only when people are converted do they recognize that they have had fathers who have 'begotten them by the Gospel' (1 Cor. 4:15). Nor does the existence of false spiritual fathers working among the people relieve them from duty. These Simon Maguses may in fact be given parishes and parish livings. Faithful fathers, however, recognize neither them nor their pretended jurisdictions. They have no warrant from King Jesus. When, however, magistrates convert, they have a duty according to their place and calling to be helpful to these spiritual fathers, without intruding into their province.

Fathers, as stewards under God, must exercise foresight and devise lawful means in all their duties, including the reclamation of the disobedient. They must be 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves'. Our Scottish forefathers with their insistence on biblical warrant for church policy evidently saw the parish as a lawful means, a 'circumstance concerning ... the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies', to be regulated by the Word and sanctified common sense (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.6).

The parish model offers many practical ways for such fathers to discharge their stewardship. Specifically, it offers all the advantages of locality. 'Locality, in truth,



Kilmany Parish Church

is the secret principle wherein our great strength lieth', said Chalmers. Locality helps define responsibility, retain focus, and encourage the labourers as they tend to their own little plots and in time enjoy the fruits of their labours. Spiritual care becomes easier and more efficient when those under care live in 'contiguous households'. Over time, the observance of the locality principle relieves the strain on ministers who have a dual charge – the care of souls baptized and in full communion as well as the souls of the ignorant and careless. On the locality principle, we draw two concentric circles. The inner circle is the membership, while the outward circle is the parish boundary containing all those who are potential members. The pastor's charge, in part, is to close the gap.

James Begg commended the parish system for these very reasons:

Every man is justly held to be morally

responsible, to a certain extent, for the state of his own parish. This is the glory of the Parochial System. Whilst it leaves any man to dissent from the Church, who chooses, it makes sure, if carried out properly, that every man in the land, in the mountain or valley, in the dense lane or stately square, has some one 'to care for his soul.' As the whole world is made up of families, and will never be full of peace until every man takes a Christian charge of his own, so this whole land consists of parishes, and will never be right until every minister does his utmost for carrying Christian instruction, by the aid of another, if not personally, to every family within his territory. No other plan can make sure none are neglected.

Further, fathers must use their authority for the good of their children. Yes, this will mean that they will be moderate and gracious with them. 'And the servant of

the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth' (2 Tim. 2:24-25). But neither may they surrender their authority. This will translate into missionary 'aggression', as Chalmers was wont to speak. James Bannerman put it this way:

(The Church's) first principle and first duty is that of aggression. The ministers of the Gospel claim it as a right to go into every nation, however fenced around and guarded from intrusion, and to demand an entrance in the name of Him who sent them, even although the magistrate should bid them depart from his coasts. Further still, the messengers of the Cross arrogate to themselves the title to enter into every human dwelling where a sinner is to be found, – seeking admittance in the name of the Saviour of sinners, that they may negotiate with the inhabitant in behalf of their Master, however sternly the door may be closed against them by jealousy of their errand, or hatred to their cause.

It has been the eloquent boast of freedom in our country, that every man's house is his castle; and that, be it but a straw-built shed, open to every breath of heaven, yet fenced about by the protection and the sanction of law, there even 'the king cannot and dare not enter.' But where the king cannot enter, there the missionary of Christ claims to be admitted; and, with a higher warrant in his hand than that of human law, bids the gates be lifted up, that with the Gospel he may enter in (*The Church of Christ*, vol. 1, p. 142).

## 8. THIRD PRINCIPLE: RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND OBLIGATION

The third of the three core principles is that religion is not ultimately voluntary, but obligatory. Our Reformed forefathers did not of course believe that conversion could be forced by the sword. Yet they hardly thought religion an optional matter, to be left to the 'innocent' free-thinking of the people. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifestly reveal the throne of the Most High (Ps. 19:1-4, Rom. 1:19, 20; cf. WCF 1.1), and that 'to him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them' (WCF 2.2). Further, the proclamation of the Gospel is an offer clothed with the highest authority, so that to reject it is to invite the King's wrath (Ps. 2:12, Luke 19:12). An attentive reading of the *Larger Catechism* on the First and Second Commandments will reveal that religion was hardly viewed as an optional matter, to be left free to the fluctuations of supply and demand.

