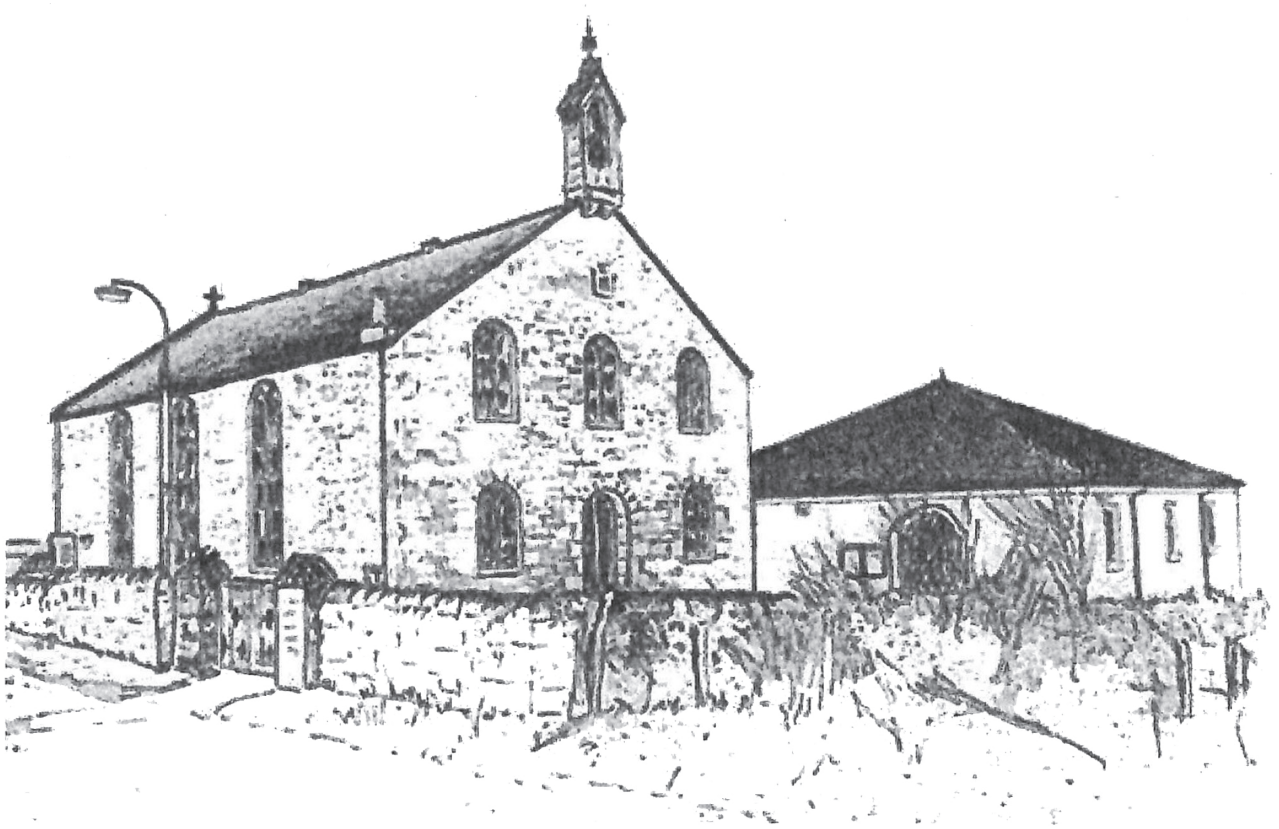


A History of Strathkinness Churches

1801 - 2023



Peter Royds

2023

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Introduction

At the request of St. Mark's Church, St. Andrews, I have written this compilation on churches in Strathkinness for their website. (St. Mark's is now the parish church for Strathkinness.) It is not about the religious practices of the church so much as the story of what has happened to the churches in the village, over the years.

At the time of writing (December 2023) Strathkinness Church is on the verge of permanent closure, so what follows could also serve as a valediction.

