



A History of
St. James'
United Reformed Church
Alnwick

Incorporating
Lisburn Street and Clayport Street
Presbyterian Churches

by
JANE STRAKER M.B.E.

TERCENTENARY 1689-1989

Marjorie

All good wishes

Team

(Tane Swaker)

January 1989.



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St James'
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Alnwick
1840-1980
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United Reformed Church
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Foreword
by
The Rev. A. L. Macarthur,
O.B.E., M.A., M.Litt

LITTLE did I think as I listened in 1939 to the then Moderator, James Frazer, and to R. S. Robson as they spoke about the first 250 years of the history of St. James' that I would be privileged fifty years on to write this foreword to Jane Straker's excellent account of the full three centuries. But then I wonder whether those who in 1689 were relieved of the restrictions and penalties from which they had suffered since 1662 expected St. James' still to be alive and part of a separate denomination. Many of them had laboured not for Toleration but for Comprehension. They would certainly have rejoiced at the thought of the faithfulness of christian witness that Miss Straker tells.

Reading it brought many faces and episodes to the 'inward eye'. Like St. Paul, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you all. Those who have been blessed by the ministries and shared the fellowship of elders, teachers and friends in the life of St. James', Lisburn Street and Clayport will find special joy in this story and will be grateful that they are part of the history of this still strong Christian congregation.

Great days and urgent tasks are before the Church and sometimes hearts fail for fear. But the God of whose un-failing purpose this history tells will go on calling and strengthening his people as He has done through three troubled centuries. As we give thanks for the past we must pledge ourselves to see that beyond the celebrations in 1989 there is a future as bright as the past.

'Crowns and thrones may perish; Kingdoms rise and wane; but the Church of Jesus constant will remain'.

May this history have the wide circulation it deserves and serve us for the days to come.

A. L. M.

Preface

WHEN I was asked to write the history of St. James' Church in honour of its tercentenary celebrations, I might have declined this formidable undertaking had I not previously done considerable research on the subject in preparing one or two talks which I had given to church organisations. By this time I had become so fascinated with St. James' story that I approached the work with some zeal, for the theme was to my liking. If the writing has given me many moments of despair and frustration it has also given me immense pleasure and the satisfaction which comes from a task completed. I trust it may also give pleasure to the reader and perhaps bring happy recollections.

The histories of Lisburn Street and Clayport Street churches, without which the history of St. James' is not complete, are not in chronological order, for the life-spans of both fall within that of St. James'. I thought it best, however, to record these first so that the reader might more easily realise the impact of the unions on the life of St. James'.

I do not claim that this is a detailed and comprehensive history, for the records are far from complete and in many instances, ambiguous and obscure. I have rather tried from my interpretation of these records, to put some flesh upon the bones of history and to convey something of the atmosphere and the life within the churches in the past.

For the early history of all three churches I have relied on our local historians and from the mid-Victorian era onwards on the minutes of Sessions, Deacons' Courts and Boards of Management and on extracts from the Alnwick Mercury and Northumberland Gazette.

If I have in any way misread or misinterpreted these records and omitted incidents and names which should have been recorded, I apologise, for the fault is mine.

I take this opportunity of expressing my deep gratitude to Miss E. H. Appleyard, M.A., J.P. for her kindness in reading the manuscript and for her wise counsel and encouragement, to Mr. John Ramsay for the benefit of his research on Presbyterian churches in Northumberland, to Mrs. J. Moffitt, Mrs. M. Archer and Mrs. E. Ogilvie for literature, newspaper cuttings and correspondence; to Mrs. P. Tweddle for her excellent typing; to Mr. John Hall Snr for processing the illustrations and to Mr. P. W. Egdel for his invaluable help in arranging for printing and publication.

Bridge End

Alnwick

30th November, 1988

A HISTORY OF ST. JAMES' UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Introduction

ST. James' Church has a long and proud history. Since the year 1689 AD it has stood on its present site at the head of Pottergate – a living witness to three centuries of faith and worship in Alnwick in the Free Church tradition. In the year 1989 AD it is fitting that we should recall its steadfast past and trust that the recollection may bring inspiration for the future.

For most of the 300 years of its history, St. James' has been a Presbyterian church and it was not until the year 1972 that it became part of the United Reformed Church, following the merger of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches of England and Wales. Most of this history will therefore be concerned with Presbyterianism – a term less easily understood as the years pass and we move further away from our original tradition.

Presbyterianism is not simply a form of church government. While in common with all Christian churches it holds the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of Mankind, its doctrines vary widely from those of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the interpretation of the Sacrament of Holy Communion and the ordination of priests.

It is in the structure of the church hierarchy, the liturgy and the method of conducting its business that the difference is apparent to the layman. The Presbyterian church is a democratic church and elders duly elected by the congregation form its governing body. These elders are assisted in business matters by deacons or managers, also elected by the members. The priest (presbyter) or minister is the preacher and spiritual overseer and all priests within the united church are of equal rank. The Moderator elected by the General Assembly is therefore only the first among equals and has no greater standing than the minister of the

local church. Matters of the highest importance, such as the calling of a minister or the closing of a church are decided by the full congregation.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE NON-CONFORMIST CHURCHES

IN the Middle Ages the whole of Christendom came under the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome but so corrupt had many of the church's practices become that a movement in protest arose throughout Europe. This movement, which came to be known as the Reformation, was most strongly felt in Germany under the leadership of Martin Luther, a learned professor at the University of Wittenburg and a man of strong and independent religious convictions. He rejected the Pope as head of the Church, declared that the Bible was the sole source of Christian truth and that priests should possess no more power than laymen. His teaching spread like fire across Europe with the result that thousands broke away from Rome and the Lutheran and later the Reformed churches came into being.

This religious revolution had little effect on the Church of England at the time and the break with Rome only occurred when Henry VIII, having failed to obtain papal sanction for his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, declared himself Head of the Church in England in place of the Pope.

The following years were turbulent ones in the Church's history. A movement against the power of the church and a desire for reform was growing amongst the clergy.

Many were influenced by the sermons of John Knox, a disciple of Calvin of Geneva, from whose teachings the Presbyterian system derived. Unlike Luther, Calvin insisted that the Church should be independent of the state and consequently John Knox, whose outspoken preaching attracted adherents both north and south of the border, fell into disfavour with the Monarchy. Queen Elizabeth I, jealous of her power as head of the Church, persecuted brutally not only recusant Catholics but outspoken churchmen and those who had broken away (the free church-

men). This continued under James I and Charles I and even the rule of Cromwell brought little respite. The promise of religious toleration by Charles II on the restoration of the monarchy proved illusory. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 required all clergymen in the Church of England to declare their faith in certain tenets of the Church, and those who refused to do so were deprived of their livings.

Among the 2000 priests thrown out of their parishes was the Reverend Gilbert Rule, incumbent of St. Michael's Parish Church in Alnwick. He was a man of strong convictions who favoured the Presbyterian doctrine, and as he was extremely popular he had a great influence on religious thought in the town. It was inevitable therefore that many would remain faithful to his teachings and leave the Anglican church.

It was then the law of the land that all must attend the parish church, yet at the risk of heavy fines and even imprisonment small bands of dissenters defied the law and began to meet secretly for worship in private houses. Many were the hardships and privations endured by the non-conformists of Alnwick, yet the secret meetings continued. It was in these groups of brave and independent Christians that the non-conformist churches in Alnwick had their origin.

It was not until the accession of William and Mary in 1689, that all Protestant dissenters were granted freedom of worship and the group meeting at the head of Pottergate lost no time in establishing their church.

LISBURN STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORMATION AND GENERAL HISTORY

IN the early years of the 19th century a group of protestant dissenters met regularly for worship in a room in Percy Street, adjacent to the Mechanics Institute, now the Elizabeth Club. Although small the group was strong and active and in 1837 its members resolved that the time had come to form a regular church. The Relief Synod of Kelso, a group of presbyterian secession churches anxious at this time to extend its influence in north Northumberland, agreed to send a supply of preachers, and in the following year the group called its first minister, the Rev. Peter Glassford and the new church came into being under the auspices of the Relief Synod.

This was the first charge for the newly ordained Mr. Glassford. He was young and enthusiastic and quickly gathered round him a substantial number of followers. Soon the need for larger premises became apparent and in 1840 a new chapel was erected on a site in Lisburn Street. The building, comprising ground floor and gallery, contained 400 sittings. The cost was £611.10s. This chapel, still in excellent repair, is now the Alnwick Baptist Church. In 1842 Mr. Glassford accepted a call to Leitholm in his native Scotland, leaving behind a small but well established church. He was succeeded in 1843 by the Rev. David Donaldson.

David Donaldson, a native of Fife and a graduate of St. Andrew's University was 27 years of age when ordained to his first and only charge at Lisburn Street – a charge which was to last for 45 years and in which he was to become not only a beloved pastor, but an honoured citizen of the town. Although the number on the Communion Roll varied during his ministry only between 120 and 160, the high standard of his preaching attracted considerable numbers to his services. During the Victorian age while most people had some connection with a church, many had

never made the act of commitment, yet would attend with reasonable regularity the church they found most compatible. Lisburn Street had many such adherents, and its pews were always well filled.

Unfortunately the new building in Lisburn Street had left the church in heavy debt, and it was not until 1860 that this was cleared. By this time the steadily rising congregation numbered about 145 and although its members were far from wealthy, by the exercise of hard work and strict economy, they were able in 1877 to build a new manse at a cost of £950. This attractive and commodious house, situated at the foot of Hope Lane, later became the manse for St. James', and is now a home for the elderly.

In 1847 the union of the Relief and Secession churches occurred and Lisburn Street became a member of the United Presbyterian Church, but on the amalgamation in 1876 of all the Presbyterian churches in England, Lisburn Street relinquished its ties with Scotland, and joined the newly named Presbyterian Church of England. There were now three Presbyterian congregations in Alnwick, all members of the same synod, and it was inevitable, with a static population in the town and a decreasing one in the county, that some form of union should be contemplated. Thus it was that in 1888 the Lisburn Street Church, though still active and flourishing, was merged with St. James'.

These are the bare bones of the church's history, but all history is dull unless we know something of those who created it. The only extant record which gives some account of the life of the Church is the minute book of Session from 1859 to 1888. All other records have disappeared. Whilst the reading of these minutes is a tedious task, yet in the end one is rewarded with some picture of the church's life and atmosphere.

The congregation was mainly a working class one, with a sprinkling of tradesmen, farmers, and one or two professional men. Many of its members were workers from farms adjacent to the town who thought nothing of walking two or three miles to church each Sunday, as did their children to Sunday School.

We are inclined to believe, on looking back, that all church members in the Victorian Age attended church with the utmost regularity, but this was not so, for the minutes register the great concern of the Session that attendance at the quarterly communions would vary between 70% and 50% of the membership or even less in bad weather. We must remember however that in those days there were no cars and baby-sitters were unheard of, but it seems certain that most of the members would be present at least at one or two of these services during the year. The communicants' roll was examined annually and freely discussed at Session meetings. Every effort was made to bring back to the fold those who had failed to avail themselves of the Sacrament, and if repeated visits by the minister and elders had failed to bear fruit, it was only with the greatest reluctance that the backsliders' names were struck from the roll.

But the Session had another important function. It was the guardian of the morals of the congregation, and the practice of calling sinners before the elders, unthinkable today, was then accepted as normal. Unmarried mothers were the chief offenders, for illegitimacy was common among the working classes, and the minutes record several such cases. The poor girl, usually unnamed but referred to as "our erring but beloved sister", would be barred from communion services until she had appeared before the Session. Here "suitable counsel" would be given, and when she had expressed her sorrow for the sin "full communicant's rights would be restored" and baptism of the child granted. The minutes are not too explicit and we are left wondering who was the "fallen brother" and what his crime, who was simply advised to "shun sin in future". What had Mr. Pateley done that the minister must ask him if he were innocent or guilty? And what of the bold Wm. Johnson who defied the summons, and refused to come forward to answer charges against him? Yet the minutes seem strangely free of any note of condemnation, but rather, no doubt under the guidance of an understanding minister, a recognition of human frailty and a sincere desire to bring the offender back to a purer way of life.

Of the social side of the church's life we know nothing, but it is almost certain that an annual soiree would be held as this was the custom of the age in most non-conformist churches. Instrumental music at divine service was frowned upon and psalms and hymns were sung unaccompanied under the guidance of a precentor. It was not until the early 1870's when the Board of Management complained of the low standard of the psalmody, that the elders, after long and earnest deliberation sought and obtained sanction from the supreme Court for the introduction of a harmonium. An organist and choirmaster was appointed and a ladies' committee formed to encourage young people to join a choir. So that this should be conducted with the utmost decorum, an elder was to be present at each weekly practice. The rigidity of church life had begun to ease.

PERSONALITIES IN THE CHURCH

THE minutes show little controversy among the eight members of Session and with one exception none stand out as being particularly vocal or influential. This exception was a Dr. Candlish, a young doctor with a large practice in the town, who was received into Lisburn Street in 1871 on transfer from St. James' where he had served as an elder for several years. He was soon elected to the Session where he appears to have served with great zeal and common sense, until, on the union of 1888, he returned to his former position at St. James'.

