
Short Note: The Mackenzie Relief Church, Glasgow, 1945–1985

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The following account is based partly on recollections supplied by Mr Iain Morrison, Waternish, to whom we are grateful.

Rev. Roderick Mackenzie (1893–1972) was a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Gairloch (1923–1932) and St Jude’s, Glasgow (1932–1944). His deep unhappiness about the circumstances in which Rev. Ewen Macqueen, Inverness had parted company with the Free Presbyterian Church in June 1938 so troubled him that in 1945 he too ceased to be a Free Presbyterian minister, after a painful period of dispute.¹ A considerable number of people supported him, and a congregation known as the Glasgow Relief Free Presbyterian congregation was formed. This congregation lasted until 1985, and the purpose of this note is to give a brief account of its history.

I. Rev. Roderick Mackenzie, 1945–1972

On Saturday 1st December 1945, Rev. Roderick Mackenzie was declared to be no longer a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church. The same day, Mr Mackenzie’s supporters held a public meeting in the Christian Institute, Glasgow, at which it was agreed to commence separate services, to be held each Sabbath and Wednesday.² Mr Mackenzie had a great respect for

¹ Details of the dispute can be found in: Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church, *To Our People* (Wick, 1944); *A Review of Events in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1925–1945* (Glasgow, 1948); *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1873–1970* (Inverness, [1974]), pp. 185–186; *The Right of Protest* (Glasgow, 1975); *One Hundred Years of Witness* (Glasgow, 1993), pp. 102–3.

² The Christian Institute was a large building on Bothwell Street which was demolished in the 1970s. The YMCA would meet on one side, and the Relief congregation on the other side.

the discipline of the Church, and at first he declined to take these services, which were conducted by elders. The four Glasgow elders Neil MacSwan, Donald Macdonald, Malcolm Macphee, and Farquhar Macpherson had been suspended from the eldership by the Southern Presbytery on 20th November, and with David John Walker (Greenock), and Christopher Mackenzie (Kames) had intimated their separation from the judicatories of the Free Presbyterian Church on 28th November. The six were deposed from the eldership by the Southern Presbytery on 11th December.³ Before this, on 15th November, Rev. A. D. Macleod, Free Presbyterian minister of the joint Sheildaig and Lochcarron congregations, had demitted his charge, and been declared by the Western Presbytery to be no longer a minister of the Church. Moving to Glasgow, he joined the Relief congregation and helped to conduct services, and eventually Mr Mackenzie was prevailed upon to do the same.⁴



Rev. Roderick Mackenzie.

Mr Mackenzie never became the pastor of the congregation. He visited the sick, and conducted marriages and funerals, but in view of his status as a suspended minister he would not conduct baptisms or communions.⁵ For the same reason, there was no Kirk Session or Deacons' Court and the congregation was run by a Committee. There was no formal association with the Macqueen Relief congregation in Inverness, but in June 1946, Neil MacSwan and Malcolm Macphee were elected elders (or 'assessor elders') in the Inverness congregation – presumably they felt free to do this because they were not elders in Glasgow.

³ *Review of Events in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1925–1945*, pp. 45-50.

⁴ Colin Mackay, former President of the Glasgow Royal College of Physicians, recalls that on one occasion Mr Macleod, who had been supplying elsewhere in the morning, took the same text at night as Mr Mackenzie had taken in the morning.

⁵ A number of children in the congregation remained unbaptised until they subsequently joined other congregations. One family in the congregation regularly attended the Saturday service of the Free Presbyterian communion in Glasgow.

