

Old Roots: New Beginnings

A history of West Kirby United Reformed Church

A talk by Barbara Mason

Thursday 22nd September 2016 as part of our New Beginnings week

Can you imagine what West Kirby was like in the 1880s? It had begun to develop from just a village with an ancient Church, St Bridget's, to a place where people came to stay for its health giving properties.

A description in the Hoylake and West Kirby Directory for 1897 pointed to its future as a residential health resort, stressing:-

"...varied and beautiful series of land and seascapes. Its climate may be said to be almost as varied as its scenery...West Kirby has a mean temperature as high and as even as any watering place in the South of England and is becoming famed for its beneficial affects in consumption and other diseases of the respiratory organs..."

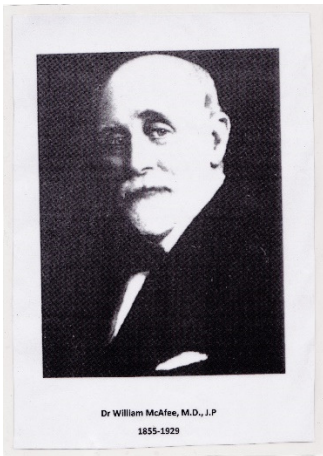
West Kirby really began to develop with the advent of the railway in 1886 and the building of good roads. In 1871 the district had a population of only 2100 and by 1891 this had risen to 6545. Hoylake Urban District Council started in 1897 and it made great strides in the next decade. Promenades were built in both townships, with a Marine Lake in West Kirby. An electric lighting station opened in 1901, public halls were erected, a water and sewage system installed. New houses were built and shops opened.

This is just to give you an idea of what the district was like.

But back to the start of our own church.

Early in 1882 a committee of 23 interested persons were granted permission by the Liverpool Presbytery to establish a Presbyterian preaching station in West Kirby. One of the signatories to the request was a young Irish Doctor called William McAfee.

"There's a young Irish Doctor gone to settle in West Kirby- get him and the success of the work is assured" so said the Rev. Patrick White to the Rev James Muir of Egremont. Dr McAfee readily undertook the task and threw himself wholeheartedly into it. His courage, faith and energy, coupled with the gift of leadership inspired those early pioneers and in eight years a tiny preaching station had grown into a strong and vigorous church and our fine buildings had been built and paid for.



As a physician he combined the healing of the body with the winning of souls for Christ's church and was a true friend to all to whom he ministered. He was the first Elder of our church, Chairman of the Committee of Management from its formation, and for a time acted as Treasurer. He was also a temperance worker; he took part in the creation and development of the Children's Convalescent Home (now the Residential School); the Lear Home of Recovery (now Lear House in association with the Abbeyfield Society). All these owe their inception to his foresight. He died in 1929 in his 74th year. It is fitting that the congregation's memorial to Dr McAfee is the red Italian marble baptismal font, for the welfare of children was always dear to his heart. In fact my mother told me that I was the second baby to be baptised in the new font in 1931.

The preaching station was first just for the summer months for visitors and residents who came to this healthful spot but interest grew and, at the request of the residents, it was extended throughout the winter months. The morning attendance averaged 100 and in the evening about 120 were present.

In 1884 a desire was expressed by the worshippers that a pastor should be appointed. At this early stage it was thought advisable to appoint for six months and the Rev. Forrest Young spent the following winter as preacher in charge.

Mr P.M. Kirkland, or Paddy Kirkland as he was fondly called, was appointed in September 1885 to take charge of the congregation, again for 6 months (a cautious lot in those days!) He took charge again in the winter months of 1886-87 and finally appointed permanently and unanimously as first Minister of our Church in February 1887.

Where and when was the church built?

Sites in Lingdale Road and Riversdale road were considered but ultimately the present site in Meols Drive was secured. On it an iron Church with places for 250 worshippers was erected at a cost of £518 and the opening service took place in May 1882.

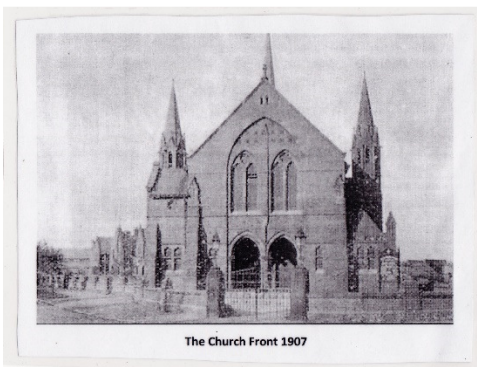


You may be surprised to learn that the site was originally a duck pond and on the opposite corner was a cockpit.

In 1886 the need for a stronger building was evident and plans were drawn up for a new building- the Lecture hall. This is the present day Main Hall, which cost £1690. In 1887 a Sunday School took the place of the Children's Services. A Superintendent, Mr R.B Annesley was appointed and he has been followed by a succession of worthy leaders, loyally supported by a strong band of teachers, right up to the present day.