Historical information has been taken from Nelda Seed's "Strathkinness – A Glimpse of a Scottish Village" (171 pages, 1986); and an article by Rev. John Hall written in 1964 for the Strathkinness Parish magazine on the one hundredth anniversary of the opening of the parish church (1864).

I am more than grateful to my daughter Elizabeth for typing this up.

Background

Scotland was a Roman Catholic country until the Reformation. The Reformation in Scotland, which started in the mid 1500's, saw murder, burnings and martyrdom only three miles from Strathkinness, in St. Andrews, then an important centre of papal authority. And only half a mile away, on Magus Muir, during a later religious conflict, an Episcopalian Archbishop was assassinated in 1679.

Such events, so close to home, preceded the birth of the Church of Scotland – a Protestant and Presbyterian institution – which became the established national church, by law, in 1690.

But until roughly the mid 1700's, Strathkinness could not really be called a village, more a spread of farmtouns. The area was part of the parish of St. Andrews and St. Leonards and the parish church was the Town Kirk, in St. Andrews, now known as Holy Trinity. All churches in the wider area, including the Town Kirk, were overseen by the Presbytery of St. Andrews.

As Strathkinness developed, the inhabitants travelled to the town for Sunday worship, though there were dissenters who went to Ceres and elsewhere.

First Church

The first church in Strathkinness was built in 1801, but not by the St. Andrews church authorities. It was built by the Relief Church which had broken away from the established Church of Scotland in 1761. The main cause of their dissent was the issue of patronage. They offered "relief to Christians oppressed in their Christian privileges."

Historical note

To follow all the bewildering splits which occurred in the national church, and which affected Strathkinness quite significantly, it is unavoidable to insert a word or two of explanation here.

The Patronage Act 1711 had re-imposed on an unwilling Church of Scotland the right of patrons – in practice, the local gentry – to appoint parish ministers, regardless of the wishes of the congregation. It was not uncommon for patrons to appoint members of their own family.

Opposition to patronage, and other issues, had caused the first split in the Church in 1733 when dissenters set up the first Secession Church. That was followed by a second Secession in 1761 by the Relief Church, as already mentioned. There were at least 5 Secession churches by 1806.

But the biggest walk-out was yet to come. Known as "The Disruption" of 1843, 474 ministers, about one third of the total, left the established church. They formed The Free Church of Scotland, which became the second largest Presbyterian church in the country. (It is not to be confused with the Free Church known as the "Wee Frees" who broke away from the mainstream Free Church in 1900.)

The various breakaway churches thereby gained the freedom to appoint their own ministers, but they had to pay them and build their own churches and manses (which explains why there are so many churches in Scotland.)

The dissenting churches were, however, no different from the established church in their beliefs or Presbyterian form of worship.

It was not until 1874 that the Patronage Act was abolished; and not until 1929 that the national church was at last re-united, though not entirely. The Wee Frees, for example, still stand apart.

Relief Church to Methodist Church

The 1801 Relief Church in Strathkinness was the very first building to be erected on the west side of Main Street, on a site which is now part of the garden of house No. 52, also known as Nelson Cottage. There is no trace of the church today.

The presence of the Relief Church was short lived, due to financial difficulties. In 1816 or 1820, they sold the building to the Methodist Church, a perhaps surprising successor. However, the Methodists, in turn, only survived a few years in Strathkinness.

Old Light Burghers

The first Secession Church of 1733 had itself split into four different divisions, one of which was known as The Old Light Burghers. In 1823 they acquired the church on Main Street.

Matters became more complicated in 1839 when most of the Old Light Burgher movement re-joined the established church, even before the main Disruption of 1843 had started.

The consequence of this re-union for Strathkinness was that the Church of Scotland had now acquired a presence in the village in the shape of the minister, congregation and manse of the former Old Light Burghers. The manse had been built opposite the church, now a private house called "Mansedale."

Their minister, Rev. Ralph Robb, joined the Presbytery of St. Andrews, the body which oversees the activities of all Church of Scotland parishes and kirk sessions in the Presbytery area. Indeed, he had served a term as Moderator (chairman) of the Presbytery. It would seem only logical at this stage for the Presbytery to establish a separate Parish of Strathkinness, based on this ready-made presence.