At the same time Mr. H. Hunter Blair resigned as Session Clerk at St. James' and defected to Lisburn Street. Mr. Blair was a prosperous bookseller in the town and proprietor of the Alnwick Mercury, and it seems odd that a man of such standing and obvious ability was content to serve on the Board of Management of his new church, rather than seek higher office. Although it was not uncommon in those days when three churches of the same denomination were available in the town, for members to transfer their allegiance from one church to another, it would be interesting to know what dispute caused these two strong personalities to take such a step.



THE REV. DAVID DONALDSON

THERE is no doubt, however, that the stability and strength of this small church lay in the character of its minister for 45 years, the Rev. David Donaldson.

He was a learned and cultured man and an able and eloquent preacher who attracted large numbers to his services, and was well known in clerical circles as the author of several scholarly discourses on literary and religious themes. But his real strength lay in his steadfast faith, his

conscientious ministry and his great love of his flock. Like the Good Shepherd "he knew them all by name". To all whom he met his manner was kindly and courteous and he was known and loved far outside the limits of his own congregation. He never married and his sister came to Alnwick as the "lady of the manse". She took an active interest in all church matters, and was ever a worthy helpmate to her brother. The writer's mother whose parents and grandparents were members of Lisburn Street, and who was christened by Mr. Donaldson, often spoke of him. She could recall as a child, his visits to her home, where his photo hung in the sitting room, and where he was always a welcome guest. She could remember his kindly ways and would speak too with great affection of Miss Donaldson who taught her after the union with St. James' in the Sunday School there.

Mr. Donaldson was deeply concerned for the welfare of the poorer children of the town, and throughout his ministry served on the management of the Ragged School, to which cause he devoted much time and labour. To the Sunday School in his own church he brought the same zeal and inspiration.

At the time of the closure of Lisburn Street and its union with St. James', Mr. Donaldson was 72 years old. He was appointed joint pastor of St. James' with the Rev. Robert Macnair and while it is certain that Mr. Macnair, because of his colleagues advancing years would carry the heavier burden, it is a tribute to the esteem in which Mr. Donaldson was held that he was accorded the title of "Senior Pastor".

On achieving his 50 years jubilee in 1893, Mr. Donaldson resigned from the ministry. Such was his standing in the town that a public subscription was raised and at a meeting in the Town Hall he was presented with several valuable pieces of silver. After a few years of happy retirement he died in 1898 at the age of 81.

A marble tablet commemorating his ministry can be seen on the pulpit wall of St. James'. His life is truly one worthy of remembrance.

UNION WITH ST. JAMES'

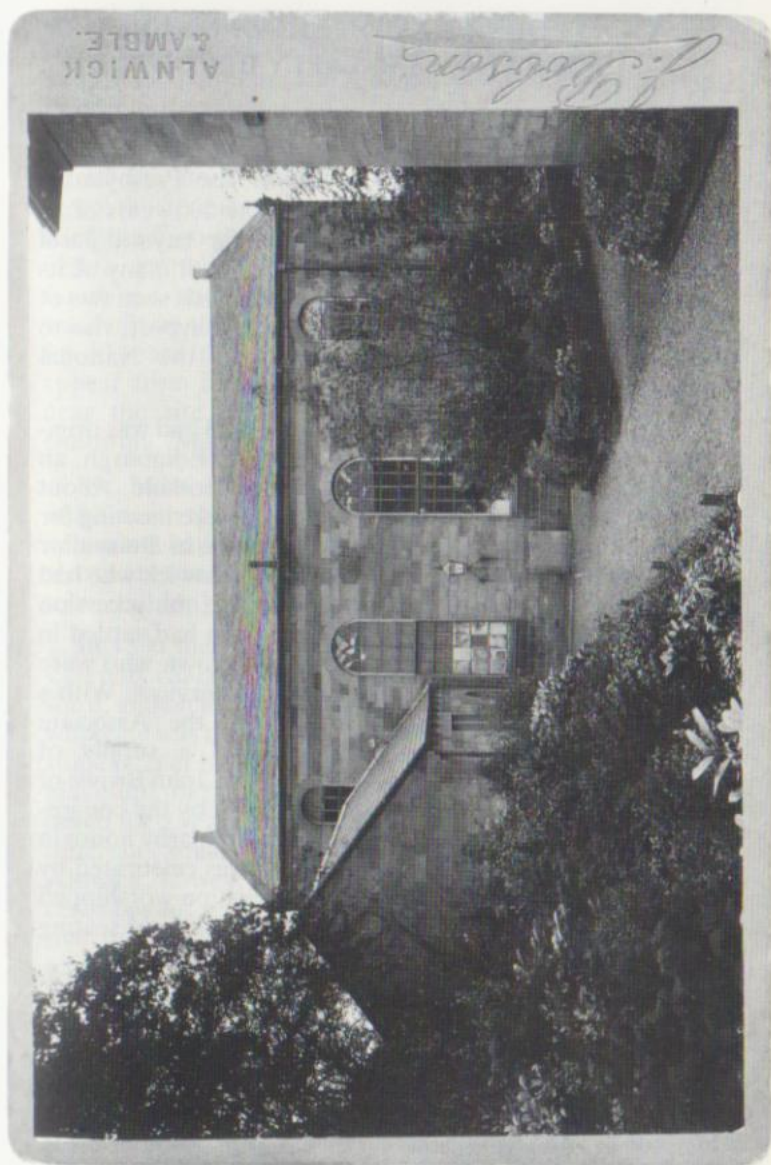
IT must have been with a feeling of great sadness that in 1888 the congregation of Lisburn Street consented, for reasons already stated, to close their church and unite with the long established and larger St. James'. However the appointment of Mr. Donaldson as joint pastor with the Rev. Robert Macnair must have done much to soften the blow, and almost all the members of Lisburn Street went with their old minister to St. James'. But as is inevitable on such occasions a few reacted with great bitterness to the event, and the closing minutes of the Lisburn Street Session record that the session Clerk, Mr. Geo. Small issued disjunction certificates to thirteen members including himself and his wife, without consultation or authority.

Great indignation was felt by the other elders at this improper action, but little could be done about it. We can only presume that the thirteen transferred their allegiance to the Clayport Street church.

The terms of the union were fair and satisfactory to both sides. The two ministers were each to receive an annual salary of £200 and Mr. Donaldson was to have the use of the Lisburn Street manse for life. All elders of Lisburn Street were received into the St. James' Session, as were the managers to the St. James' Board. With forbearance on both sides, the union proved a happy one, and the two ministers, both outstanding personalities and both greatly loved and respected worked together in complete harmony.

Today we in St. James' can look back with pride on the story of this small but valiant church, for its history is part of our history and our great heritage.

*St. James' Church in the
mid-Victorian era. ►*



CLAYPORT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORMATION AND EARLY HISTORY

THE Clayport Presbyterian Church deserves an honoured place in the annals of the Presbyterian Churches in England, for throughout the 200 years of its existence, its influence has stretched far beyond local limits. In the early nineteenth century it sent many of its sons into the ministry and the 20th century has seen two of its ministers whose first charges were at Clayport, rise to eminent and distinguished positions in the National church.

The Clayport Church was formed in 1753 and was originally connected with the Burgher Synod of Edinburgh, an evangelical secession from the Church of Scotland. About this time a group of Protestant dissenters were meeting for worship in a room at the top of Canongate in Delaval or Dr. Foster's close. Some were natives of Alnwick who had heard and been influenced by ministers of the secession church in Glasgow, some were Scots who had settled in Alnwick, and others were natives of the town who were dissatisfied with the Church of England's services. With a view to forming a church, they asked the Associate Burgher Synod of Edinburgh to send a supply of preachers, and in November 1753, the Rev. John Brown of Haddington ordained three elders, elected by the congregation. Soon a move was made to another nearby house in Canongate where the first communion was celebrated by the Rev. John Brown. Here the congregation worshipped until 1761, when a new meeting house capable of seating 300, was built in Ogle Terrace.

The first minister, the Rev. John Marshall, was ordained and inducted in 1766, and it can only be presumed that until this date the church was served by visiting preachers. Mr. Marshall who was 26 years of age on entering the ministry was of a scholarly turn of mind, and well versed in Biblical history. He was not popular as a preacher, for his manner was hesitant, yet it is recorded

that he was famed for his expositions of scripture and his historical lectures. He maintained a large family on a stipend of £50 per year, and to supplement this gave private tuition in the classics.

Mr. Marshall was a saintly man, interested in the lives of all his flock, and every ready with kindness and sympathy in times of sorrow. Under him the congregation, composed mostly of labourers, weavers and shoemakers, with a sprinkling of farmers and one or two tradesmen, flourished, and in 1803 a new meeting house of 550 sittings was built on the south side of Green Batt, on a plot leased for 40 years from the Duke of Northumberland. It would appear from future events that this building stood on or near the site of the former St. Paul's Hall, now the Brethrens' Meeting House.

Mr. Marshall died in 1805 at the age of 65. At the time of his death the membership numbered 300, but the many adherents had brought the average attendance at his services to between 400 and 500. He was greatly revered in the town and long remembered after his death.

In 1806 the Rev. David Paterson was ordained to the Clayport charge. He came from farming stock in Selkirkshire, and on leaving school went to Edinburgh University, where he was regarded as an outstanding and even brilliant student. Yet he seems to have had a vagrant streak in his make-up, for before settling down to the ministry, he wandered for 5 years from place to place in the Lowlands as an itinerant preacher. He quickly became popular in Alnwick, however, for although the local historian, Tate, describes his sermons as commonplace, he had an attractive turn of phrase and his prayers were eloquent and moving. In conversation he was lively and witty, and many were the invitations he received to social gatherings and private parties in the homes of the more affluent of his congregation. His taste for the good life appears to have broken his habit of study, for, while he produced essays and pamphlets from time to time, he belied his early promise and made no great effort to cultivate his undoubted literary talents.

But his ministry was by no means unfruitful. He was active in promoting the Fellowship Society, an organisation for young men which attracted about 30 members. While its object was religious it stimulated interest in other branches of knowledge, and mainly through the influence of this society, several of its members went on to achieve fame in the literary world, while at least six entered the ministry under the Associate Burgher Synod. Mr. Paterson died in 1843 from a heart attack brought on by attending the funeral of an elder in inclement weather. The 38 years of his ministry had all been spent at Clayport. In spite of his failings he had been a popular and influential minister; and under him the membership rose to 350, yet it is recorded that about 1,000 persons were attached to the Church. The minutes of Session during Mr. Paterson's ministry are still in existence, but the ink is so faded that they are virtually illegible.

THE VICTORIAN ERA

MR Paterson was succeeded in 1845 by the Rev. John Ker who during his six years at Clayport proved to be a zealous, conscientious and well loved minister. He had barely settled into his first charge, when notice was received from the Duke of Northumberland's agent that the lease on the site of the then meeting house would not be renewed on its expiry, as the land was required for the erection of the new Anglican Church of St. Paul's.

Fortunately, a convenient site for a new church soon became available on a piece of land between Green Batt and Clayport, and here the building in which the Clayport congregation worshipped until the union with St. James', was built. It was of unusual design with two crenallated towers, and contained 700 sittings. By this time the church must have acquired some wealthier members for almost the full cost of £1,480 was subscribed by the time the church was completed. £50 was donated by the Duke of Northumberland and £10 by Earl Grey, while the minister raised £183 on a mission tour.

While the new church was being built the congregation worshipped in the Town Hall, and it was here that the Rev. John Ker began to achieve fame as a preacher. He was a man of high intellect and a prolific writer, and soon the sermons which he began to publish, earned him a reputation as one of the most gifted preachers of the day. Indeed, so highly was he esteemed in church circles that during the last two years of his ministry in Alnwick, he was continually harassed by calls from other churches. In the end he accepted a call from a large congregation in Glasgow, where he soon became acknowledged as one of the most outstanding preachers in the city. He was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by Glasgow University, where he later became Professor of Theology.

The regard in which Dr. Ker was held must have been truly exceptional, for over 50 years later, in 1906 a new chamber was added to the church organ and dedicated to his memory.

In 1851 Dr. Ker was succeeded by yet another outstanding minister the Rev. William Limont, who was to remain at Clayport for 47 years. He soon gained a reputation for sound judgement and common sense, and his high principles, strong faith and convictions, his industrious and conscientious ministry, earned him the respect not only of his own congregation, but of the whole town. If he was somewhat inflexible in his views according to our modern standards, he was yet ever ready with sympathy, help and understanding towards those in trouble or need.

It is only in 1853 with the advent of a new minute book, that the records become legible, but even so some can only be read with difficulty. Now we begin to see something of the life of the church and through it some picture of the social conditions of the times. At this time the Session comprised eleven elders, with Mr. Michael Paterson as the Session Clerk. Their chief concerns were the conduct of worship and the morals of the congregation, and as Mr. Paterson appears to have been a most conscientious clerk, their deliberations are recorded in great detail.

In the Victorian age Christian morality was accepted as the norm, and sin was clearly defined. The churches saw it as their moral duty to bring sinners to repentance and one case, that of a Mr. John Bolton deserves mention as a significant example of the extreme zeal with which they undertook this task.

