
Resistance to the 1892 Declaratory Act in Argyllshire

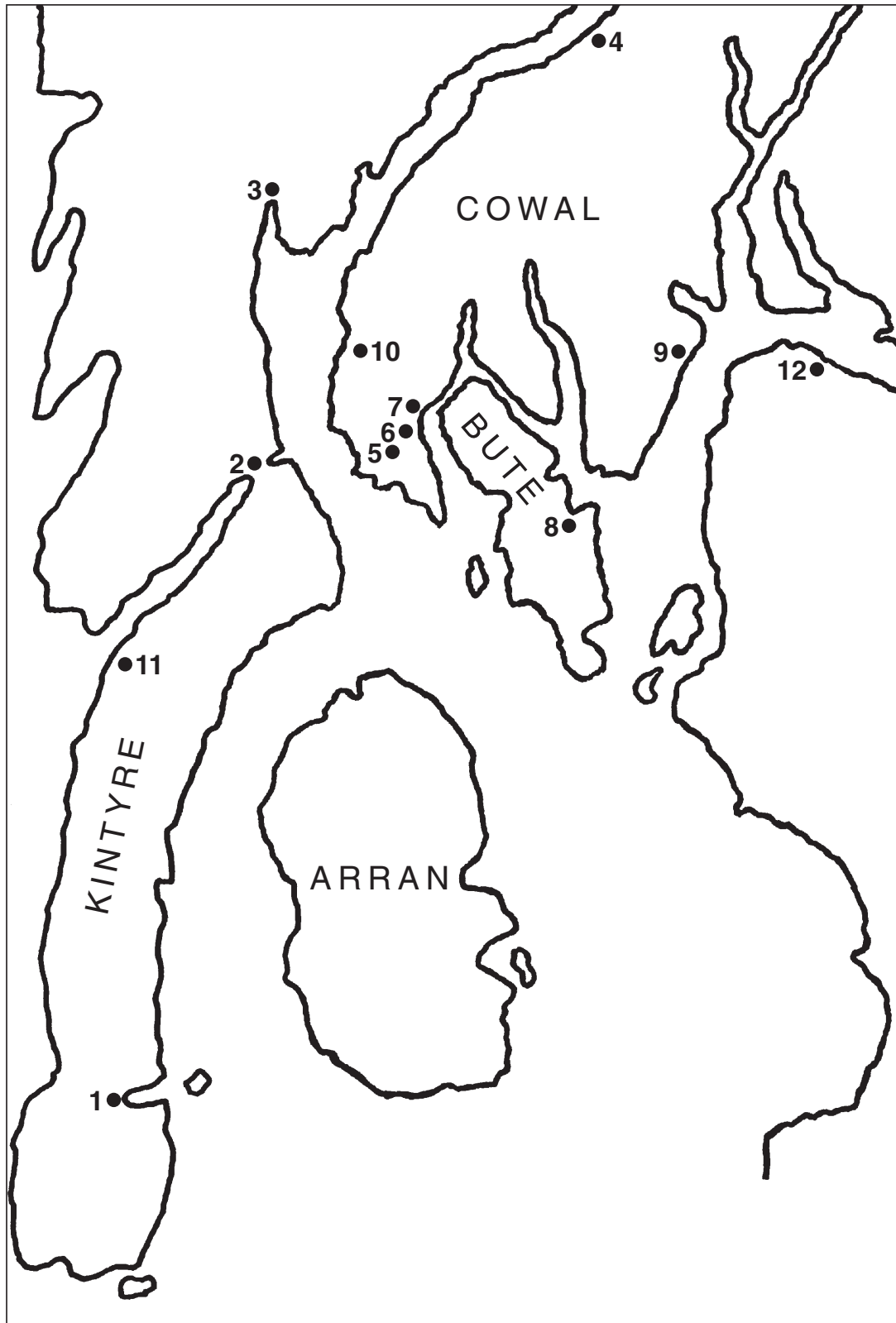
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Opposition to the doctrinal collapse of the Free Church of Scotland in the last two decades of the nineteenth century has often been portrayed as a northern Highlands phenomenon. The tendency has been for Inverness, Skye and the north-west Highlands to be seen as the strongest loci of the conservative cause following the death of the Lowland champion Dr James Begg in 1883.¹ A crucial chapter in the collapse was the passing of the Declaratory Act by the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in 1892. However, some of the strongest opposition to the Declaratory Act came from Argyllshire in the south-west Highlands, an area closer geographically and economically to the Lowlands than most Highland districts.²

A document published for the first time as an Appendix to this article shows that two Free Presbyterian leaders, Neil Cameron and Archibald Crawford, forged their opposition to the Act together in Argyllshire during the summer of 1891 in a way that prepared them

¹ For Begg, see *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 68; *Memoirs of James Begg, D.D.*, Thomas Smith (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1885); *Trembling for the Ark*, James W. Campbell (Scottish Reformation Society, 2011).

² Neither the 1974 Free Church popular history by Professor G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1974) nor the Free Presbyterian official volume, *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970* (Inverness, n.d.), give much space to Argyll. The latter's relatively scant attention to the area was counter-balanced by the historical introduction and selection process for obituaries in the book, *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, Neil Cameron, ed. R. Middleton (paperback Crewe, 1993; hardback 2011). The present writer wishes to underline that this article is a survey of events, rather than deep analysis, as he did not access Kirk Session or Presbytery records for the period in question.



*Sketch map of mid-Argyll showing some places mentioned in this article.
 Key: 1 Campbeltown; 2 Tarbert; 3 Lochgilphead; 4 Strachur; 5 Millhouse; 6 Kames;
 7 Tighnabruaich; 8 Rothesay; 9 Dunoon; 10 Kilfinan; 11 Clachan; 12 Greenock.*

mentally for the possibility of leaving the Free Church.³ The previous decline in practice and spiritual life, as it affected the large Argyllshire congregation of Lorne Street in Campbeltown, four years before the Act, will illustrate the processes in motion. In addition, the division in conservative ranks between those who went on to set up the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1893 and their erstwhile fellow-conservatives who formed the Free Church minority of 1900 will be considered. Despite there being no Free Presbyterian witness in the area today, the denomination's first congregation – Kames – was formed in the Cowal peninsula of the county. Although somewhat later in separating from the Declaratory Act body, the Oban congregation also played an important role.

1. Neil Cameron and Archibald Crawford

Archibald Crawford's contribution to the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church was crucial.⁴ He was close to the denomination's leading minister, Rev Neil Cameron of St Jude's Glasgow, who had met him while supplying the Millhouse section of Kilfinan Free Church for several months in the summer of 1891 as a divinity student.⁵ As a divinity student, Neil Cameron was the first to draw Archibald Crawford's attention to the draft of the Declaratory Act when it appeared in the early summer of 1891.⁶

Born in 1854, Neil Cameron was to become the effective leader of the Free Presbyterian movement in the early twentieth century. In the summer of 1891 however, he was providing supply to Millhouse as a divinity student. Already grieved for the Free Church's decline, the draft of the Act caused him "much darkness and confusion" as he considered it prayerfully in the immediate period after it appeared. Mr Cameron had read it in the *Scotsman* newspaper during the week of the General Assembly. He decided to test each section of the Act by asking the

³ "Anecdotes relating to the eminent Archibald Crawford", Rev Neil Cameron, Glasgow; see Appendix below. The manuscript was typed by the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Glasgow, who gave the present writer permission to publish it.

⁴ Archibald Crawford's obituary appeared in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 8, February 1904, pp. 388-395. For a conversation between an anti-Free Presbyterian minister and Archibald Crawford, see *Social and Religious Life in the Highlands*, Kenneth MacDonald (Edinburgh, 1902), pp. 269-274.

⁵ *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁶ "Anecdotes relating to the eminent Archibald Crawford"; see Appendix.

question of himself: “Do you believe that to be the Truth of God?” He came to the conclusion that the Act’s doctrines were “false and that come what may, we could have nothing to do with the Free Church should it be passed at next Assembly”. He decided to share his view with Archie Crawford. In Mr Cameron’s words:

We told him we had been considering this new act which the Free Church intended to set forth as the declaration of her faith. “And what conclusion did you come to?” he said. “If it will be passed, which we have no doubt it will, we can have nothing further to do with that church.” He looked at us most sternly and said, “You must be cautious and consider what you will do”. “I confess,” he said, “that you have the command, ‘Come out from among them and be ye separate’, but where is your example? You know one cannot walk without two feet – the one foot is the precept and I acknowledge you have that, but the example is the other foot and where is it?” This serious matter was under discussion between us for several weeks. At last we said to him, “Did not Christ command His disciples when they would see Jerusalem encompassed with armies to flee to the mountains and is it not a fact that the true Church in this case is surrounded by her enemies? Is it not high time to flee to the mountains while a way of escape is left open?” “Stop man,” he said, “that may be the other foot.” The next time we met, he said, “I have been thinking since we last met about this serious matter in the Free Church and I am fully of your mind now. The Scripture says: ‘As the mother, so is the daughter.’ The mother is the Church of Rome and men knew well what milk she gave to her children; but now that the daughter has drawn forth her breast to feed her children, men ought to test her milk to see if it is sound. I find the doctrine of that act to be Arminian and Pelagian and the power claimed to judge in her court what her children are to believe is just the doctrine of infallibility in its embryo.”⁷

Mr Cameron noted that from that discussion onwards Crawford was “separated in his mind” from the Free Church.⁸ The General Assembly of 1891 had voted by 428 to 66 to adopt the Act and send it

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

down to the Presbyteries under the Barrier Act, a mechanism designed to prevent sudden change to the constitution.⁹ The conversations in which Mr Crawford and Mr Cameron discussed the Scriptural response to the Act on the part of those defending the doctrines of the Reformation proved crucial. It seems from the latter's own testimony that these conversations were central to his early thinking on the need to separate from the Declaratory Act Free Church.

A congregational meeting in September 1891 saw Mr Crawford advise the Millhouse people not to proceed to fill the vacancy, and also heard his pledge that he could have no further connection with the denomination if it passed the Act.¹⁰ On 18th May 1892 Mr Crawford was again to express his strong opposition to the Act at a public meeting in the Kilfinan congregation. The comparison later in this article of the Kilfinan meeting and a similar 1892 meeting held in Oban will show fault lines developing within the constitutionalist ranks, long before the actual unravelling of the movement in early 1893.

The Declaratory Act was passed at the Free Church General Assembly of May 1892 by 346 to 195.¹¹ It was agreed by the constitutionalists that a final effort against it should be made at the next year's meeting of the Church's supreme court. The matter came up on Thursday 25th May 1893. When Principal Robert Rainy's motion to pass from the overtures opposing the Declaratory Act was passed by 415 votes to 120, the time for campaigning was over. Rev Donald Macfarlane of Raasay, previously minister at Kilmallie, tabled a Protest and left the building. His Protest separated him from the Free Church body although he believed that he and those adhering to his stand of repudiation of the Declaratory Act were now the true custodians of the Church's constitution.¹² Mr Crawford was present in Glasgow the night following Mr Macfarlane's Protest. Along with Neil Cameron, he was one of those who attended a meeting with Mr Macfarlane held in the Glasgow home of the divinity student Neil Macintyre.¹³

The anxiety felt by Archie Crawford about a press report that Mr Macfarlane had withdrawn his Protest was soon dispelled by questioning

⁹ *The Life of Principal Rainy*, P. Carnegie Simpson (2 vols., London, 1909), Vol. 2, p. 128.

¹⁰ "Anecdotes relating to the eminent Archibald Crawford"; see Appendix.

¹¹ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970*, pp. 63-6.

¹² *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970*, pp. 75-9.

¹³ "A brief history of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland", Neil Macintyre, in *Commemoration Papers* (Free Presbyterian Synod, May 1943), pp. 47-52.

him at this meeting. One description of the conversation stated: "When Mr Macfarlane explained the true position to Mr Crawford, the latter asked Mr Macfarlane: 'Am I to understand that you tabled a Protest and left it on the table of the Assembly, and that you are separated from that body?' Mr Macfarlane replied in the affirmative saying – 'If the Lord gives me strength, they will never see me in their company again'. Mr Crawford uncovered his head, and, in an audible voice, thanked the Most High for the stand His servant made in defence of His truth, and prayed that Mr Macfarlane might be strengthened by His grace for the solemn duties then confronting him."¹⁴

Mr Macfarlane then proceeded to preach at Millhouse on the Sabbath. On the Monday (29th May) a congregational meeting was called. After an explanation of his separation, all but six of the Millhouse Free Church congregation decided to follow Mr Macfarlane in his stand for truth. At the Monday meeting, Mr Crawford's explanation of his support for the separation came in clear terms: "I saw this bastard child being formed in the womb of the Free Church when Drs Dods and Bruce were appointed professors, but as the constitution was not changed I did not actually leave the Church, but now that this bastard child is born in the Declaratory Act, whatever others will do, I am done with the Declaratory Act Church forever." The Millhouse departure from the Free Church was said to have greatly encouraged Mr Macfarlane as he went on to return to his own congregation of Raasay which followed him *en masse*.¹⁵

2. The Free Church decline

The process which led to the conservative separations of 1893 and 1900 from the Free Church had been underway for several decades previously. As has been extensively described elsewhere, spiritual blessing on the eve of the 1843 Disruption had been followed by an initial outpouring of energy as the new denomination consolidated its position.¹⁶ Later, a decline in adherence to the doctrine, worship and practice of 1843 set in. The Free Church's involvement in co-operation with other churches during the 1859 revival, despite their lesser commitment to Biblical

¹⁴ "Rev D. Macfarlane's Protest", James Macleod, Greenock, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 47, 1942-3, p. 113.

¹⁵ "A brief history of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland", pp. 47-52.

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Annals of the Disruption*, T. Brown (Edinburgh, 1892).

