

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Rev. Alexander H. MacKenzie, 17th January, 1987  
Cumbernauld (Minister Kirkpatrick Fleming 1945-54?)

l.c.  
By telephone 17th January, 1987, having 'phoned him earlier to give him time to prepare his thoughts. Much of his talk concerned his other Churches, but was important in so far as Mr. MacKenzie is part of the parish history, his outlook and life in general must be considered relevant. Although he disclaimed any great learning, his talk was liberally laced with quotations from Milton and the scriptures to illustrate points. I found many of his descriptions quite graphic, which again is in apparent contradiction to the view, both from himself and the recollections of others, that his strength lay in pastoral work rather than preaching.

He was author of the 3rd Statistical Account for Kirkpatrick Fleming, and says that his account must survive somewhere. (The published volume appears to contain the reports in an edited form.)

Since Mr. MacKenzie was Minister, the whole interview logically falls under the standard heading of 'Church'.

The Glebe  
Controversy  
1947-48

The first thing he talked about, and with feeling, was the controversy over the glebe which did much to sour his ministry at Kirkpatrick Fleming.

There were two glebes, the outer and inner glebe, comprising about twenty two acres in all (5 inner, 17 outer, he thought). The Caledonian Railway had cut through the glebe, the station being on church property, so that a rent had always been paid for it to the Trustees of the Church. The ground was generally let out, at very low prices in view of the depressed state of agriculture before 1939. When Mr. MacKenzie went to Kirkpatrick Fleming the lease was held by a Mr. Irving whose son had (later?) a garage in Dumfries. Mr. MacKenzie thinks Irving had had it before the War. The five acres near the manse were good land, but the outer glebe was naturally marshy, poor land. It was almost entirely surrounded by Jim Connell's (Newton) land, and Jim Connell wanted to buy it, although Tom Irving wanted to keep it. And this brought the controversy.

Jim Connell was a Glasgow man, which perhaps was to tell against him (Mr. MacKenzie was from Glasgow/Clydebank area). He was a very good friend to

Mr. MacKenzie - indeed judging from the 'phone call I'd say Jim Connell and Jim Irving of Shawrig were his closest friends in the parish. In confidence, Jim sounded out the Minister about the possibility of purchasing the land. Mr. MacKenzie said he had no personal objection, and - as requested - kept the matter in confidence, which he now thinks was a mistake, for he should have informed the session at once, but he was in an awkward position and at the time thought he was doing the right thing.

Jim Connell then wrote to the General Trustees, who consulted Mr. MacKenzie and, having received his advice, recommended the sale of the land. Annan presbytery agreed to the sale, but in the meantime Tom Beattie, Session clerk and County councillor had objected. At the next Meeting of Presbytery Jim Irving - presbytery elder - said that the sale would cause some displeasure in the community, the agreement was overturned, and Tom Irving (a big burly man) got to keep the lease.

In the circumstances Mr. MacKenzie thought Presbytery was probably quite right, and he remained on friendly terms with Jim Irving, but he felt bitter and angry towards Tom Beattie - and obviously never completely got over it. This was partly because of the circumstances in which the dispute occurred. After seven years of marriage his first son was born and was due to be baptised that Sunday. The Minister's cup of happiness was running over - and then, that very day, Tom Beattie accused him of bribery and corruption.

It was the custom for the Session to meet before Communion to discuss arrangements. They would then have a prayer and go into church. At this time Tom Beattie reminded the minister it was time for prayer, but the minister 'blew his top', in his own words, and said there will be no prayer until we're in church. Tom, he said, 'would aggravate a saint from heaven', and was a trouble maker at presbytery. He'd begun as a ploughman, became a very hard working farmer, suffered from a bad heart and was a bundle of nerves. His wife was nice.

Mr McKenzie remarked that he'd always tried to base his life on his mother, and not to take offence, on the grounds that if the minister doesn't act as peacemaker you can't expect anyone else to. But Tom Beattie .....

too, he greatly liked - a very lively person - a great personality who loved children.

Also on the Session was John Mackie of Redhouse, who lived with his two maiden sisters. In this context he remarked that because the Session were nearly all excellent dairy farmers, he started to read the agricultural pages of the 'Glasgow Herald', and later amazed his fellow ministers in West Lothian by being able to price a herd of cattle at £60 the head.

Then there was Mr Graham of East Scales, a delightful person, lame, no relation to Jenny and Bessy Graham. It was Bessy who first showed him round the manse.