When one also weighs the covenantal outlook of the Scottish Church, it will become clear that religion was not left up to each new generation to decide for itself. This principle rests at the very basis of her practice of infant baptism. Children of believers are engaged to Christ from birth. And her entering into national covenants was understood as binding for succeeding generations. 'They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten' (Jer. 50:5). Opting out was not an option!



Religious voluntarism opposes ecclesiastical boundaries – and thus any parish-system – because religion, it is claimed, must be a matter of free, undictated choice. This arises from rationalist, not Reformed thinking.

At the Reformation, the religious authority of Rome was not succeeded by a vacuum. Its authority was rather reformed and reconstituted. And so too was a prominent vehicle and symbol of that enduring authority, the parish. It was both an application of and a witness to our confession that God is, that He is to be worshipped by all, and that He has sent His ambassadors throughout the world bringing terms of peace to mankind lost.

The architects of the Scottish Church

understood that they had a twofold task. One was destructive, the other constructive. 'See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant' (Jer. 1:10). In many ways, they like Jeremiah felt the formidable character of the task. But by the grace of God, they persevered and renovated a dilapidated Kirk on the verge of collapse.

The greatness of the evil and the small numbers on truth's side ought not discourage, when God has lent His almighty aid. 'Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it' (Zech. 4:7).



# A FORGOTTEN SERVANT OF CHRIST: REV. JOHN EDGAR (1798-1866)

Rev. Trevor Kirkland

Mr Kirkland is minister of Templepatrick Reformed Church

*On the Lord's Day August 26th 1866, a useful life in the cause of Christ came to an end, mourned by many in Ireland, Britain and America. The life was that of Rev John Edgar.*

## 1. FAMILY BACKGROUND

Edgar was born in Ballinahinch, Co. Down in 1798 to the Rev. Samuel Edgar, minister to the Burgher Secession congregation. Samuel was highly respected for his talents and attainments as a minister of Christ and was ordained to the pastoral care in Ballinahinch in 1793. To supplement his stipend he opened an academy. One of his pupils was John Thomson who became the head of mathematics in the Belfast Royal Academical Institution and later, Professor of Mathematics at Glasgow University. His son William (Sir William Thomson) was the consulting electrician for the transatlantic cable connection between Britain and America.

Among Samuel Edgar's other attainments was the preservation of peace in the district when there was no regular or established constabulary. The cry need only be raised, 'Here comes Edgar', and disputes and fights

instantly terminated with the combatants fleeing before Edgar arrived. The sons of Belial did not care to meet his frown or encounter his rebuke.

John, the subject of our narrative, was well prepared for college at his father's academy. He accompanied the above James Thomson to Glasgow University where he won a number of medals for his achievements, especially in classics and mathematics. Meanwhile the Belfast Royal Academical Institution opened where John, as a candidate for the ministry, completed his collegiate education.

## 2. EARLY MINISTRY

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Seceders in Ireland (as in Scotland) existed as two separate bodies. The split between the Burghers and Anti-Burghers had occurred in 1747. Sometime afterwards an Anti-Burgher congregation was established in Belfast,



and this was followed in 1814 by a Burgher congregation. With the union of the two branches in Ireland in 1818, it was expected that the newer Burgher congregation would unite with the older Anti-Burgher congregation. This they refused to do, insisting on continuing as a separate congregation though within the new body. In 1820, they elected John Edgar, who had just been licensed to preach, as their minister. The ordination service was held in the Independent Chapel on Donegall Street on 24th November. This chapel subsequently became the Donegall St Congregational Church. The congregation ceased to exist in 2011 and the building is now rented to an alternative Christian group.