John Bolton, a draper in the town and an elder of the church was known to be a heavy drinker, and rumours regarding his conduct were rife. Another elder, Mr. William Bell, also an Alnwick tradesman, took it upon himself to write to Mr. Bolton saying that his conduct was bringing disrepute upon the church and the Session, and advising him to resign voluntarily from his office as elder. Mr. Bolton, enraged by this reprimand demanded that an opportunity be given him to vindicate himself. The report of the proceedings which were conducted with all the solemnity and drama of a trial at the Old Bailey, and which cover thirteen pages of the minute book make astonishing reading.

The meeting opened with the reading of three charges:

- (1) *Desecration of the Sabbath by having twice travelled to Alnmouth by rail on Sunday afternoons. (The Alnwick Journal of the time mentions that only bona fide travellers were exempted from the provisions of the Licensing Act, and that "all the toppers in Alnwick travelled by rail to Alnmouth on Sunday afternoons").*
- (2) *Intoxication and attendance at taverns in Alnwick and Alnmouth.*
- (3) *Use of improper language and making derogatory remarks about the minister.*

Mr. Bolton denied the charge of drunkenness, but admitted that he had twice been to Alnmouth on Sundays, but had only visited the house of a friend. He admitted calling the minister a vain and conceited man, but maintained that he had a right to this opinion. If he had used any violent language, it was only because the tone of Mr. Bell's letter justified it. He concluded by saying that he would "cut Mr. Bell down with a stick" or "fight a duel with pistols until one of them fell". The case was adjourned for a week.

At the next meeting, witnesses were called to testify that Mr. Bolton had been seen entering taverns in Alnmouth, that he had used abusive language on Bilton (now Alnmouth) station while in an intoxicated state, and that he had been seen one evening leaving the White Swan in Alnwick and staggering along Bondgate Hill towards St. Michael's Pant. The week's grace had evidently also given Mr. Bolton the chance to prepare his case, and the manner in which he conducted his defence, although hardly its content, would not have disgraced a barrister. As the minutes have it "Mr. Bolton rose to cross examine".

The mainstay of his defence against the charge of intoxication, was that, far from being drunk, he suffered from corns, and his feet were so painful, that he could only walk by swaying from side to side. His questions, some completely irrelevant, were clearly designed to confuse the witnesses. ("By whom are you employed? What colour of hat was I wearing? Are you a member of the church?") and achieved their object to such an extent that the case was again adjourned. It was never reopened as shortly afterwards, Mr. Bolton fell ill and remained in poor health until he died, still an elder, five years later.

Another case which appears to have plagued the session for almost twenty years, was that of John Hope the church caretaker. In 1857 he appeared before the elders under the charge "that he is in the habit of attending dancing parties and indulging too freely in drink to the scandal of religion and his own character as a servant of the church". His defence was that he used his talents as a violin player to teach dancing to a few respectable young men, to earn a little money to add to the comfort of himself and his wife. As none of the elders could admit to having been present at these dancing sessions, they were forced to accept this gross distortion of the truth, and Mr. Hope was exonerated. However the records reveal that on four more occasions he appeared on similar charges, and his defence by this time having worn a little thin, he was on each occasion, deprived of church privileges, but reinstated within months. One can only surmise that he – or was it his

wife – was a good caretaker. It is recorded that in 1877 Mrs. Hope resigned as church officer.

In 1859 a sad incident is recorded. Mr. William Bell, the accuser in the Bolton case, advised Mr. Limont that he could not present his newly born child for baptism, as he was convinced that this sacrament had no Biblical authority. Over the ensuing weeks, Mr. Limont was at great pains to explain the doctrine, and although Mr. Bell tried valiantly to see the church's point of view, in the end he could not accept it. He was deposed from the eldership, deprived of his position as Sunday School teacher, and later of his membership of the church. No doubt more liberal views would have prevailed today, but one must admire Mr. Bell for his great courage in maintaining his principles under this harsh judgement.

At this time, infant baptisms took place after the morning service, and only in exceptional circumstances was the ceremony performed at home. It is recorded that this privilege was granted to a young couple who lived at Lesbury, on the father's plea that his wife was ailing, and they could not face the journey to Alnwick and back on foot in winter, carrying their twin babies. Home baptisms became more common towards the end of the century, and were granted for much less poignant reasons.

It was during Mr. Limont's ministry that major additions were made to the church property. In 1867 a new manse at the top of Percy Terrace was bought for £730 and in 1874 a plot of land opposite was acquired as a manse garden. In 1883 a hall was added to the church to accommodate the flourishing and ever increasing Sunday School. In 1876 a block of buildings adjacent to the church in Clayport was acquired. Some readers may recall that part of this was once occupied by Mr. Mattison, Fishmonger, and later by Mr. Carter, Fruiterer. They are now incorporated in the modernised Blue Bell Inn.

In 1889 Mr. Limont intimated that, owing to failing health he wished to retire from the active ministry, but so highly was he regarded that it was arranged that a col-

league, ultimately to become his successor, be appointed. The choice fell upon the Rev. John Oman M.A., B.D. who was ordained and inducted in December 1889. Mr. Limont gave up his salary, but was granted use of the manse and garden for life. He remained in Alnwick for a further nine years, but in 1898 retired to Edinburgh where he died in 1901 in the house where he was born. His ministry had been a strong and vigorous one, and his departure from the town was keenly felt. He had been associated with many philanthropic causes and had been especially concerned to relieve the lot of the poor and needy. On leaving Alnwick he begged to be excused any public or private farewells as the emotion of the occasion would be too great for him to endure in his failing state of health. In August 1900 a letter was received from Mrs. Limont saying that her husband was seriously ill, but that his thoughts were still with Clayport and that he wished to take a "last and loving farewell of his congregation". A brass tablet to his memory can be seen today on the wall of the first half-landing to the gallery of St. James'.

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

FEW churches in England can have been more privileged than Clayport in having for 17 years a minister of the calibre of Dr. John Oman, the successor to the Rev. Wm. Limont. He was one of the most distinguished students of his time at Edinburgh University, where he gained a first class honours degree in Philosophy. His literary talents were exceptional, and during his ministry at Alnwick he wrote and published many philosophical and religious works. His writings were widely read in ecclesiastical circles and his fame spread not only in the British Isles, but in many countries abroad. Throughout the years he received invitations to take chairs in Universities and Theological institutions in Australia and America, but all these he declined, until in 1907 he decided to accept an invitation from the Presbyterian Church of England to take

the chair of Systematic Theology at its seminary for ministers, Westminster College, Cambridge.

It was with profound regret that the congregation released Dr. Oman to serve in wider fields, for his ministry in Alnwick had been marked by his profound love for his people, to each one of whom he became a true and understanding friend. This was his extraordinary merit – that a man of such brilliant intellect, whose sermons were often hard to follow, could yet create this strong bond of affection and trust between himself and the humblest of his flock.

During Mr. Oman's time at Clayport few major changes took place. The church membership increased gradually and it is interesting to note that from time to time groups of four or five new members would join on transfer from St. James'. The vestry was enlarged, a minister's room added and a new organ – "the best type of pipe organ" – installed. This organ is still in use in St. James' church today. It was a time too when young people became more active in the church. A Young Mens' Fellowship and a Young Womens' Fellowship were formed, and from time to time social evenings (tickets 6d each) were held. Names still familiar to some senior members begin to emerge. John Balmбра, manager of the Alnwick Savings Bank, Session clerk from 1906-1929; J. L. Newbiggin, Chemist, secretary to the Alnwick Missionary Society for over 40 years; and grandfather of Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin, so well known in the U.R.C. today, and Lesslie Newbiggin, son of J. L. Newbiggin, manager and elder who carried on his father's work in the Missionary Society.

Dr. Oman was appointed principal of Westminster College in 1922 and is generally considered to be the most illustrious incumbent of that position. In 1931 he was Moderator of the General Assembly and retired from his post as principal in 1935. He died in 1939 soon after celebrating his 50 years Jubilee in the ministry. In spite of all the honours heaped upon him he kept throughout his life his deep affection for his Clayport congregation, and returned to preach whenever possible.

INTO THE 20th CENTURY

DR. Oman was succeeded in 1908 by the Rev. A. C. Don a graduate of Edinburgh University. He was a quiet dignified man who soon earned the high regard of his congregation. Under him the church flourished and the membership roll remained stable at around 250.

At this time the common cup was in use at Communion services for the whole congregation, but the minutes reveal that this practice was proving unpopular and a deterrent to some who were contemplating full membership of the church. Accordingly in 1910 after some deliberation by the Session, individual cups and unfermented wine were introduced.

In 1909 a stained glass window to the memory of the late Mrs. Reavell was presented to the church by her husband, Mr. George Reavell a member of a well known Alnwick family. This attractive window, depicting the figure of Dorcas, was removed to St. James' after the union, and can now be seen there on the south wall.

After eight years of fruitful ministry, Mr. Don accepted a call to Liverpool, and his place was taken in 1916 by the Rev. W. L. Fordyce M.A. of Etal. But now the war was exerting new pressures on ministers, and Mr. Fordyce, anxious to serve in France with the Y.M.C.A., but refused permission by the Session, exerted himself in the service of the troops stationed in the district and was constant in his care of the many families who lost sons in the conflict.

Another successful ministry at Clayport ended when Mr. Fordyce left in 1920 for a charge at Sunderland. Among his elders are those still remembered – Mr. T. S. Alder, Mr. Andrew Michie, and Mr. William Wright.

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

THE next five years from 1920 to 1925 were somewhat sad ones for the congregation, for their new minister the Rev. Hamilton Campbell was in indifferent health, and

from time to time required periods of sick leave. During the war he had seen service with the Y.M.C.A. in France, and brought the same desire for conscientious service to his peacetime ministry.

In 1922 the Presbyterian Church of England was considering the role of women in the ministry, and it is surprising to read in this year in the Clayport minutes that the session resolved "that women should be admitted to the ministry on the same terms as men" – a resolution later ratified by the General Assembly.

In April 1925 Mr. Campbell was granted 3 months sick leave, and as his health improved, hopes were high that he would return to the pulpit on the first Sunday in August. But it was not to be. He died suddenly at Norham on the 18th of July, and was buried at Ladykirk in his beloved Border country.

We now come to the period which will be easily remembered by some of our congregation, even if as children, and some may recall the short ministry of the Rev. W. W. Charlton, who came to Clayport in 1926 from his previous charge at Horncliffe. Little of interest is recorded in the minutes, but it would appear that Mr. Charlton was a friendly sociable man, ever interested in his congregation, but who lacked the drive of some of his predecessors. In 1929 he accepted a call to Silloth, by which time the membership had dropped to 183.

The six months vacancy which followed Mr. Charlton's ministry was in many ways disastrous for the church, for membership and attendance declined during this period. It was not an encouraging start for the next incumbent, the Rev. J. Drury Connell who came from Scotland, but throughout his seven years at Clayport he endeavoured to maintain a high standard of preaching.

In 1930, the same year in which he left school, Mr. J. W. Richards was appointed organist, a post he held for 21 years. His exceptional musical ability has proved a great asset to the town and district. He is now organist at the Parish Church of St. Michael and St. Paul.

The 1930s saw much increase in social life in the churches, yet some of the Victorian restrictions still prevailed. While the elders reluctantly agreed that whist might be played at social evenings, they stipulated that no prizes must be given, and expressed strong disapproval of whist drives and tombolas as a means of revenue for the church. One source of revenue was the letting of the church hall at a charge of 2/6d per night, plus 6d for use of the gas fire!

In 1936, Mr. Connell accepted a call to Longframlington. Although a scholarly well meaning and kindly man, he was not of the calibre to maintain the impetus of an active congregation, and by this time the membership had dwindled to about 140. During the year long vacancy which followed, the Northumberland Presbytery advised union with St. James', but feeling against this was so strong that the proposal was rejected.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND UNION WITH ST. JAMES'

It was almost a year later that the Rev. A. L. Macarthur M.A., came to the Clayport charge. At his ordination and induction on the 27th October 1937 he was welcomed on behalf of other denominations, by the well known and loved Archdeacon Mangin of St. Michaels, and amid great enthusiasm by a church filled to capacity.

His arrival brought a new breath of life to the congregation. He was young and enthusiastic and his outstanding gifts as preacher and pastor soon began to bear fruit. Attendances at services increased, and numbers on the roll began to rise. But soon the war brought added responsibilities, and Mr. Macarthur, deprived by his profession from active service, yet anxious to play his part, applied for, and was granted leave of absence to serve for a short time with the Y.M.C.A. in France. Other changes were taking place. The congregation was depleted by the departure of young men and women for the forces, among them Mr. Richards, the organist. His place was temporarily filled by Mr. Inns Merry, the popular manager of the Alnwick Savings Bank.

In August 1944 it was with great reluctance that the members released their minister to answer a call to New Barnet in the North London Presbytery. He left behind a strong and active church and his departure from the town was felt with keen regret. Clayport had produced yet another distinguished minister, for Mr. Macarthur became Moderator of the General Assembly in 1971 and again in 1974 and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of England (and later the U.R.C.) from 1960 to 1980.

