



# Church Recording Society

## THE HISTORY OF THE POST-REFORMATION CHURCHES IN SCOTLAND

Key dates in post-Reformation Scottish church history in the early stages:

1560-1599 Major changes brought about in Church architecture and practice

1599-1610 Lutheran Bishops in post in Scottish Churches

1610- 1638 With the Union of the Crowns gathering force, a time of Episcopalianism

1638- 1660 National Covenant; rebellion by Scots over approach of Archbishop Laud and his Prayer-book

1651 Church of Scotland officially recognised by Charles II

1660- 1690 Second Period of Episcopalianism in Scotland's churches

With the Reformation came three major changes to churches in Scotland:

- The removal of pre-Reformation fixtures and fittings
- The adaptation of existing church buildings to give prominence to the pulpit rather than to the altar. The WORD was the main element rather than visual symbols.
- Removal of provision for burial inside Churches which improved the smell of the buildings, and gave rise to alterations of buildings by Heritors who wished to demonstrate their sanctity, their generosity, their separate entrances to areas of the church, and of course separate seating areas.

At the same time, Bell Towers and belfries were developed into at times quite lavish creations as gifts to the churches when interior decoration, such as stained glass windows, was unacceptable. All church bells in Scotland were placed outside the buildings, as calls to worship rather than acting as integral parts of the service as in Catholic and Church of England environments.

A number of Fife churches provide good examples of early Reformed churches – Burntisland, Pittenweem and Crail for example. In a number of churches of the period, there is a canopy over the pulpit to amplify the sound of the WORD. While the Catholic Church had the priest as intermediary at the Altar, with his back to the congregation, the Reformed Churches in Scotland aimed at the word being passed directly from preacher to congregation. Altars disappeared, and were often replaced by Communion tables.

(The Burntisland Church has an extraordinary interior of separate pews in a Netherland Lutheran formation.)

In the First Period of Episcopalianism (1610-38), Church of Scotland bishops were ordained by Church of England bishops, as James I and Charles I attempted to harmonise Scottish and English Churches. At the time in Scotland, there was some element of mediaeval revivalism – brass chandeliers from the Netherlands, a bell tower in Pencaitland, and some low buildings of Aberdeenshire churches with clear Scandinavian influence. The Old Church in Largs has a splendid interior formed in this spell.

After the Restoration in 1660, Charles II rescinded his promises to the Scots. The Canongate Church, designed perhaps for James II's proposed triumphal return to Scotland, is very much Episcopalian in concept and design. The extraordinary blue paint throughout is a more modern variant with its own very different history.

After 1690, the emphasis on plainness was restored, and the Heritors (well worth a further chapter in themselves) began to look for other ways to recognise their families, their wealth and their generosity to the Church of Scotland. Bits and pieces of decoration returned to churches, as the heritors aimed for immense value for money but with the cheapest form of permanent memorials – thus galleries with separate entrances and so on. Gradually, leading architects were appointed to create new buildings – such as James Playfair (brother of more celebrated William) who in 1806, having studied Westminster Abbey, introduced revivalist Gothic in St George's West (at East End of George St, Edinburgh) and Farnell Church Brechin, to begin a new strand.

Throughout the period, the Word from the pulpit, and the togetherness around the Communion table were remained fundamental. The white covering of the pew shelves to this day of course emphasises this communality of worship – an extension visually of the table.

In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Telford was charged with creating new churches for new congregations in Scotland, and he designed numerous small churches and manses in vernacular style.

The 1840's reflect new directions in Scottish worship, after the Disruption. This moment led to the Free Church splitting from the Church of Scotland mainly as a result of the disagreement on who had the right to appoint ministers. While the Heritors in the C of S had undertaken this task, The Free Church saw the matter as something for the participation of the full congregation. In broad terms, The Free Kirk came to concentrate more on the essentials of simple worship; the C of S chose to focus more on the power of the Church itself, and thus more dramatic, lively architecture came into prominence – Alexander 'Greek' Thompson's creations are excellent examples of this radical new development in Glasgow - in particular St Vincent's Church and Caledonian Road Church.

Scottish Churches became more ornate again –Dowanhill Parish Church, Glasgow, (now used solely as a wedding venue), St Salvator’s St Andrews, and Govan Parish Church demonstrate the influence of major architects of the day. Stained glass returned to acceptability. The pulpits created were now highly elaborate while remaining at the centre. Dowanhill’s columned pulpit was the width of the nave itself.

Episcopalian churches developed once again and altars returned.

The Scottish Church has simple essentials –

**The Pulpit** (representing the Word)

**The Communion Table** (symbolic and unifying)

**The Bell** (calling to worship, not interrupting the service)