

St. Mungo's Church, West Linton

A Short History

of

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Original prepared July 1951, this copy of the original document made May, 2006

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St. Mungo's Church began in a simple way. An extract from a writing of John Ord Mackenzie, Esq., of Dolphinton, dated 25th July 1851 says: "*We had no clergyman at our Chapel last Sunday and a large party went to the opening of a small room in Linton which Mr Forbes has got fitted up as a schoolroom on weekdays and a place for the performance of the English church service on Sundays.*" This seems to be the origin of the Episcopal Church in West Linton.

This accounts for the peculiar architecture of St. Mungo's which runs from north to south, instead of east to west. The first idea seems to have been to build a schoolroom. Some time later the idea was changed to building a separate school at the foot of the brae, and to transform the building at the top into a church. The chancel and belfry were added. St. Mungo's Church came into existence.

There is no record of the date of the consecration of the church, but on the 8th of January 1857 the Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway preached in the church. It may therefore, be assumed that the consecration took place on that date.

The old register of Baptisms dates from 1851, begun by the first incumbent, the Rev. F. Woodward, who officiated at the first baptism in connection with the church on September 14th 1851, but the first baptism recorded in the register to have been in the church is January 18th, immediately after the visit of the Bishop. A wedding in 1852 was solemnised in a private house, showing that the building was not functioning as a church solely until about 1857.

Mr William Forbes sprang from a church building family. He was the eldest of the three sons of Lord Medwyn who, in 1814 had purchased part of the Slipperfield Estate. About 1845 Lord Medwyn became interested in the work of Dr. Alexander, who had built a mission school in the neighbourhood of Carrubbers Close in the Old Town of Edinburgh. From this mission school grew the present St Columba's Episcopal Church in Johnstone Terrace, *"through the means of Lord Medwyn and others for the benefit of the then unsheltered folk of the Old Town and for the defence of the Scottish Liturgy."*

The second son of Lord Medwyn was Alexander Penrose Forbes, the saintly and scholarly Bishop of Brechin. *"The memory and results of his devoted work are still green in Dundee, where, as a model bishop, a hard-working parish pastor, and a public minded citizen, he was respected by all classes of the community."* He also was a builder of churches. He was responsible of the building of St. Paul's Cathedral Church in Dundee and several of the smaller churches in that stronghold of Episcopacy.

The third son of Lord Medwyn, The Rev George H Forbes, built St. Serf's Episcopal Church in Burntisland, in the Diocese of St. Andrews. Therefore it was natural and inevitable that the eldest brother of the family should build a church in West Linton.

William Forbes of Medwyn was a big man in many ways. Six feet three inches in height, in physical appearance he was not unlike Mr.W.E.

Gladstone, statesman and devoted churchman, to whom the Episcopal Church in Scotland owes so much by his insistent calls upon the landed gentlemen of the Episcopal Church to build churches on their estates, known today as "Gladstone Churches", one of which is St. Mungo's, West Linton.

Buchan in his History of Peebleshire has this to say of William Forbes. *"It is to William Forbes that the present and future prosperity of West Linton as a health resort is due. The lands were treeless and were practically a stretch of rough heather. But at great financial sacrifice he expended large sums in draining and reclaiming his property with a view to bringing it into a state of cultivation. He planted an enormous amount of timber."*

That timber, with nearly a century's growth behind it, may be seen, and its splendour enjoyed, in the popular Cat Walk which runs from the path behind the post office up and through the woods and coming out behind Lynedale House. No other community in Scotland has such a beautiful setting for its games and fair days as West Linton. It is largely due to William Forbes of Medwyn.

In order to guarantee the stipend of the incumbent to the extent of £100 per annum, Mr William Forbes and his family gave £2000 which, invested, has largely maintained the living for seventy-three years.