Calvinism, opened minds to the possibility of union with the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. A firm proposal for union was debated between 1863 and 1873 but dropped. The evangelistic campaigns of Moody and Sankey, the introduction of uninspired materials of praise and musical instruments to public worship, and the effects of uncritical acceptance of the Higher Critical movement all led to a change of emphasis. By 1889, the denomination was looking at ways of offering relief to those unable to give full-hearted adherence to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.¹⁷ In the same year, the cases of Dods and Bruce marked further unwillingness to tackle declension in the denomination. Marcus Dods junior (1834-1909) was appointed to the chair of New Testament Criticism and Exegesis at Edinburgh's New College in 1889 in succession to the conservative George Smeaton. Between these two men, to quote Principal John Macleod, was a "yawning gulf".¹⁸ Dods was unsuccessfully libelled by those upholding the Reformed understanding of the inspiration of Scripture in the Free Church General Assembly of 1890 over his liberal views on the matter. His survival of that attempt at church discipline was another open mark of the declension in the denomination.¹⁹ At the same Assembly, Alexander Balmain Bruce (1831-1899) – professor of Apologetics in the Free Church's divinity hall in Glasgow – survived discipline. The court concluded that he had made unguarded statements but that he had not breached the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. One of the chief complaints against him was that in two books he had said the Bible contained errors, although he believed its accounts of Christ's miracles to be basically accurate.²⁰

Decline in Campbeltown

One illustration of how these forces of change affected the Argyllshire Free Church in the crucial decade of the 1880s can be seen in the Lorne Street, Campbeltown congregation. This had been formed in 1867 when the Gaelic and English sections of Lochend Free Church congregation were disjoined. Lorne St formed the Gaelic charge although one in which

¹⁷ For an analysis of the Free Church retreat from the *Westminster Confession*, see *The Erosion of the Calvinist Orthodoxy: Drifting From the Truth in Confessional Scottish Churches*, Ian Hamilton (Mentor, 2010), pp. 164-218; *The Second Disruption*, J. L. Macleod (East Linton, 2000); *Church and Creed in Scotland*, K. R. Ross (Edinburgh, 1988).

¹⁸ *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History since the Reformation*, John Macleod (Edinburgh, 1943), p. 289.

¹⁹ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 250.

²⁰ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, pp. 102-3.

the transition to English was well under way. By 1886, there had been four completed pastorates and the latest incumbent of the pulpit was Rev Donald Finlayson Mackenzie (1858-1942).²¹ The ethos was clearly still evangelical but in line with the thinking of the majority party in the denomination. The hybrid Reformed-evangelical tone of Lorne St, as it drifted along with wider change in the Free Church, is clear from Mr Mackenzie's comments in the locally-authored cover sheets for the congregation's copies of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Monthly and Missionary Record*. It is necessary to point out that the minister was painfully aware of a decline in congregational spirituality, but seemed not to consider the possibility that the new attitudes to God's Word, and the practical changes being introduced, might be part of the problem.²²

In the June 1886 magazine cover, Mr Mackenzie spoke disparagingly of those who had opposed Disestablishment at the previous month's General Assembly. October 1886 saw a report of an evangelistic tour by the Moderator, Rev Alexander Somerville. This had included a visit to Campbeltown. At the close of each of the evening services conducted by him, "after-meetings" had been held, at which it was hoped "not a few were brought to decide to be the Lord's . . . all the meetings were much enlivened and helped . . . by a choir".²³

The sympathies of the minister and session were to be seen in their organising a week-long series of prayer meetings in January 1887 "under the guidance of the Evangelical Alliance".²⁴ Dr Rainy had introduced

²¹ *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, ed. William Ewing (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1914), Vol. 2, p. 113. Mackenzie was born in Urray, studied in the University of Edinburgh and New College, Edinburgh and was minister of Lorne St from 1886 to 1891, when he was translated to Langside. Having joined the Union of 1900, he ministered in Bromley Trinity, London from 1904 to 1911, in Tain from 1911 until 1915, and then in London's Bar Road from 1915. In 1915 he was appointed acting director of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union, holding this post along with the ministerial one, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 238; *The Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland 1900-1929*, ed. John A. Lamb (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 485.

²² The cover sheets date from March 1886 to October 1888 and are in a bound volume of the magazines in the ownership of the present writer's family.

²³ Somerville was a member of Bonar-M'Cheyne circle and a co-founder of the National Bible Society of Scotland. He was deeply influenced by the Moody and Sankey evangelistic campaign methods; see *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 787; memoir by Somerville's son in *Precious Seed Sown in Many Lands*, A. N. Somerville (London, 1890), pp. ix-xxvii.

²⁴ The Evangelical Alliance had been set up in 1846 as part of a desire for increased unity among believers; it enjoyed the support of Free Church fathers Thomas Chalmers and Robert Candlish, see *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 304.

the minister to the Lorne St people on his first Sabbath as their minister and Mr Mackenzie welcomed the Principal's selection as Moderator for the 1887 General Assembly as he was "a trusted leader of the church". One of the assisting ministers at the June communion was Dr Alexander Lee of Nairn. Lee was widely regarded with deep suspicion by the constitutionalist party as an agent of Rainy's to drive change and to calm the Highland opposition to this.

In November 1887 it was decided to introduce hymns at the congregational prayer meeting. At a recent meeting of "Christian workers" associated with the congregation, only six out of the ninety had opposed the idea of using the Free Church Hymnal. In May 1888 Mr Mackenzie referred to a Synod of Glenelg request to the forthcoming General Assembly to reverse "recent decisions on hymns, instrumental music, etc." as being "a forlorn hope". Mr Mackenzie felt that "most people" thought that these matters had been "happily settled".

A residual element of discernment was not absent. At the 1886 annual congregational meeting, a number of speakers had stressed that financial matters and the success of congregational agencies were subordinate to spiritual results. Mr Mackenzie accepted in the July 1886 cover note that friends in the northern areas of the Free Church were not "without cause" when they sometimes accused southern congregations of "indiscriminate going forward to the Lord's Table without the necessary qualifications". Following an 1887 evangelistic campaign, he was somewhat cautious about the fruit: he stated that while "it was premature to talk of results" there had been "hopeful conversions".

From March 1887, communion seasons in Lorne St were to be held quarterly rather than twice a year as previously, as many members seemed to be "detained from communicating" more than once a year under the half-yearly cycle. The pastor accepted that "when too often dispensed" the sacrament could lose its "solemnity and impressiveness" but that when too seldom administered he claimed that there was "apt to grow around it a superstitious halo quite fatal to its usefulness". After the December 1886 communion he pointedly wrote that it gave him "special satisfaction" that almost all of the 21 young people admitted to the Lord's Table evidenced "a saving change". He went on to warn of the "coldness and deadness" which "are most disastrous" when the unconverted are admitted to the sacrament and "the fatal sleep of a carnal security" induced in the unconverted who are given the privilege.

In April 1887 there were 554 on the communicants roll, with a further 436 adherents associated with Lorne St. On several occasions Mr Mackenzie bewailed the tendency towards attendance at only one service on Sabbath, usually the afternoon. He wrote on the congregational cover for the May 1887 edition of the magazine that combining the Gaelic and English morning attendances “would not amount to 300”. The only conclusion, he wrote, was that “a considerable proportion of the congregation has lapsed into half-day hearing”. Attendances at the various services of the communion season also gave him cause for concern. The Saturday of the June 1887 communion season had seen “little more than a score” attend either the Gaelic or English preparatory services. He complained again in January 1888 of the missing communicants from the sacrament, who in his view had no good reason for their failure to attend. By July of that year, he noted that in one area of the charge, only 10 out of 24 communicants had attended the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. This was all despite the change in early 1887 where cards were now to be taken to the homes of intending communicants, rather than the time-honoured practice of tokens being handed out to them at church before the Sabbath.

While there was a weekly congregational prayer meeting, and from late 1886 a private women’s prayer meeting, this was against a background of a range of many less directly spiritual activities during the week in Lorne St. At various times of the year, four agencies were meeting weekly in connection with the congregation. In addition to the choir practice there were the Dorcas Society, the Literary Society, and the congregational Temperance Society. This was in addition to the meetings for “magic lantern” entertainments for the children, which featured scenes from Israel or illustrative of religious literature. In May 1888 Mr Mackenzie complained of poor attendance by the communicants at the prayer meeting and that it was “most disastrous to the spiritual life of those specially concerned”. In the October 1888 issue he mourned that the average attendance at the prayer meeting was 60, whereas at least 300 of the congregation were in a position to attend. This was all part of the local background of the declension in Free Church life in Argyllshire.

3. Two protest meetings contrasted

The diverging national emphases of the two wings of the constitutionalist party became apparent in Argyllshire in 1892. A large public meeting

was held in Oban on 13th April 1892 and a comparison of this with the much clearer stance taken by Kames elders at a public congregational meeting in late May is instructive.

Before examining the line being taken by the constitutionalists at these public meetings in Argyllshire in 1892, it is worth outlining the two stances *ultimately* taken by them, as these led to the formation of two divergent parties who eventually followed very different trajectories. Those who set up the Free Presbyterian Church, a process given tangible form when Rev Donald Macfarlane tabled his Protest on 25th May 1893, believed that the Declaratory Act changed the Free Church's constitution. In a statement of reasons for their separation, the fledgling Church stated that "By this Act we consider that the constitution of the Church has been altered and vitiated where we ought to hold it most sacred and inviolable. . . . When the Church has erred from the faith, we refuse to shelter ourselves in a species of Independency, as if congregations might be free, while the Church, as a Church, is involved in guilt."²⁵ A Free Presbyterian publication in the late twentieth century summarized their objection in the following terms: "The Act shielded from discipline, and granted toleration to, those who had embraced Arminianism and Rationalism."²⁶

However, those who stayed in the Free Church to maintain the conservative cause, and separated only in 1900 on the occasion of the union with the United Presbyterian Church, did not see the Declaratory Act in such stark terms. Their leaders later stated that they had believed it necessary to see the Act in the context of a wider series of moves towards the union with the United Presbyterian Church. The non-Free Presbyterian constitutionalists also saw the Act as being literally incompetent as they believed it to be *ultra vires* – beyond the power – of the Church to pass it. From 1893 onwards, they focused on questions such as the majority's right to overrule a minority on such an important change when the minority held to the original terms of communion, as well as the majority's right to claim either the identity of the denomination, or "to make good their claim to the temporal advantages which had been made over to the Church on the condition of her loyalty to her distinctive principles". The minority of 1900 stated as their

²⁵ "Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland: Reasons assigned by Rev Donald Macfarlane, Raasay, Rev Donald MacDonald, Shieldaig, and others, for forming themselves into a separate Presbytery, etc.", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 2, November 1897, pp. 252-7.

²⁶ *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, p. xxii.

primary objections: the union's abandonment of the Establishment Principle; its departure from doctrinal standards to which office-bearers had vowed allegiance; the power to be vested in the hands of the new united General Assembly to determine doctrine; and the lack of consultation with the ordinary people of the Church.²⁷

The issue of the "temporal advantages" – finance and property – was believed by Neil Cameron to have played a major role in the retreat of his erstwhile ally John Kennedy Cameron and others from the position that there should be an immediate separation in 1893. This was most clearly spelled out in a 1923 review by Neil Cameron of a book by J. Kennedy Cameron for Free Church young people on the subject of Church Union. Neil Cameron said that the two had met on the way out of the Assembly Hall on the day the Act was passed and that J. Kennedy Cameron had told him of a meeting *that evening* "to take steps to separate immediately from the Rainy party" but that when at the meeting "the property and funds of the Free Church were thrown across their path, they immediately changed their course".²⁸

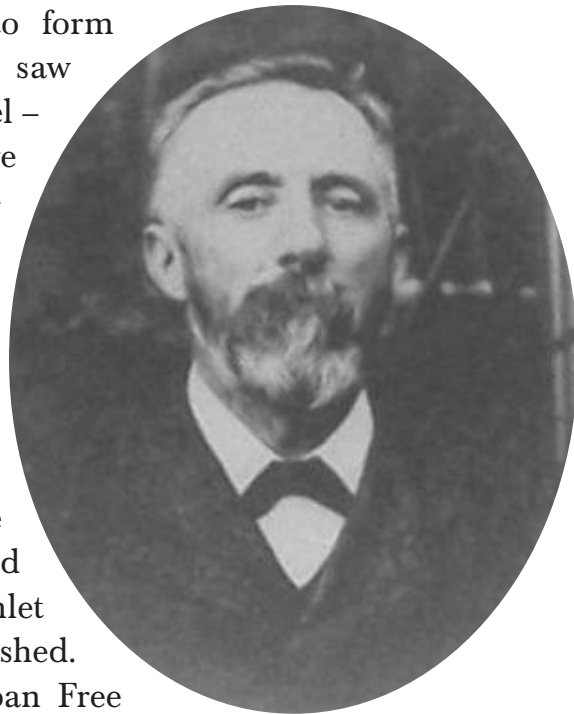
The division among the constitutionalists has been regarded as becoming most apparent in the events of June 1892. At this point, the constitutionalist party met at New College, Edinburgh; Rev Murdoch MacAskill stated that he had "never dreamt of a Disruption" while Rev William Balfour stated that the choice was to separate there and then or to be "kicked out one by one". A policy of internal campaigning was agreed on, and a Convention held in Inverness on Tuesday 14th June, 1892. This included a private meeting whose proceedings were nevertheless made public by an enterprising reporter. A protest was agreed in which they declared that the Declaratory Act would "not be binding" on them. It later emerged that the strategy of the Convention, chaired by the eminent Rev Gustavus Aird, was to prevent a separation, while allowing the opposition a voice within the Declaratory Act Free

²⁷ *The Free Church of Scotland: the Crisis of 1900*, A. Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron (Edinburgh, 1989 edition), pp. 67, 75, 119-128. The Free Church Defence Association was revived in 1898 and its manifesto stated that a majority adopting change on the basis of a majority vote "will fall outside of the Church", see *The Heritage of Our Fathers*, p. 97.

²⁸ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 28, November 1923, p. 216. This would appear to be the meeting at the 1893 General Assembly, not the constitutionalist post mortem at the May 1892 Assembly. The 1893 meeting took place the same evening as the Declaratory Act debate, whereas the 1892 meeting had been on the following day. See *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, p. xxii. If this reading of the dates is correct, then there was some wavering, on the part of J. Kennedy Cameron at least, over the policy of "staying in" which had emerged the previous year.