There was, however, a legal question over whether a parish could be set up under a minister coming in from the Secession. In any event, Presbytery did not pursue the parish issue at this stage.

Free Church

Events then overtook them. In 1843, The Disruption occurred. The formation of the Free Church of Scotland now saw Rev. Robb and his congregation leaving the Church of Scotland again and joining the Free Church. In the same year, 1843, Rev. Robb left to become a Free Church minister in Canada.

Is it possible that the Old Light Burghers in Strathkinness had never been happy with the re-union with the Church of Scotland in 1839? Coming out for the Free Church with such apparent readiness suggests that they were not. Equally telling, they had not transferred ownership of their church and manse to the Church of Scotland. These both became Free Church properties. Maybe a conflicted Rev. Robb didn't know which way to turn?

So, by 1843 the church on Main Street had been a Relief, Methodist, Old Light Burghers, Church of Scotland and now Free Church, all in the space of 42 years. The Free Church was to remain in Strathkinness for another 86 years.

Schools

Some three years later, in about 1846, the Free Church built a school further down Main Street. Around 1860, they built a two-storey schoolmaster's house next to it. Both survive as private houses.

Meanwhile, what had the Kirk Session of the established church in St. Andrews been doing in this part of their parish? They had not yet established a parish of Strathkinness or built a church here, but they had

long since set up a school, probably as early as 1650.

The whereabouts are vague until 1777, a time when Strathkinness was a growing settlement (agriculture, weaving then quarrying). In that year St. Andrews Kirk Session built a school on a site of four acres which they designated as the school glebe. This stretched from Main Street all along Church Road (at that time the “road” to Blebo Craigs) at least as far as the junction into Sunnyside (Poffle Lane) and was bounded on the north by the present High Road. The school master, who was appointed and paid by the Kirk Session, was obliged to cultivate this large tract of land. It was later partly feued for houses on Church Road between 1830 and 1860 but is still predominantly today’s village playground.

The first school on the glebe was replaced in 1836 by the one seen today. The new school was also used as a preaching station from the Town Kirk. Church of Scotland villagers therefore no longer had to go into St. Andrews for Sunday worship – at least those who ever had done.

As well as education, the Church of Scotland had also been responsible for the poor of the parish until 1845. Strathkinness was not a wealthy community. The money dispensed by the Town Kirk for poor relief came out of offerings (collections), contributions from local landowners (the heritors of the parish) and fines from those who broke the rules of the Church. It was never enough.

New Parish

Then, in 1860, the Presbytery of St. Andrews finally created the separate Parish of Strathkinness, disjoined from the parish of St. Andrews and St. Leonards. The boundaries of the parish extend well beyond the village. It is a “quoad sacra” parish, having only church government functions and no civil government role, such as education, which remained the responsibility of the Town Kirk after 1860.

The patronage system of appointing ministers still prevailed in 1860, so the original Trustees of the Parish Church took care to ensure that the appointment of its first minister, Rev. David Stewart, met with the approval of the congregation. From 1860-1864 he conducted services in the school on Church Road.

New Parish Church

A new parish church was completed in 1864 on the south side of Church Road, as seen today. The bell on the old church (school) was transferred to the new church.

On the north side of Church Road, as mentioned, lay the very ample four-acre school glebe but the Town Kirk had no need to re-designate part of it for the new church. The sites on which the church and adjacent manse were built were both donated by John Whyte Melville, a major landowner in and around Strathkinness and elsewhere. He was a member of the Episcopal Church. The Whyte-Melville’s local estates were bought by James Younger of Alloa (brewery) in 1900. The Youngers were also generous supporters of Strathkinness church and village, and are Episcopalians.



Strathkinness Parish Church, Built 1864

The manse was completed in 1873, nine years after the church. There was no church or manse glebe at Strathkinness. The naming of the two rows of houses called "The Glebe" and "Glebe Row", built fairly recently (c. 2015) on the field next to the church, is perhaps based on a misunderstanding.

