The Church of Colinton Mains, Edinburgh

THE Church Service Society has departed from precedent in the choice of a church to be described in its *Annual* for the present year. It may appear to many readers that the selected building is altogether lacking in historical significance and those architectural qualities which would warrant its inclusion in a series of notable Scottish kirks. It has been selected out of the increasing number of post-war ecclesiastical buildings in order that attention might be drawn to the extent and variety of these. Being designed by a wide selection of architects there is inevitably great variety in Scottish churches of the post-war period, as shown in the booklet published by the National Church Extension Committee with that title. Each one of them has something noteworthy and original.

It has been noted with regard to the church of Colinton Mains, designed by Mr George Hay, A.R.I.B.A., of the architectural firm of Ian G. Lindsay and Partners, " that it is economically and functionally planned to suit the present day Reformed worship of the Church of Scotland. In its white harled walls, ample windows, slated roof and shapely tower, there is an effective combination of modern design and Scottish tradition ".

This church was built by Messrs Russell and Swanston, building contractors ; with Robert Bennie, joiners, Hugh McCallum, painters, Thomas Good, wood-carver, and other contractors. It was opened and dedicated by the Right Rev. Professor James Pitt-Watson, Moderator of the General Assembly, on 20th January, 1954.

The National Church Extension Committee has completed in the period 1948-54, fifty buildings, most of which are designated " Hall-Church ". The programme is by no means complete. It is now realized that the sanctified guess which Dr. John White made ten years ago at the launch of his appeal for a million pounds to build 105 churches, was right in the number of churches required to deal with the vast projected migration of people to suburbs and new towns. The varied architecture of these new sanctuaries will be seen throughout Scotland for many years to come. They are making their own contribution to our national life and ecclesiastical history. New records

are being made in rapid growth and the numerical strength of Sunday School and youth organizations.

Many difficulties have confronted the planners and builders of these new churches in the post-war period.

Shortage of Time.

All of them have been built with a compulsion of urgency that there was a clamant need for them to be finished and in use. At first mushroom growth of prefabricated houses, and latterly the increasing rate of permanent housing in large new areas, most of them at a distance from existing churches, made church building a matter of immediate concern. As Dr. John White was wont to say on his favourite topic of "edification": "No community is complete without a central house, the House of God, to change aggregations into congregations". It has been conclusively proved that the number of those claimed for the Church in a new area falls proportionately as the work is begun in the first, second or third year after the occupation of the houses.

Restriction in Material.

Immediately following the war there was a serious shortage of necessary building materials, notably steel and soft timber. These were only released on licence and in limited quantity. The licensing authority decided a starting date for each building. These restrictions were galling both to architects and builders, imposing limitations under which they felt they could not do their best work. They had to resort to the use of substitute materials, and the result was austerity building.

High Costs.

Rapidly rising costs, which are now four times what they were in pre-war years, have imposed certain radical modifications. In the interests of economy nothing but the simplest designs could be contemplated. This has revived in certain instances an older tradition of simplicity and economy which had to be practised in post-Reformation years, but which was not so evident during prosperous times when the more elaborate churches were built, following English and continental patterns. The contrast between immediately pre-war and post-war conditions is most marked. Whereas then it was possible to provide a whole suite of buildings in stone—church, hall, vestry, etc.—for