Church. The men who were to form the Free Presbyterian Church saw this “internal campaigning” model – adopted at the New College meeting, the Inverness Convention and a cognate meeting in Glasgow in July – as a compromise.²⁹

This division had in fact been implicit in the Oban public meeting a few weeks earlier on 13th April 1892. The April meeting in Oban attracted sufficient interest for a pamphlet describing its speeches to be published. The main local speaker was Oban Free Church elder, Duncan Crawford, a nephew of Archie Crawford, who



Duncan Crawford.

described the teachings of the Declaratory Act as “subversive of . . . the Word of God”. The other speakers read like a roll-call of the constitutionalist party’s national leadership at that point in time: Revs John Kennedy of Arran, Murdoch MacAskill of Dingwall, Kenneth Moody Stuart of Moffat, John A. MacAskill of Onich, and C. Archibald Bannatyne of Coulter.³⁰ Several divinity students and laymen also spoke.³¹

Messages of support from across the Lowlands and further north were read out, including one from Sir William Mackinnon. An encourager of Rev Neil Cameron and other conservatives, Sir William

²⁹ *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, p. xxii.

³⁰ The pamphlet misspells Bannatyne’s Lanarkshire charge as Culter, the correct form for the Aberdeenshire village. A native of Oban, Rev C. A. Bannatyne (1849-1920) was the son of the Rev Archibald Bannatyne (1810-1863) who had led the Oban High congregation into the Free Church in 1843. In 1853, he had been translated to John Knox’s Tabernacle in Glasgow after its former minister, Rev Jonathan Ranken Anderson, had been disciplined by the Free Church, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 119. Rev C. A. Bannatyne helped form the Free Church minority in October 1900.

³¹ *Free Church Declaratory Act of 1891: Report of Speeches Delivered at a Public Meeting held in the Free Church Mission Hall, Oban, Against This Act, On Wednesday, 13th April, 1892* (Oban, 1892). For Duncan Crawford’s speech see pp. 24-25. I would like to acknowledge the aid of Duncan Cameron in locating this pamphlet in the archives held in the Inverness Free Presbyterian Church.

had been born and brought up in Campbeltown, had become a shipping magnate and supporter of missions, and was noted for his opposition to the slave-trade and his support for equal rights for all nations. He made his opposition to the Declaratory Act clearly known. He died in June 1893 and was buried in Clachan.³² Sir William gave financial support to Neil Cameron on an annual basis while he was studying for the ministry in Edinburgh.³³ A statue of Sir William was raised in Campbeltown and can be seen at the harbour end of Kinloch Road in the town. A plaque marking his birthplace can be seen on Argyll Street.

It is unwise to be too adamant where one has the benefit of hindsight, but a difference of tone runs through the reported speeches of the April 1892 Oban rally, with those who were to leave to form the Free Presbyterian Church in the following year taking a different approach to those who were to “stay in and fight” until 1900. While strongly condemning the Act, Rev John Kennedy of Arran held out hope for delay and reconsideration within the Church. “I think we have a perfect right . . . to ask the Church to delay in passing it,” he said. “Perhaps there will be some indication of that being the case. You will remember lately in Edinburgh, in reply to the speech of one of those who thinks with us, Dr Rainy indicated that he was open to conviction. Perhaps, after all, this matter may not be pressed. It has been explained in the way of permissive legislation on the part of the Church.”³⁴ Mr Bannatyne of Coulter spoke of the highly respected forefathers who had used the *Westminster Confession* and the Catechisms. He predicted that “were they to stand aside and let this measure be carried through their Church courts it would cause that system of doctrine to perish from their borders as surely as the tree withers to its outmost branch and twig from whose base the circling bark has been stripped”. Although a second speech that evening by Mr Bannatyne saw him refer to the need for “resolute maintenance of past attainment” in doctrine, there is no account of Mr Bannatyne calling at this meeting for separation should these efforts for maintenance fail.³⁵

³² *MacKinnon and East Africa, 1878-1895*, John S. Galbraith (Cambridge University Press, 1972); E. I. Carlyle, “Mackinnon, Sir William, baronet (1823 1893)”, revised by John S. Galbraith, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; John Goldby, “Sir William Mackinnon of East Africa, 1823-1893”, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 101, May, June, July 1996, pp. 143-7, 170-4, 205-9.

³³ *Memoir and Remains of Rev Neil Cameron*, ed. Donald Beaton (Inverness, 1932), p. 33.

³⁴ *Free Church Declaratory Act of 1891: Report of Speeches, etc.*, pp. 6-7.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 11-15, 18-19.

The clearest threats to leave the Free Church came from the divinity students present. Allan Mackenzie said they “could not go on to be ministers of the Free Church to proclaim the extraordinary doctrines of this Declaratory Act”. He reduced many in the hall to tears by asking rhetorically if they were prepared to “sacrifice” the students who could not accept the Act. He added in the plainest of terms that “if the Free Church people were prepared to pass this Act then there was nothing for some of the students but to leave the Church”.³⁶ Neil Cameron told the meeting that the controversy was not between two groups of men but “between these men and the God of Eternity . . . we never had days in Scotland in which the danger is so great as at present”. Mr Cameron also gave a clear indication that separation was approaching. The pamphlet reported him as saying that there were “many in the Church waiting anxiously for the first General Assembly, and if this Act was passed they will separate from these men; for the Church of the Declaratory Act will no longer be the Church of Scotland Free”.³⁷

The minister who spoke mostly strongly against the Act at the April 1892 Oban meeting, and implied there could be a separation over it, was Rev Murdoch MacAskill.³⁸ However, not only was he to repudiate any question of separating from the Free Church two months later at the Inverness constitutionalist Convention in June 1892, but by 1897 he had resiled from his opposition to the union of the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church and had joined Rainy’s Union Committee.³⁹ Archie Crawford seemed to have had doubts about Mr MacAskill’s conservatism in the 1880s, when under his ministry in Greenock. There appeared to be some inconsistency between his public statements and his stance within his own congregation, which led Mr Crawford to challenge him with the statement: “You are trying to ride on two horses at once, but you cannot do it.”⁴⁰ The full extent of Murdoch MacAskill’s change of heart towards the promoters of the Declaratory Act is seen not only in his co-operation with Dr Rainy but in his strong public praise for him in 1899. Writing as Vice-Convener of the Church’s

³⁶ *Free Church Declaratory Act of 1891: Report of Speeches, etc.*, pp. 21-2.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

³⁸ For Murdoch MacAskill, see *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 503.

³⁹ *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, p. xxii. For Mr MacAskill’s later U-turn, see *The Heritage of Our Fathers*, pp. 98-9.

⁴⁰ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, John Macleod; appendix in *John Macleod D.D.*, G. N. M. Collins (Edinburgh, 1951), pp. 268-9.

Highlands and Islands Committee (of which Dr Rainy was Convener), Mr MacAskill referred to the previous summer's services at fishing stations: "... the Sabbath services ... are conducted ... with occasional supplies by prominent ministers in the Church, among whom we had this year the Moderator of the Church and Principal Rainy, whose services were highly appreciated by the Highlanders, who felt honoured by such men taking an interest in their spiritual welfare."⁴¹

Back in April 1892, however, Mr MacAskill referred to the example of the Disruption generation of ministers: "They sacrificed home, they sacrificed income, they sacrificed the dearest associations of their lives, and came forth not knowing whither they were to go, in order that they might bear witness to the truth. These questions, great and important as they were, were nothing in comparison with the questions that are before us here this evening." Mr MacAskill went on to make the famous statement that while the Disruption was over whether the Church was to be overruled by the State, the Declaratory Act controversy was over questions such as "Bible or no Bible; Atonement or no Atonement; Salvation for a perishing world on the basis of the finished work of Christ, or Salvation by Works". He continued by attacking the writings of Dr Alexander B. Bruce, Professor Henry Drummond and Dr Marcus Dods.⁴²

Overall then, the Oban meeting saw strong criticism of the Act but a sense that significant constitutionalist figures present hoped for some kind of compromise within the bounds of the Free Church. A far less diluted response to the Act was apparent in the public meeting held on 18th May in the Millhouse section of the Kilfinan congregation. While divinity students Neil Cameron, John Macleod (who chaired the meeting) and Alexander Macrae spoke at this, the three resolutions opposing the Act were moved by local elders and residents. Although none of these called for separation, they followed a speech by Archibald Crawford which had underlined the need for action rather than rhetoric.⁴³

Mr Crawford compared the Declaratory Act to a "coiled snake in the grass" and warned that its language was "so craftily selected and so ambiguously put together" that unless you cut the grass you could not

⁴¹ *Free Church of Scotland Reports (No 1); May 1899*; Report of the Committee for Highlands and Islands, p. 28.

⁴² *Free Church Declaratory Act of 1891: Report of Speeches, etc.*, pp. 7-9.

⁴³ *Northern Chronicle*, 1st June 1892, p. 3.

“see the whole snake”. Continuing the metaphor, he stated that it had a sting in its tail in that it entreated “the Church to put her imprimatur upon the teaching of those men who deny Christ’s divinity and headship”. He told the Millhouse congregation that the Act would take the Free Church lower in her view of the authority of the Bible than the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation had seen a repudiation of the claims of the Roman Catholic Church to be the “supreme arbiter over the consciences of men”. The Bible had been appealed to as the only rule of faith and practice. The Roman Catholic Church accepted the Scriptures, he said, but qualified Scripture’s authority by putting it under the Church’s authority. However, the proponents of the Act in the Free Church denied “most of both the Old and New Testaments” and demanded “the full power to become judges of the faith and doctrine held forth in the Free Church”. Mr Crawford linked the corrosive effects of the Act to the warnings he had given the people thirty years previously, during the controversy over the proposed union with the United Presbyterians. He had warned then about the danger of allowing men precedence rather than Scripture’s teaching of Christ’s rule over the Church and His prerogatives. There was no ambiguity in Mr Crawford’s exhortation to the Millhouse people. He “would not go round the bush for words to describe this Act, but would tell them directly that it was the outcome of the devices of the bottomless pit”. This was “a day that would try men”, he stated, advising the people to “ponder the matter seriously, and to plead earnestly that they might be led in the path of duty”. A newspaper account states that Mr Crawford laid particular emphasis in the closing words of his speech on the words of the text “Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father, which is in heaven”.⁴⁴

4. Archibald Crawford's role in Cowal

As we saw in Section 1, these sentiments in what became known as the Kames congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, headed by Archibald Crawford, led to their separation on Monday 29th May 1893. They were the first to associate themselves officially with the Protest tabled by Rev Donald Macfarlane. It is perhaps worthwhile explaining the history, geography and nomenclature. An area of much

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.

wood and hill pasture but relatively little arable ground, the parish of Kilfinan had around 1800 inhabitants in early 1843. One thousand were to be found in the northern half of the parish and had for their use the parish church in Kilfinan village, while a church extension chapel, built in 1841 in the Ardlamont area, aimed at serving the remainder in the southern end.⁴⁵ The Kilfinan congregation of the Free Church had church buildings at Kilfinan village in the north end of the parish and one at Millhouse in the southern. The Free Church had at first found difficulty in getting sites from the landowner, although it was estimated that half the people had followed their minister, Rev Joseph Stark, in joining the new body.⁴⁶ A building was erected in Millhouse in 1850 and another in 1861 in Kilfinan.⁴⁷ Tighnabruaich had separate mission services under the Kilfinan Kirk Session of the Free Church from 1856 and was supplied for fourteen years by Rev Alexander Stark, brother to Rev Joseph Stark. Tighnabruaich had had its own stone church erected in 1863 and was made a separate sanctioned charge in 1877. It had received its first pastor, Rev James Young, in 1877.⁴⁸

Millhouse is a couple of miles inland and south-west from the coastal village of Kames, which itself is just south of the village of Tighnabruaich. Members of the Free Presbyterian congregation lived in all three communities, but the body from which they separated was the Millhouse section of the Kilfinan Free church congregation. A newspaper note in autumn 1893 was to point out explicitly that the Declaratory Act was causing controversy in the Millhouse congregation, not the separate Tighnabruaich one.⁴⁹ However, while placed on a key communications route in which Clyde ports and south-eastern Argyllshire were linked by steamer ferries, ecclesiastically the Millhouse/Kames congregation was somewhat isolated. In the rest of the peninsula, only a small group in Dunoon was to associate itself with the Free Presbyterian stand.

The previous ecclesiastical history of the peninsula had been mixed theologically. Although the Reformed tradition in Cowal had not been strong in previous centuries, nevertheless the area played an

⁴⁵ *The Statistical Account of Scotland*; Kilfinan, County of Argyll; Vol. 7, pp. 366-370.

⁴⁶ *First Report from the Select Committee on Sites for Churches (Scotland)* (London, 1847), p. 112.

⁴⁷ *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 2, pp. 108-9.

⁴⁸ *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 110.

⁴⁹ *Oban Times*, 16th September 1893, p. 3.

important role in spreading the gospel to the rest of the Gaelic-speaking area. During the seventeenth century, ministers based in or near Cowal were deeply involved in the work of the Synod of Argyll in making the Scriptures and Reformed literature available in Gaelic.⁵⁰ The Synod – which from 1638 onwards took in Argyllshire and the entire western Highland seaboard as far north as Glenelg, plus the Inner and Outer Hebrides – was noted for its “unswerving Presbyterian testimony” in the period up until 1661. By 1653 a translation of the *Shorter Catechism* was approved. This *Catechism* was mainly due to the work of Ewen Cameron, minister of Dunoon, and Dugald Campbell, minister of Knapdale. The Synod published the first fifty metrical psalms, known as the *Caogad*, in 1658-9. In October 1655 Cameron had been allocated the task of translating the first twenty of the psalms and Campbell the next twenty. Another Cowal pastor, Alexander Maclaine of Strachur and Strathlachlan was one of a team of seven instructed in 1657 to work intensively together in Inveraray to complete the first fifty psalms. On publication of the *Caogad*, the work of completing the remaining one hundred psalms went on. In May 1659 Archibald Maclean of Kilmodan was instructed to work on Psalms 91 to 100. Many years later, in 1691, work on the whole Psalter was organised with John Maclaurin, minister of Kilmodan appointed by Synod to transcribe it for the press.⁵¹

It is not clear how much the gospel was preached in Cowal or south Argyllshire in the Moderate-dominated eighteenth century, but by the end of the century the evangelical revival was reaching the area through the influence of the Haldane brothers and the growth of Baptist witness in the county. The growth of evangelicalism in Cowal came at a time of great social and agrarian change. It is thought the first enclosures of land in Cowal were associated with cattle-droving aimed at lowland markets using the peninsula as a staging post on the animals’ route out of other areas of South Argyll. Two ranch-scale centres were to be found in Kilfinan parish. These trade routes through the area continued into the

⁵⁰ *The Gaelic Psalms 1694*, ed. Duncan C. MacTavish (Lochgilphead, 1934), pp. vii-xv. Much of the ecclesiastical background can be found in *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll, 1639-67*, ed. Duncan MacTavish and James D. Ogilvie (Scottish History Society, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1943-4). MacTavish died in 1943 and Ogilvie edited the second volume.