In addition to building the church Mr Forbes built a school which stands at the foot of the brae by the river side. It was the only Episcopal Church School in Peebleshire. It had the capacity for about sixty scholars with a mistress and a staff of teachers. A Minute from the Sederunt Book says: "At a meeting of the managers held at Medwyn on this date, August 17th, 1908 it was unanimously agreed to ask the sanction of the Scotch Education Department not to re-open the school on September 15th, and to give notice to the teachers of the termination of their engagement.

The Managers were moved to take this step on the following grounds:

1. The decrease of the number for children on the roll, owing to repeated removals of families from the district.
2. None of the present pupils' parents belong to the church and therefore not having any particular attachment to the school as a church school there was a certain prospect of further withdrawal, when the new school provided with the latest educational equipment, and now in course of erection, should be opened. Although government grants have been very far from sufficient to meet the expense of carrying on the school, this in itself would not have led the managers to take the action proposed, especially as changes in, and additions to, the buildings and furnishings had been completed less than a year ago at considerable expense.

But the reasons given above seemed to the managers to point exclusively to the advisability of closing the school on their own initiative, which they did with very great regret, remembering the good and faithful service, on a religious foundation, rendered by the school to the community for more than fifty years."

The school remained the property of St. Mungo's until 1928, and was used as a recreation room. It was then sold to the West Linton Bowling Club.

Mr William Forbes maintained his active interest in St. Mungo's Church, as lay-representative, chairman of the vestry, secretary-treasurer of the congregation and patron until 1889. He died in 1891. A lasting memorial to his character and service is found in the strikingly beautiful window on the south side of the church. It is a Kempe window, the best of the stained glass art of that period. The inscription reads: *TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND GIVING THANKS TO HIM FOR THE HONOURED MEMORY OF WILLIAM FORBES, OF MEDWIN, WHO DIED MARCH 12TH, 1891.* His Friends, Relatives and Neighbours dedicate this window.

After the death of William Forbes, his son, John Houblon Forbes,

became patron of the church and charge for a further thirty years, until 1926, when the Medwyn estate was sold, and the family leaving Scotland to live in England. Thus the Forbes family maintained its influence over St Mungo's for a period of seventy-five years.

An extract from the Sederunt Book reads:-

"To John Forbes Esq:

"The Rector, Office Bearers and Members of St Mungo's Episcopal Church, West Linton, and while realising that, having left Medwyn and residing in London, you find yourself no longer able to continue carrying on the Patronage of this Incumbancy, and the offices connect therewith, so ably and so conscientiously carried out by you and your Father in thedesire at this time to place on record, in the Sederunt Book, as also to express to you, personally, their sincere regret at your demission of these offices, and your departure from West Linton. Also to express their deep sense of gratitude, for your unceasing care, with which you and your family have watched over the interests of the church and congregation in the past, _that you and yours will ever be held, in the days to come, in their affection and esteem.

"On behalf of the said office-bearers, vestrymen and members of the congregation.

"L.S. CAMPBELL COLQUHOUN

"Rector

"9th December 1928"

With the exception of two all the memorials in the church are dedicated to members of the Forbes family. The three beautiful stained glass windows, two of them Kempe windows, are dedicated to William

Forbes, to his wife, Mary Anne Forbes, the smaller window in the East, and to Louisa, the second wife of Sir James R Ferguson, of Spitalhaugh, the window in the Sanctuary.

The blue plaque is dedicated to John Houblon Forbes, his daughter Dorothy, and his sisters, Elizabeth and Helen. St Mungo's Church is a lasting memorial to the Forbes family and the house of Medwyn.

The brass tablet behind the lectern is dedicated to the Rev. William Fancourt, M.A., who was rector of the church and minister to the congregation for 25 years, leaving behind him a fragrant memory of a man who went about doing good, because he was a good man.

The brass tablet behind the rector's chair in the chancel speaks for itself, reminding us of the tragedy of war.