Immediately, Edgar set about raising funds to erect a permanent meeting place. A site was purchased in Alfred Place and a building erected for £500. The site was a former mill dam. Entrance was by means of planks laid on the ground. It is recorded that many a worshipper arrived soaked, having lost his footing and fallen into the remains of the dam.

Before long Edgar was deeply involved in numerous charitable Societies, which, under his influence began to flourish: the Destitute Sick Society, the Bible Society, the Religious Tract Society, as well as the Ulster Religious Tract and Book Society. The latter played a vital role in printing and publishing material in defence of the Trinity during the 'Trinitarian' crises.

Notwithstanding the disadvantages of his position, the young minister of Alfred Place continued to rise steadily in public estimation. Even his appearance marked him out as a person of importance. Not long after his ordination he came into collision with the local MP for joining the Reformation Society and taking part in a series of controversial discourses against Romanism. A further controversy was Orangeism, which Edgar opposed on account of its oath.

## 3. PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

A few years later, Edgar was held in such high esteem that upon the death of his father (1826) the Secession Synod unanimously appointed him as Professor of Theology. In lecturing he had little time for the minute dissection of theological systems, concentrating instead upon the theology of the Reformation. Besides preaching in Alfred Place he also laboured elsewhere in Belfast and neighbouring villages, especially Whitehouse. His frequent visits to Whitehouse also included calls on the daughter of Thomas Grimshaw, Susanna, whom he married in 1828. Four of their children died in infancy.

The Belfast Institution had a collegiate department for the training of ministers. Professors were appointed from both the Secession Synod and the Synod of Ulster. In due time the conflict over Arianism fractured

what was a promising institution. Both Synods withdrew their students and made alternative arrangements. Edgar not only challenged the Arians but he also took the time to confront geologists who were questioning the historicity of the Genesis account.

Another controversy was with Dr Croll, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, later Primate of Armagh. Edgar had exposed some of the spurious miracles of Romanism. The origin of this was the claim by a woman in Pipe Lane, Belfast, that a priest had ejected a devil from a neighbour, which he then exhibited upon a plate. Croll sought to discredit Edgar's exposé, but this turned out to be a mistake because Edgar then publicly proved through a letter to the newspaper that the Roman Breviary had similar tales to those which Croll was now seeking to deny.

Three years after his appointment as Professor, Edgar began what became a lifelong crusade – Temperance. Edgar opposed the more extreme 'teetotalism' (the advocates of which formed a separate group) arguing that 'ardent spirits' were not in the same category as wine. 'Ardent spirits' were the curse of Ulster society. In the ten years before 1829, consumption had become so widespread that drunkenness was an accepted fact of life. Edgar became the engine of Temperance, with societies springing up all across Ireland. Businessmen were persuaded to remove ardent spirits from the workplace.

Meanwhile under Edgar's labours, Alfred Place became too small; it was decided to erect a larger meeting-house. At the cost of £2000 a new building was erected near the old one on Alfred Street. Rather than knock the old one down or rent it for commercial purposes, Edgar used it as a mission station from which came two other congregations,

Eglinton Street and Argyle Street. Further, when the Synod withdrew their students from the Belfast Institution, Alfred Place became the new college.

#### 4. THE UNION OF 1840

1840 has gone down in the annals of Irish Presbyterianism as the year of renown. It was the Union of Synods. On the 10th July 1840 the Secession Synod and the Synod of Ulster united to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Drs Hanna and Edgar became joint Professors of the new body. In the Secession body Edgar was almost alone in excellence, but in the new body he was one among many such as Cooke of Belfast and Stewart of Broughshane.

Despite the heavy work load, Edgar found time for other causes. Alongside drunkenness went the degradation of women. Prostitution became a matter of grave concern. Edgar was instrumental in establishing an institution for 'fallen women' in Brunswick Street, Belfast, known as the Ulster Female Penitentiary, which opened in 1839. Just as he travelled widely for Temperance so he did for 'fallen women' and their need for help and protection. Many of these were converted and gave public testimony to the power of the gospel unto salvation.