Strangely enough I have had a tenuous link with our first Minister, Paddy Kirkland- No, I am not that old! My mother helped the Kirkland daughters move with their father to Parkgate in 1931 and Paddy Kirkland was given the job of looking after me, although I have no recollection of it at all. I believe he pushed me around in my pram in Ashton Park, where I loved looking at the trees.

Owing to the strong increase in numbers and the rapid development in West Kirby as a residential and health resort, the Lecture Hall soon became inadequate to accommodate the congregation and a permanent church opened in 1890 to seat no less than 690 persons. The cost with the furnishings was £3632. Altogether, the huge block of buildings cost £6000 with only £500 remaining which was paid off by 1893.



The Manse in Lingdale Road was bought in 1904 at a cost of £1250 and in 1906 new classrooms were built on the north side of the Main Hall to provide for the ever increasing work in the Sunday School. A sale of work was held to defray the debt on the manse and new classrooms and over £1000 was raised.

I can remember my mum taking me with her to the Monday meeting here and myself sitting and riding on a big rocking horse. I was three when I attended Sunday School with Miss Appleton, the teacher in a long, old fashioned dress, conducting us in the

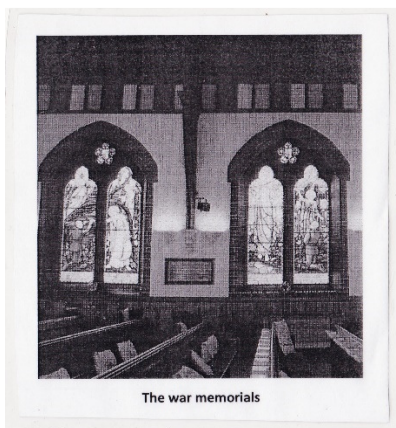
singing of 'Jesus bids us shine with a clear bright light, like a little candle burning in the night'. I can also remember a child making a puddle on the floor: I was quite shocked!

Many Sunday School teachers influenced me in my Christian life. There were quite a number of Misses who taught me. I'm afraid this was because they had little opportunity to marry when they were younger as so many young men were killed in the First World War

Then I was asked to become a teacher myself, helping Miss Evans in her department of 7-8 year olds. She was a patient, kind lady, could control children and encouraged me to take part in the services we held in her room. When Miss Winifred Evans died in 1974 she bequeathed her bungalow to our church, the proceeds of the sale forming a permanent Benevolent Fund.

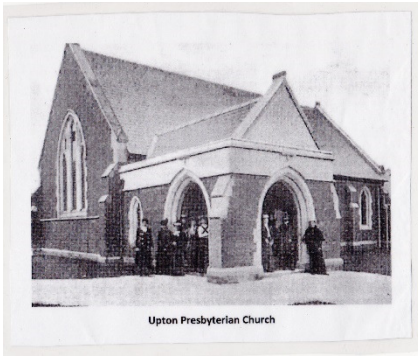
Our church organist's father, Charles Richards, was invited to come to our church by Mr Kirkland, who met him over the bridge with his wheelbarrow (he was a builder) so started his long association with our church and that of his son, Harry Richards, who was our organist for 46 years. After he died, from his estate saw the instalment of the beautiful stained glass window near the organ, based on the instruments in psalm 150

There are also stained glass windows dedicated to the fallen in World War One with bronze tablets underneath. Between the two windows is a carved oak plaque bearing the names of those who died in World War Two.

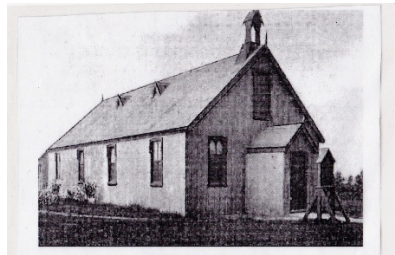


On the WW1 tablet are the poignant names of the 4 Johnston brothers and on the WW2 plaque is included the name of my uncle John Hadwin, and father of my cousin Jackie Roberts who was also a member of this church before she died.

The early years of our church were clearly evangelical and three daughter churches were established: at Upton 1893, Heswall 1899, and Meols, beginning with a church hall in 1904, and also for a short time at Saughall Massie and in South Road West Kirby



Upton Presbyterian Church



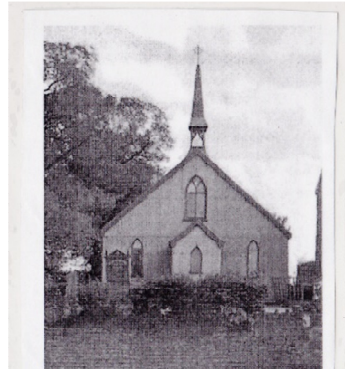
Heswall Presbyterian Church



Meols Branch Church



Saughall Massie Mission 1907



Greasby Branch Church

When our present church was built in 1889-90 the original iron Church was divided-one half being taken to Meols and the other half to Greasby. It later became the Scout Hut on the hill going out of Greasby village. The Greasby Mission Station united with the Methodist Church in 1937 to form one strong congregation in that place, the Presbyterian cause being maintained at Upton one mile away.

