

St. John the Baptist Scottish Episcopal Church Perth



**A short History
of a worshipping community
by David Willington**



Foreword by the Rev. Patrick Grant

St. John's is very grateful to David Willington for having written not only this short history of our church but having undergone an epic task of producing a full history of our church and community. Few other churches will have benefitted from such a rigorous analysis of its history. St. John's has a long and proud history of service to the Perth community and is also unusual in its conception. We are the descendants of both the Jacobite Episcopalian community that was ejected from St John's Kirk in 1689 in the fight for superiority and status as the Church of Scotland and also of an English Chapel that grew to serve both the County and the growing English presence of administrators sent to settle the Highlands.

Today St John's is in the midst of another reformation. Our current building, built in 1850, is being restored and remodelled to serve the needs of a twenty-first century community while maintaining the best of our heritage. Our restoration plans are centred on mission - how can we best reach out and serve our community with the skills and talents that are available to us.

I am delighted to say that we are an inclusive community, open to all. All members may receive communion from baptism and we welcome people of all traditions or none to worship with us. Our style is "middle of the road", we treat both sacrament and scripture seriously. We seek to accommodate as many as possible in our wide selection of services, centred on a revised 1982 service book but also including BCP Holy Communion, Matins, Evensong and a contemporary all age worship "Alive for Christ" including Eucharist. On the third Sunday we include a special service for Healing in the 10.30 Eucharist. We operate a weekly crèche and 153 Club for older children (including Godly Play), while also providing opportunities to serve and sing in our choir, together with a good welcome and social in our Threshold (Church Hall). Our St John's Fellowship meets weekly during term as does our buggy club for parents and toddlers. We have regular opportunities for teaching and there is always a way to get involved or just "be".

I am very proud to say that we are the home of SARAC the Scottish Association of retired Anglican Clergy and host our local Orthodox congregation. Both signal our intent to be there for others and not just ourselves. I hope you enjoy our history and I look forward to seeing you at worship.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ST JOHN'S CHURCH

Early days

The Reformation was a turbulent period in Scotland's history. At that time, the only church in Perth was St John's Kirk. John Knox preached there in 1559. Despite the advance of Presbyterianism over the next decades, Perth and the north east of Scotland remained predominantly Episcopalian, in the hybrid form encouraged by King James VI. But in 1689, William of Orange declared that Presbyterianism would be the official religion of Scotland, and Episcopalian clergy were ousted from their



churches, ministering to their faithful congregations as best they could in meeting-houses. Although the Toleration Act of Queen Anne (1712) provided some relief, many clergy still adhered to the Jacobite cause. After the Jacobite Rebellions in 1715 and 1719, Episcopalian priests were harassed; they were not permitted to officiate to more than six people, besides their own family, unless they took an oath of loyalty to King George I. The Revd **Henry Murray** was forced to leave Perth, but returned in 1722 and continued to officiate in private houses and rented premises until his death in 1735. His assistant and successor, the Revd **Laurence Drummond**, was in poor health and the managers of the congregation appointed a young priest, the Revd **Robert Lyon**, in 1739, who, owing to Drummond's infirmity, undertook most of the work.

At that time, Episcopalians were divided between two factions. 'Usagers' pressed for greater use of liturgical forms following the *Scottish Prayer Book* of 1637, since there was no longer any need to conciliate Presbyterian opinion. 'Anti-Usagers' wished to maintain the practice that obtained before 1689: apart from the Creed, Doxology and the Lord's Prayer, worship should be generally *ex tempore*, after the Presbyterian

manner. The managers of the meeting-house had taken insufficient care to ascertain Lyon's views on this controversy, and they soon became alarmed when he introduced more liturgical forms of service, and advocated private confession, which was mistaken for popish practice. Despite offers to mediate by Bishop Rattray, the managers evicted Lyon in 1740 and appointed an extreme Anti-Usager, the Revd **George Sempill**, who officiated without license from the Bishop. Lyon and his congregation were forced to rent other premises for worship.