The next minister was the Rev. C. H. Shaw B.A. who will still be widely remembered. He came to Clayport in September 1945 after another year long vacancy and under his able and earnest guidance the church continued to prosper.

The centenary of the church building was celebrated in February 1947 and on Sunday the 23rd of that month, a special thanksgiving service was held. On the following day the 24th (the actual date of the opening of the building 100 years before) over 200 people sat down to tea in the church hall. The meeting afterwards was addressed by the Rev. R. Backhouse from St. James', the Rev. A. C. Don and the Rev. W. Fordyce. The celebrations took place in the middle of the "Great Storm of 1947" and prevented many from attending. The Rev. A. L. Macarthur preached at a special service later in March. At this time a short history of the church was written by the Rev. C. H. Shaw and the Session clerk, Mr. W. Wright.

Mr. Shaw retired from the church in 1951 and in the same year, the Rev. H. R. Munro M.A., B.D. was inducted in his place. By this time the membership had fallen considerably and it soon became apparent that Mr. Munro, while no doubt brilliant intellectually, had little flair for uniting the congregation, or attracting new members. But his ministry records an unprecedented event – the election of the first woman to the eldership in the Alnwick churches. Mrs. C. Leath was ordained as an elder in May 1954 and also took on the role of Session Clerk. She remained as the only woman elder both in Clayport and afterwards in St. James' until her death in 1972.

In December 1953, Mr. Munro gave six months notice of his intention to resign, and left in June 1954 to take up an academic appointment.

It was now apparent that the calling of a new minister to a declining and struggling congregation would prove a difficult and possibly fruitless task, and it was with sad hearts that the elders and managers sat down to consider the future. Yet they had little choice. Their deliberations were conducted with sound judgement and common sense and at a congregational meeting on the 23rd of November 1954 the unanimous decision was taken to close Clayport Presbyterian Church and unite with the St. James' congregation. It was agreed that the office bearers of both churches should unite with their counterparts. Memorial tablets and windows were transferred to St. James' and the St. James' organ was replaced by the Clayport instrument. This organ of exceptionally high quality originally installed at Clayport in 1906, is still in use in St. James' today.

The first service of the new united congregation took place on 2nd January 1955. In spite of their sadness at leaving their well-loved church, the Clayport members with admirable forbearance and resolution to make the merger successful, soon settled happily into the new church, and under the kindly and understanding guidance of the Rev. R. Backhouse, harmony reigned from the day of the union.

Yet the Clayport church is still alive today for its spirit lives on in members who remained faithful to the Presbyterian tradition and who have enriched the life of St. James' with their committed service. Those who remain are amongst the most constant and active members of our church today. Their names are worthy of record:-

Miss C. Braidford, Mr. & Mrs. N. Cassie, Mr. & Mrs. A. Cooke, Mrs. C. Inglis, Mr. & Mrs. R. Friar, Mrs. M. McKenzie, Mrs. A. Manners, Mrs. M. Robson, Mr. & Mrs. F. Robertson, Mrs. F. Scott, Mr. & Mrs. A. Slight, Mr. & Mrs. Adam Smith, Mr. Alec Smith, Miss N. Smith, Mrs. I. Thomas, Mr. & Mrs. Jas Thompson, Mrs. V. Wayper, and among those who came as children, Mrs. C. Sergeant, Mr. M. Inkster, Mrs. V. Colgan and Mrs. M. Mabon.

ST. JAMES' UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (FORMERLY PRESBYTERIAN)

Early history – Dr. Johnathan Harle

AFTER the Reformation and throughout the years of religious persecution, a strong group of non-conformists held their secret meetings in a house near the head of Pottergate, and it was here in 1689, the year in which freedom to worship according to conscience, was granted to Protestant dissenters, that they formed their first church. Many of the group were prominent citizens of the town who had suffered under the former penal laws, and some were descendants of Protestant non-Conformist families who had fled from religious persecution in Ireland and settled in the district. It is generally accepted that the date of foundation is confirmed by the existence of an old pewter alms dish, inscribed "Remember the poor, Heb.xiii.16, Luke.xii.33" and dated 1689, which is carefully preserved in our church today. A tombstone bearing the date 1669, which was dug up in 1816, would indicate that the site of the church or the adjoining land was once a burial place. This stone now stands near the entrance to the church.

Unlike the churches of Lisburn Street and Clayport, this church (or meeting house, as these non-conformist foundations were then called) had no connection with the Scottish secession synods, and was associated only with the English Presbyterian tradition. There is no record of a minister before 1694 when Dr. Johnathan Harle was appointed. Dr. Harle had started his ministerial career as a probationer in Lincolnshire and was afterwards appointed to Morpeth, where he was ordained by fellow ministers of the district who had formed themselves into a Presbytery. A year later he was called to Alnwick and continued to serve the two congregations, preaching at each meeting house on alternate Sundays, until the Rev. John Horsley, the distinguished writer and historian entered the charge at Morpeth. It is to the Rev. John Horsley that we are indebted for a record of Dr. Harle's life and work.

The young Johnathan Harle obtained his schooling

under a private tutor, and later under Dr. Gilpin, one of the most eminent ministers of the time in the North of England. He proved an outstanding scholar, particularly well versed in the classics and in languages. After his ordination he studied medicine (a not uncommon practice among ministers in the 17th and early 18th centuries) and in 1710 obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine from Edinburgh University.

Although Horsley's account of his life may have been coloured by the friendship which existed between the two men, there is no doubt that Dr. Harle was a man of superior intelligence and outstanding personality. His preaching attracted large numbers to the meeting house and it is surprising that a man of such fine intellect could adapt his sermons to the minds of the many poor and humble people who came to hear him. He moved freely among his flock and became to them a dearly loved pastor and friend. As well as spiritual guidance, he gave to them medical attention for which he would take no fee.

Dr. Harle's motto was "a house-going parson makes a church going people" and in this he was fully justified, for his church became the strongest among the non-conformist denominations in Alnwick and during his life-time and for many years afterwards was known as "Dr. Harle's Meeting House". In spite of poor health which affected him all his adult life, this humble and devout parson never spared himself in the service of his people, and it was with great grief that the inhabitants of Alnwick learned of his death in his early sixties, on Christmas Eve 1729. There is evidence of the esteem in which he was held in the fact that he was buried in the chancel of the Parish Church of St. Michael where his tombstone may still be seen.

On Dr. Harle's death, his son the Rev. Johnathan Harle was inducted to the charge, but his appointment was keenly resented by a large faction in the church. The reason for the objection is not known, but so strong was the feeling against the new minister, that the discontents broke away and formed a new congregation, which established

itself in an old building in Bondgate. This congregation was the nucleus of what later became the Sion Congregational Church in St. Michael's Lane.

THE AGE OF REASON

THE 18th century, which came to be known as the "Age of Reason" because of the intellectual interest in philosophy and science, saw a great decline in Presbyterianism in England. Many of its ministers began to absorb unorthodox doctrines, religious life became stunted and artificial and congregations disintegrated. Some of the members drifted into the Independent Churches and others – mostly those of the more genteel families – returned to the Church of England. It was only in the North of England and especially in Northumberland that Presbyterianism held its ground.

From 1729 to 1796 the Pottergate meeting house saw a succession of no fewer than six ministers of whom little is known. They appear to have been adequate but not outstanding but were at least successful in holding the church together in its Presbyterian form. It will almost suffice to list their names:-

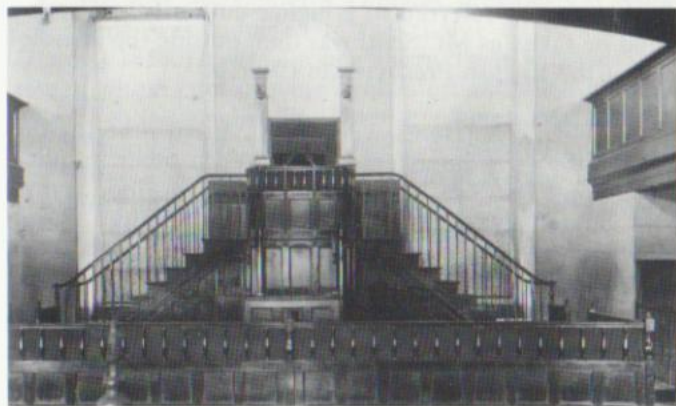
Johnathan Harle (son of Dr. Harle) 1729-42
John Waugh 1743-48 · Mr. Ferrie 1748-58
John Calder 1758-69 · Wm. Burn 1769-74
Robert Robertson 1774-96.

It is only the Rev. John Calder who deserves special mention, for during his ministry, he caused a deed to be executed conveying the meeting house, manse, garden and vestry to the minister and his successors, and a group of twelve trustees. It stipulated that the premises were to be used for the worship of God by a congregation of Protestant dissenters, and that the minister must be Presbyterian in judgement and practice. The deed was dated November 9th 1769.

THE LATE GEORGIAN AND EARLY VICTORIAN ERA

THE Rev. Robert Robertson was succeeded in 1796 by the Rev. Wm. Goldie who held the charge for 48 years (but for the last 16 only nominally) until his death in 1844. During his ministry the congregation was small and because of his age and failing health in 1828 they appointed the Rev. George Anderson as his colleague and successor. Mr. Anderson was a young man of exceptional ability who by his fervent preaching and zealous ministry soon became known to a wide district and did much to foster the cause of non conformity in the North of England. He took great interest in social and charitable work in the town and was particularly active in promoting the Alnwick Scientific and Mechanical Institution—an institution which survived until the end of the second World War. In 1837, Mr. Anderson left for Australia, leaving behind a vigorous and much increased congregation.

His successor was the Rev. Jas Scott, a licentiate of the Church of Scotland, and a young man full of energy and zeal. In 1838 the new minister was instrumental in having the church enlarged and reseated to accommodate 450 persons, but the debt incurred was not fully discharged



Interior of St. James' church c.1840. The pulpit is on the South wall.

until 20 years later. Yet the accounts of Mr. Scott's character by two local historians are conflicting. Geo. Skelly in his book "Alnwick in the Past", describes him as a man full of ardour for his work, whose preaching earned him widespread popularity and brought an influx of new members to the church. In 1844 he was "induced to accept a living" in Banchory, Scotland. The congregation and indeed the whole town, continues Mr. Skelly, were deeply indebted to the zeal and unwearied labour of Mr. Scott. On the other hand, George Tate in his "History of Alnwick" paints a different picture. He was a contemporary of Mr. Scott, and had heard him preach on several occasions. He comments "Mr. Scott was a curious example, showing how little learning is necessary to keep up a popular reputation when aided by a confident manner and vigorous elocution". He also records that Mr. Scott removed in 1843 to Banchory from which charge he was later expelled for misconduct. But there is ample evidence of this minister's devious and superficial character in the minutes of the meeting of the Berwick Presbytery on 31st October 1843, when it was reported by the Pottergate session that Mr. Scott had vacated the charge without warning or formal resignation and was believed to be at Banchory, Scotland, but that no communication had been received from that church. His conduct was considered most reprehensible and although the matter was referred to a higher authority, no action could be taken as Mr. Scott was then outside the jurisdiction of the English Presbyterian Church.

The next seven years were an unsettled time for the church, for three ministers followed each other in quick succession. The Rev. Geo. Pittendreigh was inducted in 1844, but left a year later for a charge in Edinburgh. It was common for young ministers at the time to emigrate to the colonies, and the next minister the Rev. John Thomson left after three years to take a church appointment in New Brunswick. The Rev. Alexander Gibson who came in 1848 was a young man of great promise, but he died after a ministry of little more than a year. He was buried in St. Michael's Churchyard.

The Rev. John Walker was appointed minister in 1851 and remained at Pottergate for seven years, before becoming chaplain to the garrison at Chatham. He was of a quiet and gentlemanly disposition which won for him the respect and affection of his congregation.

It is during this period that the Pottergate Meeting House, came to be known as "St. James' Church", although there is no written evidence to show that an actual decision to change the name was taken. The Rev. Robert Macnair in a paper on the history of the Church given in 1889 states that after alteration and enlargement of the building in 1838, legal documents were in the former name, but church papers in the latter. It would appear too that the stone set in the wall of the present church at the foot of the gallery staircase, bearing the inscription "St. James's Church 1838" was incorporated in the alterations of that date and later removed to the new building in 1894. The earliest written evidence is a relatively unimportant document relating to "St. James' Presbyterian Church, Alnwick" signed by five elders and dated 10th April 1848.

THE MID VICTORIAN ERA

THE Rev. Alexander F. Douglas, previously at Workington was inducted to the charge at St. James in October 1858. He was a young married man with two sons, one of whom later became a minister, and the other legal advisor to the English Presbyterian Church. Mr. Douglas was a man of some literary talent who published two or three books on religious subjects. He proved himself to be a popular and hard working pastor and under his guidance the church prospered and numbers increased.

It is only from the start of Mr. Douglas' Ministry that we begin to learn something of the internal life of the church, for all records prior to April 1859 have been lost. The congregation at this time was drawn from a wide area, as far afield as Howick, Longhoughton, Eglington and consisted of a large proportion of farm workers, working

class people of Alnwick, farmers, tradesmen and a fair number from the professional classes.

