

The Church of St. John the Evangelist



Johnstone



A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND ITS PEOPLE

WRITTEN IN TWO PARTS BY ISABEL ROBERTS
PART 2

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO
THE CHURCH
A £2 MINIMUM DONATION
WOULD BE APPRECIATED

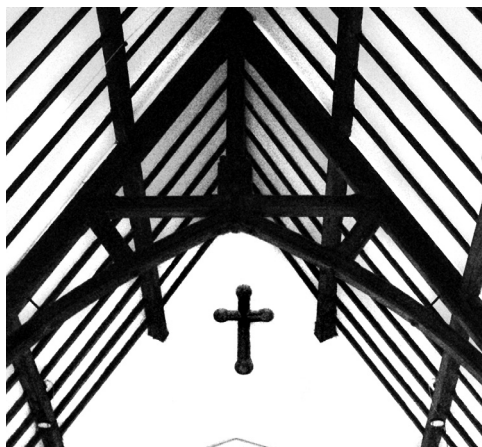
St. John's Church is a historic building with a rich heritage. We will now enter by the north door and take a look at the interior. It was built with 400 sittings and has been variously described as "a beautiful little church, a hidden gem, a jewel." Certainly there is much to admire.

For centuries Christian Churches have almost always been built on an east west orientation and St. John's is no exception. The practice of praying while facing east is older than Christianity and is almost certainly derived from sun worship. In the Christian Church the east is symbolic of Jerusalem, the rising sun, the resurrection and the second coming.

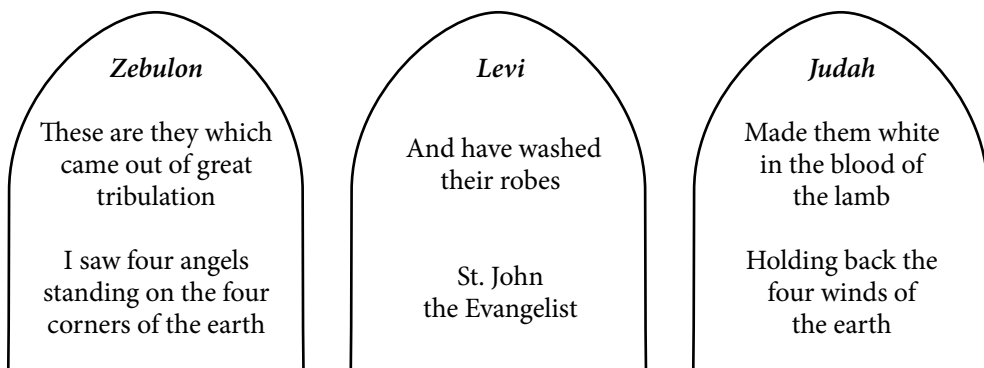
As we enter the church we pass the baptismal font on our right and the eye is drawn to the exquisite, little, round, baptismal window on the south wall. The baptismal font and window are so placed to symbolise that we enter the church through baptism. The subject of this delightful little window is the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. It is full of symbolism. On closer inspection you will notice: a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit; a fish, symbolic of Christ; a shell, symbolic of baptism; fruit, possibly pomegranates with their many seeds, symbolic of the church; an unknown flower, possibly a symbol of purity or of the trinity; and a pelican symbolic of the Eucharist. The legend of the pelican is that to feed its starving young it will draw blood from its breast. Symbolically Christ feeds us with his blood at the Eucharist.



We now turn to the east and are struck by the beauty of our surroundings, the nave with its stained glass windows and high beamed ceiling, the chancel with the beautiful, carved, oak furniture and wood panelled ceiling, the fine East window and the stunning mosaic reredos which is made of marble inlaid with gold leaf and mother of pearl.



The subject of the East window is appropriately the Revelation of St. John. It is in three parts and is inscribed as follows:



Zebulon, Levi and Judah are three of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were the three tribes who established Judea. The text above is from Revelation 7:14 and refers to the multitude before the throne. They can clearly be seen illustrated on the window. Beneath them in the centre is the figure of St. John. On either side of him is the text from Revelation 7:1 which reads: *I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth.* The angels can be seen quite clearly, two on either side holding the winds. Unfortunately, we have no information about the origins of this window.