When Bonnie Prince Charlie came to Perth in 1745, Lyon became an enthusiastic Jacobite. Believing that the Stuarts would repeal legislation hostile to the Episcopal Church, he followed the Prince into England as Chaplain to Lord Ogilvy's Regiment. Later he wrote: 'I never bore arms, for this I thought inconsistent with my sacred character.' Lyon was denounced by George Millar, the Town Clerk and a fervent Hanoverian. After Culloden, Lyon was captured, and executed at Penrith on October 28th, 1746.

After the '45, the penal laws against the Episcopal Church became harsher. Any priest who officiated without having taken the oaths required by law and praying for King George could be sentenced to six months imprisonment for a first offence, and for a second, be transported to the plantations of America for life. A 'meeting-house' was defined as a place where five persons over and above the household were assembled for purposes of worship'. In 1748 it was enacted that no Scottish priest, whether he took the oaths or not, was allowed to officiate, unless he had Letters of Orders granted by bishops of the Church of England or Ireland. The previous year, George Sempill had been arrested and sent to the Tolbooth in Perth. His diminished flock, which also faced penalties merely for attendance at worship, were cared for by the Revd **George Innes**. As the years went by, persecution of the Episcopal Church diminished, particularly after the death of Prince Charles in 1788. Innes, who had endured long years of poverty and persecution with steadfast courage, died in 1789.

The 'English Chapel'

'English' congregations began to appear in Scotland after the 1715 Rebellion. They repudiated the authority of the Scottish Episcopal Church and placed themselves within the Church of England, despite the fact that it had no jurisdiction under the Act of Union, 1707. Having taken the oaths of Abjuration and Allegiance, their clergy were 'qualified' by law. In Perth, the 'English' congregation, formed after the arrest of George Sempill, worshipped in the old Parliament House, where Marks and Spencer's now stands. The Revd **A Wood** officiated from 1750 to 1754 and was succeeded by the Revd **John Cameron**, who departed for America in 1770. His successor was the Revd **Adam Peebles**, who served until his death in 1804 at the age of sixty-three.

Three months after Prince Charles' death, the bishops of the Episcopal Church resolved 'to pray *nominatim* for the present King George and his family'. The Relief Act passed through the House of Commons three times before the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow, relented in his opposition to it in 1792. It was a further twelve years before the practical difficulties of reconciling the schismatic congregations were largely resolved. In Perth, however, the Episcopal congregation worshipped in Balhousie Castle, and the 'English' congregation had acquired a site in Princes Street in order to build a chapel. The owner, Col. Mark Wood, sold it for £70 on condition that only the services of the Church of England should be performed. The Chapel, in the neo-classical style, was built in 1800. The congregation was augmented by the presence of local lairds and the Earls of Mansfield and Kinnoull, who exercised great influence. As a vacancy had occurred in the Balhousie congregation, Peebles' successor, the Revd **Robert Fenwick**, was encouraged by the Bishop of Dunkeld to unite the congregations, and twenty-one came over to the English Chapel with the expectation that it would unite with the Episcopal Church. However, the lairds prevailed and Fenwick was dismissed. The Vestry appointed the Revd **Horace Skete**, an English cleric, in his stead, and he continued in office until 1846.

An organ was installed in the English Chapel in 1808, probably the first in Perth since the Reformation. During the eighteenth century, clergy wore the black gown of a Presbyterian minister, but Mr Skete often wore a surplice. On one occasion, when conducting a funeral, he was pelted with stones; surplices were considered to be a symbol of Popery. The congregation numbered about 120 and consisted of lairds, professional men and gentlefolk of Perth and the surrounding district. They paid rent for their pews at a guinea (£1.05) or half-guinea a year for an individual sitting. The poorer classes were excluded. English regiments were garrisoned in Perth, and when the railways, with English workers, reached Perth, the number of those requiring Anglican services increased. But the Chapel continued to be in schism with the Episcopal Church, and no Confirmations took place for many years. But in 1840, led by John Grant of Kilgraston, many of the congregation desired reconciliation with the Episcopal Church, though this was opposed by some influential members of the Vestry, including the Earl of Mansfield.