At some point before 1948, the Glasgow Relief congregation moved to the United Original Secession Church at 17, Blythwood Street.⁶ At this time, 'Relief' services were also being held in the Free Presbyterian church at Waternish, in Glendale, in the Baptist Church Hall in Stirling,⁷ in the Boys' Scout Hall in Clydebank, in the Oak Rooms in Kilblain Street in Greenock,⁸ and in the summer months in Tighnabruaich.⁹

In May 1948, the management Committee of the congregation published *A Review of Events in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1925–1945*, largely on the subject of Protest; and in February 1949, a quarterly devotional magazine, *Free Presbyterian Witness*, was started with Rev. A.D. Macleod as the editor.¹⁰ In the early 1950s, the Glasgow congregation numbered 300 to 400;¹¹ and sometime between 1953 and 1955 a church at 202 Renfrew Street was purchased from a German-speaking Lutheran congregation when this group moved to the German Institute.¹² The congregation were also able to buy a large four-storey manse on Cleveden Road for Mr Mackenzie. This was sold in the late 1960s when a flat on Airlie Street, Hyndland, was purchased.

About 1950, following the death of Rev. Ewen Macqueen, Rev. A. D. Macleod became the pastor of the Macqueen Relief congregation in Inverness. By this time the services in Glasgow were almost entirely taken by Mr Mackenzie, except latterly when he went to Waternish for a month each summer. The services were morning and evening in English on Sabbath, with Gaelic at 3pm, and prayer meetings in Gaelic on Tuesdays and English on Wednesdays. Being on a Tuesday night, the Gaelic prayer meeting was often attended by people from other congregations in Glasgow, especially those unable to attend their own prayer meeting by reason of

⁶ See *A Review of Events in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1925–1945*. The area where this church was has been totally redeveloped.

⁷ Rev. Roderick Mackenzie was living in Stirling after he demitted his Glasgow charge in October 1944, *Right of Protest*, pp. 82-83.

⁸ The elder David Walker lived in Greenock. He often acted as the precentor when he attended in Glasgow.

⁹ The services in Tighnabruaich were held at Lincluden, the home of Christopher Mackenzie.

¹⁰ A notice in the *Free Presbyterian Witness* of March 1958 intimated that the magazine would thenceforth be occasional rather than quarterly. Publication continued at least until May 1960 and perhaps much longer. Content was non-controversial and rather similar to *Banner of Truth Magazine* which commenced in 1955.

¹¹ We have heard much lower estimates but the higher figures seem more likely, especially given the money required for the purchase and maintenance of two buildings.

¹² The building dates to the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1930s it had belonged to the Seventh Day Adventists.

work. Mr Mackenzie insisted that in his absence, services should only be conducted by those who had been ordained elders in the Free Presbyterian Church which must have been an increasingly limiting constraint.

The services in Stirling, Greenock, and Glendale seem to have been discontinued early on, and we have not heard of anyone who could remember them. The services in Clydebank lasted until about 1961. Latterly they were reduced to an irregular prayer meeting conducted by Rev. Roderick Mackenzie in a hall attached to the Congregational church on Janetta Street, with just a handful attending. One of these was the elderly Hector Mackenzie, who had belonged to the St Jude's Kirk Session before 1945.¹³ The services in Tighnabruaich presumably lasted until Christopher Mackenzie moved to Skye to stay with his daughter, around 1970. About thirty attended in Waternish where the services continued till around 1980.¹⁴

Rev. Roderick Mackenzie was a remarkable man. He was a very able preacher; had an impressive scientific and engineering knowledge; and was a composer (in particular, of the psalm tune 'Gairloch'), a poet, an artist, and a clock-maker. He was also a kind and pleasant man. He had some peculiarities: for example, he had to be asked each Sabbath to conduct the services in Renfrew Street; he would allow no clock in the church; and very few people ever stayed in his manse.¹⁵

2. The end, 1972–1985

Rev. Roderick Mackenzie died on 23rd August 1972. The numbers in the congregation had remained around 150 during the 1960s but they declined rapidly after Mr Mackenzie's death. Many had continuing attending out of regard and loyalty to him. In May 1973, some members of the congregation petitioned the Free Presbyterian Synod on the matter of Protest but the

¹³ No fewer than twelve elders left the Free Presbyterian Church in sympathy with Mr Mackenzie; *West Highland Free Press*, 25th April 1986, p. 7.

