

The Scottish Churches in Holland

The Scots Kirk, Amsterdam

THE Scots Kirk in Amsterdam houses the oldest Church of Scotland congregation on the Continent of Europe. The building itself is much older than the congregation and is the third oldest ecclesiastical structure in the Dutch Capital.

In the year 1397 the nuns of the Beguine Order erected their chapel within the "hoffie" or courtyard around which they, and the women committed to their charge, lived. At that time the Courtyard was on the southern outskirts of the small fishing-place known as Amstelredamme. To-day that Courtyard is in the very centre of a bustling, noisy, modern metropolis. The calm of the Courtyard, however, has remained and at its heart still stands a place of worship, this one erected in the year 1458 to take the place of the original chapel of 1397 destroyed by fire in 1421, and the second building which was destroyed in the great fire of May 25th, 1452, which destroyed most of Amsterdam.

At the Reformation the 1458 building, containing within its structure many of the 1397 stones it is said, came into the hands of the Dutch Reformed Church and was used as a library for the New Church, Amsterdam's "Westminster Abbey". Control of the building was in the hands of the Burgomasters of Amsterdam and the Consistory (Kirk Session) of the New Church. In the year 1607 it was handed over as a free gift by the Burgomasters to the English-speaking Presbyterian congregation already formed and worshipping in the English tongue within the city.

How did there come to be such a congregation in the Amsterdam of 1607? In 1586 Queen Elizabeth of England had sent 6,000 soldiers under the Earl of Leicester to aid the Netherlanders in their struggle against the Spaniards. The three Regiments of the "Scots Brigade" were also under his command, and this famous Brigade remained in the service of the States General for nearly two hundred years. Naturally, many of our Scottish forefathers married Dutch girls and settled down in Holland to raise their families. A number of them settled in Amsterdam after demobilisation, and they seem to have been the founders of the 16th century English-speaking Reformed congregation. They

were joined by increasing numbers of English Puritans driven from home for conscience' sake, and by merchants from Scotland and England attracted to Amsterdam by its rapidly increasing prosperity and importance as a business centre.

On the 4th day of February, 1607, the Rev. John Paget, formerly Presbyterian Chaplain in the Scots Brigade, was inducted as the first minister of the congregation and preached for the first time in the congregation's own building from the text "Create in me a clean heart, O God". It is recorded that he was inducted by the Rev. John Douglas, Chaplain to the British troops at Utrecht, and in the presence of the Dutch ministers, the Rev. Petrus Plancius and the Rev. H. Lemaire. The first congregation numbered 68 souls. In the year 1662 the congregation had increased so much that an addition to the south of the original building had to be erected.

The archives of the congregation are complete from 1607, except for two burial books. The records make fascinating reading, recording as they do the religious and political life of Europe—and partly of the United States—over a period of three-and-a-half troubled and perplexing centuries. We read, for instance, of the Rev. Wm. Stodart and the Rev. Dr. Alexander McIntosh, the ministers of the day, along with representatives of the Kirk Session visiting the Duke of Plaisance, Governor-General during the French Occupation of the Netherlands, and later, the same gentlemen waiting upon the Emperor Napoleon himself during his visit to the City. An earlier visit had been made to King Louis Napoleon on 21st April, 1808. In 1666 the minister of the church, the Rev. John Maden, was in trouble with the Burgomasters for having prayed for the people of London during the Great Fire of London, the two countries being then at war! But during the days of French occupation and Anglo-Dutch wars worship in the English tongue was allowed to go on. It was left to the Occupiers of the 20th century to break the tradition for the first time. When the Germans occupied the Netherlands the church was first of all closed, and then taken over as a German naval chapel. The building was well preserved during this period and the only change made by the occupiers was the substitution of John Paget's first text, "Create in me a clean heart, O God", by the rather different one, "The Kingdom of God is not in word but in power". The assets of the congregation and its valuable and historic furnishings were saved for the

future by the courageous action of the Dutch Session Clerk, Mr C. J. Dhont, who got them from the building just before the Germans arrived and kept them buried during the occupation under the floor of his tobacco warehouse.