⁵¹ Maclaurin was born in 1658 into a family who had been the landlords of the island of Tiree; he died in 1698. He was a member of the 1692 General Assembly; see *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, ed. Hew Scott (second edition, Edinburgh, 1923), Vol. 4, p. 31. He was father of John Maclaurin, the well-known minister in Glasgow, and of Colin Maclaurin, the famous mathematician.

nineteenth century.⁵² A huge role in spreading the gospel in Cowal and Bute was played by the MacArthur sub-denomination of Baptists, led by Donald “Ban” MacArthur. More famous for being press-ganged to Liverpool and rescued through the efforts of the Haldane brothers, he later emigrated to North America. His example was followed by many Baptists in mainland south Argyll but many of his converts remained alive in Cowal well into the middle of the nineteenth-century. They were a source of fellowship for Archie Crawford and the itinerant Presbyterian evangelist Finlay Munro.

The MacArthur Baptists were reported as being distinctive by Principal John Macleod, whose informant was Mr Crawford. He esteemed them highly but had his criticisms of them. Principal Macleod concluded from Archie Crawford’s recollections that the MacArthur Baptists were “old-fashioned Calvinists who fell out of sympathy with the main body of the Baptists. They felt that the body of their persuasion were too little in sympathy with timid, tempted and tried believers. So they kept by themselves, and tended to be rather hyper-Calvinistic and very exclusive.” Archie Crawford seems to have valued their experimental emphasis while completely rejecting hyper-Calvinism.⁵³ The MacArthur influence in Cowal was supplemented by the itinerant Independent preacher Niel McGill who supplied a circuit of sixteen preaching stations in the peninsula and on the west side of Loch Fyne in the 1820s.⁵⁴

The Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 had seen sufficient accession to the Free Church in Cowal for a full Presbytery of Dunoon to be formed. A leading pre-Disruption evangelical and energetic conservative within the subsequent Free Church cause in the peninsula was Rev Mackintosh Mackay of Dunoon. His work there focused on creating new places of worship to evangelise the swelling numbers of tourists to the area.⁵⁵

⁵² *Rural Society in the Age of Reason: An Archeology of the Emergence of Modern Life in the Southern Scottish Highlands*, Chris Dalglish (New York, 2003), p. 184.

⁵³ For MacArthur and his followers, see “The Life of Donald Ban MacArthur”, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 6 (1901-2), pp. 15-22; “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 245-6, 261-2; Donald E. Meek, “The Preacher, the Press-gang and the Landlord: the impressments and the vindication of the Rev Donald MacArthur”, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. 25, Part 2 (1994), pp. 265-6; *One of Heaven’s Jewels: Rev Archibald Cook of Daviot*, Norman Campbell (Stornoway, 2009), Appendix One, pp. 251-6.

⁵⁴ For Niel McGill, see *Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and the North-East of Scotland*, William D. MacNaughton (Tiree, 2003), pp. 100-101.

⁵⁵ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 112, February 2007, pp. 48-53. This gives an edited version of a chapter from *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1877), pp. 79-88.

In 1881, the Dunoon Free Church Presbytery – taking in the whole Cowal peninsula – contained 2,457 communicants in 16 congregations. The same number of congregations in 1899 had a joint total containing around 200 more communicants. The latter was out of a total population of 25,597 in the Presbytery’s area and represented 1,075 Free Church communicants per 10,000 of population, compared to 741 in the Inveraray Presbytery, 948 per 10,000 within in the Kintyre Presbytery’s bounds, 430 in Islay and 472 in Lorn. For whatever reason, the Dunoon Presbytery’s congregations were not using the special agents so beloved by other Presbyteries for “aggressive work” on the eve of the Union – in 1899 their home mission (outreach) work was “mainly done by the ordinary congregational agencies”.⁵⁶

Archibald Crawford was cognisant of the spiritual condition of large areas of the Highlands, as well as that of his native peninsula. A close confidant of Dr Mackintosh Mackay and later a friend of Dr Kennedy, he had even been entrusted with compiling a report on the state of feeling in the late 1860s in the north for the anti-union committee of the Free Church.⁵⁷ It was said that Dr Mackay, at that stage living in Edinburgh, was instrumental in Crawford’s being hired to tour the north on behalf of the anti-unionists to distribute pamphlets. Crawford had gone round the north by Cape Wrath and John O’Groats, coming back south through Caithness, Easter Ross and Perthshire on behalf of the committee which had given him the task.⁵⁸

Crawford had been born in May 1815, at Largiemore farm on the west coast of the Cowal peninsula, where he lived until twelve years old. Subsequently raised near Inverchaolain on its east coast, Crawford came under soul concern when twenty-two years old. He was helped by contact with the MacArthur Baptist group as well as through reading the Gaelic edition of John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and listening to the preaching of Rev John MacPherson of the Gaelic Chapel in Rothesay on Bute. In 1846 Archie Crawford moved to the farm of Kilbride in the parish of his birth, Kilfinan.⁵⁹ While staying at Kilbride,

⁵⁶ *Free Church of Scotland Reports (No 1); May 1899*; Report of the Home Mission and Church Extension Committee, pp. 50-51, 57.

⁵⁷ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 250-264. For Kennedy and Mackay, see *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, pp. 455-456 and p. 520 respectively; *Life of John Kennedy, D.D.*, Alexander Auld (London, 1887).

⁵⁸ *The History of Cowal*, Archibald Brown (Greenock, 1908), p. 160.

⁵⁹ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 231-8.



Largiemore Farm, the birthplace of Archibald Crawford.

Mr Crawford was mostly under the ministry of Rev Joseph Stark, who had learned Gaelic and joined the Free Church at the Disruption of 1843. Although regarded as decidedly evangelical, Mr Stark did not seem to be a preacher whom the converted found “deep or searching”.⁶⁰ Crawford was frustrated by the lack of interest in a Sabbath School which he taught for a short period. While remaining in the Free Church, he seemed to find more spiritual fellowship with the people who had been part of the MacArthur group of Baptists. “Shortly after arriving in Kilbride,” wrote a Cowal historian, “he was grieved to see so much Sabbath desecration, particularly among the young, and ventured to hint the desirableness of mending these matters, but the leading men of the place sneered at the presumption of the stranger.” It was said that this rebuff closed his lips in public for twelve years but that he held private meetings up until 1858 with people who had been influenced by Donald MacArthur and other lay preachers.⁶¹

The continued lack of discriminatory or deeply doctrinal content in Mr Stark’s preaching was to become important for Crawford in the

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶¹ *The History of Cowal*, p. 158. See also “An Argyllshire Worthy”, p. 238.

years after 1859. He had been prevailed upon to give public exhortations every Friday evening in Millhouse Free Church, initially to counter itinerant Arminian preachers and latterly to build up the converts who traced the work of grace in their souls to these Friday exhortations. Crawford felt that his own soul needed nourishment. During a fruitless search for a message suited to his own particular situation, he benefited greatly from a sermon preached by Rev John Kennedy, Dingwall, at the Greenock communion; later the ensuing friendship saw Crawford appointed by Kennedy to help supply in Achterneed, Strathconon and Dingwall. This was followed by a number of years' residence in Greenock. From 1872 to 1886 he worked as storekeeper in a Greenock sugar-house managed by a relative of his own. During this time he took Gaelic services on Sabbath evenings at Crawforddyke Hall. One chronicler recorded that those who heard his explanations of scriptural texts were unlikely to forget them: "Having a well-modulated voice, he spoke in an earnest solemn manner, his words were well-chosen, scriptural, and graphic, and his style was like that of Brownlow North, who spoke directly to the individual hearer."⁶² He eventually returned to Cowal in 1885 where he built a house in the Tighnabruaich area.⁶³

By this point he seems to have had much foreboding about the future of the Free Church. Cowal historian Archibald Brown stated that Crawford had a house called Viewfield Cottage near Tighnabruaich, where he tended his garden and occasionally fished in the Kyles of Bute. "But," recorded Brown, "the state of the Church and religion in the land chiefly engrossed his thoughts. Shortly after the Disruption he was continually brooding over the drifting of the Church from its old principles. The attempt at Union, after much excitement, came to a halt about the property, but Mr Crawford always held out that we did not see the end of it, as it was bound to go from bad to worse, which result came sooner than he expected. In the innovations of music, posture, etc.,

⁶² *The History of Cowal*, pp. 160-1. Mr Crawford remarked in later years: "I was taught theology experimentally first, before I knew it theoretically; passing through difficulties in my own experience, and battling them in my own bosom; overcoming solely and only by the sword of the Spirit all the heresies that have been, and still are agitating the Church of Christ (particularly the Free Church). Though I could not put names on them and say 'This is Arminianism, or that Sociniansim' yet whenever they appeared in the Church, I instantly recognised my old enemies. All these are but the outcome of the enmity of the human heart against Jehovah"; see "A Few Arrows from the Quiver of the late Mr Archibald Crawford, Tighnabruaich, Kyles of Bute", in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 15, 1910-1, pp. 388-91.

⁶³ "An Argyllshire Worthy", pp. 247-270.

and in the relaxing of the subscriptions of Deacons, and to crown all, the passing of the Declaratory Act, which screens Church professors and teachers who teach as they list.”⁶⁴

Within two months of the Free Presbyterian separation of May 1893, the Free Presbytery of Dunoon were demanding use of the Millhouse building, which had continued to be used by the Free Presbyterian cause there. A Presbytery deputation addressed a large number of the members and adherents at a meeting on Tuesday 18th July held in the school-house, as use of the church was refused to them. The main argument the ministers made to oppose the Free Presbyterian movement, according to one press account, was that the Declaratory Act was “only optional, and that the congregation were quite entitled to call a minister without any reference to the said Act”. Four assessor elders were appointed.⁶⁵ On Sabbath 13th August, the Presbytery’s deputy, Rev Alexander MacGilp, was refused access to the church but preached elsewhere in the village – in Gaelic in the morning and to a larger English congregation in the afternoon. The *Oban Times* reported that the dispute with the Presbytery was rooted in the Millhouse Session’s refusal to appoint a replacement for their late pastor, Rev Duncan Campbell, who had died in May 1891. This was due to their dissatisfaction “with the policy of the Church, especially in connection with the Declaratory Act”. The Session had refused an instruction from the Free Church Presbytery of Dunoon to meet formally, because they did “not recognise the courts of the Church as now constituted”. The Presbytery were to note the two-thirds collapse in givings in Kilfinan at a meeting in February 1894.⁶⁶

In early January 1894 the Free Presbyterian congregation lost the use of the Millhouse building as a result of legal action in the Court of Session. The Free Church representative named in the case was a George Lyon, farmer, while the respondent for the Free Presbyterians in the area was Alexander Thompson, a colporteur living in Kames village. The legal action was heard at the same time as that which began the process by which the second minister to have declared for the Free Presbyterian cause, Rev Donald MacDonald, was to be deprived of the church buildings in Shieldaig.⁶⁷ The legal action was condemned by a Free

⁶⁴ *The History of Cowal*, pp. 160-1.

⁶⁵ *Oban Times*, 22nd July 1893.

⁶⁶ *Oban Times*, 19th August 1893; 17th February 1894, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Oban Times*, 3rd February 1894, p. 3.



Built in 1894, the original tin building in Kames was the first Free Presbyterian place of worship constructed. It earned for its users the local nickname of “Tin Kirkers”.

[Photo courtesy of Miss C. MacPherson]

Church minister in Glasgow, Rev John Robertson, who claimed that while the Free Presbyterians might be “misguided”, the action of their Free Church pursuers was “departing in a gross way from the Disruption principles of non-interference in sacred things of the civil courts, and as committing the whole Church to a policy of shameful injustice and tyrannical oppression”.⁶⁸

By June 1894, Duncan Macneill, probationer, had been elected as minister of the Free Church congregation in Millhouse. He was inducted on Thursday 5th July.⁶⁹ Meanwhile the Free Presbyterians had worshipped in the school, the services being taken by George Mackay;

⁶⁸ *Oban Times*, 10th February 1894, p. 3. John Robertson (b. 1856) was inducted in 1891 to Gorbals Free Church in Glasgow. He resigned in 1894 to carry out independent evangelism in the city and then went abroad. He had been ordained to his first charge, Stonehaven, in 1886 and translated to M’Crie-Roxburgh charge in Edinburgh in 1889, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, p. 301, Vol. 2, p. 94.

⁶⁹ *Oban Times*, 23rd June 1894, p. 3; 14th July 1894, p. 3. A Knapdale man by birth, Macneill had studied at Glasgow University and at the Free Church College there, see *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol 1, p. 253.



*Believed to date between 1912 and 1919, and to have been taken from the top of the golf course, this picture shows the original tin Kames Free Presbyterian church (centre right) with the manse (right). The later church building was constructed further up the slope, gable to gable with the original.**

[Photo courtesy of Miss C. MacPherson]

they had also begun building an iron church and this was opened in July. A press report stated: "The old Free Church is practically deserted, the great bulk of the congregation throwing in their lot with the secessionists."⁷⁰ The Kames church building was the first Free Presbyterian place of worship ever built.⁷¹

The ecclesiastical state of the Free Church Presbytery of Dunoon can perhaps be gauged by the fact that a choir sang during the November 1893 induction of Rev Hugh M. Rankin to the Tighnabruaich congregation. A harmonium was placed in the church early in 1894. Dunoon's Free Church (English) congregation voted that spring to

* The dates 1912-1919 are based on Miss MacPherson's father's recollection that Rev Ewan MacQueen, minister between those years, began the vegetable plot visible behind the manse.