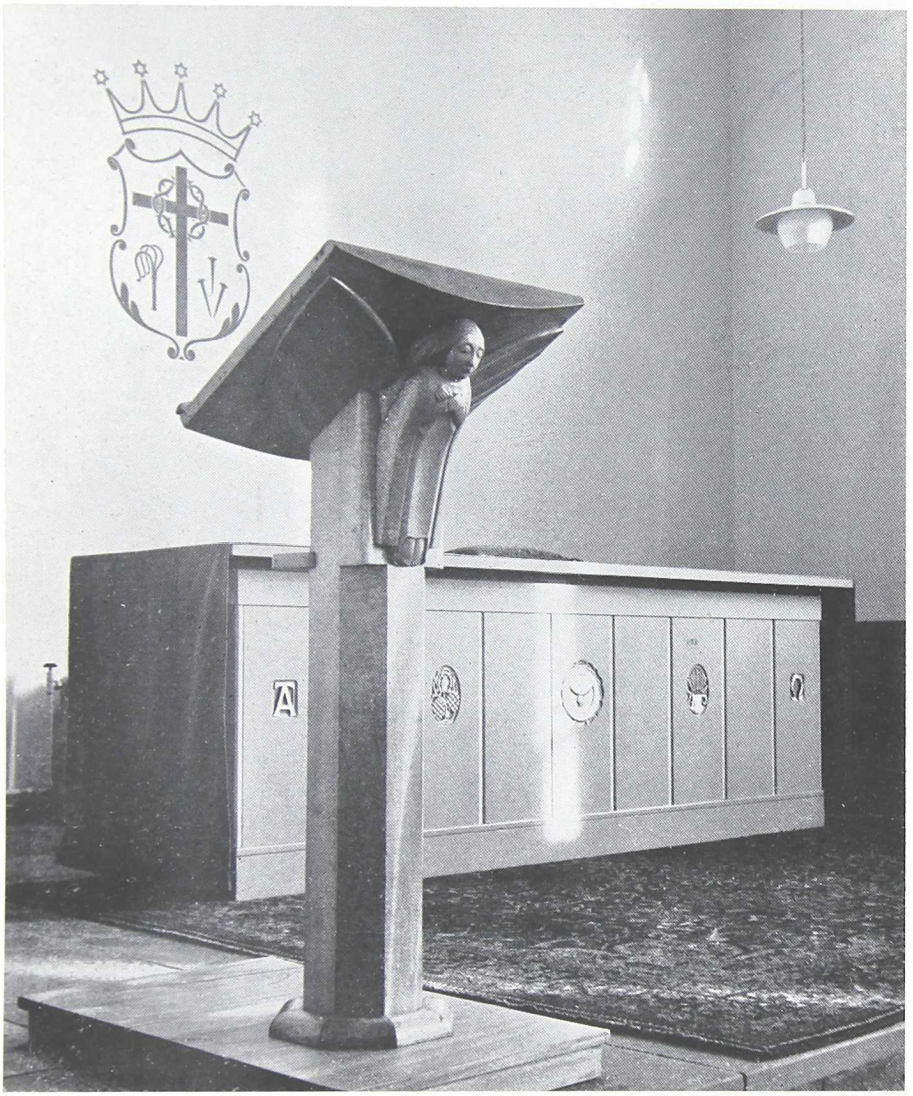
£10,000, now it requires double that amount to provide one building with two or three small rooms. The result has been the all-purpose building now called the " hall-church ". To provide one building which is equally seemly for worship and serviceable for week-night organizations has been well nigh impossible. The difficulties in several instances have been cleverly tackled by means of a moveable screen or adjustable platform. The all-purpose building, though by no means ideal, became a dire necessity. When the necessary adjustment is made and the inconvenience overcome, on the credit side it can be said there has been a re-discovery of a closer fellowship and more real relationship between work and worship. In the early Church Christians met in each other's houses for fellowship and worship. They still do in some housing schemes, but houses are not adequate to cope with the numbers of young and old who now look to the Church to provide for them socially as well as spiritually.

Vagueness as to what is required.