In 1859 the Session comprised only two elders, Thos. Short and Thos. Rennison, but over the next decade their numbers were increased to seven. It was not until 1864 that the system was adopted of allotting a district to each elder, who was expected to visit each family therein once a quarter – no easy task when one considers the distances to be travelled, mainly on foot. Communion services were held twice a year in Spring and Autumn, but later increased to three, to include a Summer celebration. On these occasions the minister was invariably assisted by another minister sometimes from as far away as Jedburgh, Berwick or Newcastle, and as this colleague would also conduct the pre-communion service on the Friday evening, it is certain that he would spend the week end at the manse, thus providing an opportunity for making and cementing friendships, and the exchange of views between kindred spirits. The rule admitting only full communicant members to the Sacrament was strictly observed and tokens for admission were handed out on the previous Sabbath. The method of electing elders and deacons (managers) was simple, for congregations then were not inhibited by an obsession for secrecy. Voting papers were handed out to members, who were required to record thereon the names, to the numbers needed, of those they considered most worthy of the posts, and to sign the paper. Two elders were appointed as tellers and those nominees receiving the highest number of votes were elected, subject to their willingness to accept office and their suitability on moral and doctrinal grounds.

The minutes of session reveal the intense earnestness with which the minister and elders conducted church affairs. Apart from the conduct of worship their main concern was the maintenance of moral standards, and a perusal of the records reveals that their task was no easy one, for almost every page tells of the appearance of some miscreant at the Session court. Cases of illegitimate children, so very common in the 19th century, are frequent,

and although the unfortunate girls would be left in no doubt as to the gravity of their sin, yet the wording of the records indicate that they were treated with kindness and compassion. There is little evidence here of the harshness and censure we are wont to associate with the Victorian age.

It is more surprising, however, to read of cases of misdemeanour among the male members of the congregation, and more surprising still to learn that many of them were deacons. In 1862 a Mr. Hartridge was summoned to appear to explain reports "seriously affecting his moral character". He had been convicted at the local court in company with a married woman, on a charge of assault on another woman, but he declined to attend, and was deposed from office and church membership. Thos. Dryden, who had been convicted of theft, declared there had been a miscarriage of justice and brought witnesses before the Session to prove it. Why his innocence could not have been established in a court of law, is not explained, but so well was his case presented, that he was restored to office. Wm. Dryden was indicted for "drunkenness on the Sabbath". These are only three examples, but there are others where the true nature of the offence is not disclosed – "rumours concerning conduct", "scandalous behaviour", "reports affecting Christian character – what scandals do these phrases conceal? And these men were deacons!

But there were other sinners too. Cases of "pre-nuptial fornication" were numerous and dealt with almost as matters of routine, usually ending in restoration of church privileges to the parents and the granting of baptism for the child. "Scandalous reports" concerning a Mr. & Mrs. Crawford resulted in this couple being struck from the roll, and in 1867 great speculation and gossip were caused by the strange behaviour of the precentor, a Mr. Barber, while conducting the unaccompanied singing at two evening services, for there was no doubt that the man was drunk. His services were only to be retained if he "signed the pledge", but whether he did or not, we do not know, for we hear no more of him.

A corrupt congregation? Certainly no more so than others of the time. We must remember that in a small community like Alnwick, such sins would not easily be concealed, and would be brought into greater prominence by the vigilance of the church. Life then was not easy for the working classes, beset as it was by poverty, illness and infant mortality, and against this tale of human frailty we must set the upright, sacrificial, often heroic, but unrecorded lives of countless ordinary people.

Mention has already been made in the account of the Lisburn Street Church, of Mr. Henry Hunter Blair, proprietor of the Alnwick Mercury, an educated man, and a figure of high standing in the town. He was ordained an elder in 1859 and at once elected Session Clerk. In 1863 he read an excellent and scholarly paper on the history of St. James to a meeting of the congregation, and in 1864 it was published in booklet form.

During the next decade Mr. Blair was extremely vocal and prominent in church affairs, and seems to have worked in close harmony with the minister, so that it is surprising that in 1869 the minutes record the resignations of three elders, H. H. Blair, Dr. Candlish and Wm. Davidson. No reasons for the resignations are recorded and all were accepted unanimously, without any expression of regret. Three letters are in existence addressed to the Northumberland Presbytery asking that an enquiry be held into "the present unhappy state of affairs" at St. James'. Two are signed by Mr. Blair and one by Mr. Blair, Dr. Candlish and Mr. Davidson. Not the slightest indication is given in the letters or subsequently in the minutes as to the nature of the dispute, but it seems certain that this was the cause of the resignations, and possibly of Mr. Douglas' decision, shortly afterwards to seek another charge. At the minister's last session meeting he reported that old Session and Deacon's Court minute books were in the possession of Mr. Blair, but that he had refused to surrender them. Is this the explanation of the missing records? Are they still gathering dust in some Alnwick attic?

The only social event in the church's life in the mid

Victorian age was the annual *soirée* usually held in the Corn Exchange, for at that time there was, of course, no church hall. According to accounts in the *Alnwick Mercury*, about 600 people would sit down to a "sumptuous tea", provided by the ladies of the congregation, and afterwards would be entertained by a few choral items and three or four addresses of about half-an-hour each on such subjects as "Calvin and Shakespeare" "Selfishness" and "Evil Speaking" given by visiting ministers. One wonders how many of the 600 were still awake at the end of the evening.

A very pleasant occasion is also recorded in the *Mercury* in connection with the Sunday School, which under Mr. Douglas' guidance had become extremely strong. On a fine summer afternoon in July 1869, a procession of scholars and teachers led by the minister and preceded by the Fife and Drum Band, marched from the church to the end of the town, where farm carts awaited to take them to Shilbottle. At this time St. James' had a branch mission at Shilbottle under the care of a student minister, a Mr. Rogerson. It was in an extremely flourishing state and had a Sunday School of nearly 80 scholars. On arrival at the village St. James' contingent joined forces with their colleagues from the mission, and adjourned to a field provided by the Colliery Agent, who had also suspended all work for the day, to enable any who wished, to attend the picnic. A "multitude" of almost 400 then enjoyed an ample tea at which 20 stones of bread were eaten, and afterwards young and old joined in a variety of games and sports. It was eight in the evening before the festivities ended and the farm carts appeared to take a tired but happy company to their homes.

In 1870 Mr. Douglas was appointed to a pastorate in Christchurch, New Zealand, whence after 10 years of hardworking but worthwhile ministry, he returned to England and accepted the charge at Ancroft Moor. Were his last months at St. James' marred by the unhappy incident of the previous year? It is to be hoped not, for from all accounts he was a good man – as one contemporary puts it – "a great little man – pastor, writer and minister".

The Rev. Archibold Craig who succeeded Mr. Douglas, was ordained and inducted to St. James' in 1871 at the age of 27. He was a humble unassuming man, who through his kindly ways, his sincere preaching and his regard for each individual in his flock, won the high regard and affection of all who knew him. During the nine years of his ministry, church life proceeded on an even keel, and no events of major importance are recorded. Quarterly communion services appear to have been introduced, and it is interesting to learn that, while the minister wished for an Easter Sunday communion, the session would not allow this. The number on the roll remained stable at about 350, large numbers joining at each communion, with correspondingly large numbers, mostly farm workers leaving for other districts.

In 1880, Mr. Craig accepted a call to Woolwich and a year later, for health reasons, emigrated to New South Wales where he died in 1883 at the age of 39. There is no doubt that he was a man of outstanding character for the minutes record the unabated attachment of the St. James' congregation and their extreme sorrow at the prospect of losing him. The marble tablet on the east wall of the church which perpetuates his memory bears out the sincerity of their words. It records "an earnest ministry" and the inscription "He being dead yet speaketh" is a testimony to the eloquence and depth of his sermons which were remembered long after his death.

THE GOLDEN AGE (I)
THE REV. ROBERT MACNAIR M.A.

THE next three decades can indeed be called the Golden Age of St. James for it was a period when the church was served by two of its most renowned ministers, men of widely different personality, yet men equally outstanding in their service and influence. Britain was then a highly favoured land. The Empire was at the height of its glory, when one fifth of the world's surface was coloured pink on the map and one quarter of the world's population came under British rule. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897 was celebrated with universal rejoicing and all the optimism and buoyancy in the nation's life was reflected in the churches. For St. James' it was a time of progress and achievement, full of interest and vitality.

The Rev. Robert Macnair M.A., a graduate of Edinburgh University was inducted to the charge of St. James' on 18 August 1880. He was a man of keen intellect and of a serious and thoughtful disposition, whose ministry was characterised by his strong faith and his extreme conscientiousness in the performance of his duties. He was too, a humble man, ever aware of his shortcomings and his failure to reach the high standard he set himself as a Christian minister. His great interest outside his work, was the study of archaeology, and as he was a man of private means he was able to indulge his hobby by occasional visits to Egypt and Greece. He wrote several papers on the subject and often gave talks on his experiences to church organisations.

Mr. Macnair brought a vigour to the church which had been absent during the ministry of the milder, saintly Archibald Craig. He was an able organiser and soon increased the eldership and re-allocated districts to facilitate visiting, which he saw as the most important part of an elder's work. He, too became a regular visitor, who took a sincere and kindly interest in every family in the congregation, and it was not long before his reputation and his forceful preaching began to attract larger attendances at



*The Rev. and Mrs. Macnair with three of their family.
James (see page 49) is on the left of the picture.*

Sunday worship. In 1880 the membership numbered just over 300. In 1890 it exceeded 500.

Although the code of morality was no less rigid, the practice of calling miscreants before the Session was dying out, and cases were dealt with by a call at the home of the offender by the minister and an elder. Mr. Macnair was punctilious in the periodic scrutiny of the roll, and every possible effort was made to recall backsliders to the fold. Names of non-attenders and the sick were recorded after each Communion. In keeping with the spirit of the age, non-conformists were strong supporters of the temperance movement, and in 1888 the Session decreed that in future only non-fermented wine should be used at the Sacrament.

It was still a time when it was common to walk long distances to church, and to serve those who were unable to attend regularly, prayer meetings and Sunday schools, usually conducted by the elder, were organised in country

districts. It is recorded that one particularly successful Sunday school with 18-20 pupils operated at Abberwick for many years.

With rising membership young people's organisations were re-vitalised., The Young Mens' Association stimulated interest in literary and philosophical subjects and encouraged its members to prepare and read papers themselves. A branch of the Y.M.C.A. was formed and the Sunday School grew in strength to a regular attendance of 140. Up to this time, the ladies of the congregation had only been heard of as providers of tea at the annual soirées, but now the Ladies' Work Party began to emerge as one of the main fund-raisers. Interest in foreign missions increased and petitions to Parliament supporting or opposing matters of social concern were not unknown.

In 1888 the Lisburn Street congregation was united with St. James' and the Rev. David Donaldson became joint pastor with Mr. Macnair. It says much for the characters of these two men that they worked together in complete harmony for the ensuing five years until Mr. Donaldson's retirement in 1893. But this happy event of 1888 was marred by one of extreme sadness in the death on 29th June of the Macnairs' son James at the age of 10 years. No circumstances of the death are recorded, but the writer's mother – a child of no more than 3 or 4 years at the time – could remember in later years being cautioned by her parents never to eat raw beans from the garden as it was this that caused the death of James Macnair. How far this is true, we do not know, but it is certain that the death was tragic and untimely, and a shattering blow to Mr. and Mrs. McNair, for he was their eldest son and a boy of high promise. The stained glass window in the north wall of the church commemorates his short life.

The bi-centenary of the church was celebrated by thanksgiving services, morning and evening on 19th May 1889, when the Rev. J. B. Hastings preached on both occasions to large congregations. On the previous Monday evening, a congregational meeting had been held in the Corn Exchange, at which Mr. Macnair read an historical

Sketch of St. James' and Lisburn Street Presbyterian Churches. It is fortunate that at least one copy of this valuable history survives.

By 1890 it was evident that the rather cramped and narrow existing church had become inadequate to accommodate this growing and busy congregation, and the thought of a new building began to take root in the minds of the officebearers. When first mooted there was much opposition to the idea, but gradually most of the congregation came to realise that the proposal was practical and necessary, and soon this great undertaking was embraced with enthusiasm and excitement. A small triangle of land behind the church was bought from the Duke of Northumberland, and on 3rd September 1894 demolition of the old building began. For the next fifteen months all Sunday services, committee meetings and church activities were held in the Corn Exchange. Familiar names now begin to emerge. Adam Douglas, founder of the Alnwick firm of solicitors, John Bolam of Bilton, great-grandfather of a present member. George Reavell, Clerk of Works to the Duke of Northumberland, and John Straker, head of a department of the Castle estate, were all active in promoting the project.

On 17th November 1894, the foundation stone of the new church was laid by Mr. James Westoll of Sunderland, father of Mrs. Macnair, and by the end of 1895 the building was completed. The architect was Mr. W. Lister Newcombe of Newcastle and the builders, R. Carse & Sons of Amble. The church, designed in the late Gothic style seats 650, and at the time of building the stained glass Macnair memorial was incorporated. The small room behind the pulpit was for use as the minister's vestry. The cost was £4,000.

