

## **Skelmorlie and Wemyss Bay: South Parish Church**

IN the middle of last century the district which later became the Parish of Skelmorlie comprised the estates of Eglinton, Wemyss Bay and Kelly.<sup>(1)</sup> It had a population of 304, of which number it was said that 40 were summer visitors. In 1853 a request was put before the Presbytery of Greenock for a new church to serve this district, and there was a good deal of discussion as to where the church should be built. The Minister of Inverkip wanted it as far away as possible from his church and for a while it looked as though the church would be built at Meigle. The Minister of Largs, on the other hand, said it should be near the Kelly Burn to serve also the residents of Wemyss Bay. This view at last prevailed, and it was eventually built on the present site, the ground of which was gifted to the Trustees by the Earl of Eglinton. It is under the name of Kelly Bridge Chapel that the church first appears in the Presbytery records. As there was at that time no parish of Skelmorlie, it took the status of a Chapel of Ease in the parishes of Largs and Inverkip.

The first Minister appointed was the Revd. Walter Little Gilmour Boyd, B.A., who was elected on 21st April, 1856, and ordained on 25th September of that year. At his ordination service the Revd. John Kinross of Largs, who fought so hard to have the church erected on its present site, presided and preached the sermon. There was also present the father of the young minister, the Revd. Dr. Boyd of Glasgow; and, one may hope, the young minister's brother, the distinguished A. K. H. Boyd of Holy Trinity Parish Church, St. Andrews.

Kelly Bridge Chapel of Ease was a pleasing little building. Pictures of it, interior and exterior, are still available. It was described at the time as a model of ecclesiastical architecture, and was erected at a cost of £1300. The young minister devoted himself wholeheartedly to the task of beautifying and enlarging the building. Before very long, in 1858, he had two transepts added to the south end of the chapel. By means of these extensions the building was capable of seating 400 people.

<sup>(1)</sup> For the history of the parish see the *Book of Skelmorlie Parish Church*, by the Revd. John Lamond, B.D.; and the *Centenary Brochure* edited by the late William Newton Macartney, Esq., J.P., a former Treasurer of the church.

In the year 1860 the Chapel of Ease attained the status of a parish church, the newly established parish stretching down the Firth as far as St. Fillans, and including the estates of Eglinton, Kelly and Wemyss Bay. The parish was a *Quoad Sacra* parish ; Largs retained the teinds as far as the limit of the Eglinton Estate, and Inverkip retained the teinds of Kelly and Wemyss Bay.

On 2nd June, 1865, the Revd. Walter L. G. Boyd did a very daring thing, for those days ; he introduced an organ in his church. Various claims have been made for this pioneering venture, but this was certainly one of the first organs ever played in the Church of Scotland, at that period of the Renaissance of Worship.<sup>(1)</sup> Naturally enough, the innovation met with strenuous opposition from many quarters. Anthems were sung, and Prose Psalms were chanted, to the amazement of the whole community. These innovations, however, were confined to the afternoon service. At the morning service the old tradition was still adhered to, until, gradually, a more tolerant attitude came to prevail. There were, of course, some who maintained their opposition to the end. The Minister's brother, the famous "A. K. H. B.", of a former generation, writes : " Once I was in a railway carriage a hundred miles from Skelmorlie, when a familiar name fell on my ear. I looked, and two old women went on, in spiteful tones, about the doings in my brother's church. ' They call it Boyd's Theatre ', one of them said "

It was not until 10th July, 1870, that elders were appointed. Prior to this date the Minister was assisted in the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion by his father from Glasgow, or by elders from neighbouring parishes. Two years later Mr Boyd's ministry came to a sudden end. He died on 4th January, 1872, aged thirty-nine, after a ministry of just over fifteen years : 1856-1872. Principal Robert H. Story wrote the epitaph inscribed on the Memorial Tablet which was transferred from the wall of the old church, and may be seen at the rear of the present one.