Reconciliation with the Episcopal Church

Mr Skete died on Christmas Day, 1846, at the age of sixty-eight, and was buried in Greyfriars behind the church. There was an interval of several months before the Revd **George Wood**, from the diocese of Durham, was appointed. During that time, the opinion of learned counsel was sought as to the legal status of the Chapel and the Vestry, which had acted as a self-perpetuating body. In a pastoral letter, Mr Wood indicated his support for submitting to the jurisdiction of the Bishop, declaring that if it was denied, he would 'seek for some other employment in my Master's vineyard'. After two meetings of the congregation at the George Inn, and a postal ballot, 108 voted for reconciliation, and only 17, including the Earl of Mansfield, against. In 1849, a Deed of Reconciliation was drawn up by Patrick Torry, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, and signed by Mr Wood and members of the Vestry. So the English Chapel became 'St John the Baptist's Episcopal Chapel', and the schism, which had begun in 1740, was over.

The building of St John's



St John's looking to the East End 1880

In order to accommodate the growing congregation, it was decided to build a new church on the same site. Money was raised from subscribers. The congregation moved into a chapel in Kinnoull Street offered by the Perth Presbytery, and demolition of the Chapel started in September 1850. Construction of the new church was completed by June 1851, at a cost of £2,451. The architects were the Hay brothers from Liverpool, who had built a number of Presbyterian churches. The design was criticised in High Church circles, in that it did not follow the traditional Anglican pattern of nave, chancel and sanctuary, and it does not have the elaborate decoration of some contemporary churches, such as St John's, Alloa. The Consecration took place on October 22nd, 1851. It was conducted by Bishop Terrot of Edinburgh, standing in for the aged Bishop Torry. Fourteen clergy of the diocese were present, including Charles Wordsworth, the Warden of Trinity College, Glenalmond, and the future Bishop of St Andrews. After the ceremony, and Morning Prayer and Holy Communion, there was lunch at the Royal George Hotel. Evening Prayer was conducted by Dean Torry, the Bishop's son, and over thirty candidates were confirmed by Bishop Terrot.

In 1853, a constitution for the church was drawn up. The Vestry was still a self-perpetuating body, though for the first time the Incumbent was permitted to attend and preside at its meetings. However, he was excluded from discussion of financial affairs. Despite the increase in provision of seats for the poorer classes, they were excluded from General Meetings of the Congregation. It was laid down that it was to be

'a place of Public Worship in which Divine Service shall be performed and the sacraments administered in the form and manner set forth in the Liturgy of the United Church of England and Ireland and not otherwise'.

Mr Wood resigned in 1855 after a dispute with the Vestry. The Revd **William Blatch**, formerly the Incumbent of Pittenweem, was appointed and under him the congregation flourished. By 1871 it numbered 650, the largest congregation in the diocese, and was very active in good works in the city. In 1857, once the debt on the building of the church had been paid off, a larger organ was installed, and a parsonage in Marshall Place purchased for Mr Blatch. He had a heavy workload, and 1875 secured the services of



*The Rev. William Blatch
Rector 1855-1879*

Dr **Francis Carl Weiss**, a curate in Crieff, who had been a Lutheran pastor. Mr Blatch's health was poor and after several attempts he obtained the living of Hanford in Staffordshire, to which he retired in 1879 after twenty-four years service. There was no regular pension for clergymen at that time, and as a token of their esteem, the Vestry granted him £100 a year for life, a singular honour.

St Andrew's Chapel and School

Charles Wordsworth had become bishop in 1853, and was enthroned in St Ninian's, the new cathedral. But he soon fell out with the Chapter over the matter of ritual, the Cathedral being High Church, and worshipped at St John's for ten years. He considered that St John's was becoming too exclusive, as not enough was done for the poorer classes, and founded his own Chapel and School of St Andrew, near the railway station. When he departed for St Andrews in 1876 he left the Chapel and School to the care of St John's, which involved considerable expense over the years. In 1879, when Dr Weiss became the Incumbent, it ceased to be a Chapel. After a series of unfavourable Inspectors' reports, the school was closed down in 1900 and the site sold to the Caledonian Railway Company.

