

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Rev. Alexander H. MacKenzie, 17th January, 1987
Cumbernauld (Minister Kirkpatrick Fleming 1945-54?)

l.c.
By telephone 17th January, 1987, having 'phoned him earlier to give him time to prepare his thoughts. Much of his talk concerned his other Churches, but was important in so far as Mr. MacKenzie is part of the parish history, his outlook and life in general must be considered relevant. Although he disclaimed any great learning, his talk was liberally laced with quotations from Milton and the scriptures to illustrate points. I found many of his descriptions quite graphic, which again is in apparent contradiction to the view, both from himself and the recollections of others, that his strength lay in pastoral work rather than preaching.

He was author of the 3rd Statistical Account for Kirkpatrick Fleming, and says that his account must survive somewhere. (The published volume appears to contain the reports in an edited form.)

Since Mr. MacKenzie was Minister, the whole interview logically falls under the standard heading of 'Church'.

The Glebe
Controversy
1947-48

The first thing he talked about, and with feeling, was the controversy over the glebe which did much to sour his ministry at Kirkpatrick Fleming.

There were two glebes, the outer and inner glebe, comprising about twenty two acres in all (5 inner, 17 outer, he thought). The Caledonian Railway had cut through the glebe, the station being on church property, so that a rent had always been paid for it to the Trustees of the Church. The ground was generally let out, at very low prices in view of the depressed state of agriculture before 1939. When Mr. MacKenzie went to Kirkpatrick Fleming the lease was held by a Mr. Irving whose son had (later?) a garage in Dumfries. Mr. MacKenzie thinks Irving had had it before the War. The five acres near the manse were good land, but the outer glebe was naturally marshy, poor land. It was almost entirely surrounded by Jim Connell's (Newton) land, and Jim Connell wanted to buy it, although Tom Irving wanted to keep it. And this brought the controversy.

Jim Connell was a Glasgow man, which perhaps was to tell against him. (Mr. MacKenzie was from Glasgow/Clydebank area). He was a very good friend to

Mr. MacKenzie - indeed judging from the 'phone call I'd say Jim Connell and Jim Irving of Shawrig were his closest friends in the parish. In confidence, Jim sounded out the Minister about the possibility of purchasing the land. Mr. MacKenzie said he had no personal objection, and - as requested - kept the matter in confidence, which he now thinks was a mistake, for he should have informed the session at once, but he was in an awkward position and at the time thought he was doing the right thing.

Jim Connell then wrote to the General Trustees, who consulted Mr. MacKenzie and, having received his advice, recommended the sale of the land. Annan presbytery agreed to the sale, but in the meantime Tom Beattie, Session clerk and County councillor had objected. At the next Meeting of Presbytery Jim Irving - presbytery elder - said that the sale would cause some displeasure in the community, the agreement was overturned, and Tom Irving (a big burly man) got to keep the lease.

In the circumstances Mr. MacKenzie thought Presbytery was probably quite right, and he remained on friendly terms with Jim Irving, but he felt bitter and angry towards Tom Beattie - and obviously never completely got over it. This was partly because of the circumstances in which the dispute occurred. After seven years of marriage his first son was born and was due to be baptised that Sunday. The Minister's cup of happiness was running over - and then, that very day, Tom Beattie accused him of bribery and corruption.

It was the custom for the Session to meet before Communion to discuss arrangements. They would then have a prayer and go into church. At this time Tom Beattie reminded the minister it was time for prayer, but the minister 'blew his top', in his own words, and said there will be no prayer until we're in church. Tom, he said, 'would aggravate a saint from heaven', and was a trouble maker at presbytery. He'd begun as a ploughman, became a very hard working farmer, suffered from a bad heart and was a bundle of nerves. His wife was nice.

Mr McKenzie remarked that he'd always tried to base his life on his mother, and not to take offence, on the grounds that if the minister doesn't act as peacemaker you can't expect anyone else to. But Tom Beattie

too, he greatly liked - a very lively person - a great personality who loved children.

Also on the Session was John Mackie of Redhouse, who lived with his two maiden sisters. In this context he remarked that because the Session were nearly all excellent dairy farmers, he started to read the agricultural pages of the 'Glasgow Herald', and later amazed his fellow ministers in West Lothian by being able to price a herd of cattle at £60 the head.

Then there was Mr Graham of East Scales, a delightful person, lame, no relation to Jenny and Bessy Graham. It was Bessy who first showed him round the manse.

John Graham, the beadle, was a largely self-taught man with an enormous fund of knowledge. He'd left school at 14, but could tell you the different rotations in all the farms round about., and could quote lots of Biblical texts. He worked with Mr Graham (above) at East Scales. He started story - 'He shook me one day' - and then got diverted into talking about his knowledge. Presumably it was some aspect of biblical or church knowledge that shook. John Graham was a very keen carpet bowler, and was on the Hall committee, of which McKenzie was chairman.

Later he reverted to Molly and Annie Mackie, Bessy and Jenny Graham as stalwarts. Mr Hodgson told him about the quarries. Mr Rogerson, 'an awfully fine chap': he thought his wife had served at Mossknow before his marriage. (I have a note here 'Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna' - in a Rogerson context). Across the road lived Mr Burnett, 'a very nice man'. He also recalled Jack Burnett - but the Mr Burnett he knew best would be his father.

The first names he mentioned in the interview were the two organists, David Johnstone, and Mrs Collinge, daughter in law of the painter.

Church Life

The service was fairly routine - just the usual Church of Scotland service.

He could not remember a Bible Class, but he himself took the Sunday School. There was no Parish magazine because of the paper shortage.

When he applied for Kirkpatrick Fleming there were 37 applicants. Eventually it was reduced to a short list. He heard later on the grapevine that most of the Session were very keen to get ~~a minister who was on the~~ one particular minister who had connections with

with the Department of Agriculture, and it was half-suggested to him by the interim moderator (I think Pollock of Gretna) that he should withdraw, but, he said, 'the common people heard him gladly', which I take to be a biblical quotation. Anyway he got their votes. He'd been happy to stay in his previous position, Papa Westray, but his wife was homesick. Quite a number of applicants were better qualified than he.

He couldn't remember whether church weddings had yet come back into fashion.

One of the parishioners he remembered was the oldest man ever in his charge, a shepherd who belonged to Eskdalemuir but lived with his daughter in Kirkpatrick Fleming, - a wonderful man - in a wee croft where he planted potatoes the year before he died aged over 99. He had a very short funeral service, it being a time of great cold (He'd be talking about the terrible winter of 1947).

Another parishioner mentioned was old Mrs Davidson, who lived towards Cranberry.

He remembered the erection of the War Memorial at Toppinghead. Mr Graham of Mossknow spoke about how they should be sad, yet proud, and Mr McKenzie spoke too. Bessy Graham went all round the parish and gave presents to all who had come back (A little doubt about this). There was also, he thought, a fancy dress parade for children (which seemed an odd celebration for a war memorial). No memory of procession to War Memorial.

It was said that Druids used to practice outside where the church is.

There was a good choir. He remarked that the Thursday night choir practice was a good chance for teenagers to meet. It wasn't clear whether this related specifically to Kirkpatrick Fleming.

There were some 230 members. Only at Communion was there an evening service.

The manse thrilled him. Someone had planted boxwood hedges. The garden was enormous, a lovely piece of grass in front, with rhododendrons. One day Jim Connell got him a £6 lawnmower as a present. It was the joy of his life. After Orkney it seemed to him a beautiful warm house, with big windows that let in the sun. It seemed like 'tropical Africa'.

