

AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEWPORT-ON-TAY:

By Helen MacGregor (Student)

Part Two

I have chosen to analyse the coming into being of the United Presbyterian Church, Newport-on-Tay, Fife (Trinity United Free Church since c1900). My reasons for doing so are quite straightforward. Of the first two churches I was interested in, one minister didn't reply to my letter and the other one informed me that his Church had only been in the present building for twenty-five years and he didn't know anything of its history. I was left, therefore, with my third choice, the later-built United Presbyterian Church in Newport. Here I struck lucky. A very helpful Session Clerk, Mr. Wallace and an historian's paradise of primary source material, were on hand. So armed with my camera, pen and lots of paper, I went to work. What follows are my findings and interpretation of same, and how they highlight two or three different issues concerning religion in mid-Victorian Britain, particularly in Scotland.

Newport-on-Tay began as New Dundee in 1713-15 with the construction of an inn and a pier. Houses were being built in the 1790's; then after the opening of Telford's steamboat pier in 1823 and again after the opening of the Tay Bridge in 1878, it expanded, first as an appendage to Dundee and later to a holiday resort for the citizens of Dundee. Two churches had been built during this time; the Congregational Church in 1868 and the Parish Church in 1869-70.
(The Buildings of Scotland - Fife, pp 334-5)

So bearing these points in mind, let us now consider how the U.P. Church came into being.

".....A meeting of members of the U.P. Church, resident in Newport and neighbourhood, held in the Blyth Hall, Newport, on 13th May 1878...." was held to determine whether or not there was a need to open, ".....a Preaching Station during the summer months...." in Newport. (1) ".....The United Presbytery of Dundee was asked to provide services...." and in June of that year, "....worship was begun in a hall, the people taking financial responsibility...." (2) This must have proved successful because at a meeting on 16th September 1878 in the Mission Hall, Newport, "The chairman reported the result of the experiment during the summer months....and stated that the time had come for considering [whether] to form the Station into a regular congregation in connection with the U.P. Church....", and followed this by saying he believed it would help to promote the growth of the denomination in the area. (3) From an extract of the minutes of Dundee Presbytery on 3rd December 1878, it was decided since no-one was against it, "....to form the members of the [Preaching] Station into a regular congregation....", and on 10th December the members of the Preaching Station unanimously agreed to petition the Presbytery to "....appoint one of its number to Moderate in an election of Elders...." which was duly carried out at a meeting in the Blyth Hall on 27th January 1879. (4) On 1st April 1879, the Rev. James Simpson Scotland was translated from the U.P. Church, Errol to the U.P. Church, Newport and was inducted on 10th September 1879. (5)

At the time of Rev. J.S. Scotland's induction there were forty-two members on the Communicant's Roll and by 1881, this had risen to ninety-two. Their occupations are given as follows: 1 Banker; 2 Shoe- and 1 Boot-maker; 1 Carver & Gilder; 2 Clothiers; 2 Gardeners; 1 Widow; 1 Farmer; 1 coachman; 1 retired Mason; 3 Servants; an Ironmonger, a Secretary, a Spinster and a Printer; 1 Glazier; 1 Ship Broker; 1 Bank Clerk and an Insurance Agent. (6)

This was then, very much a community Church, with its members coming from all walks of life and apparently not restricted to any particular class. But it was to be another two-and-a-half years after his induction before the Rev. Scotland would have a permanent Church building to house his congregation, and not before a number of issues were dealt with.

On 13th May 1879, at a managers' meeting, it was decided to proceed with the building of a church as soon as possible. (7) On 14th October, it was decided to increase the sites committee by two and to send the 'tracing' to an architect if necessary. (8) This was followed, at a Special Meeting on 26th January 1880, by the decision to send an appointed Deputation to met with planners regarding the possible sites for the Church and on 5th February, three or four different sites were proposed and plans submitted. (9)

At a managers' meeting on 1st April 1880, there was a discussion of the different possible sites for the proposed building; the site then being decided upon and a building fund set up. (10)

Due to a few hiccoughs regarding certain clauses in a site agreement, it was 2nd September 1880 before a site was finally accepted and plans from three architects were asked for. (11) By 15th October, three architects had been selected and on 30th October, the plans of C. & L. Ower were accepted by the committee. (12) By 17th January 1881, there was £1,100 in the building fund and on 3rd February the sites committee was discharged and a building committee was set up. (13) At a meeting of the managers on 14th February, "....it was resolved to instruct architects to proceed at once with the plans and specifications and take in offers with a view to forward the work of building the Church." (14)

It was now almost three years since the people first got together to form a United Presbyterian Church in Newport and who could blame them for getting a trifle impatient to see their church built. By 7th April 1881, local tradesmen were given the opportunity to offer their various departments in connection with the building of the church and on 2nd May the offers were received and accepted by the committee; the total amount being £1,933 - 7s - 4d. (15) Over three-and-a-half months later, on 20th August 1881, the foundation stone was laid. A momentous occasion indeed. (16) The following year, on 15th April 1882, as the building was nearing completion, members were invited to choose the seats they wished to occupy. (17) (Two years previously, the seat rent had been 6/- per annum, payable quarterly in advance. The name plates on the ends of the pews are still there and still in use to this day.)