The later nineteenth century

During Dr Weiss' incumbency, a new constitution was drawn up, which provided for annual meetings of the congregation, and elections to the Vestry. In 1890, a new organ, by Harrison & Harrison of Durham, was installed on the west wall of the church. In the same year, all incumbents were given the title of Rector. Dr Weiss was, unfortunately, given to strong drink, and he was sacked by the Vestry in 1892, and left without a pension or prospect of further employment. In his stead, the Revd **Henry Armstrong Hall** was appointed, an Englishman. In 1893, a new Rectory was purchased at 6 Dupplin Terrace, which remained in the church's hands until it was sold in 1991. Armstrong Hall was an excellent preacher, but he offended many of the congregation by his superior ways, his neglect of parish duties and frequent absences. He resigned in 1898 and eventually became Archdeacon of Richmond.

The Vestry chose the Revd **Charles de Labilliere** as Rector over many other applicants. He was twenty-nine years old. He has been a curate in London, and later became the grandfather of Lt. Gen. Sir Peter de la Billiere. Shortly after coming to Perth, he experienced a conversion to Evangelicalism and set up a Pentecostal League. His style of preaching offended many of his congregation and, after a dispute with the organist and a showdown with the Vestry resigned, and obtained a living in Birmingham.

The twentieth century

After three Rectors, two English and one German, who had in various ways fallen foul of their flock, the Vestry turned with relief to the Very Revd **Vincent Rorison**, the Dean of the Diocese. He came from the heart of the Scottish Episcopal Church. His father had been the Incumbent of Peterhead, and he himself had been Incumbent of Forfar and then Provost of St Ninian's. During his time there, the Cathedral had been completed with the building of the nave. At St John's, he revived the congregation, which had fallen off during the late incumbencies, and

despite financial difficulties built the present north porch of the church. In 1910, he was diagnosed with cancer and died in August of that year.

Despite the troubles of two world wars, and the difficulties they caused, St John's enjoyed a tranquil period under the long Rectorship of the Revd **George Vallings**. He was born in 1867 and spent his early life in India. He had been Chaplain at Loretto School, Chaplain to the Forces in Hong Kong, and latterly Rector of Lochgilphead and Canon of Cumbrae. In 1913, a new constitution for the church was proposed, which involved changing



New furniture including the rood Screen and Rectors Prayer desk were imposed on a small chancel in the 1920's

the stipulation that only services of the Church of England be used, and transferring the trusteeship of the church from the Provost of Perth and the Advocate Depute of Perthshire (the arrangement in 1802) to the Bishop, Chancellor and Registrar of the Diocese. However, determined opposition by some older and influential members of the congregation brought this to nought, the historical 'English' element prevailing. The constitution was not brought up to date in accordance with general practice until 1963, when, incidentally, women were admitted to the Vestry for the first time.

In April 1915, Canon Vallings was summoned to act as Chaplain to the Gordon Highlanders, who were largely drawn from the Episcopalian north east. Every year, he returned from France to keep in touch with the congregation, and for his war service he was awarded the DSO with two bars, and was made a Canon of St Ninian's. During the war, an organ chamber was built on the north east corner of the church. The Church Hall at 54/58 Princes Street, which had previously been rented, was purchased outright in 1932. During WW II, the building was requisitioned by the military. By 1946, Canon Vallings was seventy-nine years old and

he retired the following year. His Rectorship was the second longest on the church's history. His regular congregation of 450 remained faithful in attendance and giving, despite the exigencies of two world wars.