Come and have a look at the building itself. It is difficult to find, situated as it is in cloistered calm within the hubbub of Amsterdam. Enter from the Spui through a narrow close and descend some ten steps. Now you have turned back the clock at least five hundred years. Gone is the noise of the great town. You stand in the tranquillity of more than six hundred years of Christian praise and prayer. Walk forward a little towards a weather-beaten old stone pump and gaze at the warm red-brick square tower of our old kirk. All around you are ancient houses of the 15th. and 16th. centuries, occupied now only by spinsters of the Roman Catholic church. Behind you, hardly noticeable, is the present-day chapel of the 20th. century Beguines, two ordinary houses converted into a church in the days when they were forbidden to worship after their own fashion. Before each house there is a tidy fenced garden, resplendent in the spring with glorious Dutch flowers. The main area is lawn and, at the southern end of the lawn stands the Scots Kirk in Amsterdam with its tower and main door facing you at the West end of the building.

The tower is unique in Amsterdam, slender and square, its red bricks supporting a pointed and slated spire. Immediately above the door is the stone-carved figure of The Good Shepherd, the seal of this congregation. Right above that is a small four-paned round window, and then further up the tower the red brick face is broken and gives way to a pointed window of eighteen lights. The edges of the red tower are picked out in irregular courses with white sandstone blocks of varying sizes. The whole effect is one of dignity and yet country-like welcome. Indeed, many country folks dwelling in this great town prefer to worship in the quietness of the Scots kirk, which reminds them, in its locus and architecture, of the smaller and more intimate kirks of the farm lands and villages.

Walk up three steps, and through the open doors into the outer vestibule. This is dark and, apart from giving access to a tiny room on the left, leads only to another three steps, which bring you to the level of the church. Now we are in the inner vestibule, with its oak beams and grave-stoned floor. Under us and, indeed, all over the church

area Roman Catholic nuns and presbyterians, laymen and ministers were buried from the 14th. century until 1865. The entrance to the Consistory Chamber is from the right of this vestibule. If we look inside we shall be moved when we reflect upon the wall records in parchment and wood, giving the names and dates of every Elder and Minister from the beginning, in 1607. A man cannot stand here without being conscious of the great succession! On the Consistory table lies the 17th century inkstand complete with inkpot and sprinkler, all in pewter, the ivory Moderator's mallet lying nearby. In this room also is the wall safe containing the beautiful silver communion plate and ebony offering boxes of 1771. The purely English members of the 1607 congregation found Amsterdam too lively for them and moved on to Leiden. From there, in time, the majority of them decided on the great adventure of crossing the Atlantic, arriving eventually on the Mayflower and becoming known to history as the Pilgrim Fathers. That is why the claim was made earlier that our records, kept in this very room, cover some part of American history as well as European. It was in this room also that the Liturgical Offices used in the Netherlands Reformed Church for the administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons were first translated from Latin and Dutch into English, the work being done by the ministers of the day. These translations were accepted by the (Dutch) Reformed Church in the United States.

But let us hasten into the church itself. Back into the inner vestibule and now from there we come into the centre of Scottish worship in Amsterdam for three and a half centuries. As we entered from the vestibule we passed under the pipe organ, and stand now, half-way down the main aisle, facing directly towards the great chancel area and the Holy Table. The chancel is almost one-third as long as the main building and contains twenty elders' stalls set into four sides of the five chancel walls. The fifth, and east side contains great doors which are never used today. The doors and the stalls are of fine oak workmanship and the walls of the chancel are panelled in oak to a height of twelve feet, a small carved canopy crowning the whole, the overall line being broken on the east wall by the slightly higher oaken lintel of the great doors. Above this lintel is John Paget's text, picked out in red on a lemon-coloured background. Above the text is a glorious stained window

showing the Pilgrim Fathers leaving Dutch soil and being blessed by their pastor. The windows in the other four chancel walls are fitted with mauve-coloured glass, which gives a peculiarly pleasant and restful tone to the whole area.