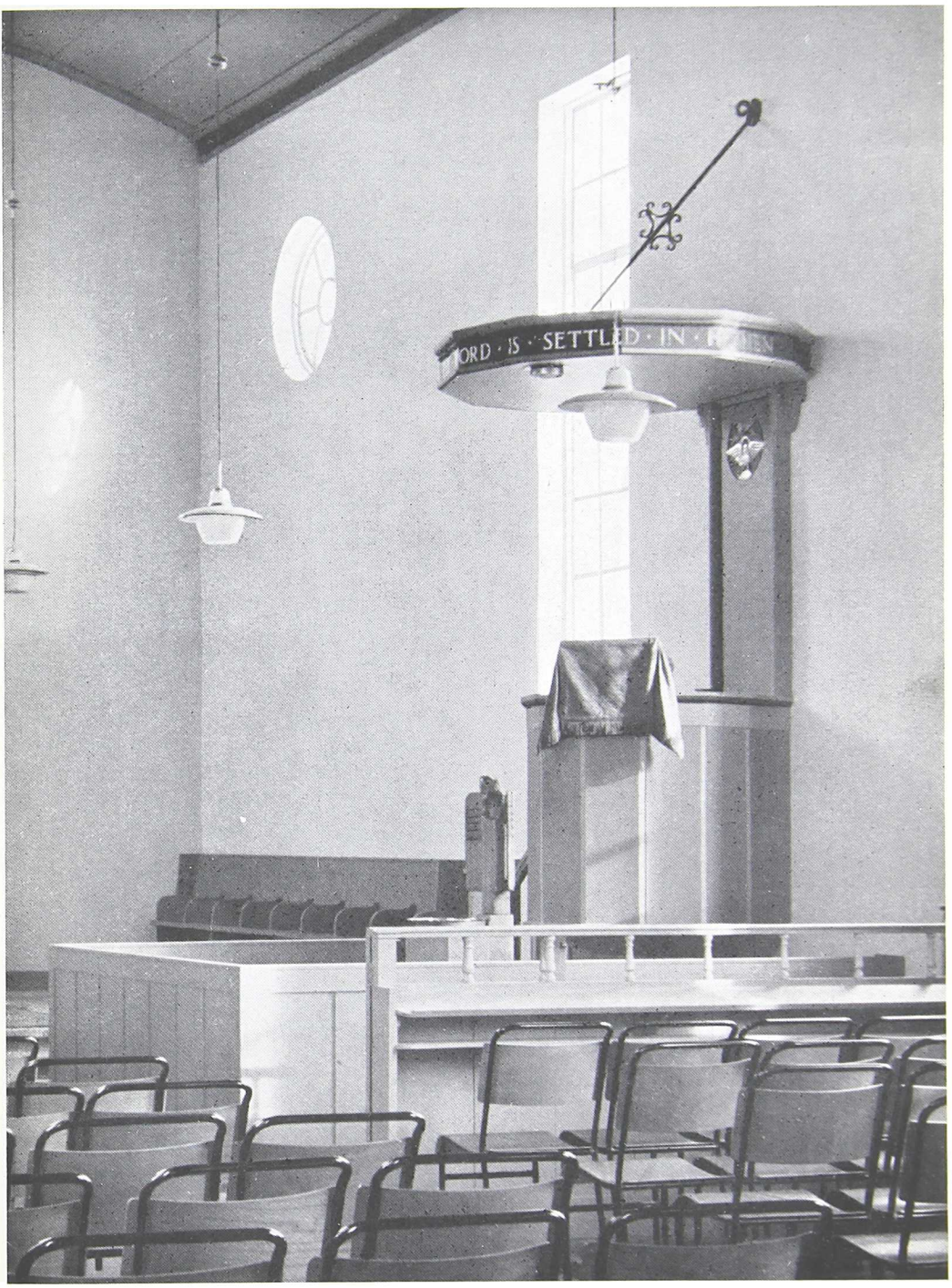
Dr. J. Arnott Hamilton at the beginning of chapter one of *The Principles of Church Design* writes: " The Architect, in formulating the plan of any building, necessarily first considers the function for which that building will be employed. It will be used for a definite purpose and he seeks to arrange the component parts in order that it may fulfil its aim in the most satisfactory way. The people for whose accommodation the building is designed must be enabled to use it with the greatest possible convenience and satisfaction. A church is an edifice for the worship of God in prayer and praise, for the proclamation of God and the exposition of His Word, and for the administration of the Sacraments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ".

