

King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, 1500 – 2000

edited by Jane Geddes

Aberdeen: Northern Universities Press, 2000,

paperback, ISBN 1 902653 19 X, 303 pages, b/w illustration and 14 pages of full colour illustration, price £28.50.

The Monastery & Abbey of Paisley

edited by John Malden,

Paisley: Renfrewshire Local History Forum, 2000,

paperback, ISBN 0 9529195 7 5, 251 pages, b/w illustration and 14 pages of full colour illustration distributed through the text, price £15.00.

Those familiar with *The Annual* of the Church Service Society (1928-1970) will remember the invariable feature of articles on churches, often focusing on the restoration of a building or the re-ordering of its interior, reflecting changing patterns and understandings of worship. The first number of *The Annual* included an article on Paisley Abbey, just as restoration reached the point of the rededication of the choir on 1st December 1928. An historical article on King's College Chapel appeared in *The Annual* 11 (1938-39). Ecclesiological articles took on a greater significance following the winding up of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society in the 1960s. The Church Service Society continued to publish a number of illustrated articles on ecclesiological themes in *Liturgical Review* until the inflationary costs of printing dictated changes from 1977. Professor Bernard Reymond's centenary lecture on architectural and theological meanings of reformed worship buildings, published in *The Record* no 34 (1998), is the only recent example of the publication of ecclesiological material.

Both books are lavishly illustrated and relate to well attended and successful conferences, each using a talented group of scholars from different disciplines: history, history of art and of architecture, heraldry, etc. The books illustrate the work and use the historical writings of members of The Scottish Ecclesiological Society, an ecumenical group of ministers, architects, craftsmen and others, who sought to improve the context of the worship of their day through the study of church buildings, their history and furnishings, and the relation between worship and architecture. Scottish Ecclesiologists were involved in scholarly work on, and nineteenth and twentieth century

restorations of, both buildings. A.R. Howell, minister of the second charge at Paisley Abbey from 1918, would give his 1936 Presidential Address to the Scottish Ecclesiological Society on 'Paisley Abbey: Monastic and Reformed'.

The Monastery & Abbey of Paisley, published by the local History Forum, includes the proceedings (with supplementary material) of a conference held in the autumn of 1999. The editor, John Malden, arranged for contributions from scholars based locally, in Glasgow and across Scotland, and even in London, drawing together current knowledge and scholarship on Paisley Abbey: its history and special place in the Cluniac Order, the architecture, shrines and sculpture, the heraldry, stained glass, music and surviving documents. A major stimulus leading to this re-assessment was the rediscovery in 1991 of the late medieval drain. Careful specialist examination of finds includes: food, medicinal and other plants sieved from samples in the debris removed from the drain during excavation, a rare group of lead seals used for quality control in the medieval cloth trade, and slates, one inscribed with a fifteenth century love lyric. Two irregular fragments of slate bearing incised musical symbols, which may have been used for mid-fifteenth century chorister training, provide evidence of polyphony in Scotland earlier than the Carver Choirbook begun about the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Apart from the slate finds the only direct contribution to our understanding of worship at the Abbey is by George McPhee, Organist since 1963. There are only tantalising glimpses of the musical life of the Abbey in the Middle Ages. In 1253 an organist named Ambrose signed a document in Paisley and *The Abbey Rental* refers to 40 shillings from the Kirk land of Neilston paying for choristers 'to sing to the glory of God in the chapel of the Blessed Mary'. The Earl of Arran made a payment in 1545 to encourage the bairns of the choir. Information is provided from the late eighteenth century onwards about choirs, the succession of organists and the 1872 Cavaille Coll organ and subsequent work to it in 1928, 1968 and 1998.

A number of glaring proof reading errors do not diminish the achievement of the book. For example Charles Eamer Kempe, the English Victorian stained glass artist, is correctly spelt (with a final e) in the index and on page 111, but is mis-spelt twice on page 108 and again on page 113. The minister involved in completing the restoration of the choir, Alexander Rutherford Howell, is given correct initials on pages 173, 175 and 180, but is incorrectly

given as A P Howell in the bibliography (page 1) and on pages 122, 123 and 210. It is irritating not to have a contents page for the illustrations, which is a useful tool in the King's College book. The serious student will rejoice at the inclusion of microfiches of *The Paisley Register* and *The Abbey Rental*. All involved in the production of the book are to be congratulated for attracting sufficient funding to make it relatively affordable.