¹⁴ The Free Presbyterian church in Waternish was built on a croft belonging to the Beaton family. With the exception of the sister Mary Ann, the Beaton family supported Mr Mackenzie in 1945 and would only allow Mackenzie supporters to use the building. After Donald Beaton's death around 1980, Mary Ann restored access to the Free Presbyterian Church. The locks were changed, and Relief services in Waternish came to an end. The building is currently being rented to the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

¹⁵ The statement that the windows of the Renfrew Street church were covered with brown paper to hide 'idolatrous' stained glass does not seem to be correct, but may have applied to some other building occasionally used for services; J. Macleod, *Banner in the West* (Edinburgh, 2008), p. 249.

Synod refused to receive the petition.¹⁶ The next year, the congregation requested an informal conference with some representatives of the Free Presbyterian Synod, one of the proposals in mind being restoration as a separate congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church. The request for a conference was debated by the Synod but refused by a majority of one.¹⁷ In 1975, a number of members of the congregation rejoined the Free Presbyterian Church, while others left during this period for St Vincent Street Free Church, Partick Highland Free Church (now Dowanvale), Grant Street Free Church, and Milton Free Church.

Following Mr Mackenzie's death, Christopher Mackenzie, by this time living in Waternish, started to travel down every week to take the services at Renfrew Street. This went on for a number of years, with Christopher Mackenzie staying in the flat on Airlie Street on these occasions.¹⁸ When Christopher Mackenzie was unable to come, members of the management Committee read sermons of Spurgeon, Ryle, Highland ministers, and others. The numbers continued to dwindle. As already mentioned, Relief services in Waternish discontinued around 1980.

In May 1981, the Free Presbyterian ministers Revs. John Brentnall and Moshe Radcliffe were suspended from the ministry *sine die*, again on the issue of Protest, and they conducted a number of services for the Renfrew Street congregation over the next few years. Mr Brentnall preached his first sermon there on 10th June 1981. Mr Brentnall mentions thirteen people by name at that time who belonged to the congregation and two others who had apparently come down from Skye. The leading figure was Ian MacDiarmid, the Secretary of the Free Presbyterian Relief Congregation Contingency Committee.

Mr Brentnall preached his final sermon for the congregation on 9th December 1984, and says that they decided to close down sometime afterwards.¹⁹ The library was divided between himself and Mr Radcliffe

¹⁶ S. Fraser Tallach, *The Ides of May* (Kinlochbervie, 1981), preface. For the petition, see *Right of Protest*, pp. 95-99. The petitioners were Dr Duncan MacSween, Hugh Mackay, and William Sutherland.

¹⁷ *Right of Protest*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁸ Christopher Mackenzie was born in Mellon Udrigle on 23rd October 1893, one of seven children. His father died about 1897. He moved to Tighnabruaich in the early 1930s where he had a butcher's van (White and Mackenzie's). His mother, Ann, had an obituary in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* in October 1945, pp. 109-110, just a month before Christopher left the Church. He died in April 1986 at the age of 92, and was buried in Kames, with Rev. Moshe Radcliffe presiding at the grave-side. See notice in *West Highland Free Press*, 25th April 1986, p. 7.

¹⁹ J. M. Brentnall, *Free Presbyterian Reminiscences* (rev. edn., no place or date), pp. 224-227.

and the building was sold to the Glasgow College of Art. Soon afterwards, however, – to the dismay of former members of the congregation – it was purchased by the Society of St Pius X, a breakaway Roman Catholic group, and has been used for masses ever since. The congregation had supported a number of Christian organisations over the years including the Trinitarian Bible Society, the Scottish Reformation Society, the Reformation Translation Fellowship,²⁰ and the Lord's Day Observance Society, and it is understood that the proceeds from the sale of the church were divided among these organisations.

²⁰ In 1976, the Renfrew Street congregation contributed nearly a quarter of the total 'donations from churches' received by the Reformation Translation Fellowship. Mr William Sutherland was a member of the Reformation Translation Fellowship committee; see *Reformation Translation Fellowship Newsletter*, Spring 1977.