By this time the railway had come to Wemyss Bay, and mansion houses were being built along the twenty-five foot terraced beach which is such a notable feature of the Firth, and on the hill above the old sea cliff. Before very long it was stated that from Castle Wemyss to Skelmorlie Castle there was more wealth than in any other parish of like size in Scotland. With the quick growth of building and an ever-

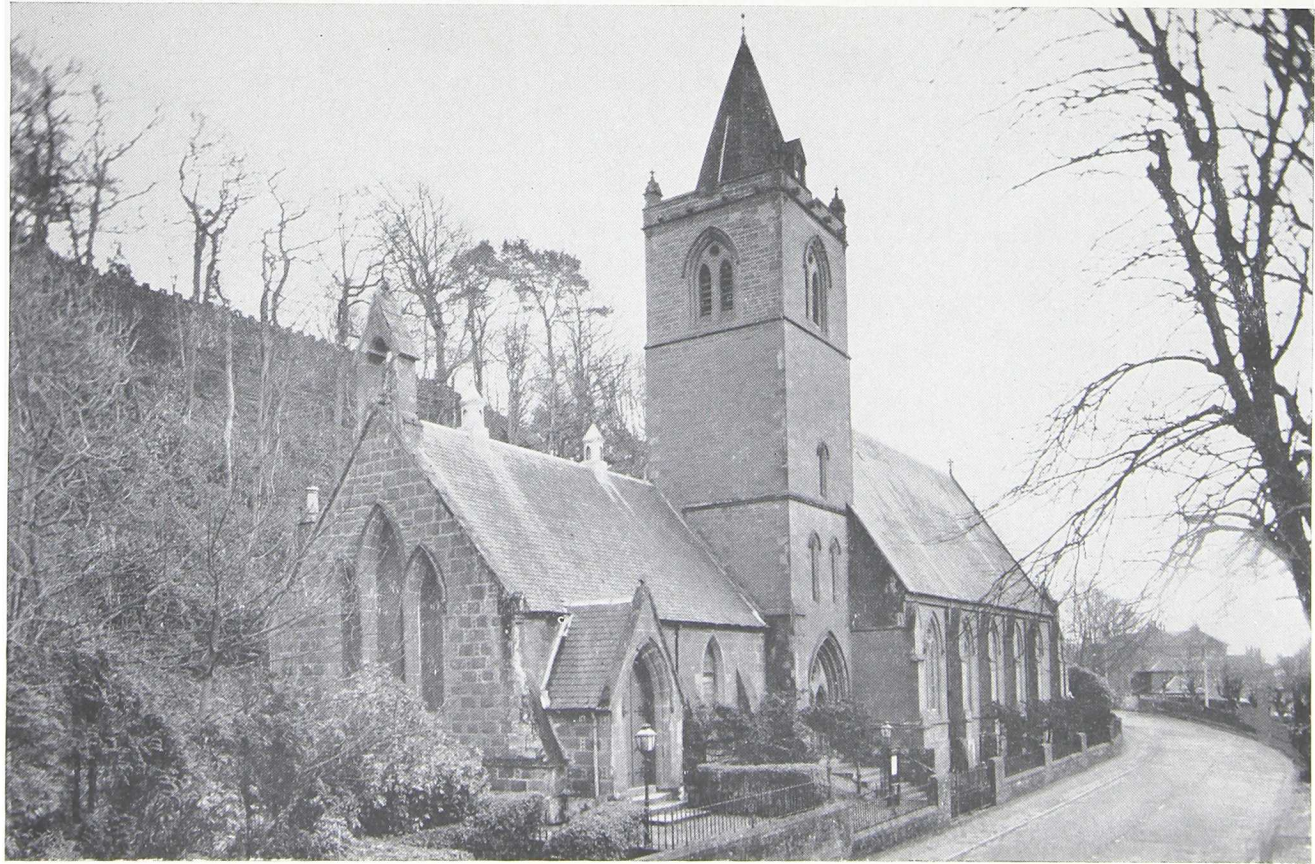
<sup>(1)</sup> *Renaissance of Worship* is the title of the Lee Lecture by the Revd. John Kerr, a former minister of Skelmorlie, and later of Dirleton, East Lothian.

increasing number of summer visitors it was felt, early in the nineties, that something more spacious should take the place of the lovely little parish church beneath the cliff ; and the problem was placed before the architects, Messrs. John Honeyman and Keppie. The reconstruction and adaptation of an existing building is always a problem. These difficulties were, however, overcome, and the new church was opened for worship on 13th October, 1895, the occasional preacher being the Revd. Professor Charteris, D.D., of Edinburgh.