The chancel is raised two steps from the floor level and the oak Holy Table stands in a central and forward position, bearing normally an open 18th. century Bible. To the left and against the north wall stands the Prayer Desk, and between the two is the Font. All the furnishings are quietly and tastefully designed in dark oak. The chancel was restored only at the beginning of this century, and opened up then for use after having been boarded off from the time of the Reformation. At that time the pulpit was placed in the centre of the north wall, the chancel used as a cloakroom, and the seating arranged around the pulpit. During the ministry of the late Rev. Dr. Wm. Thomson, of Aberdeen (1895 to 1935), the whole building was turned around to the original pattern and the pulpit placed on what would have been the southern wall before the addition of 1662. Now, as will be seen from the photograph, the pulpit stands about two-thirds of the way down from the north wall and at the junction of the chancel and the 17th. century addition. It is a strange position brought about by the congregation's history, but one that curiously enough gives centrality to Word and also to Sacrament in a unique way! The pulpit is also constructed of oak and has four beautifully carved panels, the carving being done by the famous Dutchman, Van Tuuk, to mark the accession of Her Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina.

A brass lectern is fitted to the pulpit and holds the Bible. It is formed in the shape of a lion and a lion's claw, and was gifted to the congregation by William and Mary, in 1689. It bears the Royal Cipher W.M.R.R. (William, Mary, Rex, Regina), and authorities have said that it is the oldest post-Reformation brass lectern known. The pulpit and lectern bibles are 18th. century and are in regular use within the church. Behind the pulpit, and forming part of the southern addition, is the former Deacon's Chamber, now used as the minister's vestry. Here may be seen on the walls the names of all the Deacons and Deaconesses since the formation of the congregation.

Come back into the church and walk down the smallest of the three aisles, the one closest to the southern wall. Here, right in the centre of the wall and facing the north (towards where the pulpit used to be), is the Burgomaster's



THE SCOTS KIRK, AMSTERDAM: ENTRANCE PORCH FROM THE SPUI

Block kindly lent by the Consistory



THE SCOTS KIRK, AMSTERDAM: THE INTERIOR

Block kindly lent by the Consistory



THE SCOTS CHURCH, ROTTERDAM: THE INTERIOR

Photograph J. A. van Es, Rotterdam



THE SCOTS CHURCH, ROTTERDAM : INTERIOR, FACING THE ORGAN GALLERY

Photograph J. A. van Es, Rotterdam

Bench, all done in oak, raised one step from the floor level, canopied with rich carving and holding within the coping piece a 17th. century clock. This is the official seat of the Civic Head of the City and is also used by members of the Dutch Royal Family when they worship from time to time in the Scots Kirk. This bench was put in when the church building was extended. Let us sit in the old pew for a while and allow our eye to rove around the area of the church. As we look towards the entrance door we see above it the handsome organ-front of oak. The organ was inaugurated in 1753 when the front was erected, and renewed in 1874. It was rebuilt in 1907 and again in 1954. To-day it is one of the finest small church organs in Holland.

On the north wall hang two flags : one is the Scottish Standard and the other is obviously Scottish, though not so well known. It is a copy of the flag of the MacKay Regiment, which was part of the Scots Brigade. The original hangs in St. Giles, Edinburgh. From the chancel walls hang four other flags,—the Union Jack, a gift from the women of the Perthshire Continental Auxiliary ; the St. Andrew's Cross, gifted by his mother in memory of F/Sgt. Jack Cameron of Perth ; the Stars and Stripes, given by the Pilgrim Fathers' Society of Plymouth, U.S.A., and the Flag of Orange, the gift of Her Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina.

But now the time has come to go from our old kirk, with all its history and its memories. No one can visit it and go away without a blessing. Six hundred years of prayer and faith have laden its walls and the very air is rich with peace. To-day its witness and worship goes on. It gathers within its walls, week by week, men and women from eleven different nations living in Amsterdam, and in the summer months it is the centre of English-speaking Christian worship, representative of all the lands. With us, who live and serve here, give thanks for its witness, and pray for its continuance in an age when Amsterdam has become again a world centre.

JAMES KEILLOR

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The Scots Church, Rotterdam

The Scots Congregations in Amsterdam and Rotterdam were founded within 36 years of each other. But more than 650 years separates the two church buildings, the one pre-Reformation, the other only five years old this autumn.