The organ, a valuable asset to our church, was completely renovated in 1952 during the alterations to the interior of our church. Then, following the completion of the re-lighting in 1999 the organ was again modified and electrified by replacing the old worn out bellows, one for each pipe, 1000 of them, and replaced with solenoids, which meant there was no longer a delay between striking a key and the note being produced.

In this talk today I obviously can't mention all of the changes that were made in the intervening years but the following were important ones:

The Boys Brigade was formed in 1961 with Mr Rotherham as Leader, followed by John Prince with help from Russel Swift and Jim McKeddie. John Prince's personal involvement with the company lasted 40 years. The company had to disband in 2003 due to lack of sufficient leaders to comply with the new Children's Act.

The King's Missionary Band under the leadership of Miss Theodora Gamble was active from 1966. She put on plays with grownups and children and raised thousands of pounds for overseas missions, particularly in Taiwan, where a number of village and mountain churches were established. They were very old-fashioned

plays. My daughters and I took part in a few. I can remember my daughter Ann in the final line up suddenly being sick. She was in the front row too!

After several years of negotiation 1972 saw the union of the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church under the new title of the United Reformed Church. Special services were held in London and locally we held a social evening in October with our congregational friends from Hoylake and a service the following evening in Hoylake.

1976 saw the revival of the Youth Fellowship under the leadership of Professor and Mrs James Taylor in their home and church.

Miss Dorothy Kirkland, the surviving daughter of our first Minister died in 1975. She left the residue of her estate to the church which included that of her sister, Miss Margaret Kirkland.

The 1980s and 90s were busy times. I am going to read out some of the activities that started:

House groups, church weekends away, our 125 year booklet was published and we held celebrations. The Women's Guild continued under Charlotte McKeddie and the Monday afternoon meeting continued under Dorothy Johnston. Coach parties were organised by Elizabeth Crewe and helpers, together with plant sales and jumble sales.

, Men's breakfast began and we supported Mission England with Billy Graham. Junior church continued to support a Burmese girl, Myot Mon and we supported Philip Hillman working in a Kenyan school through A.I.M. His parents, Brian and Glenys went to Kenya as Missionaries. Brian, as a solicitor, sorted and made legal some of the properties and land Kenyans owned. Glenys was a great help to him and took women's classes.

Holiday club started with Dave Bennet, of the Pocket Testament League and then continued to be run by ourselves for many years.

Youth fellowship continued to thrive on a Sunday evening and Crosspoint, a Saturday night youth club, commenced (now known as Saturday Night Live). Wilfred Prince retired as serving Elder after 42 years and as church secretary after 46 years.

Allan and Annette Mackie decided to become missionaries and, after training, went to serve in Madagascar with A.I.M.

In 1990 the congregation studied Mission Pursuit in 6 monthly sessions. As a result an aim was put to the church meeting and agreed:- to show the love of Jesus and to

be an active, relevant witness to Him so as to serve the community and to bring others to know the Lord'.

A Bible class was established for 11-14 year olds. The small hall with the kitchenette and toilets had been erected in 1965 and opened and dedicated in February 1966 and was much used for smaller meetings.

1992 saw the conclusion of the major building project when the small hall was extended upwards by two rooms with additional space for storage in the Main Hall, a crèche and new toilet created under the gallery stairs. This was made possible by the generous bequest of Miss Greig (hence the Greig room).

The Baptistry located beneath the dais was built in 1994 by several of our own expert members. This enabled West Kirby URC to offer both infant baptism or baptism by immersion.

In 1994 the church ran its first Alpha course, held for enquirers into the Christian faith. These have been very successful for many years.

A tape ministry was also developed by which housebound members could receive a recorded copy of sermons.

In 1994 a Mums and Toddlers group was founded and within a year there were 70 toddlers with their mums each Friday morning. Now there are morning and afternoon sessions with numbers growing and a waiting list. A group called 'Who let the dads out' was started too on a Saturday morning once a month to enable dads to bring their toddlers and give their mums a rest. It is now known as Toddlers for Dads.

In 1996 Churches Together in West Kirby set up a display in West Kirby library of 'Past and Present' artefacts, videos and pictures, as well as interviews with members of local churches. Four members of West Kirby URC made a banner of Unity which was hung after the event in each of the participating churches. Our vision for the week was to reach out to young people in their teens to early twenties who had no contact with a church.