Finally, on the evening of Thursday 18th May 1882, Newport United Presbyterian Church was officially opened by a Dr. Kerr, who preached from the last three verses of the hundred and twenty-second psalm. The Rev. J.S. Scotland remarked in 1886, "...It was a matter of great satisfaction and comfort that the Church was opened free from debt, the whole of the money having been subscribed before the buildings were completed." The Rev. Scotland also writes, in 1886, that the total number of Communicants by that time was one hundred and seventy-two and the number of "....sittings let at present is,215." He adds that a "....considerable number...." of these are occupied by friends outside the membership. (18)

Obviously, the setting up and building of a church was not a matter to be undertaken lightly. On 1st June 1882, the managers held their first meeting in their own Church Hall - what a proud meeting that must have been! And the congregation had had to wait even longer - four years - before they held their first service in their own Church.

The building itself is situated in the angle between two roads, as can be seen from one of two of the photographs, and I wonder whether this had anything to do with the final shape of the church? i.e. a cross-shape. It has semi-octagonal ends to the transepts and an octagonal steeple. It is built in a Spikey Gothic (19) style and has, with one exception, plain, coloured stained-glass windows; the exception being the round window, above and behind the original pulpit, which depicts the head of Christ in its centre. The position of the original pulpit can be seen in the photograph of the plan and the round window and position of the new pulpit can be seen in the photograph looking towards the organ pipes (a later addition). The intricacy of the roof beams can be seen in the photograph of the semi-octagonal end to the N.W. transept. Looking at the plan, I would say that this would have been the only possible shape the church could have

been built on this particular site. It is also possible, from the plan, to see the arrangement of the pews, which remains almost unchanged today. Everyone focussed on the central pulpit. Preaching must have been a fairly important part of the service.

I hope I have shown that in the late 1870s and early 1880s, religion was important enough in this area to warrant the setting up of a summer "Preaching Station" to enable those on holiday to attend church while absent from home. Leading on from this, the subsequent setting up of a permanent church points to there being no lessening of religious interest, at least in this area, and presumably the Congregational and Parish Churches weren't serving the needs of all the people - maybe they were more classist? Which brings me to the final point, regarding the occupations of the Communicants. This Church would not appear to share the same difficulties with class as we have seen in other Victorian Churches and in fact, was known to be unusually liberal with its contributions to both home and foreign mission schemes. (Dundee Advertiser, August 23rd 1904)

Was this liberality an attribute of the Scots, or was it more local than that? Or was it to do with the rural location, or because the Scots in general, were perhaps more strictly religious? Or is it this particular denomination? I don't know.

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Dundee Advertiser, August 23rd 1904. Note 2.

Communicants Roll Book for Newport United Presbyterian Church, 1878 - 188?. Note 6

Newport United Presbyterian Church, Minutes of Managers Meetings, 13th May 1879 - c1884, pp 1-2, 9, 15-16 & 17, 19, 23-25, 26 & 28, 32 & 34-35, 36, 42, & 53. Notes: 7 - 17 incl.

Scotland, Rev. James, Simpson, Short Review of the History of Newport United Presbyterian Church, 31st December 1886. Note 18.

(All the above documents were found in the vestry of the now, Trinity United Free Church, Newport-on-Tay thanks to the help of Mr. Wallace, the present Session Clerk.)

Gifford, John, The Buildings of Scotland - FIFE, 1988, Butler and Tanner Ltd., pp 334-336. Note 19.

TRINITY U.F. CHURCH, NEWPORT-ON-TAY

Communicants on Roll (31/12/85)	83 total	} 16
Communicants on Roll (31/12/94)	67 total	

From Records to hand, over the past nine years the changes are as follows:-

Year 85-86	minus 7	(1 died & 6 left)
86-87	plus 5	(12 Admitted, 3 died & 4 left)
87-88	no change	(6 Admitted, 2 died & 4 left)
88-89	no change	(2 Admitted, 1 died & 1 left)
89-90	minus 1	(6 Admitted, 6 died & 1 left)
90-91	minus 1	(2 Admitted, & 3 died)
91-92	minus 5	(No admissions, 4 died & 1 left)
92-93	minus 3	(2 Admitted, 4 died & 1 left)
93-94	minus 4	(1 Admitted, 1 died & 4 left)
<u>minus 16*</u>		

There are 3 Organisations, namely the Women's Association, Bible Study / Prayer group & a Missionary group: Last year the W.A. averaged 15 in attendance / meeting, the B.S./P.G. averaged 7 female & 4 male in attendance & the M.G. averaged 7 female & 3 male in attendance.

The Kirk Session has 3 female & 9 male office-bearers & the Board of Management has 3 female & 7 male office-bearers, these figures are for the past year '94.

There has been no Sunday School for the past few years & upto early last year '94 there was a Youth Fellowship, but this was mainly youth from outwith our membership & come early summer they sort of come of age & left only 2, remained, the others went off to higher education & some left the area. (Youth Fellowship nos. for '94 were 4 female & 2 male)

The remaining 2 joined up with the Newport U.F. Church, Youth Fellowship.

Of the 67 Communicants on the Roll, there is approx a 50% split, male & female, mostly are middle aged, that is the reason for the shortage of youth in the membership. The average attendance at a Sunday morning service is 30, which is very good as a fair percentage of the total are house bound, live outwith the district or hospitalised. We have 8 Adherents, (4 male & 4 female), of these 8, 20 the number are reported to T.