Nor is there a graveyard. Quoad sacra churches are not obliged to bury their dead. Until the 1900's the coffins were conveyed to St. Andrews for burial by a horse-drawn hearse kept at the "hearse house", no. 36 High Road. The hearse was maintained by local public subscription. A sort of funeral club.

Two churches, two schools

Three years after the parish church was completed in 1864, the Free Church built themselves a new church further up Main Street in 1867. This is now the Village Hall. Both churches co-existed until 1935.



The second Strathkinness Free Church, Built 1867

The two church schools also continued separately until 1885 when they were amalgamated to become the village school of today.

Churches ceased to have responsibility for school education, which passed to the School Boards in 1872. So, it was the local School Board which combined the two former church schools in 1885.

In transferring the glebe to the school board in 1872, the Town Kirk stipulated that their school must remain available to the parish church for meetings etc. Also, that the glebe must be used for educational purposes only. This is why the playpark has survived as an open space. As mentioned, some houses were allowed on the glebe before 1872 but anything after 1872 required a building dispensation or waiver from the Kirk Session of Holy Trinity (not Strathkinness) who imposed the original restriction on use.

The school-master's house, on the corner of Church Road and Main Street, was re-built by the Education Authority in 1905 and has since become a private house called "The Old School House".

Discipline

Within the Church of Scotland and the Free Church, discipline was formidable. "Acts of Scandal" such as adultery, fornication, drunkenness and other transgressions of the moral standards of the Kirk are recorded in the kirk session minute books. Attendance at church was expected every Sunday, and especially at the twice-yearly Celebration of Holy Communion, for which records of those present were kept. Attendance at this service was a valued privilege and could be withdrawn for bad behaviour. Working on the Sabbath was not allowed.

Punishments included appearing before the congregation in “public humiliation” (until 1800) or fines (until 1840). Appearances before the Kirk Session, rather than the whole congregation, continued for significantly longer and the minute books for Strathkinness Parish Church 1860-1890’s bear witness to the proceedings. For example, single women found “guilty” of having a child were censured, though discovering who the father was enabled the Elders (members of the Kirk Session) to cajole him into paying maintenance.

Kirk Session meetings are still a basic feature of Presbyterian church governance, though discipline is now unlikely to appear on the agenda! The intriguing question today is why people dutifully accepted the cradle to grave influence and discipline of the church. Was it through fearful resignation to its overwhelming authority; or through genuine belief in its teachings, and promises of the hereafter? Or both?

Re-union

For seventy-five years (1860 -1935) the two churches in Strathkinness continued their separate existences. But by the 1920’s the Free Church had encountered a variety of difficulties and had united with the Free Church in Ceres in 1917, the minister living in Ceres.

Nationally, the gradual and piecemeal moves by the dissenting churches resulted in the re-union of the Free Church movement with the Church of Scotland in 1929.

Locally, however, the Free Church in Strathkinness, despite its troubles, decided not to unite with the parish church (although Ceres Free Church had united with its parish church). They did not want Rev. Walter McLeod of the parish church to be their minister. A compromise was reached whereby the two congregations would unite and jointly call a new minister when Mr McLeod retired or died. He did not retire and did not die for another six years, in 1935. He had served as the parish church minister for thirty-eight years, the longest tenure of all its ministers. During those last six years, the Free Kirk was reduced to a preaching station, and had no minister of its own from 1917 onwards.

Rev. McLeod was not the first minister to die in office. A plaque on the baptismal font in the parish church records that the last ministerial act of the Rev. Andrew Tait was “to baptise on his deathbed two little ones” in 1890. During his fourteen-year tenure, Rev. Tait conducted 369 baptisms (average 1 every 2 weeks). The Baptism Register dates from 1876.

One Church

After the eventual union of the two churches in 1935, the parish church was retained in preference to the Free Church building; and likewise, the manses. There were 419 names on the new combined members roll, not including children. The first minister of the united churches was Rev. John Patterson.