The new Scots Church in Rotterdam stands quite near the site of the one destroyed in the devastation of May, 1940. The foundation stone was laid in November, 1951, and, such is the speed of Dutch building, the whole work was completed by the following August. On 2nd September, 1952, the new Church was dedicated in a unique service conducted by the then Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and his "opposite number" in Holland, the Praeses of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. The building as a whole, of course, is a "church" in the broad sense of the word, for as well as the Church proper it comprises also Hall, Consistory (i.e. Session) Room, beadle's house, and manse. Even in a city whose whole centre has been rebuilt since the war, it is regarded as one of the finest examples of modern church architecture. It is, understandably enough, the envy of many a Dutch congregation, and has already more than once been taken as a model for other new churches in Holland.

The plan of the building is shaped like a half-cross. The ground floor of the long arm is occupied by the Hall, with the main vestibule and cloakrooms at one end, and the vestry, kitchen and Consistory Room at the other. Underneath the vestibule is a cellar, one half of which accommodates the boilers of the central heating system and a set of three pumps, which enable the Church, Hall and Consistory Room to be heated independently. The other half is a strong-room containing the congregation's ancient silver treasures and the records of over 300 years of its life, all of which were fortunately preserved. This juxtaposition of new and old at the foundations of the building, in itself a mere matter of architectural convenience, is not without its symbolic significance, for a church that has its roots both in modern achievement and in ancient traditions. The Church is situated above the Hall—a position chosen for purely technical reasons, but with the incidental result that the Church is the Upper Room! From the main vestibule a stairway leads up to a second vestibule opening into it, while at the pulpit end a smaller stair gives direct access from vestry and Consistory Room. The beadle's house also forms part of this main block, being built in two stories above the Consistory Room and behind the chancel of the Church. The compact, two-story manse occupies the short arm of the cross. The quadrant behind it encloses a small garden and a parking place for the inevitable Dutch bicycles.

The Church has a normal seating capacity of 290, though up to 200 extra seats can be brought in for special occasions. In form and disposition it follows a familiar pattern: a plain oblong building with high vaulted ceiling, the chancel apse at one end with the well-known triangular arrangement of Communion Table, pulpit and lectern, and at the other end a small organ in its gallery above and behind the congregation. Yet the whole makes an impression which words cannot adequately describe. It takes eye and heart to register the thrilling way in which this Church combines beauty with simplicity, and intimacy with spaciousness. There is light here that seems to brighten more than just the building. There is colour, too, that is rich and at the same time restful—the warm red-brown of the natural (unvarnished) mahogany pews and chancel furniture on the soft gold-brown of the beechwood floor, the deep blue of the pew cushions and of the carpet that stretches down the whole centre aisle into the chancel, and the creamy white of walls and roof (blue and white for Scotland!).

Then the eye is caught by the great silver Cross on the back wall of the chancel. It is, of course, no crucifix but an empty cross, the symbol of victory—a simple, slender cross with an extraordinary air of straightforwardness and transcendence. But right at its base, and firmly in our midst, stands the Communion Table, as if to say that here the eternal Cross penetrates right into our own lives. The six panels of the Table, with a small silver cross in the centre, a grape cluster to the left, a sheaf of corn to the right, and three St Andrew's crosses underneath, mark the fact that this is no vague penetration: it is a practical communion with the crucified and risen Lord which is to govern our whole national and communal life.

The pulpit is perfectly plain, but the canopy that surmounts it has a blue and white frieze of Scottish saltires. The architect's intention here was, of course, to express the place of the preaching of the Word in our national heritage. Many find this canopy a little disturbing at first sight, but most discover that it soon grows on them until they would not be without it after all. A more definite reminder of the past working of the Word is provided by the recently-acquired pulpit fall. This is a replica of Richard Cameron's banner,—a St Andrew's flag with five roses in the centre, and the inscription "Covenants for Religion, King and Kingdoms", in gold. For it was in the Scots Church in Rotterdam that Richard Cameron, the

“Lion of the Covenant”, was ordained, and the famous Robert MacWard, who took a prophetic part in the service, was minister of our congregation at the time. Two other visible links with the congregation’s long history are provided by the silver vessels, which were fortunately preserved in 1940, and are still used in celebrating the sacraments: the four priceless Communion cups engraved with the arms of Rotterdam were a gift from the City Fathers in 1644, and the baptismal basin was presented in 1833 by a Scot who had become City Architect of Rotterdam.