*"To the Glory of God and the dear memory
of James Adam Hamilton
son of Sir James R Ferguson, Bart. of
Spitalhaugh
Born 22nd March, 1892
Killed in action at the Battle of the Aisne
20th September, 1914."*

It is interesting to learn that before the building of St. Mungo's there was a private Episcopal Chapel at Dolphinton House, Dolphinton, built by a member of the Mackenzie family, Mr Richard Mackenzie. His son John Ord Mackenzie and his family attended St. Mungo's church in turn with their attendance at their own Episcopal Chapel at Dolphinton. Kenneth Mackenzie, son of John Ord Mackenzie, served on the vestry for many years, and now his son, John Moncrieff Ord Mackenzie, is rector's warden at St. Mungos to-day and in turn his son Richard Windham John Mackenzie is one of the younger members of the congregation.

Other notable Episcopalian families living in the parish at that time were the Brodies of Whim, the Fergusons of Spitalhaugh, the Beresford – Hopes of Macbie Hill, one of whom, Alexander J. B. Beresford-Hope gave the beautiful Communion Set, used to-day, the Nichols of Netherurd, besides a number of business men and tradesmen with their families living in West Linton and the neighbourhood. Several of these friends of St Mungo's helped to furnish the church, the Communion Set already mentioned, the first lectern Bible by Elizabeth Hume, the first Altar Book by the Rev. George Forbes, the younger brother of Mr. William Forbes.

In its one hundred years of history St Mungo's has had sixteen incumbents – F. Woodward, 1851; William Minniken, 1852-53; William Y. Moir, 1853-56; William Stephen, 1856-58; Walter Bell, 1858-67; James Hicks, 1867-73; John T Raymond, 1873-75; George Charles, 1876; David Preston, 1877-81; William Fancourt, 1882-1907; J.S. Begg, 1907-13; Percy Young, 1913-21; M.E. Carrington, 1921-26; L.S. Campbell-Colquhoun, 1926-29; A.B. Caird, 1929-44; J.R. Kennedy, 1944 – present rector.

Among prominent laymen who supported the church in their day and generation not the least was Professor Hannah of Whim, whose son is rector of St. John's, Selkirk. To his memory the family presented the Lectern Bible now in use.

In the Children's Corner hangs the strikingly beautiful painting known as 'The Madonna of the Candleabra' by Raphael, a contemporary copy by one of his pupils. It was gifted to St. Mungo's by Lady Constance Erskine, who purchased it at the sale of Miss Dorothy Forbes' pictures in 1941. The picture used to be in Medwyn House which Lady Constance so often visited. She and her sister, Lady Francis Tufnell, were specially fond of the painting, and are delighted that it has found a home in St. Mungo's.

Lady Constance Erskine and Lady Francis Tufnell are sisters of the present Earl of Mar and Kellie. Their mother was the eldest daughter of William Forbes of Medwyn. Both are generous supporters of St. Mungo's.

What of the present and future of St. Mungo's? It is as strong to-day as it was a hundred years ago. With the exception of the Mackenzie family of Dolphinton, the older families have passed on, either by death or removal. The old connection with Medwyn House is maintained by Miss MacGregor and Mr & Mrs MacGregor, Spitalhaugh is maintained by Mr J. Roger Orr and his family. New estates have been founded in the district by incoming families, several of whom are staunch Episcopalians. Amongst the business families in West Linton no family has served St Mungo's more loyally than the Walter family. For two generations they have served on the vestry and provided an organist for the services. And no history of St. Mungo's could be truthfully written without mention of Miss 'Minnie' Low, the oldest member of the congregation, the members of whose family have kept the church clean and sweet for sixty years; Mrs Laidlaw and Miss Mary Morris of Blythbridge.

The Mungo's has been aptly described as:

The smallest church
The highest steeple
The largest parish
The fewest people.

The Episcopal Church in Scotland has grown steadily, if slowly. Her members number 160,000 and her communicants 60,000. They are under the care of seven bishops and about 330 clergy. Each of her seven dioceses possesses a cathedral, and although the number of her members is small when compared with the total population of Scotland, she looks forward, with faith and courage that have been well tested during her history, to the future that is one day to dawn for the eventually reunited Church of Scotland.

July 1951

Retyped only May 2006