The Reredos

The reredos, the decorative frieze behind the altar depicts the Risen Christ. The figures of the saints around the Risen Christ are left to right: James the Greater; John the Evangelist [kneeling]; Mary, mother of Jesus; Francis of Assisi [kneeling]; Peter the leader of the apostles; and Paul apostle to the gentiles. A brass plaque beside the reredos tells us that it was gifted to St. John's in memory of Samuel Marshall Thomson of Linwood House who died on 3rd May 1903.

Samuel Marshall Thomson was born in Motherwell in 1859, the son of an Irish doctor. He studied law and as a young man he was a solicitor in Glasgow. At the time of his death in 1903 he was married with four children and was the proprietor of a coal mine. He lived at Linwood House, a fine dwelling in Napier Street in Linwood which had originally been built for the owners of the Linwood Cotton Mill. The site of the house and gardens is now a street of modern houses. After his death at the early age of 43 his wife and four children returned to Leicestershire where she had been born. Further tragic events were to befall the family when his two sons were killed within six months of each other during the Great War.

Interestingly, the reredos although on a smaller scale has striking similarities to the mosaic reredos of the Ascension designed by Robert Speir in 1884 for the Episcopal Church of St. Andrew in St. Andrews in Fife. The latter was executed by Powell & Sons of London a prestigious company, specialising in stained glass, which is also known as Whitefriars Glass.

The Speirs of Elderslie

Alexander Speirs was born about 1714 in Edinburgh and was one of the four original tobacco lords credited with laying the foundation of Glasgow's commercial greatness. He was considered to be the wealthiest man in Scotland at that time.

His Glasgow residence was the prestigious Virginia Mansion in Ingram Street. He bought land at King's Inch near Renfrew, as well as several other neighbouring estates in Renfrewshire including the Wallace Estate in Elderslie. All the estates were combined and entitled The Barony of Elderslie. He then built a grand country house at King's Inch on the banks of the River Clyde which was completed shortly before he died in 1782. He named his new mansion Elderslie House and it was to be the principal home of the Speirs family until 1870. The house was

demolished in the 1920's and is now the site of Braehead Shopping Centre.

In 1867 his great grandson Archibald Alexander Speirs married Lady Anne Playdell Bouverie [b 1844] daughter of the Earl of Radnor, but the marriage was short lived as he died tragically in 1868 at the early age of 28. Their son Alexander Archibald Haggart Speirs was born in 1869 and in 1870 Lady Anne moved to the shooting lodge at Houston. This was the old castle which had once belonged to the Houstouns of Johnstone Castle.

Lady Anne set about enlarging the castle in the Scottish Baronial style to make it the fine house it is today. She ran the estate until her son came of age. An aristocrat of the old school, she took a great interest in the welfare of the workers on her estate finding or creating work for unemployed men and encouraging the women to take up embroidery work which was already a successful village industry.

The Origins of the Houston Embroidery

About 1811 Mr Mathew King moved to Houston where he met and married an embroideress. At that time the women of the area did white work known as "Ayrshire work" or "flowering". A Mr Fulton showed Mr King a colourful gauze dress which was known to have been embroidered in a French convent. Mathew King was impressed by the design and workmanship and set four of his embroideresses to copy it. Their efforts were so successful that an industry soon became established, the embroideresses turning out many kinds of colourful needlework



Lady Anne Speirs

and patterns. Ann and Jeannie King the daughters of Mathew were also involved in the designing and embroidering of pieces. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 Queen Victoria opened the proceedings in front of a curtain embroidered by Houston workers and peers of the realm sat on velvet cushions in the House of Lords which were also the work of the Renfrewshire Village. In the year 1875 Mathew King died having set up a successful village industry. However the development of the sewing machine was to be responsible for a decline in the Houston industry. In the 1880's Lady Anne Speirs, concerned about the poverty of women in the village, saw the revival of the craft as a means of providing employment and a modest income. Interest was undoubtedly stimulated by the popularity of the Arts and Crafts movement.