An interesting feature of the Lectern is the large candlestick, the symbolism of which is obvious. On Christmas Day a candle actually burns here—a thing which might seem strange to the Scot straight from home, but finds its natural setting in the traditional continental association of Advent and Christmas with the coming of the Light of the Incarnate Word.

Worthy of mention is also the chancel light, which is set in the wall on the lectern side of the apse (the only outside wall). It consists of a large cruciform window, in the centre of which the circular Consistory Seal has been worked in stained glass—the Scottish white cross on a blue ground, with the arms of Rotterdam in the top quadrant, the Burning Bush in the bottom, and the other two quadrants each bearing a thistle surmounted by the Scottish crown, the whole surrounded by the name of the Church and the motto *Nec tamen consumebatur*.

The main vestibule has glass-panelled doors to the street at either side. This not only provides for illumination and ease of access, but also means that the open door can usually be on the sheltered side, an important consideration in a city of strong and biting winds. In this part of the building, as elsewhere, the architect has found expression for his love of symbolism. The two pillars of the main vestibules are adorned with silver thistles and gold Scottish crowns. The marble stairway to the Church is lit by a panel of five stained glass windows representing St. James, St. John, the Son of Man, St. Peter, and St. Paul. These were originally part of a former English Presbyterian Church in the Hague. In the upstairs vestibule are four blue pillars each covered with gold representations of one of the symbols of the Apocalypse traditionally associated with the four evangelists—the Ox, the Lion, the Eagle and the Man. In this upstairs vestibule a symbol of another kind is also to be found: the nose of the bomb that des-

troyed the old Church has been mounted at the head of the stair, where it now serves as a receptacle for contributions to the Fabric Fund of the new one !

The Hall, which can seat some 200 comfortably, is laid with attractive composition tiles specially designed for hard wear, and at the same time easily cleaned. For technical reasons the main floor-level had to be some two feet lower than that of the vestibule, and this has provided four wide steps right across the back (vestibule end) of the hall, each broad enough to take a row of chairs. Three massive pillars down each side support the roof (the floor of the Church), and at the same time divide the sides of the hall conveniently into bays which can each seat groups of 10-20 people while still leaving the centre of the floor clear ; a most useful arrangement for such things as socials and country dance evenings. There is also a commodious stage with access either at the front (by steps from the hall), or by two doors at the back opening on a passage which runs between the stage and the Consistory Room, with doors at either end to the street. The hall, too, has its touches of symbolism—in the gold saltires over the stage, in the blue of the doors and stage curtain with the white of walls and ceiling, but above all in the delightful silver decorations on the doors : the two doors at the back, which form the main exit to the great Port of Rotterdam, are appropriately studded with anchors, while the kitchen door has teapots, cups and saucers, and the door to the vestry has shepherd and sheep.

The Consistory Room is large enough to serve not only for the Consistory, but also for various group meetings of up to about 30 people. As in the Consistory Room of the old Church, the walls are hung with portraits of all the ministers of the congregation since its inception. The original oil paintings were, of course, lost in 1940, and their place has had to be taken by enlarged photographs of portraits found elsewhere. Among them hangs the congregation's most recent acquisition : a specially-made Delft plate inscribed " Schouwen en Duivenland 1-2/16-8, 1953, Hospitality and Love ". This was presented by the Dutch island congregation of Schouwen and Duivenland who were driven from their homes by the floods of February, 1953, and spent the following six and a half months in closest association with us. It is specially prized as a token that the old associations not only with Scotland but also with the Netherlands are still alive.

The whole building indeed, is a testimony to that. For such a building could never have been raised by the congregation alone, not even with the wide-spread support received from Scots at home. Its existence is due in no small measure also to the willing and generous help of the civic authorities, of private well-wishers, and of large sections of the local commercial and shipping community.

The new Scots Church is undoubtedly far finer than the old. It houses a congregation which is unique in that, ever since its foundation in 1643, it has been a full charge both of the Church of Scotland and of the Dutch Reformed Church, and has contributed to the life of both in ways that have often had far-reaching significance. But it is not only valued for its beauty and its historical associations. Already it is valued still more for being, like the old one, an important centre of Christian worship and life in the City. By God's grace it will be increasingly so in days to come.

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