At the third meeting of the new Presbyterian body, in 1842, Edgar was chosen Moderator. It was the bi-centenary of the first Irish Presbytery constituted in Carrickfergus in 1642. Irish Presbyterianism owes its origin to the Scots. The first Presbyterian minister to set foot on Irish soil was Edward Brice from Airth near Stirling. Many others were to follow, much to the blessing of Ireland. Under Edgar, the new body turned its attention to the rest of Ireland, setting aside funds to erect

meeting-houses and schools. Edgar used his position as Moderator to advance the cause of the gospel among Romanists.

#### 5. THE HARDSHIPS OF PRESBYTERIANS

One other issue taken up by Edgar was the abuse of ecclesiastical judiciaries in Ireland. Edgar petitioned Parliament for redress. Under these courts there was routine discrimination against Presbyterians. At a whim, wills, property, and marriages were annulled or amended and burials were refused by Episcopalians.

Two particular incidents demonstrated the hardship of Presbyterians. The first was the Armagh marriage case of 1840. A Presbyterian, married by a Presbyterian minister to an Episcopalian some years before, had died. The deceased's property became a matter of dispute. It was ruled that since the marriage was not performed by an Episcopalian it was invalid; thus the property was awarded to the Episcopalian's family. The judgment called into question every Presbyterian marriage in Ireland and meant that all their children were illegitimate. This was followed by another case in which a man accused of bigamy successfully defended himself on the ground that one of the marriages had been performed by a Presbyterian.

The second was the Greyabbey burial case. In Greyabbey, Co. Down a dispute arose concerning the use of the parochial burying ground. The local Presbyterian minister was invited to chair the annual meeting of the vestry to resolve the dispute. He was subsequently arrested and charged with brawling by the local ecclesiastical court and fined £700. The case lasted sixteen months and generated nine hundred pages of depositions. Being unable to pay, the Presbyterian minister faced

going to jail.

Thus Edgar sought legal redress from Parliament.

#### 6. OTHER WORK AS MODERATOR IN 1843

Controversy was never far from the surface for Edgar. In 1843, the bi-centenary of the Westminster Assembly was held. Edgar gave an address that offended the Unitarians.

1843 saw the Non-Intrusion case coming to a head in Scotland with the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Once again Edgar threw his support behind the new cause. In February a special meeting of the Irish General Assembly was convened to express support for the Non-Intrusionists. Edgar's opening prayer as Moderator was long remembered for its pertinency and devotion. Six weeks later a huge meeting was held in Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church in support, only to be marred by a very public attack from a local politician. No one would rise to answer. Edgar undertook the task with a boldness that delighted the faithful and silenced the critics.

Other societies that rendered excellent service under Edgar were the Ulster Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Seaman's Friend Society. Edgar was not only the leading light but the Sinclair Seaman's Church owes its existence to his labours. Another society was the Belfast Town Mission. This Mission was originally interdenominational. The union of 1840 gave the Presbyterians the largest grouping on the committee. In 1843 they decided to set up a new town mission directly under their control and called The Belfast Town Mission. Edgar was its Secretary





Donegall St Congregational Church, Belfast

for many years. From its work came new congregations across Belfast.

Another cause that Edgar took up was the provision of manse for ministers. Under Edgar the denomination agreed a plan that congregations build not only a meeting-house but also provide a manse. For almost

two hundred years a manse had rarely been connected with a congregation. The Church and Manse scheme put an end to this anomaly. Many a Presbyterian minister today lives in a manse, unaware that its provision dates from 1843 and from the efforts of Dr John Edgar.