Photographs allow study of a selection of the early twentieth century carved stone bosses in the roof of the choir, usually hard to see properly, even with the benefit of the mirror on wheels provided at the Abbey. It would have been helpful to include a diagram and some information about the context in which the work was begun by Glasgow architect Dr. Peter Macgregor Chalmers and completed by Sir Robert Lorimer. Urgent work at Glasgow Cathedral had been successfully completed before the effects of the 1914 war on the world stage delayed the progress of the restoration of Paisley Abbey. The Glasgow District of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society visited Glasgow Cathedral in March 1913 to examine the recently carved wooden bosses in the renewed choir roof. On the central ridge 'certain of the more striking events in His life', to the south 'the Miracles of Christ', and to the north 'Emblems of His Person and Redeeming Work' (*Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society*, volume 4, part 1, 1913, xx and 103). Two months earlier government architect W T Oldrieve (who had joined the Scottish Society 1905) had lectured to a joint meeting of the Glasgow Institute of Architects with the Ecclesiological Society about work identified in 1909, started in May 1910 (once Parliament had voted funding) and finally dedicated in December 1912. J Jeffrey Waddell, senior assistant to Macgregor Chalmers, had written to the *Glasgow Herald* about the scheme in July and December 1912.

Howell (*The Annual* 1, 1928-29, 62) clarifies the role of the two architects in the restoration of the Paisley choir. 'Unfortunately he [Macgregor Chalmers] did not live to see the completion of what he rightly regarded as his greatest achievement. But the walls of the new choir had been erected, and the vaulted roof, with its elaborately carved bosses, has been completed according to his plans. Dr Macgregor Chalmers was succeeded by Sir Robert Lorimer, who has been responsible for the final stages.' A letter dated 22 October 1913 from Macgregor Chalmers to Alexander M. Maclean (minister of the first charge at Paisley Abbey 1910-25) outlines his plans for an integrated scheme of carved stone roof bosses to be placed in the restored choir. He indicates one

possible depiction of scripture, and the way in which those who see it should be led 'inevitably' from one incarnational reality to the next:

The bosses of the ceiling should have a central idea -/
surely, the Life of Christ – ... illustrated/
on either 6 or 11 bosses .../

... The [central] Boss A/
over the Communion Table (East end) might be The Christ in Glory/
and the four C Bosses [surrounding the central A boss] might be the Four Evangelists/
with their Symbols. .../

.... each/
picture should be anticipated by the cultured beholder -/
I would like such pictures to be inevitable – you know all/
that I mean ---/

King's College Chapel, Aberdeen 1500 – 2000, published for the University of Aberdeen, with contributions by scholars based locally and throughout Scotland, is divided into two sections with individual chapters on worship, architecture, furnishings, heraldry, paintings, silver and stained glass. The first section examines the building of the chapel with its original furnishings, and the worship and music for which it was designed. Highlighted is an unique range of surviving early sixteenth century artefacts including a contemporary portrait of the founder Bishop William Elphinstone (on a painted wooden panel) and the wooden choir stalls and rood screen and Bishop Stewart's pulpit, originally set up in St Machar's in the 1530s. The second section is devoted to the period from the Reformation to the 500th anniversary on 2nd April 2000. An excellent bibliography includes the many plans, drawings and photographs held by Historic Collections of Aberdeen University. Strangely there is no reference in text or bibliography to the short article on the history and worship of the chapel in *Annual 11* by Professor G D Henderson (President of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society 1937-38). There is plentiful black and white illustration, and vivid colour full pages include heraldry on the exterior of the chapel, and a selection of the stained glass, demonstrating every phase of the work of Dr Douglas Strachan.

Enough archival information survives to give a good picture of late medieval worship in the chapel until 1569. A team of 6 (originally 4) choir boys and 8 priests, including Cantor and Sacrist, was responsible for maintaining the cycle of daily and weekly chapel services. 7 services were sung each day from Matins and Lauds at 6 am to Compline at 6 pm, with a daily solemn

high mass and additional masses for the souls of alumni and benefactors. Members of the academic community, teachers and students, would take part in Compline daily and mass on Sunday and on the great festivals like Christmas and Easter. The chapel was one context for the use of Scotland's first printed book, the *Aberdeen Breviary*, published in two parts in February and June 1510. Part of Bishop Elphinstone's liturgical reforms, it brought new liturgical festivals from Europe into Scotland and added some 81 Scottish saints, including the patron saints of all the Scottish cathedrals and Northumbrian saints who had Scottish missionary connections, but reduced the number and significance of Anglo-Saxon saints from the Sarum use.

John Harper places the music of the chapel in the context of colleges, chantries and household chapels throughout Britain. Elphinstone's desire to raise the standard of singing is indicated by the emphasis placed on the Cantor's teaching of choirboys and students with bursaries. Priests and boys positioned in stalls around three sides of the choir, the organ placed on the rood screen above, allowed for the elaboration of a liturgy of word and song rather than ceremony and procession. The basic sound during worship would be plainsong chanting (psalms, prayers and scripture, etc), and only on special days or at special moments the more elaborate sound of polyphony and of the organ. Music and musicians since 1891 are described by the Director of Music and University Organist, Roger B Williams. A curious modern link between the two places of worship discussed in this review is that an anthem for St Machar's Day, based on a text from the *Aberdeen Breviary*, was commissioned in 1997 from George McPhee of Paisley Abbey.