In 1997 the Church Meeting agreed to appoint a full time youth worker and Verity Peacock was appointed in September 1997 followed by Dan Sach. Dan has really developed youth work in church, schools, the Hub at the Concourse, and also in partnership with Hoylake Chapel. Dan and his helpers are a great asset to our church.

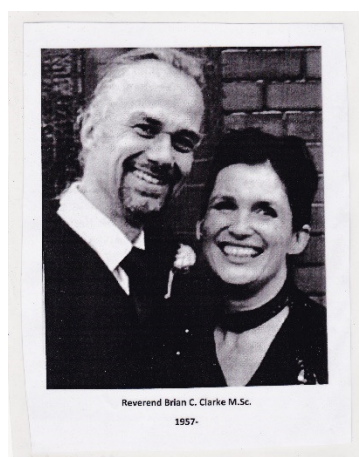
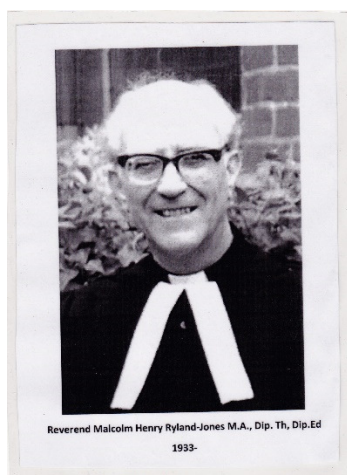
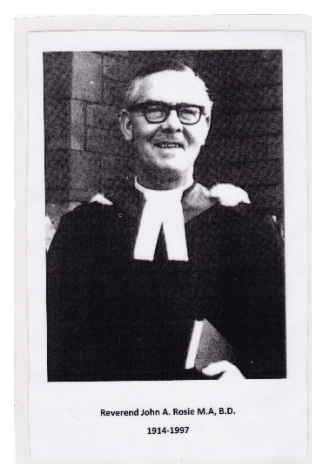
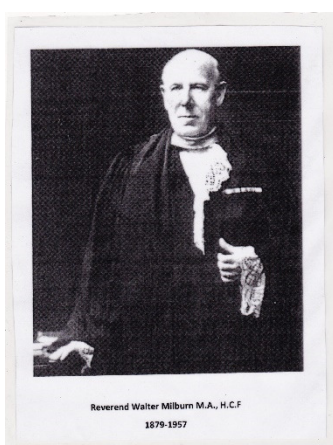
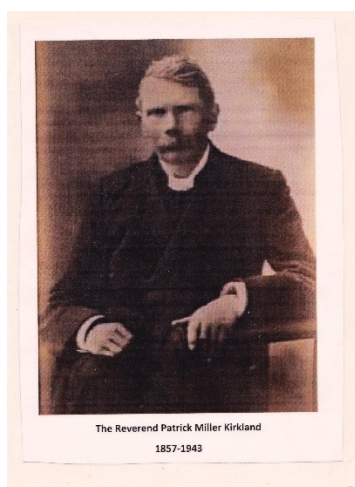
It is 30 years since we held our first Flower Festival. Not many people know, however, that my husband, Geoff, slept in the church to guard the more valuable

items on show, such as silver. There is an album of photos taken by Wilfred Prince-not unfortunately of Geoff snoozing away!

Cornerstone was founded in 1998, a fellowship group for women which met fortnightly. Owing to the age of members and ill health numbers declined and the group disbanded in 2015.

1998 also saw the setting up of the church's website.

It is most unusual that our church has had only 5 male Ministers from 1882 to 2014.
: Patrick Kirkland, Walter Milburn, John Rosie, Malcolm Ryland Jones and Brian Clark. *Sam Sach has kindly copied pictures and relevant details of each Minister as well as other photos. Thank you Sam.*



I knew Jack Rosie and his wife Margaret from my teens and he married Geoff and me in 1956 and christened our 2 girls and a couple of our grandsons. As a family we were all involved in the Garden parties held at Roseacre, Meols drive, the home of Dorothy and Charles Rutherford. Each year a Rose Queen was chosen with a retinue and both our girls were the Rose Queen.



Then just over 2 years ago came our first lady Minister, Louise Franklin, with her exuberance, lively faith and vision for New Beginnings. And dare I say it, more than a passing interest in the lovely Gary Barlow!

Just look at our lovely new buildings. They were made possible through a magnificent legacy from Miss Marjory Price; with the reordering Committee under Liz Wilson; the vision and expertise of our Architect, Colin Usher and unanimous agreement of the Church meeting. We oldies realise the new buildings are for future generations with thanks to all the Old Roots- the Ministers, Elders, Officers, Committee members, helpers in all the organisations of past years as we look forward to new beginnings. **Our vision is to grow a relevant Christ-like church that serves the community.** Christ's work does not stop and we are definitely on our way to new beginnings.

Barbara Mason