## 7. WORK IN SOUTHERN IRELAND

On ceasing to be Moderator, Edgar undertook extensive travel in the rest of Ireland, especially in Connaught which became dear to his heart. Both Unitarianism and Romanism had left the south of Ireland in a dreadful state. Edgar threw all his energy into ministerial and educational provision much to the angst of opponents. Ministerial help was appealed for and Edgar had the pleasure of seeing the Tyrone presbytery send Rev.. Michael Brannigan (a converted Roman Catholic) to the south and west of Ireland. Brannigan erected over 20 schools in Sligo and Mayo with 1,700 pupils, most of whom were Roman Catholics. The curriculum began with Scripture reading and the Shorter Catechism! In conjunction with Edgar, industrial schools were also set up across Connaught. Edgar enlisted the help of the Belfast Ladies Association to support such schools.

The Rev Robert Allan was also sent with 144 schools under his care. This was the start of a long line of godly men who faithfully laboured in the south of Ireland. The Belfast students formed a society to send the gospel to Roman Catholics. Edgar as Secretary to the Assembly's Home Mission went with Allan to visit all these schools. He did so as the potato famine was taking its toll. On his return he wrote the famous tract 'A Cry from Connaught' to raise awareness of the devastating impact of the famine and to explain its cause. Twenty thousand copies were run off requiring further editions.

In 1847-8, three Divinity students ready for licensing informed Edgar that they were willing to devote themselves to Connaught. Under Edgar's direction of these students, a number of new congregations were erected.

## 8. THE LATTER YEARS

In 1848 Edgar demitted his charge of Alfred Street but this did not mean the end of his usefulness. He continued to preach, teach, lecture, correspond and push, desiring to see the cause of Christ extend and prosper.

The economic disaster of 1858 threatened the existence of the Industrial Schools in Connaught. Further the expense of maintaining the entire missionary labours in Connaught required outside help. Accordingly Edgar and two others were sent to America to appeal for funds. Providentially they set off in 1859, just as the Revival was underway. Reports of the Revival had already reached America. The deputation was soon busy reporting on the Revival which was extensively recorded wherever they went.

On return from America Edgar purchased from the Baptists their meeting-house on Academy Street Belfast. He succeeded in organising a congregation in 1862. Soon the congregation outgrew the building and removed to a new building on Clifton Street. Edgar started again and another congregation was constituted. A benevolent lady gave money to erect a new building and thus came into existence Ekenhead Presbyterian Church. Later, Berry Street came out of Academy Street as a separate congregation. Edgar was thus responsible for half a dozen new congregations in Belfast on top of those he helped establish in the south.

At the beginning of 1863 Edgar fell ill with a fever. It was the beginning of the end. He died in 1866, a useful and worthy servant of the Saviour.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## REFORMATION POSTER

Parents and teachers may be interested in a Reformation wall-poster from Switzerland, some copies of which have been purchased by the Society. The poster is laminated, has text in English outlining the history of the Reformation, an annotated map of the countries influenced by the Reformation, and also pictures and brief biographies of several of the leading reformers. The cost of the poster is £10 (including p. & p.) and copies may be ordered from the Society.

## WRITING AND PROJECT COMPETITION 2012-2013

The closing date for entries is the end of March 2013. Details of the competition were announced in the July-September 2012 *Bulwark* and can also be obtained from [info@scottishreformationssociety.org.uk](mailto:info@scottishreformationssociety.org.uk).

## MEMBERSHIP AND BULWARK SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions run from January to December. A renewal letter is being sent to all current members and subscribers. Any UK tax-payer who has not filled in a Gift Aid form for 2012 could help the Society by requesting one.

## MARTIN LUTHER TOUR SEPTEMBER 2013

See Page 13

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

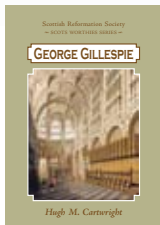
Two new publications have been issued by the Society. The first, George Gillespie, is a 36-page account of Gillespie's life and his involvement in the Westminster Assembly, written by the late Rev. Hugh Cartwright, Edinburgh. This booklet is the first in the Society's new 'Scots Worthies' series. The intention is to cover the lives of major figures from the first and second Reformation periods in Scotland and to present their significance for the modern reader. The cost of the booklet is £3.50 (including p. & p.), obtainable from the Society.