The first Free Church (originally the Relief Church etc) was taken over in 1867 by Andrew Thom, Joiners, and later Danskins Transport. The building no longer exists. The replacement Free Church further up Main Street was sold in 1938 to become the Village Hall, as it still is today. The bell from the Free Church is preserved inside the hall. The Free Church school in lower Main Street became the Mitchell Hall (Mitchell was a quarry master) and is now a private house called “The Old Hall”. The school-master’s house next to it is also a private house, “The Hall House”. The Free Kirk manse, opposite the first church, and known as “Mansedale”, was sold in 1957 to Magnus Danskin, previously tenant.

Alterations to the Parish Church

In 1893, the (upstairs) gallery of the parish church was extended and choir seats were installed downstairs. The Precenter, who led the singing in the church, was provided with a new raised chair. A harmonium was allowed in 1898, the singing being unaccompanied by instrumental music before that. The combination of choirs and organs brought about the eventual demise of precenters (though the Wee Frees possibly still have them).

At the time of the union in 1935, electricity was installed in the church. The heating system was improved but remained troublesome. The pulpit, which was built in the centre of the east wall, was removed. A new pulpit was constructed in the north-east corner. The organ and choir, previously in front of the old pulpit, were relocated to the south-east corner. The central wall space, where the old pulpit had been, was panelled in light wood. A new communion table in matching light oak took centre stage. In 1937, the St. Andrews Citizen reported “now the church has been beautified, it would be the finest church of its size in the Presbytery.”

Since then, the church has retained substantially the same appearance inside and out, although in the late 1950's the windows in the east wall were replaced by the two stained glass windows seen today. They were once in the University's St. Salvator's Chapel. The coloured glass portrayals of the bible and eagle are bespoke additions. The bible motif is intentionally illegible. The seats for the choir were no longer required when it was disbanded in the early 1970's. Extensive ceiling and roof repairs were carried out in 1980 and 1984.

Tap water and sanitation only came to Strathkinness in the mid 1950's, all water for drinking and cooking being drawn from the numerous wells in the village before then. Mains gas arrived in the early 1990's.



East end interior of Parish Church (organ now removed)



West end interior of Parish Church

Post war era

The first minister of the united churches, Rev. John Patterson, went on active service as an army chaplain during World War II, from 1939 to 1942, and left for the Scots Kirk in Bombay in 1946.

The war saw five names added to the twenty-three already inscribed on the village war memorial after World War I. The memorial was erected at the corner of the school-house garden in 1921. Commemorative services have probably been held at the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday every year to 2023 and hopefully will continue after the church closes.

In 1945, the congregation voted by 22 to 2 that women should not be admitted as church elders. It is not clear why so few people attended the meeting. It was not until 1973 that women elders were appointed in Strathkinness. One of the first intake of three women, Dr. Veronica Smart, is still an elder today at St. Marks, St. Andrews, fifty years on.

During the ministry of Rev. Charles Nicol (1951-1960), the church and village were involved in a well-documented celebration of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. A special church service was held on 31st May and then, on 2nd June, a 12-inch black and white TV was set up in the village hall for viewing the coronation ceremony. Few people had a TV at the time. There was a fancy-dress parade around the village and sports events in the afternoon, a dance in the hall that evening, followed by a bonfire at 11.45pm.

100 years on

By the time of the centenary of the founding of the parish in 1960, nine ministers of the parish had come and gone. There was a vacancy that year after the Rev. Nicol left and the Presbytery of St. Andrews would not allow the congregation to select anyone as their new minister who was under fifty-five. Among the reasons given were that there was a shortage of young ministers and their energies were required for more demanding parishes. Despite fierce opposition to this restriction, the kirk session eventually complied and appointed Rev. John Hall in 1961.

In the event, Mr Hall proved a popular choice and served for seven years. He initiated the construction of the first church hall, a pre-fabricated structure assembled in 1963. It occupied the same site where the larger second hall now stands on ground which was then part of the manse garden. The hall provided a meeting place for the Sunday school, which was previously held in the manse and, from 1967, the Playgroup. Also, for the Womens' Guild which used to meet in the Youth House on Bonfield Road. The Youth House, now a private house, No.1 Bonfield Road, was originally built and donated by Mrs Younger in 1909 as a Women's and Girls' club, with tennis courts opposite tended by her gardeners.