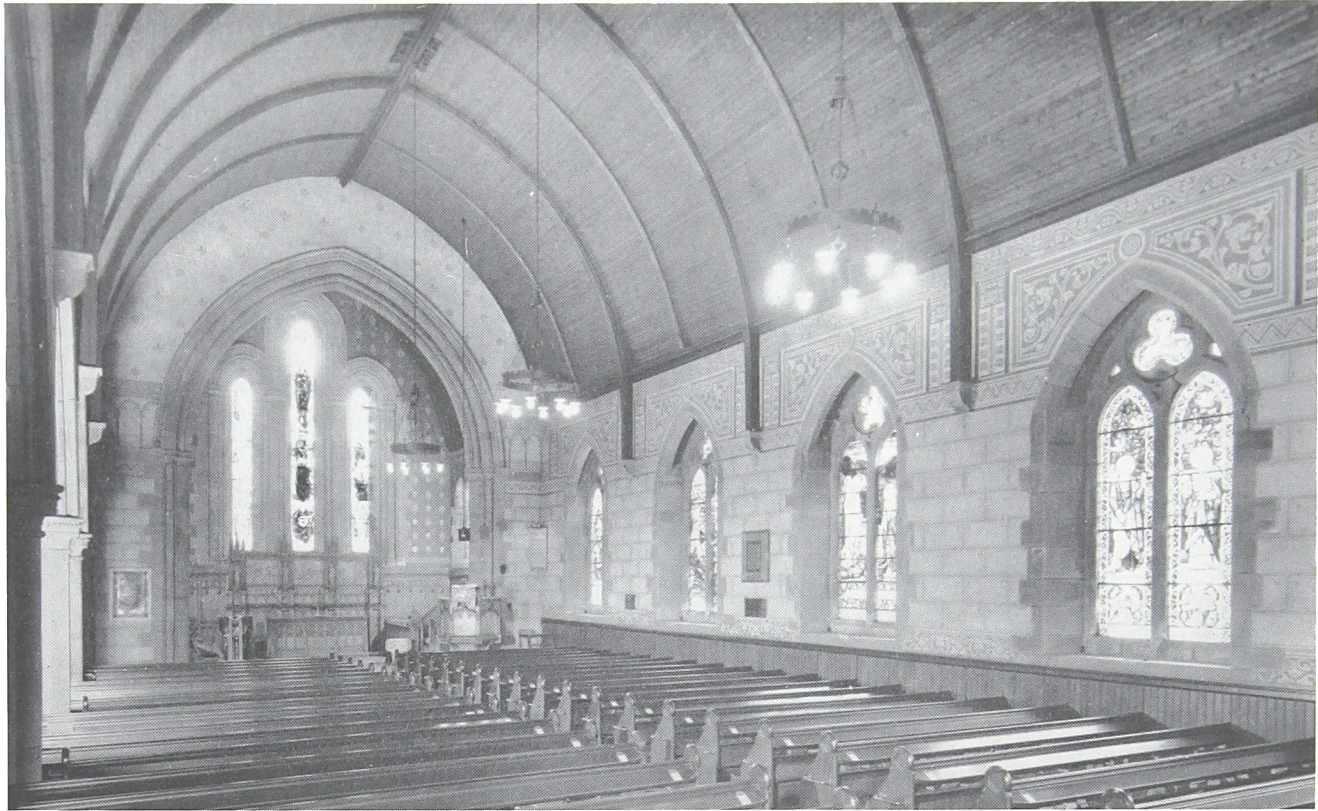
The architectural features of the re-constructed church have met with universal approval. In the scheme of reconstruction the old church of 1856 became a useful and imposing hall, for Sunday School and other congregational activities. The whole building, outside and in, is of a beautiful warm-tinted, red sandstone from the local quarries. The entrance to the church is at the base of the tower, the outer doorway being deeply recessed and richly moulded. The details of the interior are much richer and more delicate than those of the exterior. The high, rounded roof is of darkly dressed timber. The style of architecture has been described as that which prevailed about the middle of the thirteenth century. There is a side aisle separated from the nave by five arches. Steps at the south of the church lead up to the chancel which contains an organ chamber with openings towards the chancel and the side aisle. The entire mason work was carried out by a local builder, Mr W. W. Oswald.