John Graham, the beadle, was a largely self-taught man with an enormous fund of knowledge. He'd left school at 14, but could tell you the different rotations in all the farms round about., and could quote lots of Biblical texts. He worked with Mr Graham (above) at East Scales. He started story - 'He shook me one day' - and then got diverted into talking about his knowledge. Presumably it was some aspect of biblical or church knowledge that shook. John Graham was a very keen carpet bowler, and was on the Hall committee, of which McKenzie was chairman.

Later he reverted to Molly and Annie Mackie, Bessy and Jenny Graham as stalwarts. Mr Hodgson told him about the quarries. Mr Rogerson, 'an awfully fine chap': he thought his wife had served at Mossknow before his marriage. (I have a note here 'Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna' - in a Rogerson context). Across the road lived Mr Burnett, 'a very nice man'. He also recalled Jack Burnett - but the Mr Burnett he knew best would be his father.

The first names he mentioned in the interview were the two organists, David Johnstone, and Mrs Collinge, daughter in law of the painter.

#### Church Life

The service was fairly routine - just the usual Church of Scotland service.

He could not remember a Bible Class, but he himself took the Sunday School. There was no Parish magazine because of the paper shortage.

When he applied for Kirkpatrick Fleming there were 37 applicants. Eventually it was reduced to a short list. He heard later on the grapevine that most of the Session were very keen to get ~~a minister who was on the~~ one particular minister who had connections with

with the Department of Agriculture, and it was half-suggested to him by the interim moderator (I think Pollock of Gretna) that he should withdraw, but, he said, 'the common people heard him gladly', which I take to be a biblical quotation. Anyway he got their votes. He'd been happy to stay in his previous position, Papa Westray, but his wife was homesick. Quite a number of applicants were better qualified than he.

He couldn't remember whether church weddings had yet come back into fashion.

One of the parishioners he remembered was the oldest man ever in his charge, a shepherd who belonged to Eskdalemuir but lived with his daughter in Kirkpatrick Fleming, - a wonderful man - in a wee croft where he planted potatoes the year before he died aged over 99. He had a very short funeral service, it being a time of great cold (He'd be talking about the terrible winter of 1947).

Another parishioner mentioned was old Mrs Davidson, who lived towards Cranberry.

He remembered the erection of the War Memorial at Toppinghead. Mr Graham of Mossknow spoke about how they should be sad, yet proud, and Mr McKenzie spoke too. Bessy Graham went all round the parish and gave presents to all who had come back (A little doubt about this). There was also, he thought, a fancy dress parade for children (which seemed an odd celebration for a war memorial). No memory of procession to War Memorial.

It was said that Druids used to practice outside where the church is.

There was a good choir. He remarked that the Thursday night choir practice was a good chance for teenagers to meet. It wasn't clear whether this related specifically to Kirkpatrick Fleming.

There were some 230 members. Only at Communion was there an evening service.

The manse thrilled him. Someone had planted boxwood hedges. The garden was enormous, a lovely piece of grass in front, with rhododendrons. One day Jim Connell got him a £6 lawnmower as a present. It was the joy of his life. After Orkney it seemed to him a beautiful warm house, with big windows that let in the sun. It seemed like 'tropical Africa'.

When Bessy Graham was showing him round the manse, he was thrilled with a lovely stove. The way he worded it I thought it sounded as if it heated two rooms at once, but this should be checked. But he did not like the blood-red, or crimson, colour which Mr Duncan had had the kitchen (or dining room?) painted. It reminded him too much of Mr Fyffe's suicide, so he got Mr Collinge to change it - probably to green, a restful colour which he likes. He finds grass very restful.

He wasn't 'preached in' - nor in any of his charges. He didn't like all that sort of thing.

The thing that makes him proudest is William G Niven, now minister Lesmahagow, outgoing, a great organist, former pupil of Kirkpatrick Fleming and Annan Academy. In wartime he served in Palestine in the Intelligence Corps. He was ordained in 1958, after being at St Andrew's university.

At Kirkpatrick Fleming he usually had a bike, which he mended himself, until his brother in law gave him a pedal assisted 1.5 h.p. 'motor cycle' which thrilled him to bits.

There were no major structural changes to the church, which he thought dated back to about 1700, built to a 'T' plan. The stone head had been made by master craftsmen. Physically it was an easy church to preach in. He remarked that he had since discovered that 'pulpitum' is the latin for 'scaffold' - a remark typical of his conversation.

A lad Steele (Hollie) kept asking to be taken on as a gardener till at last Mr McKenzie had to tell him bluntly that he couldn't afford it.

Somebody had planted lovely daffodils at manse gate.