One can only imagine with what feelings of pride, thankfulness and wonder the congregation gazed around this spacious well proportioned, light and airy building, in all its pristine freshness as they gathered for the opening services on Sunday, 1st December 1895; and with what emotion they sang the first hymn, the Old Hundredth "All

people that on earth do dwell". The Rev. R. Leitch of Newcastle, then in his year of office as Moderator of the General Assembly, preached both morning and evening, to a church filled to capacity. The dream was realised! It was a happy and memorable day!



St. James' ^{Manse} c.1900, prior to conversion to church hall and schools.

To celebrate the event in lighter vein a soirée was held in the Corn Exchange the next evening, when the unprecedented number of over 1,000 persons attended for tea, all accommodated expertly by the ladies in three sittings. After the tables were cleared away the gathering enjoyed humorous (yet all with an underlying serious theme) talks by visiting ministers, including Dr. Oman from Clayport, and musical items were given by the choir.

But the building of the new church had laid a heavy burden on the congregation. A bazaar held in 1893 had raised a few hundred pounds towards the cost and a loan (not interest free) was necessary to meet the balance. By 1898 a debt of £1,050 with an interest charge of £45 per year still remained. This was cleared by the proceeds of a magnificent sale of work held in the Corn Exchange on two days 26th and 27th October.

It was shortly after this that the congregation learned that Mr. Macnair intended to resign. This was a shattering and unwelcome blow to St. James', for their minister was universally respected and revered. Never before had the

church known such stability and strength; membership had risen to 550 and attendances of over 400 at Communion were common. He gave as his reason for going the educational needs of his young family, yet in his farewell words to the Session he told them of his conviction that the church, after 18 years under one minister, needed the impetus of a new energy and voice. He spoke too of "opportunities missed, of things not done which ought to have been done;" of his inability to meet the high standard of his calling; yet his deeds belied his words. He retired to Edinburgh, but did not at once seek another charge. It was with profound sadness that his people saw him go for he had become to them "father and friend". Before he left he bade a personal farewell to every family in the congregation by delivering himself all cards for his final communion service. This was a formidable undertaking but one which he carried out with sincerity and genuine affection, and one which was long remembered. At his farewell service on 16th April 1899 the church was filled long before the commencement at 6pm. Every seat was taken and standing room was filled to capacity. Other non-conformist churches in the town had cancelled their evening services to allow their members to attend for his influence and reputation had extended far beyond the limits of his own church. It was said of him that his eloquence and conviction had grown throughout the years of his ministry and that his closing sermon was one of the finest he had ever preached.

Yet all through his remaining years his great love for Alnwick and its countryside never left him. He named his house in Colinton Road, Edinburgh, "Brizlee", and recently this verse written by him came to light:

*"I still recall the good old town,
Its Parks and castle grey,
My former church and people true,
Are in my heart today,
Then let us praise the brave old town,
Good fortune be to thee,
And blessing on our ancient church,
And all who loveth thee."*

THE GOLDEN AGE (2)
THE REV. J. A. R. CAIRNS B.A. LLB

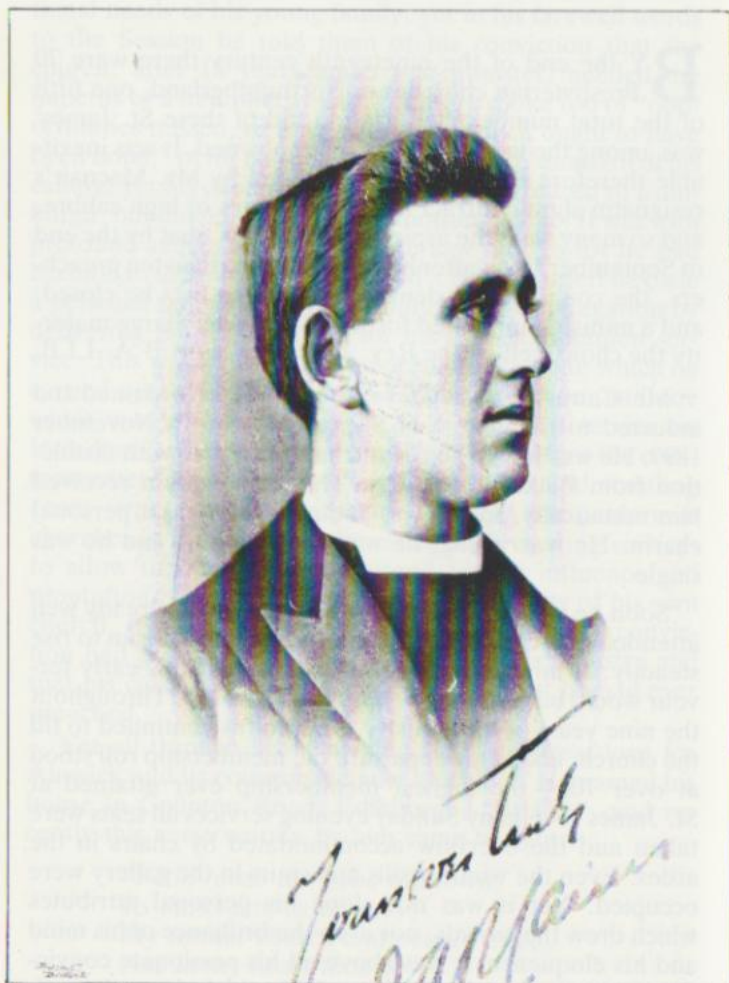
BY the end of the nineteenth century there were 70 Presbyterian churches in Northumberland, one fifth of the total number in England, and of these St. James' was among the most vigorous and renowned. It was inevitable therefore that the vacancy caused by Mr. Macnair's resignation should attract many candidates of high calibre, and so many were the aspirants to the post, that by the end of September 1899, after hearing no fewer than ten preachers, the congregation demanded that the lists be closed, and a minister appointed forthwith. By a very large majority the choice fell on the Rev. J. A. R. Cairns B.A. LLB.

Mr. Cairns was only 26 years of age when ordained and inducted to the charge of St. James' on 15th November 1899. He was Irish by birth and had graduated with distinction from Belfast University. The congregation received him ecstatically, for he was endowed with great personal charm. He was young, he was good looking and he was single.

Soon he was attracting larger crowds to an already well attended church, and the numbers on the roll began to rise steadily. It might have been expected that this early fervour would burn itself out, but this was not so. Throughout the nine years of his ministry, Mr. Cairns continued to fill the church, and at his departure the membership roll stood at over 700 – the highest membership ever attained at St. James'. At many Sunday evening services all seats were taken and the overflow accommodated by chairs in the aisles. Even the window sills and stairs in the gallery were occupied. Yet it was not alone his personal attributes which drew the crowds, nor even the brilliance of his mind and his eloquence; it was above all his passionate conviction in the truth of the Christian faith which shone through his sermons and inspired all who heard him.

During his ministry Mr. Cairns made many useful innovations. One of the most important and widely appreciated

The Rev. J. A. R. Cairns B.A., L.L.B.



was the introduction of Holy Communion (hitherto celebrated at a morning service only) to the evening service also, "for the convenience of mothers and servants". Week night services were also started and became so renowned that requests were received from distant churches asking for advice on organisation and the reason of their success. At this time many of the indoor servants at the Castle, mostly girls from Scottish homes, were members of the church, but were required by the Duchess to attend the parish church each Sunday, except on a Communion Sunday, when they were allowed to attend the evening service at St. James'. Mr. Cairns objected to this unwarranted restriction, and protested strongly in an interview with the Duchess. The outcome is not recorded, but no doubt the strong minded Presbyterian was able to achieve some compromise.

In spite of his popularity, Mr. Cairns' ministry could not have been an easy one. Constant complaints were received from the Managers on the quality of the church music, and the lack of training of the choir. Even Mr. Cairns had cause to complain that the noise of the organ upset him. The organist who resigned in 1901, was succeeded by another who, after some years service was deemed not to be worth his annual salary of £30, but who later improved his performance and was retained.

This was the age when restrictions on young people were easing, and social events were becoming more common in the churches. In St. James' the choir seems to have been the most active social group, and their annual picnic was a particularly popular event. But unlimited freedom was not allowed for the Session minutes record that the minister had occasion to express his disapproval that the choirmaster had allowed dancing at a social evening held in the Town Hall, as he did not consider this a suitable activity at a Presbyterian gathering.

Mr. Cairns was, however, a keen lover of football and early in his ministry he raised a team from the young men of St. James'. This team was known as "The Saints" and played with great success in local and county matches. In

1905 they won the Minor Cup at St. James' Park, Newcastle – a great and exciting achievement.

In 1903 a dispute arose between two prominent elders, Adam Douglas and George Reavell, both educated men of high standing in the town. The Controversy raged for several months. Statements were read from the pulpit to a no doubt astonished and intrigued congregation and the matter was referred to the Presbytery, who declined to intervene; but although much time was spent in discussion in the Session and much space was taken up in the minutes, not the slightest hint of what the dispute was about emerges. George Reavell later joined the Clayport congregation, and it is his wife whose life is commemorated in the stained glass window on the south wall of the church.

The Sunday School, always a major feature of the life of St. James' Church, had by the turn of the century achieved a membership of 238. The scholars met in a room hired for an hour each Sunday in the Corn Exchange, and as this was becoming totally inadequate to house the ever growing number of scholars it was clear that a separate functional building was essential. The proposal put forward astounded the congregation and caused great discussion and controversy. This was that the Manse, an attractive, commodious and fairly new house which stood to the side of the church, should be partially demolished and converted into a hall and Sunday Schools. On reflection, however, the majority realised the sense of the scheme, for at this time St. James' owned another manse, the Lisburn Street Manse, then vacant following the death of the Reverend Donaldson and his sister. This house, between the head of Percy Street and The Dunterns, served as St. James' manse until the end of the ministry of the Reverend R. Backhouse.

In 1903 the Board of Management passed the plan for the alterations by a reasonable but not unanimous majority and the work was put in hand. The most vociferous of the minority against it was one of the elders, Mr. David Elliott, who was so enraged by the scheme that he felt the matter should be made public, and in three strong letters to the

local press he made his feelings known. His chief objections were the waste of money on a building which would lie empty most of the week, the destruction of a modern and well appointed house, and that of those who had voted in favour of the scheme, "many were women, old and young, who would not know the back of a plan from the front". The Session, equally incensed at a private church matter being made public, considered Mr. Elliott's act a breach of privilege, and a motion of censure was passed against him. Mr. Elliott later left the church, as did several others who shared his views.

The stone set in the wall of the halls, just inside the church entrance gate, bearing the inscription "The Children's Stone 1904", bears witness to the original purpose of the building. For many years it was simply known as "The Schools", and today many will still remember the sliding panels which divided the Lower Hall into four classrooms. The Upper Hall, used for the senior classes, was also used on weekdays for meetings and social events. We who enjoy the privilege of using these halls today owe a debt of gratitude to this former generation for their foresight and to Mr. Cairns for the innovation of the project.

The architect was George Reavell, son of the previously mentioned George Reavell. He did not follow his father to Clayport Church and later became an elder at St. James'.

The cost of the alterations was £1,100, and on an appeal to the congregation, the sum of £600 was raised within a few weeks. To meet the balance a "Grand Bazaar and Winter Fete" covering three days was held in the Corn Exchange on the 19th, 20th and 21st of October, 1904. Mr. Cairns' influence in the town and district must have been considerable, for it was opened on the first day by Earl Grey of Howick and subscriptions were given by most of the local aristocracy, gentry and clergy. An immense amount of merchandise must have been donated, for in addition to the contributions of the congregation, collecting points for receiving gifts for the sale were established in

London, Glasgow, Belfast and Newcastle. A faded photograph still shows evidence of a distinguished event. Within the space of ten years St. James' had achieved an almost impossible task. It had acquired by its own efforts, a new Church, new halls and for the first time, its own Sunday Schools.

In spite of the ups and downs normal in Church life Mr. Cairns' ministry continued to prosper. He was not of a strong constitution and at intervals required short periods of sick leave to recover from a troublesome throat condition. Yet the power of his preaching never abated and throughout his tenure he continued to fill the church.

The news of his intention to resign the charge in June 1908 was received with dismay, and the announcement that he was resolved to leave the ministry and enter the legal profession with a sense of shock. It was then revealed that he was fully qualified to become a barrister, and soon after leaving St. James', he was called to the Bar. For several years he practised as a barrister and in 1920, became a Metropolitan Magistrate in the Thames Division, where he served with great distinction. He was ever motivated by his strong faith and Christian principles, and noted for his compassion for the offenders who came before him, and his work in London among the poor.

It is curious that neither the minutes of the Session nor the Managers make any comment on Mr. Cairns' departure, but perhaps this may best be explained by the recollections of the writer's mother who was a girl in her late teens and early twenties during his ministry. She could recall his immense popularity, and how the crowds flocked to hear him on Sunday evenings. He was young and attractive and speculation was rife in the congregation as to whom he would marry. He did in fact become engaged to and later married a Miss Purvis, whom she remembered as a "very good looking girl", a member of the church and the daughter of a prosperous grocer in the town (the domed building at the corner of Market Street and Bondgate Within, now the Carpet Centre, was the site of his shop and

was formerly known as Purvis' Corner). She could recall vividly the gloom caused by the news of Mr. Cairn's intention to resign and how the mood changed to one of disapproval and almost anger among an influential faction when his future plans became known. Gossip and rumour ran through the church. It was said that while on periodical visits to London on church business Mr. Cairns had used these occasions to keep the required terms at one of the Inns of Court, and that he had only resigned from St. James', when these visits had served their purpose and he was fully qualified to enter the legal profession. But the rank and file remained loyal and believed no ill of their adored minister.

