

Notes of interviews with Duncan
Adamson, 1987, researching for
Kirkpatrick Fleming. On the Borders
of History.

Rev. ERIC DUNCAN, Stirling

I telephoned Mr Duncan, who was minister 1938-1944, in order to make an appointment, but he spoke for an hour. In a sense everything was about the church, but he obviously considered that the big thing was the Honduras lumberjacks, which presented a tremendous Christian challenge. Since this has elsewhere been listed under 'Economic', I have decided to adhere to the headings used in other interviews.

School Among the elders he listed Mr Doull - then a young man, who died many years since (someone else thought he was living in Ayr).

He himself later taught RE at Aberdeen Grammar School, and was founder member and president of RE teachers association.

Sport etc He was on the Hall Committee, but during the war many things were discontinued, such as the annual children's picnic. He was at only one, in the summer of 1938 (I wonder if he meant 1939?).

The tennis courts had gone by the time he arrived.

Church British Honduras - see Economic

He talked about the missing old church records,

Records which went quite some way back were there when he went, but he couldn't find them when he left.

Like Mr Mackenzie (whom he never met), he cycled from farm to farm.

He was installed in December 1938, Mr Fyffe having committed suicide in May. No-one knew why he had done it, and at the time no-one knew he was unhappy, though afterwards some felt that there had been signs to be seen. Naturally Mr Duncan heard a lot of talk and theorising about it. That very evening, I think, Mr Beattie, the Session Clerk had visited him (the phone crackled at this point, but that is what I took him to have said). His sister rushed to Mr Davidson, tenants of Kirkpatrick House, for help - the Davidsons and Fyffes being good friends. I mentioned Ann Graham's story about a throat operation, but he'd never heard it before.

There was no Parish Supplement in his time.

When/

When he was inducted in December 1938 the Session Clerk was Tom Beattie, who was to prove a very good friend. Some found him hard to deal with, a very canny man - 'You had to -'. But then he changed what he was going to say, so we can only guess at what you had to. All this was given unsolicited - it was only after he'd said the above that I mentioned Mr Mackenzie's difficulties with Tom Beattie. He then remarked that he found him increasingly difficult as he aged, which he noticed when he used to visit him in later years.

He then mentioned the other elders, given below in the order he mentioned them:-

Rogerson, Williamsfield; Elliot, Hillhead (which he knew had become Davidson of Hayfield); Doull (seeschool); Mark Simpson the blacksmith; Mr Burnett; Jim Mitchell, who left while he was minister; and Robin Irving, whom he keeps up with, now in Canonbie in his mid 80's - his wife Agnes Burnett died recently.

He then added Halliday of Flosch to his list, and later mentioned Jim Irving, Mr Hall and John Lamont. He knew the Hallidays very well. Milly Halliday worked as a maid at the manse, and married George White who died 2 years ago. Mr Duncan's eldest son, now a lecturer at Stirling University, used to go to Flosch for holidays, and his daughter visited the Irvings of Nutberry. The Irvings had no family. When he first knew them they had only a small farm.

Mr Hall lived in the Eaglesfield direction. John Lamont was what people would have called a 'manse man' - devoted to the church, had helped look after the manse, probably at one time beadle, and no intellectual. He died while Mr Duncan was there.

His beadle was an awfully nice young man who lived about Irvington, John Graham - a 'gem' for whom he'd tremendous respect and affection, a man with 'an innate sense of dignity'. At one point he had to stay off work for a while because of a nervous breakdown brought about by depression, but he got over that, did a lot for the church, where he became a leading figure and ultimately an elder.

His first child, his son, was delivered in the manse by Dr Smith in Annan who became a personal friend. So when their second was due, although he'd left Kirkpatrick Fleming he arranged that Dr Smith would again take charge. They got a little house in Annan run by a retired woman from the maternity hospital, and there Audrey was born in 1945. Their third child was also born in Annan.