The cost of the reconstruction was £5813 19s. 6d. Two years later the church was clear of debt. This was the outcome of a great effort, inspired by the Minister, the Revd. John Lamond. There is in existence a printed report which shows how the money was raised, with the names and addresses of all the subscribers. It is a tremendously interesting document today, as it gives the names of the occupiers of nearly every house in Skelmorlie and Wemyss Bay, seventy years ago. It was during Mr Lamond's ministry, which began on 18th May, 1891, that the new church was built.

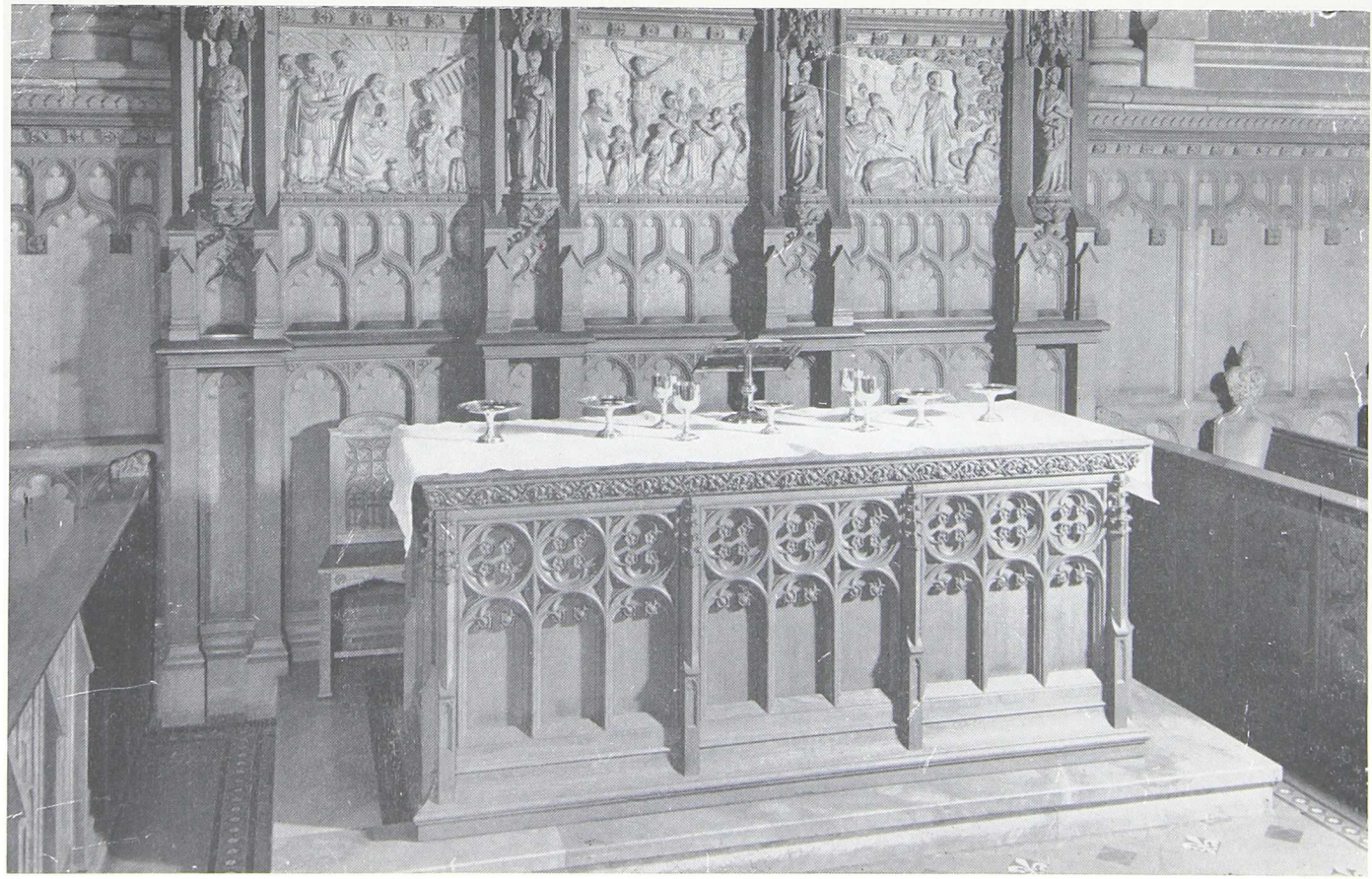
At the south end of the church, lighting the chancel, are three tall windows of stained glass, the work of a Glasgow artist, William Guthrie. These show the Baptism of our Lord in Jordan ; Christ in Gethsemane ; and in the centre the Ascension. These fine windows were the gift of Mrs Dunn, of Annet House, in memory of her husband, David Dunn. Unfortunately the inscription in the window is obscured by the reredos.