It seems sad that Mr. Cairns' outstanding ministry should have been marred at the end by this apparent fall from grace, for it seems clear from a letter written by him to Cassells Weekly in the early nineteen twenties, that the devious action ascribed to him was quite unjustified. It appears odd that such a letter should have been written so long after the event, but in it he explained that he had joined the Middle Temple simply as a club to which he could go while in London, and with no thought of being called to the Bar. It was only after he had served ten terms that he was urged by another distinguished minister to change his profession, and as soon as the decision was made he notified the Session of his intention to resign.

The news of his death in 1933 at the age of 59 was received by those who knew him at St. James', with great sadness, for by this time only the greatness of his ministry was remembered.

WAR & PEACE 1909-1922

THE Rev. Jos. Reavley started his working life as a draper's assistant in London, where he became interested in the Y.M.C.A. Mission in Aldersgate. His work there was so outstanding that he was advised to enter the ministry, and after studying at Aberdeen University and Westminster College, Cambridge, he was ordained in 1903 and inducted to the charge of the Presbyterian Church in Oldham. In November 1908 he became the minister of St. James'.

It must have been with some trepidation that Mr. Reavley started on his new charge, for he had none of the dynamic characteristics of his predecessor. In saying this no fault is imputed, for he was a sincere, hardworking and conscientious man who soon became well liked and respected. Under him the congregation settled down to a calmer and more stable period.

We now come to the time just within living memory and some familiar names are recorded among the elders and managers - Alexander Lawrie, Anthony McCutcheon, George Bolam. Perhaps too, some may remember David Duncan the hairdresser.

For the next few years, church life continued on an even keel. In 1911 the choir moved to the gallery where, as an experiment they occupied the seats facing the pulpit, but in 1914 when the platform was raised, they returned to their former positions downstairs. Hitherto the communion wine had been served from a common cup but a proposal made in 1911 to change to individual cups and serve the bread diced, from plates, received universal accord. Owing to lack of funds, it was not until 1914 that this scheme was carried out. Two silver communion bread plates engraved with the name of the church were donated by Mr. & Mrs. Lawrie and are still in use.

The advent of war in August 1914 brought added responsibilities to the minister and congregation.

St. James' was designated the official church for the non conformist soldiers stationed in the district, and Mr. Reavley was appointed chaplain. Both sides of the gallery were set aside for the soldiers attending normal services in a body, and special services were conducted in turn by other non conformist ministers in the town. Concerts and social evenings were arranged, but when the halls were requisitioned by the military in November 1915, it was only with the greatest difficulty that any social life could be maintained. Our colleagues at Clayport offered the use of their hall when possible, until it too was taken over.

Early in the war some Belgian refugees were received into Alnwick following the German invasion of their country, and St. James', along with other churches was active in providing for their needs. They were housed in cottages now demolished, with a frontage in Bondgate Without, from the present entrance to the Car Park to the Playhouse. In 1917, Mr. Reavley served for three months with the Y.M.C.A. in France.

In December 1918 the halls were released and a social evening was held to welcome back those returning to civilian life. On the back wall of the church hangs the Roll of Honour recording the names of the 49 men from the congregation who served in the armed forces and the four women who left their homes for war work. By its side is a marble tablet commemorating the lives of their eleven comrades who did not return.

And so the church reverted to peace time activities but the numbers on the roll had fallen considerably in common with the nationwide decline in churchgoing following the war. Yet St. James' maintained stability with a membership of over 300 and kept its position as the largest non conformist church in the town. It was, too, an active church and while by no means wealthy, was always able to pay its way. Its finances make strange reading today. The total income was in the region of £550, made from little more than church collections and the annual Sale of Work which usually produced about £150. The assessment for the Sustentation (now the Maintenance of the Ministry Fund) was

£205 in 1920, but the church gave £215. After the war, £11,000 was required for the rebuilding of the China Mission Stations which had been devastated during the conflict, and St. James' was required to produce £19. In 1921 the Freewill offering envelope scheme was introduced and proved so successful that in its first quarter it produced £50 more than in the same quarter of the preceding year.

Perhaps it was due to the suffragette movement or maybe to the shortage of male members during the war years, that for the first time, ladies were elected to the Board of Management. Here too are familiar names – Mrs. J. Bolam, Mrs. W. Green, Mrs. J. Elliott. More well known names also emerge among the elders and managers – Jos. Whittle, J. E. Watson, A. J. Straker, J. Elliott, Ralph Glass, Geo. Mills, J. Tindle.

Social life at this time was confined to the annual soiree, meetings of the Ladies' Work Party, the Guild of Service and the Sunday School picnic. The choir members continued to enjoy themselves with an annual picnic, for which the church gave the sum of £10!

During his ministry, Mr. Reaveley had never enjoyed good health, and had required several periods of sick leave. In 1922 he decided to accept a call further south to Shrewsbury. The congregation were sorry to see him go, for he had been a good and friendly minister and under him the church had been peaceful and stable. After a few years at Shrewsbury he became minister to a Church of Scotland congregation in Funchal, Madeira, where he died in 1933 at the age of 62.

BETWEEN THE WARS 1922-1928

THE Rev. Alexander Brown M.A. took up the charge at St. James at the end of 1922. He was a native of Glasgow and graduated from the University there with an honours degree in Civil Law.

He was a man of a happy nature, an extrovert disposition and adventurous spirit, full of energy and zeal. Perhaps three things which characterised his ministry will best serve to illustrate his personality. He had the distinction of being the first clergyman in Alnwick to own a motor car, he was a keen and skilful gardener, (a rare talent among St. James' ministers) and the only known minister to damage church property. He was an exuberant preacher and often to emphasise a point, would bang his fist down on the pulpit ledge. One of our members recalls that on one occasion, when the fist came down with particular force, the pulpit light above his head crashed to the ground before a startled congregation. "It's all right" said Mr. Brown impassively "it's only the light", and carried on (more calmly) with his sermon.

In the immediate post war years the Presbyterian Church of England rebuilt its mission stations in Formosa (now Taiwan) and Mr. Brown encouraged interest in these by establishing branches of the Women's Missionary Association and the Kings Missionary Band, the latter attended mostly by members of the Sunday School. There will still be those in the church who recall the thrill of acting (if such it may be called) in missionary plays, when they were dressed and made up like little Chinese children. The Girls' Auxiliary, an organisation for young women also took an interest and raised funds for the mission stations.

The social life of the church during the twenties continued much as before, the highlights of the year being the Soiree, the Sale of Work and the Choir outing. There was also of course the Sunday School picnic, held on a day in August in the school holidays. It is still well remembered. Looking back, we believe it never rained! The excitement

of it all – the meeting in the Abbey Grounds at 2 o'clock, the hoist onto sacks of straw on the waiting farm carts, the thrill of the rumbling journey through the Parks, past the Wishing Well and up the hill to Hulne Priory, and the cheering as the mothers and babies sped past in the horse drawn brake from Glass's Livery Stables. Then there was the tea – a bag of delicious buns and cakes for each child, with mugs of hot tea to wash them down. Afterwards came the races with fascinating prizes for winners and losers. Only the big boys from the senior class were allowed on the swing on the tall sycamore tree! Times were still hard and children did not expect much. For many it was the only treat in the whole of the holidays.

As is usual in church life, no sooner is one debt cleared than another arises. In 1922, repairs to the church organ cost £217, but these were soon paid for by a Sale of Work which raised the then astonishing sum of £622. In 1924, there was trouble with the gallery pipes; in 1925, the church boiler burst and had to be replaced. In 1927, it was decided to install electric lighting in the church as the gas system had become quite inadequate, and this was most generously paid for by Miss Macnair, one of the daughters of the Reverend R. Macnair. At the same time the Macnair family gave a brass plaque in memory of their father and mother, which can be seen today on the north wall of the church.

In 1926, Mr. Samuel Heatley, who had been session clerk since 1908, became ill, and his place was taken temporarily by Mr. George Bolam. Mr. Bolam died in 1927 and it was not until some time later that Mr. Jos. Whittle accepted the post. Other familiar names now appear among the elders and managers – Robert Dodds, George Coulter, James Hall, and a very young manager, Mr. John Hall, now our senior elder, who by his skill and craftsmanship has done much to enhance the interior of the church. In 1928, Mr. A. J. Straker became Sunday School Superintendent after the death of Mr. George Bolam. If present members care to look in the back seat of the north aisle of the church, they will see a small plaque carved with

the initials G.B. Mr. Brown was also an accomplished wood carver and this was his memorial to Mr. Bolam. In 1928, Mr. Frank Green was appointed organist. He proved a great asset to the church and the news of his death at the early age of 61 was received with great regret.

Mr. Brown resigned in 1928 after accepting a call to Peebles. He had proved a popular and efficient minister and during the difficult period of the aftermath of war when church attendances were declining generally he had kept the church in an active and flourishing state and had maintained a membership of well over 350.

THE REV. JAMES SCOTT M.A.
1928-1944

AFTER Mr. Brown's short but active ministry, the church was anxious for a period of stability and the congregation could therefore not have been more fortunate in the choice of the Rev. James Scott, M.A. as its next minister.

Mr. Scott was a native of Newcastle and a graduate of Durham University, and before coming to St. James' had had extensive experience in previous pastorates at Bermondsey, Handsworth and Gateshead. Many of our present members will remember him well – a serious down-to-earth man, gifted with common sense, yet with a sense of humour – a man not afraid to speak his mind, but who always had a kindly care and concern for every member of his flock. He was a familiar figure about the town, with his black shovel hat and limping gait, the legacy of a football accident at college.

In 1929 the roll stood at 360, and in spite of the difficult days at the end of his ministry, Mr. Scott maintained this level of membership throughout. We are inclined to believe today that pre-war communion attendances were high, yet the records show that at their highest they were no more than 60% of the congregation. Many of the members were farmers and farm workers from outlying districts and as it was still not the age of the car and the baby sitter, regular attendance by everyone could hardly be expected. To receive the Sacraments, communicants would move from the side seats to the main body of the church, to be joined there by the occupants of the gallery.

The Session at this time comprising only 12 elders, was sadly depleted in the early thirties by the loss of three of its most faithful and long serving members. Jos. Whittle, Session Clerk died in 1932. Alexander Lawrie (a venerable white bearded figure) church treasurer for over 50 years, died in the same year, and in 1933, the sudden death of Anthony McCutcheon, Presbytery Elder, throughout his

eldership, deprived the church of another faithful servant. Yet St. James' is fortunate in that there are always those willing to come forward to take on responsibility and during Mr. Scott's tenure more familiar names appear in the records as office bearers – F. Green, Jas. Hall, J. Beacom, T. Kirkup, W. Sergeant, G. Egdell, J. Matheson, G. Anderson, W. Crosier. Mr. A. T. Park, a newly ordained elder, became Session Clerk in 1933.

The only womens' organisation in the church during this period was the Womens' Missionary Association, an industrious band of ladies, on whom fell the duty of providing teas for the soirees and all social events, and whose members worked all the year for the Annual Gift Sale. The sale would usually raise about £250 – an exceptional sum for money was not plentiful – and the stalls of exquisite needlework, beautifully iced cakes, dressed poultry, and home made produce are still remembered.

The Girls' Guild, once the Girls' Auxiliary, was also active in church life. Its meetings were partly of a devotional nature, and partly social. Every year the Guild produced a costume play, enthusiastically acted, and loudly acclaimed by an equally enthusiastic audience. Perhaps some may recall a musical version of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" and the scene where the Prince, to the accompaniment of the "Skye Boat Song", was rowed to Skye in a makeshift boat. To the surprise of the crew and the delight of the audience, the boat capsized, tipping its occupants into the sea (crumpled blue cloth arranged behind the footlights). Unperturbed and amid loud applause, the royal party re-assembled the boat, picked up the strain of their song and rowed on to their destination. The church was deeply indebted in these days to Molly Watson (Mrs. Stewart), Jean Dodds, Lilly Cassie, and Peggy Tindle (Mrs. Mitchell), the four stalwarts of the Guild, for providing so much satisfying, unsophisticated fun and entertainment.

The Sunday School too was active under Mr. A. J. Straker. The annual concert and prizegiving was a memorable event – tea with individual bags of cakes and buns, followed by a concert with items of poetry, songs and

piano recitals from every age group and always the grand finale, a sketch by the senior class (of girls). How the parents must have watched with equal pride and trepidation until their offspring were safely through.