When an architect is asked to plan a church in a new area there will be given to him a bewildering number of requirements. In connection with the planning of St. Nicholas Church, Sighthill—the Children's Church, to be built by money provided by children's offerings—an architectural competition was held. There was a large entry, and the question inevitably asked by some who examined with care the submitted drawings was this: How many competitors first considered the *function* for which that building would be employed ?

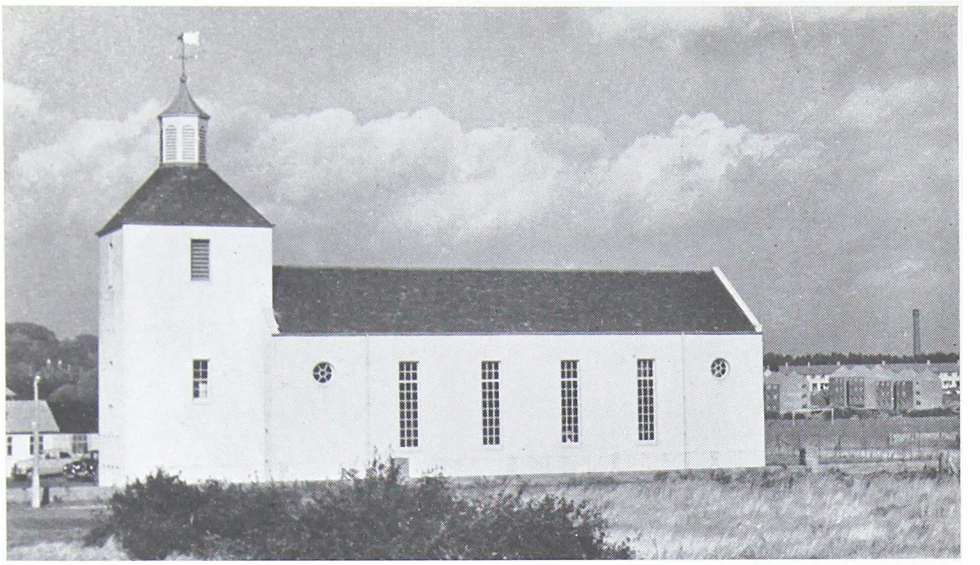
COLINTON MAINS CHURCH: THE INTERIOR.



COLINTON MAINS CHURCH: The Holy Table and Lectern.



COLINTON MAINS CHURCH: Pulpit and Font.



COLINTON MAINS CHURCH: EXTERIOR FROM SOUTH.

COLINTON MAINS CHURCH: EXTERIOR FROM WEST.

In the new housing area, where architectural standards are confused and sometimes sadly lacking, the church building has to set a standard. It has to proclaim its true purpose to the people around it and within it. To do so it has to be seen. Some churches are indistinguishable from the houses among which they are set. The church building should attract attention to itself. It should appear as the central house of the community. It should be conspicuous not by reason of its peculiarities but by reason of its genuineness, its grace, its demonstration of its true religious significance.

It can be claimed with some justification that these difficulties have been surmounted in Colinton Mains. Although the charge was formed in 1939 and attained full status as a parish in 1944, yet the foundation stone of the permanent church was not laid until December, 1952. Meanwhile a hut-hall which was erected in time for the induction of the first minister, the Rev. Kenneth Dunbar, on 15th September, 1939, was used for services, for organizations, and for all the varied needs of a new community, including child-welfare clinic and continuation classes. The temporary buildings have been twice enlarged to keep pace with growing numbers. Thus the start in building a much needed church was postponed until the more serious restrictions were removed. The standard of building is therefore much superior to that possible a few years previously. With the temporary building still available as hall accommodation it was possible to advise the architect to emphasize the church aspect and minimize the hall aspect of the new church-hall. About the same time the emphasis of the National Church Extension Committee moved in the same direction by stating that the hall-church might be regarded as the church of the completed suite of buildings and not as the hall. This meant that the hall-church could be initially planned more as a church than formerly.