SKELMORLIE AND WEMYSS BAY SOUTH CHURCH : EXTERIOR



SKELMORLIE AND WEMYSS BAY SOUTH CHURCH : INTERIOR, SHOWING BARREL VAULTED ROOF



SKELMORLIE AND WEMYSS BAY SOUTH CHURCH : COMMUNION TABLE



SKELMORLIE AND WEMYSS BAY SOUTH CHURCH :  
CHANCEL AND PULPIT

This magnificent reredos of carved wood is the work of John Crawford, and is dated 1896. John Crawford was described by Mr Honeyman, the architect, as “our best Gothic wood-carver”. The workmanship is beyond all praise and should be studied with loving care. Wood-carved statues of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John stand in niches; and there are three wood-carved scenes; the Stable at Bethlehem, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The Resurrection would seem to be a very original conception, for it depicts the fear and horror of the Temple Guards (St. Matthew xxviii, 4) as the huge rock rolls from the mouth of the sepulchre, and the Risen Lord emerges from the Tomb. No written record has been discovered of the donor of this beautiful piece of work; but one has been told that the funds for it were collected by Mr Robert Sinclair Scott; that it cost £280, and that much of the work was done in Scott’s Shipyard at Greenock.

There are three beautiful little windows in the chancel opposite the organ. These are the gift of the Architect, John Honeyman, R.S.A., in memory of his wife and two sons. They feature the three Scottish Saints: St. Ninian, St. Kentigern and St. Columba. In front of the reredos is the handsome Communion Table designed to be in keeping with it, and gifted in memory of Daniel and Mary Campbell. Captain Campbell was one of the owners of the white-funnelled Millport and Rothesay steamers which some of the older people still remember. The Patens in use at Holy Communion were the gift of the Women’s Guild to commemorate the faith and devotion to the Church of Miss Mary Campbell, his daughter.

The lovely “Storm Window”—Christ stilling the Tempest—is in memory of Peter Simpson and his wife, gifted by their children. The window is the work of Douglas Strachan, who not only designed the window but also executed the work himself. He was, of course, the artist responsible for the stained glass window which was Great Britain’s gift to the Palace of Peace, at the Hague. It was he also who designed and executed the complete set of windows in the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh; the Goldsmiths’ window in St. Paul’s Cathedral; the Moses Window in Glasgow Cathedral; and many other windows in our Scottish churches. Skelmorlie is proud to have this fine example of his work.