Mr. Scott was particularly anxious that young members should find their recreation in the church, and in 1929 a badminton club was formed. This proved to be immensely popular and flourished successfully until well after the war. The church halls were now being used extensively, and when not in use for church activities, were often let to outside organisations, thus providing useful income for the church. In 1930, it was deemed advisable to have a second access to the upper hall, and a staircase was built in the south east corner to connect with the ground floor. It was opened on the 17th of September by two small boys, no more than eight years old, Walter Scott, son of the minister, and John Straker, son of the contractor and nephew of the Sunday School Superintendent.

The 250th anniversary of the foundation of St. James' took place on Monday, 6th March 1939. The Upper hall was filled to capacity for the occasion, and after a short thanksgiving service, speeches of congratulation were given by the Moderator of the General Assembly, and ministers of the surrounding Presbyterian Churches. Mr. R. S. Robson of Newcastle, an authority on Northumbrian Presbyterian Churches, gave a talk on the history of St. James'. Tea was provided by the ladies, and a special cake was cut by Mrs. Yeaman, the oldest member. Miss Peggy Tindle sang solos, accompanied by Mr. Frank Green at the piano. This was to be the last major event in church life before the outbreak of war.

St. James' in line with the national spirit soon adapted to wartime conditions. The gallery in the church was closed for the duration; because of lighting restrictions the evening service was brought forward to 3pm, but as the population quickly became used to groping about in the black-out, this soon reverted to the normal time of 6pm. St. James' once more became the official church for the

non-conformist soldiers stationed in the district, (it was estimated that there were 500 Presbyterians among them) and the north wall seats were set aside for their use. Soon the halls were requisitioned and as the young men and women were called to the forces or to war work, almost all social activity ceased.

The church and vestry were used for the Sunday School, committee meetings, and the few social events which were possible. On one evening a week the Girl's Guild welcomed soldiers stationed in Alnwick to tea, buns and chat in the vestry. Fund raising was difficult, and the main source of income, apart from Sunday collections was a yearly "Silver Tree".

An additional burden was a levy of £600 to be paid over two years, imposed by the church headquarters to help towards restoration of damaged churches after the war, but in spite of these trials St. James' was still solvent when peace came.

In April 1944, Mr. Scott retired from the ministry. He had maintained a stable church in difficult circumstances; he had been well liked and respected, his sermons had been forthright and memorable, and it was with great regret that the congregation saw him go.

The year-long vacancy which followed Mr. Scott's departure was a harrowing time for the church. The Presbytery's proposal that instead of calling a minister, St. James' should unite with the Clayport church was received with astonishment and disbelief. When it was realised that the intention was not that Clayport should close and join St. James', which would have been acceptable, but that *St. James' should close and join with Clayport*, feeling ran high.

Throughout the year both Presbytery and London H.Q. brought intense pressure to bear to enforce the union. The shortage of ministers, the few ministers in training because of the war, the need for economy, were all reasons cited in favour of the scheme. Joint meetings of representatives from both churches ended in stalemate, and confusion and

bewilderment reigned throughout the congregation.

It was not until the 24th of October 1944 that the matter was settled at a congregational meeting at St. James', called by Presbytery in a last desperate effort to impose their will. The 60 members present, after listening to endless argument, found to their dismay and disbelief that on the motion for amalgamation and removal to Clayport being put to the meeting, whether owing to misunderstanding of the wording of the proposal or confusion over the speakers' arguments, they had voted in favour by a majority of one.

The writer's mother could remember the meeting vividly and the uproar which broke out following the Presbytery's announcement that St. James' must close. Even the youngest members were on their feet shouting that this could not be, and a cry which rang dramatically through the church – "St. James' doors will never close", was echoed vociferously. At this point the Session Clerk, Mr. A. T. Park, intervened and said that he could not accept the result as representative of such a large congregation. He demanded a paper ballot of all members, and this was granted. This resulted in an overwhelming vote against the union. St. James' was saved!

In the words of the Managers' minutes of December 1944 "Thus ended a grievous and anxious time for St. James'". The congregation turned with renewed hope to the future, not then knowing that the coming years were to prove one of the happiest periods in St. James' history.

THE END OF AN ERA 1945-1972

ST. James' was indeed blessed in the choice of its next minister, the Rev. Roy Backhouse M.A. who was inducted to the charge in April 1945. His ministry of 23 years will long be remembered for it was a particularly happy one and brought great renown to the church.

Mr. Backhouse was a man of outstanding character, who, in spite of indifferent health, worked excessively hard and conscientiously and never spared himself in the service of the church. He had a deep concern for every member of the congregation, and his yearly visit to every home ensured that he "knew them all by name". In his presence, the humblest person became of some account for all mattered to him. While his sermons may not have ranked in eloquence with those of Mr. Macnair and Mr. Cairns, they were clear, simple and uplifting, with a message for daily living. But it was in his talks to the children at Sunday morning service, that he excelled. They were enjoyed by young and old alike and many are remembered to this day.

The Second World War was still at a critical stage in the early part of 1945, and one of the new minister's first tasks was to write a personal letter to all the members serving in the forces. This was a thoughtful and long remembered act, as was the gift of an inscribed hymn book on their return. The three carved chairs in the sanctuary are the congregations' tribute to all those who served in the forces, and the baptismal font commemorates the four young men who gave their lives in the cause of freedom – *J. Douglas Cook, killed in an air raid on Gibraltar. Gordon Mills, P.O.W., died on the notorious Thailand Railway. Wm. Purvis, Commando, killed in action during the liberation of Holland in 1945. Allonby Sisterson, killed in action in the North African Campaign.*

After the war the membership of the church began to rise steadily until in the early fifties it reached a peak of

over 520 and remained at this level throughout the remainder of Mr. Backhouse's stay. He was aided by many faithful and able office-bearers, some no longer with us, but who are still remembered. We recall Mr. A. T. Park who died in 1953, a quiet dignified man who served as Session Clerk for 16 years and to whose leadership during the long vacancy of 1944 the church is indebted. Mr. W. Wilson, treasurer for sixteen years, was succeeded by Mr. Maurice Thwaites who died an untimely death in 1967. There are others too who gave devoted service as elders or managers: W. Haining, L. Moffitt, Miss E. D. Hall, Mrs. J. Beacon Dr. F. Kohler, B. Bilclough, K. Kinghorn, Robert Green, G. Piercy, A. Purvis. *Purvis*

The union with Clayport church in 1955 brought no problems, and the 50 or so members who came to St. James' soon settled happily and brought added vigour to the church's life. An inscribed stone in the wall at the side of the church door commemorates the union.

Under Mr. Backhouse's influence the church became strong and united and there is no doubt that the friendly atmosphere which prevailed attracted many to its door. Organisations catering for every age came into being and were well supported. Children, many from families without church connections flocked to the Sunday School: there were Guides, Brownies and a very active Youth Club. The ladies were happy (and still are) at the Womens' meeting and the Evening Guild, and the Mens' Club has now flourished for 30 years. The Senior Fellowship has continued with unabated vigour for over 40 years – an astonishing record, for every year from October to March it has maintained a weekly session of cultural or educational interest of a very high standard.

No ministry is ever free from property troubles and this era had more than its share. Over the years a considerable amount of money was spent; new floors were laid in both the upper and lower halls, and a particularly costly operation was the extension to the entrance to the church halls, the provision of new cloakrooms downstairs and a modern

and spacious kitchen above. The caretaker's flat was also modernised.

In 1961 dry rot was discovered in the window lintels in the gallery and at the same time the slight movement in the east wall of the church began to cause anxiety; but it was not until 1967 that these problems became suddenly urgent. By this time dry rot had spread along some walls and the roof, and the east wall became in danger of collapse. The amount needed for strengthening the foundations and eliminating the dry rot was almost £3,000, and a Restoration Fund to raise the money was opened. Such was the loyalty of the congregation that within three weeks almost the whole of the amount required was subscribed. A considerable sum was given by former members and townspeople, unconnected with the church

The manse too was causing trouble with rising damp and minor repairs were constantly needed. With some reluctance it was decided to sell it, for it was a well situated, pleasant house, and in 1968 the present manse in Swansfield Park Road was bought. It was made ready for the new minister after Mr. Backhouse's resignation.

It was with great sorrow that the congregation accepted Mr. Backhouse's decision to retire in 1968, for he had been a dearly loved minister and under his guidance St. James' had achieved a high reputation in the town and district. It is amazing that in his often precarious state of health he had maintained such a high standard. Every year he had made an average of 300 pastoral visits, and during his ministry had preached well over 2,000 sermons, none of which were repeated. He used his car only when necessary for country visiting and would frequently be seen walking through the town, stopping to chat for a few minutes with those he knew. There must have been few people in Alnwick who did not know him, and there were many who never "darkened a church door" who were grateful for his kindly words and guidance. The Rev. Roy Backhouse was a true vicar of Christ, a man who stood head and shoulders above the crowd.

After leaving St. James' he had the oversight of the small Longframlington church for many years, and died in 1984 at the age of 81.

His successor was the Rev. J. R. Mather M.A., a young and enthusiastic minister who had previously been Secretary of the Assembly Youth Committee. He brought renewed vigour to the church and was successful in involving more members in church government and activities. After little more than 2 years service, his was to be the difficult task of reorganisation following the creation of the United Reformed Church by the union of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations in 1972. It was the end of an era. No longer could St. James' people call themselves Presbyterians.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

AFTER long deliberation the union of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches of England & Wales to form the United Reformed Church, took place on 5 October 1972. By some it was received with acclamation as a triumphant step towards the visible unity of the whole Christian Church in this country, by some as a matter of expediency, and by others with sadness at the loss of their old traditions.

While the new church varies little in doctrine from Presbyterianism, its constitution is a compromise between those of the two former churches. The General Assembly remains as the highest council, but the country is divided into twelve regions, each with its own Provincial Moderator, who has the oversight of all the United Reformed churches in his district. In the local church the minister is still the spiritual overseer and preacher, but the Committee of Management has been abolished. The Elders' Meeting (formerly known as the Session) still has control over spiritual matters and the conduct of worship, but can only recommend action on business and financial matters to the Quarterly Church Meeting at which all members are entitled to vote.

The history of St. James' United Reformed Church, must be left to others, for the events of the short seventeen years of its life are too close to be seen in perspective. These events can, however, be recorded to give some impression of how the new church is emerging.

The Reverend J. E. Mather M.A., minister at the time of the union, achieved a smooth transition from the old ways to the new, and the church soon settled back into its normal pattern. He left in 1973, and was succeeded by the Reverend Stanley Jones B.A., a man of strong conviction and an eloquent preacher, who became well-known in the North for his late-night epilogues on television. The Reverend Joseph Hislop, J.P., B.A., the present minister,

succeeded him in 1981, but is due to retire in 1989. Mr. Hislop is a cheerful, practical man, who has done much to improve the fabric of the church and who, like his two predecessors, has most commendably held the congregation together through all the adverse circumstances of the present age.

There have, of course, been changes and innovations. For the first time, St. James' has ordained lady elders who have brought their own special contribution to the Elders' Meeting and to church life. It is sad that we have already lost by death two of those originally ordained – Miss. E. Hall and Mrs. I. Milne, who both gave dedicated and faithful service. The Common Cup for Elders only has been re-introduced at Communion services and fermented wine is again in use.

It is still an active church and organisations formed in the immediate post war years still flourish and provide pleasure and relaxation for its members. The annual soiree, so long a feature of non-conformist churches, has disappeared, and the Sale of Work has been replaced by a Gift Day, which brings in a greater income for less work. The ladies of the church, who have inherited in full measure the catering skills of their forbears, feed the populace at the annual Alnwick Fair in June, by providing lunches and teas in the Northumberland Hall for a full week. The task is enormous, but so well is it organised that it is carried out with apparent ease, and raises a large sum of money, now an essential part of the church's income.

Of all the churches in the town, St. James' has undoubtedly the finest and most commodious accommodation for social purposes, and the church halls are kept in excellent repair. In recent years a new gas heating system has been installed in the upper hall and a similar system is now contemplated for the church. We must not be too complacent however, for we are never quite sure of the stability of the east wall.

As in former days the church has never lacked those prepared to give devoted and willing service in office, yet the

gaps left by those who predecease us are never quite filled. We remember the genial kindly smile of John Beacom, Session Clerk and Church Secretary for over 30 years; and we miss too, William Crosier, Herbert Riley, W. Haddon, Robert Guthrie, John Gerrard, Reginald Blackmore, Roger Robson, David Graham and George Middlemiss.

As we approach the ter-centenary date, the church has become a hive of industry and the congregation is united in a feeling of thankfulness and pride as we prepare to celebrate this great event. We have seen great changes in the course of time, but strangely these have made little difference. It is still the same St. James', still our own well loved church. It has stood the test of time; it is a good church, a friendly, welcoming church. May it always have for us and others its special charm.

And so we come to the year of our Lord 1989. It is time to pause and look back over three centuries of faithful witness and give thanks for our great heritage. This history is inevitably a record of small things, of the small trials, the small victories, which tell the story of our church's life. Yet the true history will never be written for it lies in the countless unrecorded courageous lives of those who have gone before, who have fought the good fight and kept the faith. May we who follow, inspired by its teaching, so uphold our church's reputation that St. James' may long be a hallowed place, where men may come to seek and find the eternal truths.

*"Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace,
God of our Fathers be the God,
Of their succeeding race."*

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