Rev. Hall was succeeded by Rev. Alestair Bennett, aged 60, (1969-1976). He started a church news-sheet in 1969, printed free of charge at Guardbridge Paper Mill where one of the elders happened to be the managing director. Mr Bennett was supportive of women in the church. He was largely responsible for setting up the Kirk Youth Club in 1975.

The next minister was Rev. Douglas Galbraith, who was well under 55 (1977-1980). He took on the leadership of the youth club and the editorship of Mr Bennett's church newsletter, renamed "Kirk and Community" to attract a broader readership. This publication continued until 2020. Rev. Galbraith was the last minister to live in the manse.

First Linkage – 1980

A church linkage (as distinct from a union) is the combining of one or more parishes into a single unit. Only one minister and one manse are required for the whole, though services at the different churches can continue as before. Each congregation retains its financial independence and its own kirk session, but the costs of the joint expenses, such as the minister's stipend (salary) and the upkeep of the manse, are shared in agreed proportions. These arrangements have become common-place due to shrinking congregations and the continuing shortage of ministers.

The St. Andrews Presbytery had only recently linked Dairsie and Kemback parishes in this way when, in 1980, they added Strathkinness to the grouping. The minister of the dual linkage, Rev. James Hamilton, became minister of the triple linkage and continued to occupy the manse at Dairsie. That meant the Strathkinness and Kemback manses could be sold. There was no place for Rev. Galbraith of Strathkinness in the new arrangements.

Rev. Hamilton, a man of 50, had a previously diagnosed heart condition and suffered a further heart attack which forced him to retire only months after the addition of Strathkinness to his charge. Sadly, he died soon after retiring.

Rev. Alex Strickland succeeded him in the triple linkage in 1981. It was a large area for pastoral visits, and he could not be in three places at once for Sunday worship. He could only manage two services on rota, the third church having to pay a supply minister. Attending meetings of the three different kirk sessions and financial (or congregational) boards, mostly in the evenings, was not ideal.

Above all, three parishes had lost their own minister. It was the start of the retreat of the church presence in Strathkinness. The manse was sold in 1981 with the stipulation (by Church of Scotland Head Office) that the word "manse" must not be used in the house name. It is simply now called "Strathkinness House".

Nonetheless, from 1993-96, the church devoted considerable energy and money to building a new church hall to replace the original (1963) which was no longer fit for purpose. It cost over £100,000. Nearly half of that came from invested proceeds from the sale of the manse. There were a large number of fundraising events over two and a half years. Sizeable donations were solicited from local and national charities. One of the items for a silent auction was a porcelain trinket box donated by the Queen Mother. About £20,000 was contributed by village groups and residents.

The new hall was opened in 1995. There was a further phase of fundraising to fit out the basement for a revived youth club which restarted in March 1999. Although the whole hall project was orchestrated by the church, it was intended as a community facility.



Demolition of old Church Hall 1994/5



New Church Hall, completed 1995

Ups and downs

The take-up for the new church hall demonstrated that there were still enough groups and events at that time to generate sufficient business for the two halls in the village.

Disappointingly for the Church, however, the support for its hall was not reflected in any increase in church membership or attendance.

In 2003, towards the end of his ministry, Rev. Strickland wrote to all members regretting that attendance at Sunday worship was now rarely as many as thirty. He warned of an uncertain future when he retired in two years.

Second Linkage – 2005

When Rev. Strickland retired in 2005, the cumbersome three way linkage was dissolved. Instead, Strathkinness was linked with Hope Park Church in St. Andrews, Dairsie with St. John's in Cupar and Kemback with Ceres church. The disappearance of the triple linkage meant that no replacement minister need be found; and Dairsie manse could be sold. This neat and tidy outcome belies the inept handling by St. Andrews Presbytery of the so-called consultations which preceded it.