The second publication is Vol. 3 of the *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*. The contents are as follows:

*'John Knox and the Destruction of the Perth Friaries in May 1559'* by Douglas Somerset;

*'The Covenanters, Unity in Religion, and Uniformity of Church Government in the 1640s: Presbytery by Coercion or Co-operation?'* by Jeffrey Stephen;

*'The Scots Church in Rotterdam – a Church for Seventeenth Century Migrants and Exiles. Part I'* by Robert J. Dickie;



*'Alexander Shields, the Revolution Settlement and the Unity of the Visible Church. Part II'* by Matthew Vogan;

*'The Attitude of James Begg and The Watchword Magazine to the 1872 Education Act'* by Andrew R. Middleton;

*'The Witness of the Kames Free Presbyterian Church, Argyllshire'* by Norman Campbell;

*'Movements in the Main-Line Presbyterian Churches in Scotland in the Twentieth Century'* by John W. Keddie;

*'The Sabbath Protest at Strome Ferry in 1883'* by Norman Campbell.

Copies of the *Journal* can be ordered either directly from the Society (at £10.95 including p. & p.), or through the Lulu website [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).

## OTHER CURRENT PUBLICATIONS

Current publications by the Society include:

*Trembling for the Ark: James Begg and the Free Church of Scotland* by James W. Campbell (£7.95 including postage and packing).

*Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction to His Theology* edited by Matthew Vogan (£10.95 including postage and packing).

*Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal, Volume 1* (£9.95 including postage and packing).

*Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal, Volume 2* (£9.95 inc postage and packing).

These can be ordered either directly from the Society, or through the Lulu website: [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).

# BRANCH NEWS

The following branch meetings have been arranged for 2013.

## Aberdeen Branch

Meetings are on Fridays in the Dunbar St Hall, Old Aberdeen, AB24 1UU at 7.30pm (DV).

22<sup>nd</sup> February, 'John Macdonald of Calcutta', Rev Neil Ross (Dingwall)

29<sup>th</sup> March, 'James Begg', Neil Angus Macdonald (Edinburgh)

## Lewis Branch

Meetings are on Fridays in the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway at 7.30 pm (DV).

11<sup>th</sup> January, 'The Scottish Psalter', Dr Robert Dickie (Stornoway)

1<sup>st</sup> February, 'Scotland and the Jews', Rev Maurice Roberts (Inverness)

22<sup>nd</sup> March, 'Modern Interpretations of the Scottish Reformation', Rev Professor John McIntosh (Free Church College)

## Inverness Branch

Meetings are on Mondays in the Inverness Royal Academy, Culduthel Road, Inverness at 7.30pm (DV).

14<sup>th</sup> January, '19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Missions to the Jews', Rev Dr John Ross (Glenurquhart)

18<sup>th</sup> February, 'The Heidelberg Catechism Remembered', Ds Wouter Pieters (Holland)

18<sup>th</sup> March, 'The Solemn League & Covenant', Rev A Sinclair Horne (Edinburgh)



# CONTENTS

John Erskine of Dun (1509-1591)	3
Charlie Webster	
Martin Luther Tour	13
John Erskine on the Kirk of God	14
A Reformed View of Scotland's Parish System	16
Rev. Michael Ives	
A Forgotten Servant of Christ: Rev. John Edgar	24
Rev. Trevor Kirkland	
Society and Branch News	30

## MEMBERSHIP & BULWARK SUBSCRIPTIONS

All correspondence regarding Membership and Bulwark subscriptions should be sent to the Membership Secretary, Mrs Deborah Coghill, Millhouse, 53A Garrabost, Point, Isle of Lewis, HS2 0PF.

The subscription is £7 per annum for membership of the Society and £8 per annum for the Bulwark. Membership forms can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, or the Magdalen Chapel, or downloaded from the internet:

[www.scottishreformationsociety.org.uk/downloads/SRS\\_Membership\\_Form.pdf](http://www.scottishreformationsociety.org.uk/downloads/SRS_Membership_Form.pdf)