⁷⁰ The structure had floor space of 51 feet in length, 31 feet in breadth and capable of taking 300 people, *Oban Times*, 30th June 1894, p. 3.

⁷¹ See obituary for Donald MacCallum (1838-1933), one of the original six elders to establish the congregation; *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1933-4, pp. 247-251.

introduce musical instruments to the public worship.⁷² These events cannot but have strengthened Archibald Crawford and his fellow-elders in the belief that they had taken the right step in leaving the Free Church.

The Kames Free Presbyterian congregation gained its first minister in November 1894, when Rev Alexander MacRae was inducted following a call signed by 234 people: 36 communicants and 198 adherents. Its second pastor, Rev John Macleod, was inducted in January 1901. One of the best minds of his generation in the Scottish Church scene, Mr Macleod had been one of Neil Cameron's confidants among the pre-1893 divinity students. Kames was to suffer a blow in late 1905 when Mr Macleod left the denomination with two other ministers, Revs George Mackay (Stornoway), Alexander Stewart (Edinburgh) and the divinity student James Sinclair to join the Free Church of Scotland. In his farewell letter to the congregation, Mr Macleod urged them to stay together.⁷³ It is thought that this event may have been referred to obliquely in Mr Cameron's obituary for Kames elder Benjamin Dawson, whom he described as "weeping over the unfaithfulness of some of whom he had better hopes for many years".⁷⁴ Rev Duncan Mackenzie, in earlier life one of the Free Church elders in Oban who supported the Free Presbyterian movement, served Kames between 1921 and 1930.⁷⁵ The much-revered Glasgow elder Angus Fraser gave supply for several months on the death of Mr Mackenzie.

An important ministry for the congregation began with the induction of Rev James A. Tallach in May 1931.⁷⁶ Conversions took place and the spiritual strength of the congregation can perhaps be gauged by attendances of 40 at the prayer meeting on a night of bad weather. A new church was built about 1940 and monthly services were even held in a satellite location – the Ardlamont village hall a few miles south being the venue. Mr Tallach's pastorate ended with his translation to Stornoway in

⁷² *Oban Times*, 11th November 1893, p. 3; 24th March 1894, p. 6; 7th April 1894, p. 3. For Rankin, see *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 1, p. 295.

⁷³ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970*, p. 90; *John Macleod D.D.*, pp. 90-6.

⁷⁴ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 28, 1923-4 pp. 342-344 and substantially republished in *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ For Mackenzie's obituary, see *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 22-6. The original was first published in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 35, 1930-1, pp. 422-7.

⁷⁶ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 36, June 1931, pp. 60, 74.



The plaque of the re-built church of 1940 at Kames is still retained on the outside of the now private dwelling.

September 1952.⁷⁷ However, the inability to sustain a Kirk Session on the ground in Kames may be seen as early as the 1930s. The much-loved elder Duncan MacPherson, the last living link with those who had organised the 1893 separation there, died in July 1935.⁷⁸ At the denominational Synod of November 1936, Rev Neil Macintyre moved that “the Kirk Session of Kames be granted authority to meet as a Kirk Session in Glasgow”. Mr James Mackay seconded this motion, which was agreed to.⁷⁹

Question Meetings were never held in Kames on the Friday of a communion season, as Archie Crawford had come to object to them, despite having spoken at some in his earlier years. He “spoke to the question” at the very first service he attended in the north, which was in summer 1866, in Dingwall. The Question Meeting was presided over by Dr Mackay and the subject for the exercise of the day was the Perseverance of the Saints. Dr Kennedy as local minister insisted that Archie Crawford speak. After much hesitation he got up and said that “he was a stranger in the place and to the forms of their meetings, at which he was but a spectator for the first time on the previous day, that he was in the position of Elihu the friend of Job, who said ‘I am young in years and ye are aged, and I am afraid of showing my opinion’. But if I were to form an opinion I would venture to find an analogy in the case of the disconsolate Naomi and her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth who, when pressed to return to their own country, both kissed her very affectionately, but with this difference: Ruth declared that she would cleave to her till death, whereas Orpah kissed her a second time, but it was the parting kiss, at which she went back to the land of Moab, to her people and to her gods.” Brown then tells of how Dr Mackay referred in a pleasant manner to Mr Crawford’s appearance at the Question

⁷⁷ See *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970*, p. 236. For attendance figures, see *Fraser: Not a Private Matter*, Fraser Tallach with John and David Tallach (Banner of Truth, 2003), p. 13.

⁷⁸ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 40, 1935-6, pp. 219-221.

⁷⁹ Report of November 1936 Synod in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 41, January 1937, p. 366.

Meeting, “saying that Mr Crawford referred to his youth and inexperience, but his grey hairs and point of his remark showed otherwise. He then turned to the audience and said, ‘Can any good come from Nazareth (meaning Argyllshire). Come and see’.” It is thought that Mr Crawford’s eventual objection to Question Meetings may have arisen from speakers in other parts of the Church using them to air the ecclesiastical issues of the day, rather than giving the marks of grace associated with the text.⁸⁰

Several Free Presbyterian families were evacuated to the area from Clydeside during the Second World War. The late Rev Donald Maclean (1915-2010) preached his first sermon as a divinity student to a congregation of about 100 in Kames in 1945. After Mr Tallach’s departure the cause was largely maintained by the efforts of Mr Donald MacPherson, son of Duncan MacPherson, who ran a butcher’s shop in the village. In addition to church duties there he sometimes also had to give supply to Lochgilphead. He died in 1981. Over the years several people left Kames Free Presbyterian Church for the Church of Scotland, as they were being refused baptism by the Free Presbyterian Church for working on the Sabbath day. Although a number of Glasgow Free Presbyterians would take holidays every year in the village, for much of the rest of the year the Kames congregation was somewhat isolated from others of the same denomination, the tiny cause in Dunoon being in the same position. Attendances were down to about 40 in the 1960s and a dozen by the late 1980s. The last service was conducted in 1997 by Rev Alexander MacPherson, whose roots were in the area.⁸¹ The congregation was formally closed the following year. The pulpit Bible and the remaining pew Bibles are in the Free Presbyterian church in Aberdeen.

The Kames people were regarded as somewhat different to those in other areas of the Highlands. There may have been less deference to ministers: a leading preacher, who criticised the Kames precentor after a service for having used a repeating tune, found himself rounded on by a local elder who told him that the precentor was not the only person repeating himself that day. The elder had recently heard the minister

⁸⁰ *The History of Cowal*, p. 159. The writer is grateful to Rev Dr James R. Tallach for the material about the possible reason for Crawford’s objection to Question Meetings.

⁸¹ Alexander MacPherson was brought up in Glasgow but his father was from Kames and his mother from Rothesay; see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 106 (2001), p. 84. His widow, Jenny MacLachlan, belonged to Kames and died in December 2011.



*The former 1940s Free Presbyterian church at Kames as it appears today.
The last service held in this building was conducted by Rev A. MacPherson in 1997.*

delivering the same sermon in another congregation. There was said to be a practical strain to the Kames people's religion and for more of the objective than the subjective to be in their spiritual outlook.⁸²

5. The 1893 separation in Oban

In Oban, the locus of resistance was the Free High congregation which was the bilingual charge in the town. The Free High had its roots in the Chapel of Ease opened in 1821 in the town. The Chapel's minister, Rev Archibald Bannatyne, led three elders and a "considerable" number of the people out in the Disruption of 1843, having been ordained the year before. Despite the unusual providence of having a landlord sympathetic to the Free Church position, a new church was not opened until 1847.⁸³

⁸² Report of November 1936 Synod, in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 41, January 1937, p. 366. The writer acknowledges the assistance of the late Rev Donald Maclean, Miss Catherine MacPherson, Murdo Maclean, and the Revs James R. and John and Mr Cameron Tallach, sons of the late Rev James A. Tallach of Kames and Stornoway.

⁸³ *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, Rev John J. Murray (Oban, 1984), pp. 1-6, 14. The Marquis of Breadalbane gave generously to Free Church funds after the Disruption.

Its daughter congregation, the English-only charge, had been created in 1886. A building was erected in Argyll Square and the congregation joined the union in 1900. The General Assembly of 1886 heard that the English charge had 73 communicants and 110 adherents.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the Free High congregation enjoyed blessing between 1876 and 1883 under the ministry of Rev John Mackay. It is also thought that a sermon preached by Charles Spurgeon to a crowd of 3,000 on the hillside next to the church in 1877 may have been blessed spiritually to adherents in the Free High congregation.⁸⁵

The conservative stance of the Free High congregation in the 1880s is seen in their having recorded the loss to the denomination in the death of Dr James Begg in 1883 and Rev John Kennedy of Dingwall in 1884.⁸⁶ The congregation's chronicler (and pastor in the 1980s and early 1990s) Rev John J. Murray, notes the significance of a petition in 1890 from the Session to the Presbytery complaining of the false teaching of professors in the denominations' colleges, particularly that of Marcus Dods. His survival of that attempt at church discipline was seen by the elders in Oban as another open mark of the declension in the denomination.⁸⁷

Strong opposition to the Declaratory Act was recorded in the 23rd November 1892 minutes of the Kirk Session where all six elders signed a protest against it.⁸⁸ On 21st March 1893, a public meeting was held at the Oban Free Church Mission Hall at which Neil Cameron spoke on the subject of "The Teaching Legalised by the Declaratory Act".⁸⁹ The interim-moderator of the Free High charge at this time, Rev Thomas Mackenzie, does not seem to have played a large role in Church politics or spoken much at congregational meetings.⁹⁰ By October 1893, the Oban congregation was in turmoil. There had been no immediate

⁸⁴ The Free High was described at the time as "large and strong", *The Free Church Monthly and Missionary Record*, July 1886, p. 212.

⁸⁵ Mackay, born in 1846, took a call from Cromarty in 1883 and went on to do evangelistic work in other areas of the Highlands, *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, pp. 11, 14, 17.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14; *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 250.

⁸⁸ *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Typescript extracts (10pp.) from the *Oban Express*, 13th May 1892-22nd December 1893, in the possession of the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Glasgow, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁰ Born in 1826, Mackenzie had been ordained in Bonaive, Muckairn, and was to retire in 1898, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, p. 239.

separation and a majority wished to oppose the Declaratory Act by not seeking to appoint a new minister. However, a meeting of Monday 2nd October showed that at least one influential elder, Hugh Skinner, was now slightly more favourable to the Declaratory Act and willing to argue publically for at least one of its tenets, while still wishing the Act removed.⁹¹ Mr Skinner, who was born in Fearn in 1840, had come to Oban in 1862 as a teacher in the Free Church school and had gone on to have a powerful influence on education in the town. He became Session Clerk in 1893 and retained the post with the post-1900 Free High congregation until his death in 1932.⁹² Duncan Crawford criticised Mr Skinner for this stance as it was in contradiction of a resolution which he had signed in the Kirk Session records, to which Mr Skinner replied that a man was entitled to change his mind.⁹³

The actual separation to create a Free Presbyterian cause in Oban occurred at a congregational meeting on 13th December 1893. A vacancy committee had recommended to the congregational meeting that a minister of the constitutionalist party be called. There was some concern that insufficient notice had been given of the vacancy committee's meeting. Duncan Mackenzie moved a motion criticising that year's General Assembly for refusing to repeal the Declaratory Act, declaring that the congregation "resolve not to acknowledge the authority and jurisdiction of the courts of the Free Church as presently constituted", and seeking to call a minister who would hold to this stance. His motion was supported by elders Neil Mackinnon, Captain James Dawson, and Angus MacDougall, and deacon John MacColl. An amendment was moved by Hugh Skinner instructing the interim moderator to seek probationers as candidates for the vacancy. This, however, was then withdrawn in favour of a counter-motion by Duncan C. Brown enjoining a month's delay. Mr Brown's counter-motion defeated Mr Mackenzie's. At this point Mackenzie, Mackinnon, Dawson, and others resolved to separate from the Free Church. The remaining part of the Free Church had become less attractive as time passed for the group most opposed to the Act, and the prospect of continued internal opposition had grown less palatable.⁹⁴

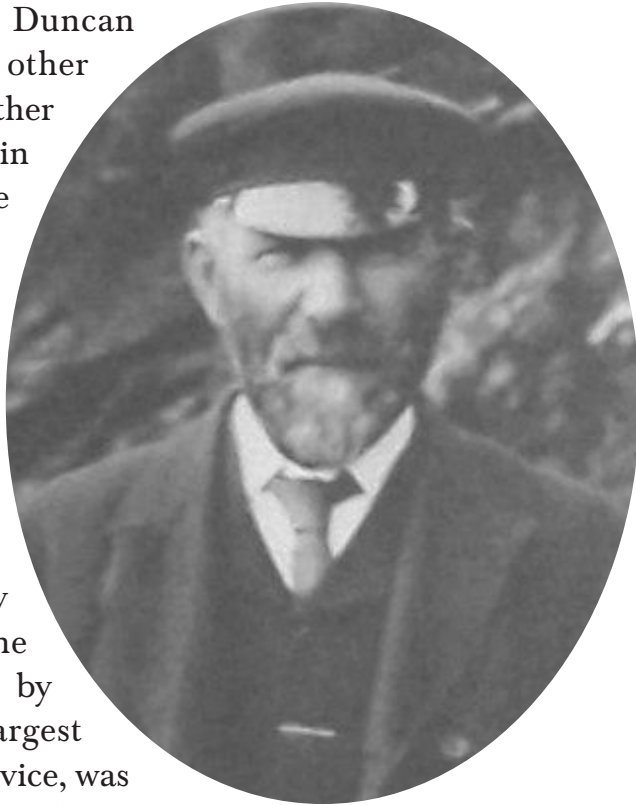
⁹¹ *Oban Times*, 9th October 1893, p. 2. Skinner spoke in favour of the statement that the love of God was to be in the forefront of divine revelation.

⁹² *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, pp. 13, 15.

⁹³ *Oban Times*, 9th October 1893, p. 2.

⁹⁴ *Oban Times*, 16th December 1893, p. 4; *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 24-5; "The Story of the Oban Free Presbyterian Congregation", Donald Beaton,

On 15th December, Duncan Mackenzie and the other separatists met to make further arrangements. They met again the next day, by which time Neil Mackinnon was no longer with them. The first services in Oban under the Free Presbyterian banner were held on Sabbath 17th December in the Rockfield Road school. The morning and evening services were conducted in English by Duncan Mackenzie and the afternoon service in Gaelic by Captain Dawson.⁹⁵ The largest attendance, at the evening service, was about 150.⁹⁶ Hugh Skinner – who had stayed with the majority at the



Captain James Dawson.