Rev. David Arnott, minister of Hope Park, St. Andrews, also became minister at Strathkinness under this new linkage. He could take the Sunday service at both churches because Hope Park was not already linked to any other church, unlike the two other Church of Scotland town churches. They had expressed no wish to link with Strathkinness. Strathkinness maintained its financial independence and its own kirk session and Financial Board but shared the costs of the manse in St. Andrews.

150 years on

Rev. Arnott retired in 2010. In the following year he became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The new minister of the linked charge was Rev. Allan McCafferty. He was to be the last minister at Strathkinness. Hope Park Church was now called Hope Park & Martyrs, Martyrs Church in St. Andrews having united with Hope Park.

In 2014, a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the opening of Strathkinness parish church took place with an exhibition of memorabilia and historical information in the church, accompanied by a very fine floral display.



150th Anniversary of Parish Church, October 2014

However, all the groups and activities with a church connection had, over the years, come to an end by 2020 – Sunday school (ended 2004), Women’s Guild (2009), Youth Club (2014), “Kirk and Community” (2020) and finally the Friendship Club (2020), a weekly social gathering for mainly elderly villagers. The “Kirk and Community” newsletter was a sad loss, after fifty years or so. Around 400 copies were distributed monthly to homes in the area. The surviving editions are a unique record of village life.

Church finances and viability

Up until the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020, there were still plenty of non-church activities in the hall, although the Dancing School closed in 2019. These included the Playgroup (no longer affiliated to the church), Pilates Class, Post Office, Open Group, Craft Group, Community Council meetings, Councillors’ surgeries and Elections.

The hall had become a small business. Moreover, the rental income ensured that the church remained viable. The church did not nearly sustain itself financially by the income from the congregation. The problem was not the congregation’s lack of generosity, but lack of numbers.

Pre-pandemic, church attendance on Sunday was typically between 8 and 16. About 30 members and adherents gave money to the church on a regular basis, of whom less than 10 were under seventy years old, and at least 10 were over eighty.

All in all, the prognosis was not good. The Church of Scotland can exercise itself with initiatives on taking the Church forward – mission, inclusiveness, rationalisation of churches, team ministries etc etc – but it is self-evident that if there is no next generation of members, the church does not have a future.

Covid 19 Pandemic 2020/21

When the first lockdown was imposed, the church closed on 15th March 2020 until 20th September when services resumed, but only once a month. The ban was re-imposed from Boxing Day that year through to 28th March 2021 when churches could re-open under continuing restrictions. There was still 2 metre social distancing, later relaxed to 1 metre. Zig zag tape and cards on pews indicated where to sit, or not to. It was likened to a crime scene. Singing was not allowed at first, but, in time, was permitted with masks on. Hand sanitizing, on entering and leaving, and a one-way system, were constant requirements. Contact details of those attending were kept, for tracing purposes.

The hall was an even more complicated issue, because of the risks of cross-contamination among multiple users. It also closed in March 2020 but didn't reopen during either that year or 2021, except for the twice weekly Post Office facility, which was exempt from lockdown as an essential public service.

Unsurprisingly the church ran at a financial loss in 2020 and 2021. That was not the reason for its eventual closure, however. It had enough resources to carry on, if necessary. What it did not have was enough people.

Union – 2021

A church union is more than a linkage. Congregations which unite become as one, with a united kirk session and finances. They can still retain more than one church, particularly if they are in different areas.

In 2019, before the pandemic, a Local Church Review by St. Andrews Presbytery had recommended that consideration be given by Strathkinness to a union with Hope Park & Martyrs (H.P & M), with whom they were already linked, "bearing in mind.... the congregation is small and ageing, and the burden of responsibilities falls on..... the few."

By mid-2021, the Strathkinness Kirk Session had shrunk to 3 members and the Financial Board to 5, including the minister on both. There was no Session Clerk, Clerk to the Financial Board, Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Data Protection Officer or Presbytery Elder. And after twenty years each in post, the Hall Manager had retired, and the Treasurer had given notice. All these posts are unremunerated. It was obvious that the office-bearers were not going to be replaced from among the "small and ageing" Strathkinness membership.

Discussions on a possible union were revived in 2021 after the brunt of the pandemic and a union of the two congregations was agreed, to take effect from 31st December 2021.