Other  
Ministers

He knew John Walker, as presbytery clerk. John Walker had been heartbroken to leave Kirkpatrick Fleming.

Eric Duncan became chaplain to Aberdeen Grammar School, now lived in Stirling.

He did not know about Mr Cartwright and the communion rails. He thought Mr Cartwright had done one very sensible thing, which he wished he had done. There was no baptismal font in the church, so Mr Cartwright suggested that Nat Wallace should give one, in memory of his only son, who was killed in Normandy in 1944. Nat Wallace was a very close friend of Mr McKenzie.

Mr Walker had got 6 sovereigns for the manse. He got

Life and  
Career

£6.

Mr McKenzie had a very strict upbringing in a stern liberal household where beer, wine, cards and books other than the Bible on Sundays were forbidden. Even as a grown man he was expected to say where he'd been if he was out after 10.15. He determined never to treat his own children so. Consequently, though, he never played in Kirkpatrick Fleming whist drives.

He seems to have some sort of dramatic conversion in the mid 1920's (He quoted Jeremiah who protested to God that he couldn't speak to people about religion - a similar case). Not being academic he struggled to make his way to and through university. He seems to have regarded passing lower maths as a triumph. He took an ordinary degree in modern history, with geology as one of his subjects. Both have remained lifelong interests.

As a minister he would have liked mission work, but was turned down by the Foreign and Colonial bodies. Eventually he got Papa Westray against 2 other applicants. He went 6 weeks before the war began, left 6 weeks before it ended. He tried to move thence to Stromness, but it wasn't easy to replace Papa Westray, so he didn't get it. He told me that he had been told by one of those in the guard ship that the 'Royal Oak' had been sunk not by a U-boat, as was the official version, but by a saboteur.

Then to Kirkpatrick Fleming - an assisted place, like Papa Westray. In 1954 he went to Fauldhouse, for 4.25 years. He got a call to Bathgate, but his wife and mother in law didn't want it. From 1959-68 he was at Aberdeen St George's, and then he was transferred to a linked congregation in the remotest part of Buchan, where he stayed till 1974 - and where he was visited by Campbell Beattie. I couldn't make out the name, but it is on the highest ground between Aberdeen and Fraserburgh.

He remarked that he was in Kirkpatrick Fleming so long partly because it wasn't easy to get out. He didn't like being in an assisted church, and once he went to Fauldhouse he felt he was earning his keep.

His wife had two miscarriages before his first son was born in 1947 - which added poignancy to his fight with Tom Beattie. Two of his children were born in Cresswell, one in the manse. His son was born on 21st February 1947, when there was 2 feet of snow on the ground. I think the middle child was born before the doctor arrived. His youngest daughter was born on 15th June 1954, the day he received the call to Fauldhouse.

One daughter is married, one doing social work, one unmarried, one living in Nairobi (probably the married one). His son took a B.Sc. chemistry and married a fine girl, despite the fact that she's a catholic.

His wife died on his birthday. True to his upbringing and habits he refused to take a taxi for the 6 mile journey home.

When he retired he wanted to live in Edinburgh, but couldn't get council accomodation for his unmarried daughter, so went to Cumbernauld which he quite likes. He loves reading. He found his retiral like a second childhood, for he was able to read all the books he wanted. One of his favourites is Hugh Millar's 'My Schools and Schoolmasters'. He mentioned his childhood favourites - Para Handy, Three Men in a Boat - books his father disapproved of.

He had a very high opinion of Mr Duke, the Middlebie minister. The Kirtle minister was Mr Malseed.

At the age of 60 he got a 'car essential' parish, and at that age learned to drive.

Among miscellaneous remarks - that the church is the most conservative of all bodies.

He promised to send me any other memories. He thinks he has some lists of elders and photographs of the Session, but he did not keep a personal book of baptisms, weddings and funerals.

People and Places

Tom Irving  
Jim Connell

Tom Beattie  
Campbell Beattie  
Colin Davidson  
Jim Irving  
Mrs Jim Irving  
John Mackie  
Mr Graham (East Scales)  
Jenny Graham  
Bessy Graham  
Molly Mackie  
Annie Mackie  
John Graham  
Mr Hodgson  
Mr Roger  
Mr Burnett  
Davie Johnstone  
Mrs Collinge  
Mrs Davidson  
Eric Duncan  
Mr Fyffe  
Mr Steele  
John Walker  
Mr Cartwright  
Nat Wallace  
Alex. H McKenzie passim

Newton  
Glebe  
Shawrig  
Redhouse  
East Scales  
Cranberry  
Hollie