Free High – denied a press claim that those in the congregation who had remained in the Free Church saw no inconsistency between Presbyterian doctrine and the Declaratory Act. In early January of 1894 the divinity student George Mackay supplied the Free Presbyterian group. On Monday 15th January 1894, Duncan Crawford attended a congregational meeting of the Free High to give in his resignation, but Neil Mackinnon who had supported him in the December meeting made clear he was staying within the Free Church. Mr Crawford said he would not deny there were still godly people in the Free Church, and that his dispute was with the denominational leadership not the local office-bearers. By February, the Free Presbyterian cause had organised a Sabbath school, had enjoyed English supply from the divinity student,

typescript notes (6pp.) of lecture given in 1943, in possession of the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Glasgow, p. 4. The second reference contains a further interesting anecdote about the meeting of 13th December.

⁹⁵ An obituary for Captain Dawson appeared in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 33, 1928-9, p. 351.

⁹⁶ "The Story of the Oban Free Presbyterian Congregation", p. 4; typescript extracts from the *Oban Express*, pp. 8-10.

James S. Sinclair, and in Gaelic from “Mr E. Mackenzie, missionary, Harris”, and had heard a lecture by Mr Sinclair on the ground for the separation.⁹⁷

One regular preacher to the Oban Free High congregation during this crucial year was a divinity student, Roderick Mackenzie (1864-1958), who later found his way into the Church of Scotland. He served the Free High congregation from January until October of 1893, at which point he appears to have joined the Free Presbyterian movement. He told the congregation that he could accept no further engagements as they had complied with courts of the Free Church. A presentation to Mr Mackenzie in recognition of his services was made on behalf of the Free High by elder Duncan Crawford at a congregational meeting in mid-October.⁹⁸ Within a matter of weeks, Mr Mackenzie had preached to the Free Presbyterian congregation in Portree.⁹⁹ The *Oban Times*, of 14th April 1894, reported on Mr Mackenzie’s good progress at the Assembly’s College, Belfast, to which some Free Presbyterian divinity students had gone; Roderick Mackenzie was now seen as the “acting minister” of the Portree Free Presbyterian congregation. The paper reminded readers that he was a nephew of the Rev Murdoch Mackenzie, minister of the Free North Church.

While enjoying regular supply from divinity students and elders, the Oban Free Presbyterian congregation also had occasional preaching from Rev Alexander M. Bannatyne of Rothesay.¹⁰⁰ Alexander Bannatyne was a cousin of Rev Archibald Bannatyne of Coulter. In April 1894 the *Oban Times* described him as having resigned his Aberdeen charge some years before “on account of what he considered the innovations and defections in the doctrine and the worship in the Free Church”.¹⁰¹ His ministry in Union Free Church in Aberdeen between

⁹⁷ *Oban Times*, 23rd December 1893, p. 5; 30th December 1893, p. 3; 13th January 1894, p. 3; 20th January 1894, p. 5; 3rd February 1894, p. 3; 10th February 1894, p. 5; *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1893-1970*, Articles on the Declaratory Act, pp. 385-427.

⁹⁸ *Oban Times*, 14th October 1893, p. 5; 28th October 1893, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Oban Times*, 28th October 1893, p. 3

¹⁰⁰ Bannatyne took the services on 14th January, 15th April, and 5th August 1894. Other non-Free Presbyterian supply included the Reformed Presbyterian minister Rev Dr James Kerr, Glasgow, on 18th February and Major Macleod, Dalkeith, who took the Gaelic afternoon service on 5th August; see MS list of supply and collections for Oban Free [Presbyterian] Church, 17th December 1893-2nd November 1894, in possession of the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Glasgow.

¹⁰¹ *Oban Times*, 21st April 1894, p. 3.

1858 and 1890 spanned much of the theological and practical decline in the denomination. He was once described as “conservative to the last degree”. The writer of *Churches of Aberdeen* added: “This was evident in his theological position, in his attitude towards all developments in the religious world, and in his outlook on the Church and affairs generally. It was only to be expected that he should influence his congregation, and Union Church readily responded to his teaching, and became as conservative as its minister. Thus the old practice was maintained of standing during prayer and sitting during singing. Hymns, and even paraphrases, were rigidly excluded from the service of praise, and afternoon services were continued long after these had been superseded by evening services in almost every other church in the city.”¹⁰² In 1891, after the publication of the Declaratory Act, people separated from several Free Church congregations on the island of Bute and worshipped together in Rothesay. Mr Bannatyne provided supply for this group, which never joined the Free Presbyterian Church but did become part of the Free Church of Scotland in 1905.¹⁰³

The first communion season under the auspices of the Free Presbyterian Church in Oban was held on and around Sabbath 6th May 1894. People had attended from “Lochaber, Mull and other out-lying districts”. The services included a Fellowship/Question meeting on the Friday, all of which, bar the summary or “closing of the question”, was in Gaelic. Mr Macfarlane of Raasay and Allan Mackenzie preached at the services.¹⁰⁴ A congregational meeting held in July empowered the Managing Committee to procure a site for a church building at the corner of High Street and Campbell Street.¹⁰⁵ There were several speeches defending the separate stand taken, including one in which Duncan Crawford explained that there had been no relief whatsoever provided to true Calvinists by the 1894 decision of the Free Church General Assembly to retain the theologically-conservative series of

¹⁰² *The Churches of Aberdeen*, A. Gammie (Aberdeen, 1909), p. 224.

¹⁰³ For more on Alexander Bannatyne, see *Aberdeen and the Highland Church (1785-1900)*, Ian R. MacDonald (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 221-2, 234-8, 240, 271.

¹⁰⁴ *Oban Times*, 12th May 1894, p. 3. Notes of a Fellowship Meeting held in 1903 in the Oban congregation – which include contributions by visitors from Ontario, Skye and Lochaber – appeared in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 53, January 1949, pp. 166-9.

¹⁰⁵ The church building was not completed until the summer of 1896, see “The Story of the Oban Free Presbyterian Congregation”, pp. 5-6. Spurgeon contributed £1 towards the cost of the building. Pictures of the Free High and the Free Presbyterian (later Associated Presbyterian Churches) buildings in Oban can be viewed on “The Churches of Britain and Ireland” website.



The Free Presbyterian (later Associated Presbyterian Churches) building showing the plaque above the door with the date 1896.

questions put to ministers being ordained, the Questions and Formula.¹⁰⁶ The Free Presbyterian cause remained strong in the town for some decades but slowly declined. Most of the congregation joined the Associated Presbyterian Churches in the division of 1989 and services are no longer held there by the Free Presbyterian Church.

Further south than Oban, the Church of Scotland had been Moderate in ethos to a large degree. Arran (once part of the Kintyre Presbytery in the Church of Scotland), the Inner Hebrides and north Argyll had relatively strong evangelical churches due to Baptist itinerancy which led to both Baptist congregations being formed and the groundwork laid locally for the evangelical revival within the Church of Scotland. The south was patchier in its response to evangelicalism. The Church of Scotland historian, Rev John Macinnes, wrote: "Argyll became a Highland stronghold of Moderatism, but it is worthy of notice that the Evangelical stream, tenuous perhaps, continued unbroken." The formation of a Relief Church in Campbeltown in 1767 was seen to have weakened the Evangelical cause within the Church of Scotland in south

¹⁰⁶ *Oban Times*, 21st July 1894, p. 3. For a wider discussion of the Questions and Formula, see *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy*, pp. 192-5.

Argyll. Evangelical impulses had often seen people leave the Church of Scotland and form Baptist congregations. The Haldanes had seen success in Kintyre in the first decade of the nineteenth century, with their preachers witnessing a minor revival. A 1797 evangelistic effort in Kilbrandon resulted in some converts, who aligned themselves with the Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹⁰⁷ Although the Disruption Free Church did set up several presbyteries in Argyllshire – including Kintyre, Islay and Lorn – the conservative Calvinism found further north in the county does not seem to have had sufficient strength in the south to ensure a strong stand in 1893 or 1900 for full adherence to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The Free Presbyterian Church did, however, find enough of a following to have services in Lochgilphead and Tarbert, Loch Fyne.

Since their inception in 1895, Lochgilphead services seem to have been largely the responsibility of the elder Malcolm MacCulloch who separated from the Free Church that year. A lock-keeper by profession, he died on 28th November 1912. A brief obituary noted of him: “A man of deep piety, intelligent grasp of questions ecclesiastical and spiritual, keen insight into men and things, and all round sterling worth, he was a tower of strength to the congregation. The loss is a very great one indeed, and will not easily be made up.” Another office-bearer in the Lochgilphead congregation, Donald Dewar of Ardrishaig, died a fortnight after Mr MacCulloch. Mr Dewar, too, had been involved with the Free Presbyterian Lochgilphead cause since the beginning.¹⁰⁸ From 1922 to 1939 John MacEwan of Silvercraigs near Lochgilphead served as an elder in Lochgilphead.¹⁰⁹ Between 1934 and 1952, the Lochgilphead congregation benefited from the efforts of divinity students studying under the church tutor Rev Donald Beaton of Oban. By the late 1940s around twenty people attended. Made up of indigenous Argyllshire people, and a large Caithness family engaged in fishing, they were regarded as firmly Free Presbyterian in outlook despite their isolation. The congregation had shrunk to three elderly people by the early 1970s and seems to have folded in 1973. The church building was subsequently demolished. The baptism bowl used in the church was sent

¹⁰⁷ *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland: 1688 to 1800*, John Macinnes (Aberdeen, 1951), pp. 102, 142, 164.

¹⁰⁸ Both obituaries appear in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 17, January 1913, pp. 357-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 46, May 1941, pp. 13-15.

to the Free Presbyterian Bulawayo congregation in Zimbabwe.¹¹⁰ The date of the demise of the Tarbert Free Presbyterian cause is now unknown but the death of George Hay in 1911 seems to have been a significant loss.¹¹¹

Oban and Lochgilphead were by no means the only Free Presbyterian congregations to separate a considerable period of time after Mr Macfarlane tabled his Protest in May 1893. Plockton in south-west Ross-shire experienced secession from the Free Church only in January 1894, as did Lochboisdale in South Uist, where services were held by a “Mr A. Ferguson, elder”.¹¹² Waternish in Skye saw a Free Presbyterian cause established as late as March 1894. Staffin congregation emerged in the same month, after Mr Macfarlane addressed the Stenscholl congregation in the church building. Although “almost the whole congregation” of many hundreds of people present on this occasion stood to show opposition to the Declaratory Act, services held the next week by the catechist Norman Munro on behalf of the Free Presbyterian Church were attended by around 100 people.¹¹³

6. The post-1893 anti-union movement in Oban and southwards

The remaining anti-unionist congregation at the Oban Free High were rallied by the induction of Rev Ewan Macleod in 1895. He had

¹¹⁰ The writer owes this information to the late Rev Donald Maclean and to Mrs Catherine Ross.

¹¹¹ See obituary in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 16, 1911-12, pp. 116-117. George Hay died on 20th June 1911 at the age of sixty-six. This suggests that he is almost certainly the George Hay, aged 16, found in the 1861 census for Tarbert and mentioned in footnote 8 of Kintyre historian Angus Martin’s essay on the twentieth-century Gaelic and Scots poet George Campbell Hay – grandson of the Free Presbyterian. This would show Free Presbyterian family influence on two of Gaeldom’s leading poets of the century, the other being Sorley Maclean. George Hay’s son, John MacDougall Hay, father of the poet, married a daughter of Rev Duncan Campbell, Kilfinan, but does not appear to have been of strong Calvinistic persuasion; he is better known today as the author of the novel *Gillespie*. See *Kintyre: the Hidden Past* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 48-71.

¹¹² *Oban Times*, 24th February 1894, p. 3. After the 1989 division in the Free Presbyterian Church, the Associated Presbyterian Churches (APC) element in the Kyle-Plockton congregation used the Plockton meeting-house which had been built in 1953. The final service took place on Sabbath 19th March 2006, see “Last service for Plockton Church”, *The Hebridean* newspaper, Friday 31st March 2006, p. 21. Regular weekly services had been held by the then interim-moderator Rev J. W. Ross. Services had become fortnightly by 2002. The closing service was conducted by Jan D. van Woerden, assisted by the Kyle Free Church and Church of Scotland ministers. The site was used for two new homes.

¹¹³ *Oban Times*, 31st March 1894; p. 3; 24th March 1894, p. 3; 7th April 1894, p. 6.

previously served in Duthil and was to lead the Free High in consistent opposition to the union of 1900. He was alone among the ministers in the Presbytery of Lorn in refusing to enter the union, and he took the vast majority of his congregation, including Hugh Skinner, with him into the Free Church minority group. The congregation retained their church and manse buildings under the terms of the Parliamentary Commission appointed after the minority's historic 1904 victory in the House of Lords.¹¹⁴

It seems that the focus of the remaining constitutionalist cause in the Free High was more on disapproval of the basis of the proposed union than on the relaxing of commitment to the *Westminster Confession* in consequence of the Declaratory Act. On 20th December 1898, the Session had adopted the following finding:

The Session, having taken up consideration of the remit of the General Assembly to Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions anent union with the United Presbyterian Church unanimously disapprove of the same for the following reasons viz. (1) because it involves the abandonment of Free Church principles, notably the Headship of Christ; (2) because it permits office-bearers to believe as much or as little as they choose of the Standards of the Church; (3) because the amalgamation of churches holding views so different could be no union; and (4) because the proposed union would lead to the alienation and loss to the Free Church of many of her people".¹¹⁵

Thanks to the growing Free Presbyterian movement, and the lingering anti-union sentiment, the Highlands of the mid-to-late 1890s was a rebellious province for the Free Church leadership. Both problems were all the more galling for the authorities as it became clear that there was further potential for growth in the number of communicants in the north; this was an important weapon in an age of denominational competition between the Free Church and the Church of Scotland.