Former President Henry Sefton provides a typically focused and disciplined contribution on post-Reformation worship in the chapel. He discusses the provision by The Alexander Murray Bequest from the 1820s for a Sunday lecture in the College Chapel, Murray's will expressing the wish 'that this famous seminary would agree upon a form of public prayer and worship with or without responses and instrumental music.' Organ music was not introduced into the Reformed Church of Scotland until the nineteenth century, or King's College Chapel until the 1890s! Dr Sefton draws attention to the detailed, unresearched reports prepared between 1891 and 1918 by Sacrist Charles Dankester. University Chaplain Gillean Maclean describes the current use (2000) of the chapel by an ecumenical chaplaincy team for term-time daily and Sunday worship, the celebration of University occasions and

anniversaries, and for baptisms, marriages, memorial services and funerals for members of the university community.

By repeating the 1995 celebration of the mass for a strictly limited number of communicants an opportunity was missed at the 500th anniversary conference to enable everyone uniquely to experience medieval collegiate worship, with the performance of some authentic Scottish Renaissance music. Instead a packed chapel was invited to a truly medieval 'performance' of the mass, from which the majority in the building, unable to receive bread and wine, were excluded from full participation.

Neither book mentions the Scottish Ecclesiologists, a group committed to a collective programme, modified by denominational difference, without whose work neither book could have been produced. The King's College Chapel book is full of references to the work of scholarly founders of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society (1886), including architect A Marshall Mackenzie, as well as references to the work of later ecclesiologists like Monsignor David McRoberts and Dr W Douglas Simpson. The 1891 restoration by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson was pioneered by Principal Sir William D Geddes, who became a Vice-President of the Aberdeen Society, having joined in 1888. The preface cites the work of four historians whose work is developed by the book: two of these were ecclesiologists. 12 out of 26 chapters use the work, with occasional corrections, of Dr F C Eeles, who joined the Aberdeen Society 1895, and 13 chapters depend on the work of architect Dr William Kelly. In discussing the history of the architecture of the building, Richard Fawcett describes Dr Kelly's views as 'invaluable and highly perceptive', accepting many of them. Elizabeth Cumming sets the work of William Kelly in its proper Arts and Crafts context in her discussion of the World War 1 Memorial furnishings in the ante-chapel. William Kelly is described as 'largely instrumental in creating King's College Chapel as we know it today', and the prize-winning drawings of Dr James Cromar Watt illustrate the text and are noted in the bibliography. (Note the early drawings by another founder, Charles Carmichael (Kelly's brother-in-law) in the bibliography). Use is also made of the work of University Registrar Dr Robert Walker (who joined the Aberdeen Society 1886), University Librarian Dr P J Anderson and Town Clerk A M Munro (both Aberdeen Society 1887) and Lyon King Sir James Balfour Paul (Scottish Society 1903).

Paisley Abbey was restored by two ministers and three architects who were Scottish Ecclesiologists. The minister of the first charge who launched the

restoration scheme 1912, and the minister of the second charge who saw it through to its triumphant conclusion 1928 were both members. Maclean (Aberdeen Society 1894) had joined the Church Service Society 1889, and was Presbytery Correspondent while parish minister of Turriff from 1889 – 96, and Howell (Scottish Society 1909) had joined 1900, when he was at St Stephen's, Inverness. Rowand Anderson had joined the original Aberdeen Society in 1893, becoming a Vice-President of the Scottish Society. Two members of the Glasgow Ecclesiological Society installed stained glass windows: Stephen Adam on the theme of sin and redemption (1889) and Oscar Paterson on Faith, Hope and Charity (1908). Peter Macgregor Chalmers joined the Glasgow Society from its start in 1893, was a popular lecturer, and was deeply involved in the activities of the Scottish Society until his death in 1922. Robert Lorimer who followed him became a member towards the end of the restoration, but was less involved in the work of the Society than either Anderson or Macgregor Chalmers. Use is made of the work of 3 ecclesiological historians: Episcopal Bishop John Dowden and architect Dr Thomas Ross (who both joined the Scottish Society 1903 on the merger of the Aberdeen and Glasgow Societies), and the last President of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society, Professor Gordon Donaldson.

These books, accessible to a wide readership, are good for a casual dip and the enjoyment of lavish illustration. Both repay careful study of the story of the place or of the detailed arguments presented in each specialist area. In their different ways each collection of articles is a model of how to focus, draw together and present research on Scotland's medieval buildings. Our generation is made aware of the prayerful thought and practical ecclesiological endeavour of ministers, architects, craftsmen and donors in restoring and retaining great medieval sanctuaries for contemporary worship of God by today's people of faith and vision.

Tom A Davidson Kelly