External Features.

The design adopted by Mr Hay is a simple building economically and functionally planned in the Scottish tradition evident in Reay Kirk and others built at a time when good value for the money available was a deciding factor.

At the entrance to the church is the main gate, having on each leaf a St. Martin's cross, which is repeated at

intervals on the surrounding railings. The main door faces north; on the wall beside it, to the right, is the foundation stone, laid on Christmas Eve, 1952, by the late Sir John L. Falconer, formerly Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and representative for Colinton Ward. On the stone is a text inscribed: "Glory to God in the Highest". The door handles are in the form of a Sanctuary Ring.

At the west end of the building is a broad, square tower. The first storey is the entrance porch, the second storey is a small Session room, and the third is a belfry with louvre windows. On the top of the cupola is a weather-vane and saltire, picked out in gilt paint. This feature—66 feet in height—stands conspicuously above the surrounding houses.

The white, harled walls, the roof slated with Scots slates from Ballachulish, and the high rectangular windows with wooden astragals and small panes of clear glass, are typically Scottish.

The Interior.

There is a west gallery, and, reminiscent of some of our earlier Reformed kirks, a north aisle. These additions to the plain rectangle provide the maximum of seating capacity. It surprises the visitor to learn that this church can comfortably seat 425 people. Over the north aisle is a loft which accommodates choir and organ. The pulpit is set against the south wall directly opposite the north aisle and loft. Of traditional form but modern in treatment, it is decagonal, with panels in two shades of grey in keeping with the design of the Holy Table. The sounding-board is supported by an arm of wrought iron, and round it is inscribed the text included for the dedication of a pulpit in the *Book of Common Order*, and in the Order for the Dedication of Churches commonly used by the Church Extension Committee: "For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven". On the back board is carved a dove with two open hands behind.

Three steps lead to the chancel which is paved with Caithness flagstones and occupies the full width of the church. The Holy Table is prominent and of good proportions, being ten feet two inches in length and three feet four inches high. The panels are in two shades of grey. On the front are carved details picked out in colour. These are *Alpha* and *Omega*; bunch of grapes and sheaf of wheat; and in the central panel a chalice and paten in a monogram. The Holy Table is set on an eastern rug with Tree

of Life design, and upon it is a full-length runner of printed damask in blue, matching the pulpit fall. The Bible rests on a crimson cushion of stamped velvet. Elders' stalls are placed against the side walls and facing inwards towards the table, a most suitable arrangement for our Reformed Church worship.

The baptismal font and lectern were carved by Thomas Whalen, in accordance with previous plans made in 1939 but not proceeded with. They are of polished limewood with oak base and octagonal pedestal. Both include an angelic figure and reveal fine Scottish design and craftsmanship. They were the gift of the late H. B. Marshall of Rachan and his daughter, Miss Margaret Marshall.

The north aisle, pulpit, chancel and choir loft form a unit, with a capacity for over one hundred worshippers. The north aisle and galleries have pews. Chairs have been used in the nave, to allow of possible re-arrangement for classes, groups and other purposes. A low screen, with gates meeting in the middle of the centre passage, divides the east end from the nave. When either part is used separately a curtain may be fixed upon the screen. This division is not noticeable on Sundays when the whole church is being used. It is not possible, of course, to use both these parts for different purposes at the same time; but the screen helps toward a more seemly use of either part.

The plastered walls are white, and above a painted cornice the segmental main ceiling, panelled in acoustic boarding, is painted a golden yellow. The same colour is reproduced in the chains of the pendant lights, which are designed to shed light upward as well as downward. The effect, by day and by night, is that the interior appears light, roomy, colourful, and satisfying.

At the east end beneath a large rose window glazed with clear glass, there has been painted on the plain white wall in deep bronze the "Arms of the Passion" design, containing the cross, scourges, nails, crown of thorns and crown of glory.

GEORGE D. MONRO.