The Free Church had ended the year 1898 claiming to have within her bounds 293,684 communicants, 111,114 adherents above the age of 18, and a further 120,996 younger adherents. Over 9,700 elders had been

¹¹⁴ *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, pp. 14-5. For the Court case, see *Free Church of Scotland Appeals 1903-4*, R. L. Orr (Edinburgh, 1904); *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, pp. 336-8.

¹¹⁵ *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide*, p. 14.

listed at the same time. The disparity in attitudes between the Lowland and Highland areas with regard to profession of faith by taking the Lord's Supper was seen starkly in the figures published for the 1899 General Assembly. In the Lowlands there were 210 adherents for every 1,000 communicants, while the opposite prevailed in the Highlands with 2,336 adherents for every 1,000 communicants. The ratio in the Highlands had been moving very slowly in the direction of the Lowlands in the previous two years. A report to Assembly stated that the fewness of communicants in the Highlands was a feature "showing what room there still is in the Highlands for very large increases of members from among those adhering to the Free Church".¹¹⁶

A year before the union, the ongoing effects of the separation of 1893 were still making themselves felt. The Free Church Committee on Religion and Morals reported to the 1899 General Assembly that "serious secessions took place in some congregations" as a result of the Free Presbyterian movement and that there was subsequently "great difficulty in getting office-bearers and Sabbath-school teachers to carry on the work of these congregations". Kilmallie and North Ballachulish were especially mentioned.¹¹⁷

As noted, Rev Ewan Macleod of the Oban Free High Church took the vast majority of his congregation into the Free Church minority group. Mr Macleod was transferred to Dornoch in 1906, and was succeeded in 1908 by the Ulsterman Samuel McCune who had come to Scotland in 1905 as pastor of Stevenston. Slow decline marked the twentieth-century experience of the congregation; a 1984 history of the Free High congregation stated that the same gospel as was preached by the 1843 pastor Rev Archibald Bannatyne was still being preached from the pulpit and that the congregation looked "to the Lord to send us times of spiritual refreshing".¹¹⁸

In the rest of mid and south Argyllshire, the Free Church minority who refused to join the 1900 union represented a severely weakened remnant. A resuscitated Presbytery of Inveraray, stretching from Portnahaven in Islay to Strachur, was created in 1907. Services were held in Killean and Clachan in Kintyre but these petered out. Strachur was

¹¹⁶ *Free Church of Scotland Reports (No 1); May 1899; Report of Committee on Statistics, pp. 1-4.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *The Church on the Hill; Oban Free High Church: A History and Guide, pp. 15-17.*

declared a preaching station in May 1908.¹¹⁹ An Inveraray Presbytery overture of 1910, supporting the posture of standing for prayer and sitting for singing in public worship, was backed by the General Assembly that year.¹²⁰ Inveraray Presbytery was merged with that of Lochaber and Lorn in 1983, to create the new Presbytery of Argyll and Lochaber.¹²¹ The Argyllshire element of this new Presbytery – consisting of Campbeltown, Tarbert and Islay, Lochgilphead and Lochfyneside, and Oban, Mull and Coll – was itself merged with the Glasgow Presbytery in 2000. The Lochaber section was hived off in the same year to become part of the massive Presbytery of Inverness, Lochaber and Ross.¹²²

The Free Church congregation at Balvicar on Seil – known by the old parish name of Kilbrandon and Kilchattan and the descendant of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation on Seil – was merged with Oban in 1975. The sale of the church in Balvicar was also authorised by Assembly in 1975, as was that of the Jura Free Church.¹²³ The year 1977 saw the sale of the Minard and Coll manses in Argyll. Lochgilphead and Lochfyneside were united as one charge in 1986. They in turn were merged in 1988 with Kilmartin and North Knapdale.¹²⁴ Campbeltown became a “redevelopment charge” in 1989.¹²⁵ Islay was united to Tarbert in 1992, while the sale of the Campbeltown manse was authorised in 1996 as part of the consolidation of the charge with Tarbert and Islay in the latter year.¹²⁶ The Tarbert and Campbeltown Kirk Sessions were united in 2000 and the Portnahaven church’s sale approved in 2001. The Minard church’s sale was approved in 2002.¹²⁷ Sabbath attendances in mid and south Argyll are now barely into double figures in any of the

¹¹⁹ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1900-1909.*

¹²⁰ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1910-1919.* VII. – Act anent Postures in Public Worship (No. 6 of Class II), Edinburgh, 31st May 1910, Session 11. The opposite posture is now (2011) in use in Campbeltown, Tarbert and Lochgilphead.

¹²¹ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1980-1989,* p. 43.

¹²² *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 2000-2004,* p. 48.

¹²³ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1970-1979,* p. 73.

¹²⁴ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1980-1989,* pp. 98, 118-9.

¹²⁵ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1980-1989,* p. 146.

¹²⁶ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1990-1999,* pp. 64, 109, 111.

¹²⁷ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 2000-2004,* pp. 17, 37, 86.



*Strachur Free Church, opened in 1854 by Rev John Kennedy, Dingwall.
The manse (to the right of the picture) is still standing as a private house.*

Free Church places of worship. Three communicants live on Islay but services are no longer held on the island.¹²⁸

The twentieth-century decline in the Free Church and Free Presbyterian causes occurred against a wider back-drop of ongoing evangelical weakness in the county. An evangelical tradition was said to mark the Church of Scotland in Tiree and in Campbeltown's Highland Parish congregation. However, for the most part there have not been other evangelical Churches in the county, other than some Baptist Churches which were affected by the Charismatic movement – and in Campbeltown a Plymouth Brethren witness.

In Cowal, the anti-union Free Church could muster support only in Dunoon and Strachur. The church building in the latter community had been opened by Dr Kennedy, Dingwall, in 1854. The 1904 House of Lords' decision to grant title to the minority Free Church did not protect their position in Strachur in the long-term, as the Government-appointed Executive Commission of 1905 deprived the anti-union group of the

¹²⁸ The writer acknowledges the kindness of Rev Donald Morrison, Lochgilphead Free Church, in providing this information. On the context of the wider evangelical presence in the county, the writer is grateful for the advice of Rev John J. Murray and Rev Dr R. Macleod, Furnace.

church and manse. The building subsequently erected by the Free Church minority in 1909 was replaced in 1971 by their third place of worship of the twentieth century. This last building was opened by Professor G. N. M. Collins and is still used at present.¹²⁹ In 1973 the Dunoon and Strachur congregations were united as one charge.¹³⁰ Between 1976 and 1981 the pastor was Rev Norman Whitla. The year 1981 also saw the Dunoon-Strachur charge linked to Greenock, with the minister in the latter, Rev Alasdair Gollan, serving the three communities until 1985, followed in 1986 by an 11-year pastorate of Rev Robert Bray. This period of union with Greenock was in its turn followed by the Cowal groups becoming a separate charge again in August 2002.¹³¹

As with their Free Presbyterian brethren, the Free Church congregations in Cowal saw gradual decline in the amount of people attending the public means of grace. The small group which left in 1905 increased during the first part of the twentieth century, and by the early 1950s, around 60 to 70 people were in regular attendance at Dunoon, with around 30 to 40 in Strachur. This, however, has now (2011) reached single figures in both centres.¹³²

7. Conclusion

Argyllshire was the birthplace of both Archie Crawford and Rev Neil Cameron. It was where they agreed that separation from the Free Church would be necessary should it adopt the Declaratory Act. Large public meetings opposing the Act were held in the county and sufficient opposition existed for national leaders of the conservative Free Church wing to campaign there. Divisions among the constitutionalist party opposing the Act became clear in Argyllshire as in other areas. Sadly, a century after the event, the spiritual decline predicted by those highlighting the pernicious effects of the Declaratory Act has proceeded even further there than in many other areas of the Highlands.

¹²⁹ The new Strachur church of 1971 was built on croft land donated by the Maclennan family, who had Lochcarron connections. The writer acknowledges the great deal of help received in this section from Roddy Maclennan, elder, Strachur.

¹³⁰ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1970-1979*, pp. 46-7, 66. This came through a Commission of Assembly of October 1973, and was agreed in May 1974.

¹³¹ *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 2000-2004*, p. 63.

¹³² The attendance in Strachur Free Church is 4 or 5, with 8 people attending in Dunoon.

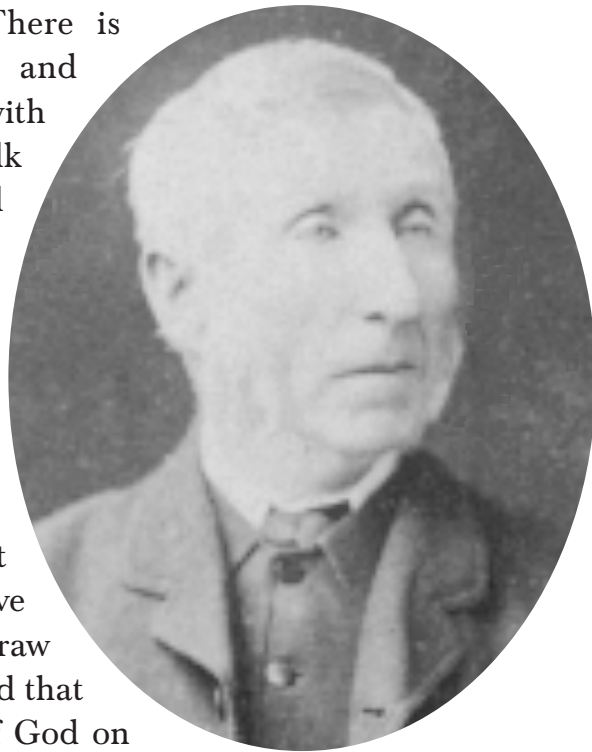
APPENDIX
ANECDOTES RELATING TO
ARCHIBALD CRAWFORD

(The following anecdotes relating to the eminent Archibald Crawford were taken from a handwritten manuscript left by Rev Neil Cameron, Glasgow, and preserved by the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Glasgow)

AT the beginning of the South African war he was very harassed in his mind by reading newspaper reports of our army firing shells among the Boers while they were assembled at a prayer meeting in the open field on the Lord's Day. He expressed his fear that this would bring down the wrath of God upon us as a nation, as it proved not only awful rebellion against the Lord's command – "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" – but also contempt of the reverence due to His worship. It came into his mind to set some time apart in order to seek by prayer the Lord's mind on this matter. While he prayed for light upon it, the scripture came vividly before his mind: "The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah." He understood this to mean that the prayer meetings of the Boers were not so genuine as he thought and that there was less hypocrisy in British shells than in Boer prayer meetings. He deplored exceedingly the amount of Sabbath desecration perpetrated by our army in that war, and he, along with many others who feared God, believed that many of the terrible catastrophes which befell our army in that war were due to the reckless disregard manifested by officers and soldiers to the Lord's command. Ever after that day he lost his confidence in the integrity of the Boers and as time opened up their intrigues, the most of his fellow-countrymen became too conscious of the same fact.

He had a method of expounding the word of God peculiar to himself. He was in the habit, when some friend called to see him, of quoting some passage and then he would proceed to open up the meaning of it with marvellous lucidity. It was clear to every intelligent listener that the wonderful thoughts he poured forth were all his own. The light he caused to spill into the mind of the attentive listener was convincing, informative and comforting. On one occasion he quoted the words: "So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the

ear.” He went on to say, “There is nothing more green, sappy and beautiful than a field covered with grain but when the ear or stalk shoots up, if you look you will see just at the mouth of the ground a yellow ring appearing. This ring travels up the stalk and as it proceeds, a green leaf falls to the ground – today on this side and tomorrow on that side – until by the time it reaches the top, not one green leaf is left. You have then nothing but a stalk of straw and a few grains of the same kind that was sown. So is the kingdom of God on man’s soul. The Word of God is sown in the soul by the Holy Ghost. There is



Archibald Crawford.

always a time of rich experiences following, which may be compared to the blade. After that experiences begin to decay until the poor sinner will have nothing but what may very well be compared to straw and a few grains or passages of the Word of God. If this will not stand, poor Archie Crawford will be lost forever. I am nothing in myself but a dry stalk of something more useless than straw, but I must confess there are a few passages of God’s Word in my mind upon which I rest my hope for eternity, dry and withered as I am.”

On another occasion he said: “Purifying their hearts by faith.” “I saw a woman once in a rivulet cleaning the many plies of a sheep. She turned over a fold and exposed much filth that had to be cleaned. When she had cleaned this fold she turned over another which revealed as much impurity as the first, and so she went on turning over a fold at a time and cleaning behind it till she went over the whole. I thought to myself, surely it is clean now; but the woman knew better. She began again to turn the plies over backward, and you would really think it was as dirty as ever. So is the heart of man. When one thinks that it is being cleansed by faith and that good progress has been made, another ply is turned over and the poor sinner concludes that nothing has been done at all in purifying it.”

Quoting the words: "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." "When," said he, "could we find the best illustration of this change? Let us take Nicodemus. He was hearing much about Christ and the miracles he performed and he did not bury in the earth the talent God gave him (i.e. his reason) but used it about the report which went abroad about Christ. So he came to the conclusion that Christ was a teacher sent from God, because he was convinced in his own mind that no man could do these works except God were with him. This moved him to desire an interview with Christ but he was afraid to come in daylight lest the Pharisees (his former companions) should hear of it and mock. He came at night. When he did meet Christ he told Him of the conclusion he had come to, as the cause of his having come. Christ introduced at once the great doctrine of the new birth and the necessity of it in order to salvation. Nicodemus, knowing nothing about this doctrine, stated the impossibility of being born of a woman twice. Christ told him that, even although it should be possible that one could be born again of a woman, he would still be flesh as he was at his first birth; but that one needed to be born of water and of the Spirit in order to his entering into the Kingdom of God. He was amazed at this doctrine which he had never considered and asked Christ, 'How can these things be?'. Christ upbraided him with being a teacher in the church while he was ignorant of this most important change. So you will find him taking the place of the little child, and he got that night the Kingdom of God which he was utterly ignorant of till then. As a proof of this you find him putting in a good word for Christ when the Sanhedrin asked the officers who were sent to apprehend Him, 'Why have ye not brought him?'. They answered 'Never man spake like this man'. He afforded additional proof at the burial of Christ."

