

THE FATE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

Since the Union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929 there have necessarily been many local unions and linkings and some congregations have been dissolved. The result is that in every city and town and in many villages and country places buildings formerly used for worship have been demolished, used for other purposes or are derelict. Often there were two or three buildings in a district simply because there had been two or three denominations and not because the number of worshippers required them. And in the years since the 1939-45 War other factors have forced readjustment on the Church, at a steady rate – movement of vast numbers of people from old city centres to new housing areas at the perimeters, the considerably reduced number of minister-preachers available for parish work, the cost of maintenance in inflationary times taking so much of Christian liberality. Perhaps most important of all is the positive need for the Church of Scotland to be composed of strong viable congregations, able to carry financial responsibility, care for their buildings, give for great church and Christian causes, witness and work in the parish and worship the Lord of All Being through Jesus Christ. Also there should be as equitable a division as possible for the full-time ministers of the Gospel.

The optimum size of a congregation must vary with many circumstances. It must differ according to whether it is urban, suburban or rural. It must be larger than it has been and than many would like it to be, because the number of persons available to preach the Word and administer the sacraments in the country, for which the Church is responsible territorially, is smaller. But it should not be so large that a pastor, or pastors, cannot know every member well and large numbers of non-members in the parish. It is important too in these days that every minister have, and be seen to have, a full task to perform in the congregation and community.

When a church building is no longer required for worship, what happens to it? Most people know of at least one building that stands like a great tombstone, ill-cared for, yet recalling sadly the once intense worship, warm fellowship and happy life of many years. Some know of church buildings which are now used for purposes which offend the eye and the mind. A church is but a building, yet it is consecrated by association and if worship is the worthiest work of man, then any other use will strike some as inappropriate: and it is important that the Church offend no more than need be offended.

It is not always possible to demolish redundant buildings and it is difficult to bind others than the first purchaser. The Church must realize as much as is reasonably possible so that the realized asset may be used for extension work in the district or in the new housing areas.

Many buildings of historic or architectural merit or standing on a city skyline are dear to others than those who worshipped there and amenity societies are taking more and more interest in the preservation of such buildings and seeking for good alternative use.

It may be of interest to notice what has happened to Church of Scotland churches in Edinburgh no longer required for worship in the period 1929-1975. The following have been demolished:

Moray-Knox in High Street, replaced by the Home Board's 'Netherbow'

North Richmond Street

St. Aidan's in Bread Street, now replaced by St. Cuthbert's Cooperative buildings

Hope Park, the site used for part of the Dick Veterinary College

Bristo, the site now occupied by the University refectory

St. Andrew's, Drumsheugh, now replaced by Inland Revenue Offices

Chalmers in West Port, the site now occupied by part of the Art

College

Fountainhall Road, now replaced by a Public Library

St. John's West, Leith

St. David's, Morrison Street

Haymarket, the site, used for some years by Woolworths, now occupied by a furniture company

Regent Street, Portobello

West Coates, the site replaced by an office complex

St. Ninian's Coburg Street, Leith

Bonnington, Leith, replaced by housing

St. Margaret's Dumbiedykes, replaced by housing

West St. Giles' in the Meadows

The first buildings at *Burdiehouse* and at Crewe Toll (*Old Kirk*) have also been removed. *Trinity College and Moray-Knox* church in Jeffrey Street was demolished to make room for offices but the apse, constructed with stones from the old Trinity College which stood from 1462 until 1845 where platform I of Waverley Station now is, was preserved as a reading room, now in the care of the District Council.

The next group consists of church buildings used at present by other denominations or for purposes which give fairly general satisfaction:

Bruntsfield in Leamington Terrace, used by the 'Evangelical Church'

St. Leonard's, used by the 'Church of Christ'

- Dalmeny Street*, used by the Uniate Church of Ukrainians
St. Oswald's in Montpelier Park, used for educational purposes
 by the Regional authority.
New North, used for a number of years by the University Chap-
 laincy
 (Free) *High*, now New College Library
The Old Kirk in Holyrood Road now part of Moray House College
 of Education
St. George's in Charlotte Square, now West Register House
Morningside High, a fine Repertory Theatre
Wester Coates (Roseburn), Headquarters of the National Bible
 Society of Scotland
Tron, to be a Civic Centre
Craigmillar Park in Suffolk Road became an assembly hall for St.
 Margaret's School
Fountainbridge is to become a funeral chapel for St. Cuthbert's
 Cooperative Society
St. Catherine's in Grange was converted into halls for St. Catherine's
 Argyle Church
St. Thomas's Leith is to be a Sikh Temple.
St. Bride's is to be used by the Regional Educational authority for
 educational purposes.