Another notable window in our church is the one depicting “The Angel at the Tomb”, in memory of Mr and Mrs Robert Blyth of Balvonie, and their daughter. This

window is from a design by the well-known Victorian artist, Sir Edward Burne-Jones. With all his other highly imaginative work he found time to design quite a number of striking stained glass windows. These may be found in unexpected places up and down Britain. Perhaps the most notable one is in Christ Church, Oxford.

The church bell, which weighs over twelve hundred-weights, was gifted by the first Baron Inverclyde and his wife in 1895. This devoted couple died within a few days of one another : Lord Inverclyde on 12th February, 1901, and his wife on 14th February, 1901. The handsome window near the Inverclyde pew at the back of the church commemorates the event ; and the splendid three-manual organ was gifted in their memory by their daughters, Agnes Caroline Burns and Jane Clelland Burns. This organ was dedicated on 1st January, 1905, the ' notable ' first organ having lasted forty years. At the inauguration ceremony the new organ was played by Mr Herbert Walton, then organist of Glasgow Cathedral. The glorious window nearest the pulpit was gifted by Agnes Caroline Burns in memory of Beatrice, her friend and the first wife of the Revd. John McGilchrist.

In recent years many generous gifts have been made to the church : the provision of new lighting ; a carved oak table for the vestibule ; a mural recording the names of Ministers who have served the parish of Skelmorlie during the past century—of whom the ancient Word stands written : “ They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever ”.

GEORGE P. INNES

## MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH

WALTER LITTLE GILMOUR BOYD, B.A.,  
1856-1872

Ordained 25th September, 1856 ;  
died 4th January, 1872.

ROBERT STEWART, B.D., 1872-1875

Ordained 11th June, 1872 ; trans-  
lated to Duns, 19th August, 1875.

JOHN KERR, M.A., 1876-1878

Ordained 20th April, 1876 ; trans-  
lated to Dirleton, 11th July, 1878.

JOHN KEITH, B.D., 1878-1885

Ordained 7th November, 1878 ;  
translated to Largs, 5th February,  
1885.

ROBERT HOWIE FISHER, B.D., 1885-1890

Ordained 20th August, 1885 ; trans-  
lated to Jedburgh, 20th November,  
1890.

JOHN LAMOND, B.D., 1891-1899

Translated from Kelton, and ad-  
mitted 19th May, 1891 ; translated  
to Greenside, Edinburgh, 20th  
April, 1899.

JOHN MCGILCHRIST, B.D., 1899-1911

Translated from Fodderty, and ad-  
mitted 14th November, 1899 ;  
translated to West St. Giles', Edin-  
burgh, 10th March, 1911.

DAVID BRUCE NICOL, M.C., B.D.,  
1911-1920

Ordained 12th July, 1911 ; trans-  
lated to St. Margaret's, Edinburgh,  
3rd August, 1920.

ROLLO RUSSELL GRANT SUTHERLAND,  
B.D., 1921-1926

Translated from Ballantrae, 11th  
February, 1921 ; translated to  
St. Marnock's, Kilmarnock, 18th  
February, 1926.

DUDLEY STUART HOPKIRK, B.D., B.LITT.,  
1926-1929

Ordained 5th August, 1926 ; trans-  
lated to Greenside, Edinburgh, 26th  
April, 1929.

ALEXANDER DOUGLAS FRASER, M.A.,  
1929-1938

Ordained at Kelvinside, Glasgow,  
23rd June, 1925 ; admitted to  
Skelmorlie, 29th October, 1929 ;  
translated to Park, Glasgow, 3rd  
March, 1938.

GEORGE PEAT INNES, B.D., LL.B., PH.D.,  
1938

Ordained as Assistant Minister at  
Glasgow Cathedral, 25th October,  
1936 ; admitted to Skelmorlie, 18th  
November, 1938.