Fatalism

He considered fatalism one of the most destructive evils to which the mind of fallen man has become subject. The most dangerous form of it, he thought, was that which caused the sinner to neglect the duties which were bound upon him by the God of Truth. As an instance of it, he told us that he once went to visit a dying woman along with his minister. The minister urged upon the woman her need of repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. The woman answered: "O, if He will not do it Himself, what can I do?" He urged upon the woman to lay to

heart that she had her duty laid upon her by God and that she would be held responsible for neglecting it. To this she returned the same answer. The minister, finding that he could not dislodge her mind out of this position, turned to Mr Crawford and said to him, "Have you anything to say to this woman?". Mr Crawford answered: "I will ask her one question and it will depend on her answer whether or not I shall say anything to her." Turning to the woman, he asked her, "Was it from hearsay only that you came to the conclusion that unless the Lord will work in you, you can do nothing or did you learn it by self-experience?". She gave no reply and he had to leave her in her fatalism.

Arminianism

He concluded Arminianism as directed against the sovereignty of God and Calvinism, when set before sinners unguardedly, as tending to fatalism. "The Arminian," he said, "falls into the fundamental error of believing that man has the power to turn to God by an act of his own will and, overlooking the doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit as absolutely necessary in the sinner's returning to God by repentance, they press upon the sinner to act rational faith on the Word of God and that he will be saved. Calvinists, on the other hand, urge the sinner to repent and believe, which is certainly the sinner's duty: but I have heard ministers urge this upon their hearers and in the next breath saying, 'But I must tell you that you cannot either believe or repent'. This is a great fact, that man is impotent of himself and it has its own place in the Word of God, but should that be thrust in this place to throw the poor sinner on his back and cause him to refrain from all effort. When one declares to sinners the state into which the fall brought them, with its corruption, guilt and impotency, he should make these points as clear to them as he can – he has ample warrant from God's Word to do so – but when one offers mercy through Christ crucified to sinners and calls them to turn from sin to God by repentance and faith, he ought not to entammel the call of the Gospel but to leave the issue with the Holy Ghost and the sinner. It is always so in the discourses of Christ and His apostles."

He illustrated this by two illustrations:

(1) "Let us," he said, "take a man's hand as an illustration. If a man has all the fingers but wants the thumb, he cannot grasp anything by that hand. Again if he has the thumb but wants the fingers, he cannot grasp anything. Now take the fingers for man's

responsibility and the thumb for God's sovereignty. A man's effort will not lay hold of Christ in the offer of the Gospel without God's sovereignty closing in with that effort and neither will God's sovereignty close you in with Christ without your own faith, which is the sinner's act."

(2) "Let us use another illustration. A river needs two banks in order that it may run in its channel. If it has only one bank it will run out on the fields and spoil them. It does not matter which bank is wanting. But if it has its two banks it will run between them till it comes to the sea. So it is with God's sovereignty and man's responsibility; they are the two banks between which the river of the water of life runs freely in the Bible – between which it will run into the ocean of eternity. God works by means in everything and it is in the use of means that He bestows His blessing. This is true in spiritual matters; God has set up the means of grace and He blesses them, at His own good time, to sinners who make a diligent use of them as means to accomplish the end for which God gave them – His own Glory and the salvation of sinners."

Discourse on Paul's shipwreck

We heard of a very ingenious discourse which he preached at Millhouse at the time of the revival in 1860. His text was: "But the centurion . . . commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea and get to land: and the rest, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land."

He compared those told to swim to those who are already in Christ and in whom the Spirit dwells as the Spirit of adoption. It was safe for them in the greatest trials, even in death, to cast themselves on the mercy of God in Christ and they would assuredly get to land safely. Those who could not swim he compared to the unconverted sinners who find themselves ready to be drowned by the wrath of God in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. The broken boards and pieces of the ship upon which they were commanded to cast themselves were the invitations and promises of the Word of God. He then began to set forth the invitations and promises of the gospel to all present. "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else." "Cast thyself," he said, "on that invitation and promise of God and it will bring you safe to land as it brought many before you."

“I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” That is another board that has brought many a poor sinner safely to land. Cast thyself upon it and it will bring you also.” The effect of that discourse on the audience was extraordinary. For 31 years afterwards it remained quite vivid in the mind of the elder who rehearsed it to us.

His dreams

He had dreams which were wonderful and worth recording, however little credit may be given to some dreams. He saw that his brother and himself were out on the hills beside a lake on a bright starry night, but without moonlight. He observed the stars in great commotion, moving from one place to another on the face of the sky. He drew his brother’s attention to this wonderful phenomenon, but his brother told him he could see nothing of what he was pointing out to him. At last all the stars on the face of the firmament took the shape of a cock. They continued in that shape for some time and then the commotion began again. This time all the stars took the shape of a horse with a man on its back. The horse, with its rider, galloped away to the west, went out of sight behind the hills and left not a star on the face of the sky. Only a ray of light continued a short time till its tail had disappeared. This dream made a lasting impression on his mind. We heard him tell it several times and on each occasion, one would think it was the night before he had seen the dream on account of the vividness with which he described its details. He was not, in general, a believer in dreams but he did believe there was a real meaning in this particular dream. He believed that it meant there was a time coming on Scotland when there would not be one true minister of Christ left in it. He more than once said to us: “I am afraid you are the tail of the stars and that poor Scotland will soon be in darkness spiritually.” He met Dr Kennedy at Greenock and told him the dream. The Doctor said: “Never call that a dream.” He asked him what interpretation he had of it in his own mind. Mr Crawford told him. “That is firmly my opinion,” said the Doctor.

In his early life he had a dream about a relative of his own who served at the time with an English gentleman who had a lease of shootings in Cowal. In his dream he met a man from the place where his relative served and asked how she was. The man told him that she was so dangerously ill that four doctors attended her night and day and that her life was despaired of. He got so grieved and alarmed about her that

he went away at once to the place to see how she was. He came to the house, rang the bell and the door was opened by one of the doctors. He invited him to go in and see for himself how she was and expressed his pleasure at his coming just at that critical hour. He went in and saw her lying on a bed with her breast heaving with every breath. The doctors got a mattress, laid it on the bedroom floor and lifting her out of the bed laid her on the mattress. They then produced a large knife and told Mr Crawford that all her disease was in her heart, that she was sure to die if an operation were not performed on her heart, that they could not perform that operation but that he could and that they were now leaving her with him. They charged him that he would be guilty of causing her death if he did not perform the operation. They immediately walked away and left him there with the dying woman at his feet and the big knife in his hand. The terror that she would die and that he would be responsible for her death set him to work. He took the big knife, ripped up her breast, put in his hand, took out the heart, ripped it open with the knife, cleaned it thoroughly, closed it together as well as he could, put it into its place again and closed the breast together. All this finished he put his ear to her mouth to ascertain if she still breathed and behold she did. He awoke and had to rise out of bed to put off his nightshirt and the two sheets that were under and above him as they were wet with perspiration. We asked him if there was anything afterwards in the history of that young woman. He told us he saw her in as great distress about her soul as anyone he ever met and that she seemed really to have been truly changed. The gentleman left the country and went to England some time after that and this young woman went with the family. Two years later she took ill and died. Her master wrote her father giving a detailed account of the happy death-bed she had. He concluded by saying that if he was as sure of going to heaven as he was that she had gone there, he would desire to depart that very day.

The dying elder

One of the elders of the congregation called to see a godly man who was seriously ill. The elder asked the man if Archie Crawford had been seeing him. The man said he had not and that the reason was that the Lord told Archie Crawford that he was a hypocrite and would not let him come. The elder went straight from the sick man's house to Mr Crawford and told of the man's serious illness and of the temptation he had. Mr Crawford went to see the man. As soon as he came into his bedroom he

said to him: "He has allowed you to come at last." Mr Crawford told him that he had only heard that very day that he had been sick and that he came as soon as he heard. But the man held to his opinion – that he found out from the Lord that he was a hypocrite, that the Lord would not let him come to see him and that he was now to be lost forever notwithstanding all the profession he had made in the world. Mr Crawford did his utmost to disprove the two statements – that he was a hypocrite and that there was no hope for him now – but he saw that there was an ingenuity in the man to turn every truth in the Bible against himself that indicated that it emanated from Satan. So Mr Crawford made up his mind that he had to deal with Satan and not with the man. He quoted the truth: "Who knoweth if he will return and repent and leave a blessing behind him?" "Do you know?" he asked. "No," said the man and immediately the tempter left him. The man died in full assurance of faith and in much comfort. Mr Crawford told us that he never saw Satan more vividly than he saw him in pursuing that man's soul.

Visiting the sick

It was very rarely he visited any of the sick. We often wondered why a man so tender, kind and accommodating should neglect this duty. One day he told us that he was asked once to go to visit a young man who was seriously ill. He went and he saw that the young man was not likely to live long. He spoke to him of his great need that the Holy Spirit would open his eyes so that he might see his lost and ruined condition and his need of being saved by Christ. When he rose to leave the young man said to him, "Will you not pray before you leave?". Mr Crawford asked him: "What do you wish me to pray for?" "That my eyes may be opened to see my lost state," the sick man said. "Is that all you wish me to pray for?" he asked. "Yes," said the young man. Mr Crawford prayed and went away. He was not more than half a mile away from the house when the young man began to cry out and roar that he was lost and that he felt the fire of the wrath of God burning him already. He passed away to eternity in that condition.

Ever after that day Mr Crawford felt it extremely difficult for him to visit any in sickness and especially such as spent their time till sickness came in forgetfulness of God and their own everlasting interests. Others are at liberty to condemn him for this if they feel so inclined; but we declare we feel very great sympathy with anyone who feels the same difficulty, for we feel it very much ourselves.

Covenant with the ploughman

During the early period of his life he held the farm of Kilbride in Cowal and was in the habit of keeping two ploughmen – a grieve and an underploughman. He wanted an underploughman one year and there was none that could think of who could do his work but a man who was notorious for drunkenness. He went to him and told him that he wanted a ploughman and asked him if he desired to be engaged. The man told him he would be quite willing to enter into his service. Mr Crawford undertook to engage the man if he would agree to one condition while he was with him. The man asked him what might that be. “You will have to promise that you will not get drunk during the time that you are to be engaged by me. If you will get drunk and break your promise, you will lose all the wages you will have earned and you will leave my service immediately.” The man promised this at once and he engaged him.

Three months passed without his taking any strong drink but then he arrived home one night drunk and began to boast how little he cared for Mr Crawford or any other man. Mr Crawford told his housekeeper to give the man his supper and let him away to bed. This was done. Next morning, Mr Crawford went out early and found the young man brushing his horses in order to prepare to go out to plough in the field. He said to him, “You better prepare yourself and leave my service forthwith for you know the covenant that was between you and me, which you are aware you have broken”. The man said to him, “Surely you will forgive me for once”. Mr Crawford replied: “No. Once a covenant of services is broken it can never be made up, so you will have to leave as soon as you will take your breakfast and you will get nothing for the time you have been in my employment.” He went away and left him.

After breakfast he asked the grieve, how the young man had taken what he had said to him. The grieve told him that he had been sitting in one of the stalls weeping ever since. “That will do,” he told the grieve, “I will go out to speak to him now.” He went out to the stable and said to the young man, “The covenant is broken and cannot be made up anymore; but if you will agree to it, I will make a new one with you”. The young man asked what that one would be. “Well,” said Mr Crawford, “I am prepared to take you from this day to the term on the condition that you will promise me that you will not get drunk till the term day, and I will give you the proportion of wages that will be due to you from this day till the term and the portion you have forfeited along

with it". "That is a far better covenant than the first one," said the young man. The young man continued in his service and became a sober man from that day.

This will bring vividly before the mind of the intelligent reader the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Although there is no mercy in the law once it was broken by man, there is mercy in the covenant of grace; and one gets in that covenant, not only good things for the future but also all that he lost in the broken covenant. The sagacity of Mr Crawford's mind appears very conspicuously in this business.

The Declaratory Act

In the year 1891, the Declaratory Act of the Free Church of Scotland made its appearance in the *Scotsman* on a certain morning during the sitting of the General Assembly. As soon as it was read by us we at once saw that a very serious crisis had arisen in that church and that it demanded our immediate prayerful attention. We spent some days in the consideration of it in much darkness and confusion. One day, while in the hill alone we began to read it and to ask the question regarding each doctrine stated in it, "Do you believe that to be the Truth of God?" We came to the conclusions that its doctrines were false and that come what may, we could have nothing to do with the Free Church should it be passed at next Assembly. Next day, after coming to this conclusion, we went to see Mr Crawford. He asked what kept us from coming to see him for such a length of time. We told him we had been considering this new act which the Free Church intended to set forth as the declaration of her faith. "And what conclusion did you come to?" he said. "If it will be passed, which we have no doubt it will, we can have nothing further to do with that church." He looked at us most sternly and said, "You must be cautious and consider what you will do". "I confess," he said, "that you have the command, 'Come out from among them and be ye separate', but where is your example? You know one cannot walk without two feet – the one foot is the precept and I acknowledge you have that but the example is the other foot and where is it?" This serious matter was under discussion between us for several weeks. At last we said to him, "Did not Christ command His disciples when they would see Jerusalem encompassed with armies to flee to the mountains and is it not a fact that the true Church in this case is surrounded by her enemies? Is it not high

time to flee to the mountains while a way of escape is left open?” “Stop man,” he said, “that may be the other foot.”

The next time we met, he said, “I have been thinking since we last met about this serious matter in the Free Church and I am fully of your mind now. The Scripture says: ‘As the mother, so is the daughter.’ The mother is the Church of Rome and men knew well what milk she gave to her children; but now that the daughter has drawn forth her breast to feed her children, men ought to test her milk to see if it is sound. I find the doctrine of that act to be Arminian and Pelagian and the power claimed to judge in her court what her children are to believe is just the doctrine of infallibility in its embryo.” Ever after that day he was separated in his mind from that church.

In the month of September of that year he advised the congregation at a public meeting in the Millhouse church not to proceed to call a minister until they would see at the next Assembly what the Church would do with that act. If they would pass it, he told them that he for one could have no further connection with it. They took his advice. The Assembly did pass the act and the larger portion of the congregation separated publicly from the Free Church in 1893.

*Archibald Crawford's grave
in Kilfinan churchyard.*