Then there are former churches which are now used by the University or as stores for the time being and, having in some cases no towers, spires nor other clearly-marked ecclesiastical features, do not draw the too critical eye:

- Granton Church*, near Granton Harbour
Lady Yester's in Infirmary Street
Guthrie Memorial in Easter Road
St. Ninian's Leith (Mariners' Church) in Commercial Street
Warrender beside Bruntsfield Hospital
Queen Street
St. John's East, Leith, in Constitution Street
College, until recently a University reading room
St. David's Viewforth has been sold to Newcastle Brewery, the site
 to be redeveloped
Pleasance, used at present as Willis's Organ Store, and *St. Paul's* in
 St. Leonard's Street may soon be affected by development and
 the same may apply to *Buccleuch* and *Nicolson Street* (now a
 market)
Leith Kirkgate is to be demolished and redeveloped
Slateford Church is now a joiner's store but is off the main road and
 not easily seen
St. James's Place behind St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral,

until recently was used as halls for the Cathedral but its future is now uncertain

St. Columba's beside the Usher Hall, was used for a while as Festival offices but is now occupied by 'The Young Lyceum'

Hopetoun (formerly *St. James's* in McDonald Road) belongs to the District Council for social service work

St. Andrew's Place, Leith, has recently been taken by the Arts Council as a Visual Aids Centre

The old Lady Glenorchy's (*Holy Trinity*) building in Roxburgh Place is used for University purposes. It was designed by McGregor Chalmers and is a fine example of his work. *St. Oran's* in Broughton Street is used for business purposes; its façade is distinctive and was provided when the church was built for the Catholic Apostolic denomination. The *Robertson Memorial Mission* building in the Grassmarket is also a distinctive edifice, used at present as a store.

It is regrettable that some other former church buildings, and obviously such, are now used for very obviously lay purposes. *St. John's* in Victoria Street, built in 1840 for work by Guthrie in the Grassmarket, is now a commission agent's office. The *Barony* building in Broughton Street, the pride of the Free Church when the Prince Consort was brought to see it shortly after its erection, is a store for a theatrical costumier. The *Davidson* church in Eyre Crescent is a sweet manufacturer's wholesale store.

The following church buildings have recently been vacated as a result of union or dissolution and are awaiting decision as to use: *St. Andrew's Newhaven, Portobello Windsor Place, Belford, Stockbridge, McDonald Road.*

The buildings so far mentioned have been given up since 1929, but there are other former church buildings, still standing, which were used by denominations now forming part of the Church of Scotland. Some are used by the Free Church, Free Presbyterians, United Free, Baptists and Roman Catholics. For completeness, a list of most others is here given:

Holyrood Abbey Church (Canongate) now a ruin

The first *Chalmers* building in West Port, now a store

Free Tron in Chambers Street, used by University Mathematics Department

Blackfriars U.P., now a printing work

Holyrood U.F. at the entrance to Holyrood Palace, now a palace store

Infirmary Street, below Lady Yester's, now a store

St. Cuthbert's Free in Spittal Street, now a chest clinic

Tolbooth Free in St. Andrew Square, the Actuaries Headquarters

Dean Street, now a photographer's workshop

Free St. Stephen's in Wemyss Place

Cowgatehead Free, now a store

Cowgate Free, used by the University as Wilkie House

East Fountainbridge, part of the S.M.T. Offices

Vennel, part of the Salvation Army Hostel

New College Settlement (formerly Pleasance Free), part of University Psychology Department

The Church sometimes incurs criticism for having allowed sanctified buildings to be used for non-ecclesiastical purposes. But when costs of demolition are so high and the need to realise every possible asset so great, what is the Church to do? The pressure to preserve an architectural heritage is strong, even when the population has moved from an area, and if the pressure is used responsibly it is of great value. The redundancy of churches of real historic or architectural merit presents the Church with a problem every time it seems necessary, but the Church's duty is primarily spiritual and there is a sense in which it is right that if society wishes buildings preserved for their own sake, society ought to provide the means. The redundancy of church buildings is not primarily because the Church cannot maintain them; it is because the population has been moved in vast numbers to new areas. New churches and halls have to be built where the people now are and since 1929, in the Edinburgh area, at least twenty such new complexes have had to be provided. And no financial help has been given by the state, and the cost of new building is becoming a very heavy burden indeed.

Likewise, the maintenance of ancient church structures and large buildings of historic and architectural merit is becoming a matter of deep concern. Many of them were not formerly maintained out of the Church's Christian liberality and it is doubtful if the Church itself could ever have afforded to erect them. It seems right that some state money should be made available so that the best buildings should be properly maintained for the sake of posterity. In this connection a pilot scheme is in operation by which government grants have been made available to Legerwood and Whitekirk, and it is hoped that with the departure of times of financial stringency the scheme may become general. There have been occasions recently when local government authorities have made money available for special needs of ecclesiastical buildings. However the principal responsibility will remain with the Church, and the Christian people of Scotland will wish to see that their House of God is worthily maintained. The best way to keep it from becoming redundant, in many cases, is in their own hands; they should fill it to capacity for the worship of God.

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(*Situation fluctuating – information correct at time of going to press – Ed.*)