He was succeeded by the Revd **Lionel Derrick-Large**, an Irishman. The Parish Magazine, *Quest*, was revived, and covenants were introduced for church subscriptions. The south Transept under the gallery was enclosed and converted into a War Memorial Chapel, and was dedicated on Remembrance Day, 1951. The Church Hall, which suffered from dry rot and other inconveniences, was substantially rebuilt in 1963. The final abolition of pew rents, which had first been proposed in 1929, took place in 1963, as a consequence of the change in the constitution. The name plates were removed. In 1965, Mr Derrick-Large preached at Aberdalgie in the Stewartry of Strathearn, and in return the Minister of Dupplin and Aberdalgie, the Revd Dr J Fraser, preached at St John's, the first Church of Scotland minister to do so. Mr Derrick-Large was, however in poor health and died that same year.

The Very Revd **Thomas Thurstan Irvine** was trained in England. In 1940, he became Precentor of St Ninian's Cathedral and later Rector of Bridge of Allan and Rector of Callander. He was appointed Dean of the Diocese in 1959 and Rector of St John's in 1966. His duties as Dean required some absences from his charge, and a succession of young priests were brought in as curates. During his Rectorship, the church was much preoccupied with the purchase of a new organ (1971), again built by Harrison & Harrison, which was erected against the west wall of the church. Great changes were afoot in worship and Liturgy at the time. Communion was shared with members of non-Episcopal churches. As an experiment, on occasion, a sung Eucharist was substituted for Matins. Lay members began to administer the chalice. Various drafts of the Eucharist were tried by the Episcopal Church, and in 1982, the Blue Book was produced, which is still in use.

Another matter which dominated the 1970s was inflation. Could Perth sustain two Episcopalian congregations, at St John's and St Ninian's Cathedral, when rapidly increasing costs imposed great strain on resources? Lengthy consultations ensued between the church and the cathedral, about shared ministry and shared services. A joint Vestry was

established, but agreement was never reached as to the scope of its authority and the talks ran out of steam. During the Recession of the early 1980s, when the Revd **Fergus Harris** became Rector (1983), discussion was resumed, but came to nothing. St John's was determined to carry on as an independent congregation. As Fergus Harris observed at the Annual General Meeting in 1988, 'The two Episcopalian congregations in Perth complement each other in a number of ways and are certainly not in competition'. Fergus Harris had trained for the ministry at Yale Divinity School in Connecticut and Westcott House, Cambridge. After a curacy in St Andrews, he became Chaplain to Edinburgh University and, in 1971, Rector of St Peter's, Lutton Place, Edinburgh. For a time he was Chairman of the Perth Civic Trust.

From 1988 to 1990, he shared a team ministry with the Revd **Bruce Cameron**. He had held youth and university chaplaincies, and a shared ministry at Livingston. He was sole Rector of St John's from 1990 to 1992, when he became Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, and later Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church (2000).



He was succeeded by the Revd **Robert Fyffe**, a graduate of Edinburgh University. He became Youth Chaplain for the Diocese of Bath and Wells in 1983 and Provincial Youth Officer for the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1987. He was appointed Rector of St John's in 1993 and continued until 2006. During his Rectorship, the church hall was sold and the ground floor of a property adjacent to the church, once a public house, was acquired – the 'Threshold'.

After an interregnum, the Revd **Patrick Grant**, the current Rector, was appointed in 2007. Previously, he had been a valuer in scientific and medical instruments for Christie's in London. He trained at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, and was Vicar of St Michael's with St Paul's, South Beddington and Roundshaw. There are ambitious plans afoot for the re-ordering of the church, and it is hoped that the removal of the large (and over-powerful) organ will be the first step in rendering the church fit for twenty-first century ministry and worship.

A GUIDE TO THE MONUMENTS IN THE CHURCH

North Porch:

Window The small window is given in memory of Frank McKinlay, father of Miss Barbara McKinlay, retired dress-maker's assistant. She died in 1980.

Bell The church bell was acquired from Killin in 1972.

North Wall:

Plaque in memory of Selina, daughter of Sir Thomas Moncrieffe. Sir Thomas was a prominent member of the Vestry and subscribed £100 towards the building of St Johns in 1850.