All 72 members of Strathkinness Church were notified of the meeting on 7th November 2021 to vote on the union. 10 people came along. Discussion on a new name for the united congregation prompted the most interest. The vote was unanimously in favour of a union with H.P & M.

What next?

H.P & M is also an ageing congregation. It was disappointing but clear from the union discussions that they would be unable to provide enough support to keep either the church or the hall open in Strathkinness. H.P & M church would therefore be the only place of worship.

What then, was the point of a union? The alternative was Dissolution, whereby Strathkinness could simply vote to dissolve itself rather than unite. Strathkinness kirk session nevertheless decided to unite so that its funds and deposits of approximately £95,000 would pass to the united congregation, rather than into the coffers of the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh by dissolution.

As for the consequences of a union for the Strathkinness church and hall buildings, these (like nearly all church buildings) are owned by the General Trustees anyway. So, although the ownership could not pass to the newly united congregation, it is the established practice that when a church, manse or hall is sold, the General Trustees keep the proceeds but allow the local church to draw on that fund for future repair and maintenance costs of its remaining buildings. In this case, that would be the H.P & M church, hall and manse in St. Andrews.

In finalising the union, it was agreed that the united congregation be called St. Mark's Parish Church, St. Andrews. The words St. Mark include ST for Strathkinness, MA for Martyrs and RK for Hope Park.

Strathkinness church went on the market in summer 2022. There is a prospective purchaser, but negotiations have become protracted, and the sale is not yet concluded. Meanwhile, ever since the union, the church has remained open for the last two years for Sunday worship (and funerals) by the united congregation of St. Marks's on the second Sunday of each month. That is simply to prevent a very considerable increase in the insurance premium if the building was left unoccupied, and more prone to vandalism.

The hall was not put up for sale because Strathkinness Community Trust requested the opportunity to buy it. They were given a Licence by the General Trustees to occupy the hall for 2 years in order to raise funds and re-generate the business. The Trust, however, after less than eighteen months, voted not to proceed with this buy-out opportunity. The General Trustees will therefore put the hall on the open market.

There is perhaps one final avenue which should be explored. On one view, Strathkinness has lost everything and gained nothing from the union. As mentioned, local donations for building the hall in the 1990's represented about 20% of the cost. The concern was raised at the Community Trust meeting (on whether or not to proceed with the buy-out) that if the hall was sold and lost to the community, there would be nothing left to show for these contributions from local residents.

There is arguably a case that 20% of the sale proceeds of the hall should remain in the village in some shape or form. That would not only show some benefit from the union but would also be a worthwhile legacy to Strathkinness from the departed church.

The last minister at Strathkinness, Rev. Allan McCafferty, who has witnessed so much change, will not be here to witness what happens next. At the end of this year, he leaves St. Andrews for a post at Church of Scotland central office in Edinburgh. He departs amid ongoing discussions about the re-organisation/union of the three Church of Scotland town churches.

Conclusion

This story has come full circle – from having no church in Strathkinness before 1801 to no church again after 2023. I have attempted a compilation of historical facts about the churches in the village during that 222-year period. The earlier events are perhaps the most interesting. There is no analysis of the reasons for the decline in the importance of the church, nationally; nor of why people gradually de-prioritized their church, locally.

However, I hope it gives a picture of how things began, progressed and ended, and that the record is worth preserving for anyone interested in knowing about the past. Life goes on.

Peter Royds

The 16 Ministers of Strathkinness Parish Church 1860-2021

1860 David Stewart

1865 Dr A.K.H. Boyd

1866 Thomas Murray

1876 Andrew D. Tait

1890 J Rolland McNab

1897 Walter McLeod

1936 John H. Patterson (1939-1942 on military service)

1946 William M.G. Edgar

1951 Charles Nicol

1961 John A. Hall

1969 Alestair Bennett

1977 Douglas Galbraith

1980 James Hamilton

1981 Alexander Strickland

2006 A.D.K. Arnott

2011 Allan McCafferty

2021 Union with Hope Park and Martyrs