He had had contacts with German students at university, which probably helped him to get the World SCM job. He stayed in London until he could go to Geneva, where he worked from 1945-47. After a temporary job he got St. Margaret's, Dunfermline where he ministered for 10/11 years until 1960 he took up teaching at Aberdeen Grammar School, where he became friendly with Bob McNay. Judging from noises off stage his wife is still alive and well.

Economic The most traumatic episode was the death of the Gretna minister and about 14 others in the Gretna bombing - although it was outside the parish. The main thing within the parish was the coming of the lumberjacks from British Honduras. It upset some of the people in the parish quite a bit, and although there was no outright opposition, some felt they shouldn't be there. Others, by contrast, rallied round. Mr Duncan himself was against any racial prejudice, and tried to help. There were at least 2 camps, one at Duns and one at Kirkpatrick Fleming. Unfortunately the government department responsible had failed to anticipate any recreational needs. Huts, beds, food and work were provided, nothing else. They had nothing to do in the evenings - and that soon led to trouble.

They arrived, all flapping in white shirts, in beautiful September weather, probably in 1941, possibly 1940. Within 4 weeks the weather had changed dramatically for the worse, many of them had 'flu, against which they had no protection or experience, and the idea spread amongst them that they had been brought over to die. This caused tremendous trouble among the 100 or so inmates of the camp. To make things worse some could hardly speak English. But they were expert lumberjacks, for Belize was then a major timber importing centre. Wood was needed for the war, and potential local cutters were all away in the forces.

In the end the Colonial Office were asked to help, and they had much more understanding of the problem. They contacted the YMCA, whose acting general secretary, Prof. Forrester of St. Andrews came down to meet Mr Duncan and some others. The upshot was the arrival of David Carmichael, a Portpatrick man who had worked with the Polish army and was appointed Recreation Officer. Finally he was also put in charge at Duns. Not only was he tremendously successful, but it was the making of his/

his career for after the war he was taken on by the Colonial Office to work in Ghana to do with student grants, and later was to do with choosing teachers to go abroad.

One Sunday morning the Recreation Hut was burnt down. Some of the least desirable girls inevitably began to make for the camp so that multi-coloured babies began to appear - although he could remember specifically only one, at Toppinghead. There was a tragedy one night following a whist drive at the hall, attended by some campers as well as the locals. A Mrs Goldie left to go home, and one of the more responsible Hundurans said he'd accompany her. On the way they were both knocked down by a lorry and killed.

I asked him, but he had no recollection of Americans ever coming to Kirkpatrick Fleming, and he suspected Jack Burnett's memory was at fault. They stayed only 2 years before being sent to cut in the Highlands where there was a lot of trouble over their playing football on a Sunday.

Most of the Kirkpatrick Fleming young men were exempted from military service because they were needed on the farms. He knew of only two deaths of which Irving Wallace was the one that affected him most, because when he first came to Kirkpatrick Fleming he had lodged with Nat Wallace at Newton until the manse was ready. Irving was then at school, after which he worked in the Carlisle railway office until he was called up. When on leave he used to visit Mr Duncan, who was on holiday when he heard that Irving had been killed (He said it was after he left Kirkpatrick Fleming, but I understood he was killed on the Normandy beaches, and E.D. handed in his resignation in June 1944, just about the time of D Day). He didn't know the other boy so well. He was the son of John Crossan, the station porter. Crossan was quite a character. He'd lost his job as signalman on the Dumfries-Lockerbie line as a result of his passion for snaring rabbits. One day the train was kept waiting for an hour while John, who'd forgotten all about it, was pursuing his hobby. So they sent him to Kirkpatrick Fleming as porter. Mr Duncan thought his son might have been a nominal Roman Catholic. He was killed early in the war.

Personal On retiring Mr Duncan took an M Litt at Stirling University, specialising in the attitude of the Scottish Enlightenment to slavery. He studied Francis Hutcheson, who was the first to mount an intellectual attack on Aristotle's support of the institution. He also studied Hume and Miller