Plaque in memory of Thomas Thurstan Irvine, Dean of the Diocese of St Andrews, and Rector 1965-1983.

Plaque in memory of William and James Ross, writers (solicitors). Both men acted as Treasurer and Secretary to the Vestry for many years.

Glass goblet This was presented to the church by the Revd and Mrs William Glazebrook. Designed by Rev William Glazebrook.

Banner See explanatory notice.

East End:

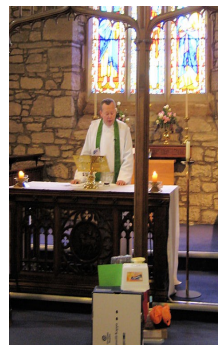
Plaque in memory of Vincent Lewis Rorison, formerly Provost of St Ninian's Cathedral, Dean of the Diocese of St Andrews and Rector 1901-1910.

Altar Rails These were designed by the Perth Architect AG Heiton and given by subscription in memory of Dean Rorison. They were dedicated at Easter 1911.

Pulpit The Pulpit dates from 1851 and is of Caen Stone. The panels, which depict scenes from the life of John the Baptist, were added in 1872. They are the work of Miss Mary Grant (1830-1908), daughter of John Grant of Kilgraston. She was one of the pioneers among women to take up sculpture professionally. Among her ecclesiastical works are the figures in the porch of Lichfield Cathedral, the Reredos in St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh and the statue of Isaac Walton in Winchester Cathedral.

Chancel Arch (or screen) This was erected in 1920 in memory of Misses Isabella and Mary Archer, who had both taught at the Sunday School for over fifty years.

East Window This was given to the church by Lt. Col. Murray Belshes, Laird of Invermay, in 1853. It portrays, on the left of the Christ, St John the Baptist, on the right, St John the Evangelist. It is not known who the artist was.



Altar This was given by Mrs Ross of Belwood, in memory of her husband, William Ross, who died in 1926. It was consecrated in 1929.

Cross This was given by General Woolcombe in memory of his son Charles, who was the first member of the congregation to be killed in WWI.

Candlesticks These were given in memory of two choirmen, Robert Young and Charles Menzies, who were killed in WWI.

Rector's Stall This was given by Mrs Helen Watson in memory of her husband, James Watson of Inchyra, who died in 1893.

Plaque in memory of George Ross Vallings, Rector 1910- 1947.

Plaque in memory of Archibald Sandeman, sometime Professor of Math-

ematics and Natural Philosophy at Owen's College, Manchester. He was a generous benefactor of this church and of the City of Perth.

South Wall:

Lectern This was presented by the Earl of Airlie when the family chapel at Cortachy was dismantled in 1951.

Lady Chapel The south transept under the Gallery was enclosed and converted into a War Memorial Chapel. It was dedicated on Remembrance Sunday, 1951. Above the door is a plaque in memory of Commander RA Vallings, son of the Rector GR Vallings.

Tapestry The tapestry of the Lamb of God, the symbol of John the Baptist, was embroidered and given to the church by Mrs Jean Bean.

Plaque in memory of Col. Thomas Peebles. His father, the Revd Adam Peebles, had been Incumbent of the English congregation in Perth 1770-1804. This plaque was originally erected in the English Chapel, which preceded St John's on this site (1800-1850).

Moncrieffe Window This was given in memory of Rosemary Moncrieffe (1935-1960), wife of Captain David Anstice, who died in childbirth.

West Wall:

Font The font, originally in the central aisle of the church, was given by an anonymous lady at the building of the church 1850-1851.

Organ This was built by Harrison and Harrison of Durham in 1971. In 2011, it was sold and replaced by a digital organ.

In the porch under the organ are two windows in memory of the Revd Lionel Derrick-Large, Rector 1947-1965.



Christmas Nativity 2010



Regular social events including seminars



The Rt Rev Richard Holloway Guest Preacher Good Friday
2010

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