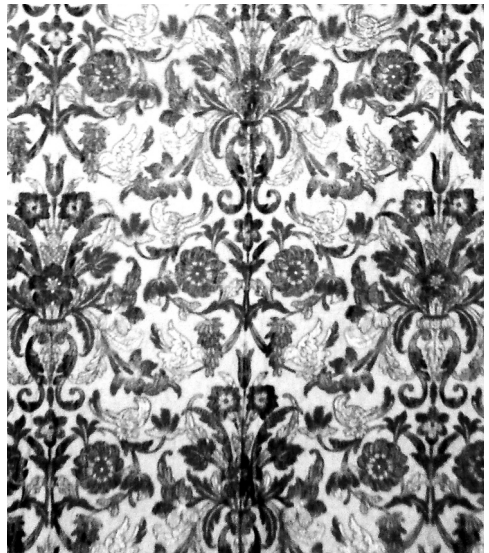
An article in the Renfrewshire Gazette of the 17th March, 1894 reports that Mr A.A. Speirs, aged 21, later laird of Houston and a member of St. John's, presided at an afternoon gathering in Houston Village Hall where embroidery work, old and new, was exhibited. Among the exhibits were quilts, fire screens, table covers, napery etc. That evening prizes were given to the best embroideresses. The Rev. Wm. McDermott, first rector of St. John's gave the benediction. It was also reported at this time "a set of altar decorations made of white Roman satin and embroidered in old gold silk with art work done in old embroidery stitches" was in use at St. Mary's Church, Bourdon St., London.

In 1894 a beautiful dorsal for the altar of St. John's the gift of Lady Anne Speirs of Houston House was much admired.

According to the book "Victorian Embroidery" by Barbara Morris, Lady Anne superintended the embroidery work in the village of Houston which was later known as "The Houston School of Embroidery".

In 1988 four items of Houston Embroidery from St. John's Church were placed in Paisley Museum for safe keeping. Two curtains, an altar frontal and an altar frieze are there on a long term loan.

Many members of the congregation can remember the curtains hanging on brass poles on either side of the altar. According to the museum "they are good examples of the rich and colourful embroidery of the late 19th century". They were gifted to the church by Lady Anne Speirs presumably at or about the same time as the dorsal and were last on display at St. John's on the first doors open day in 1999.



A dorsal or dossal was a curtain suspended at the back of the altar with two others one at each side of it. It may have preceded the reredos which was gifted some time after 1903 but there is no record of how long it was in use or of what became of it.

Lady Anne died in 1915 and was buried in Houston Cemetery.

Alexander Archibald Hagart Speirs [1869-1958] was closely involved with Houston and Killellan Church which was situated on his estate in Houston and had been built by his mother and grandmother in memory of his father. Andrew Herron who was minister at Houston [1940-1969] said of him that he was kindly, considerate and courteous in all his dealings, with grace and dignity and an acceptance of responsibility. He also took a keen interest in St. John's where he was a lifelong member and a long serving vestryman. It was also said of him that his right hand didn't know what his left hand was giving. He married in 1918 and died without an heir in 1958. The estate was inherited by a distant cousin and the house has since been sold.

Note: There is no known connection between the Speir family of Burnbrae and Culdees and the Speirs family of Elderslie.

The Organ

The organ which is encased behind beautifully, crafted, pine, wooden doors is situated within the chancel. It was built by Messrs. Hewins Organ Builders of Stratford on Avon. The company is no longer in existence and the date of the construction is unknown. Built as a residence organ for a large country house, it had to be reduced in size to fit into the church. It is believed to have been given to St. John's by George Ludovic Houstoun of Johnstone Castle who in 1874 gave the land on which the church is built. It may have been installed in the 1880's. It is known that in the early days Lady Anne Napier of Milliken House played the harmonium.

Originally the organ was steam driven. In 1912 there was a problem regarding the hydraulic engine for blowing the organ which had been damaged by frost. A letter from Messrs.T.



Melvin & Sons of St. Rollox Iron Works, Glasgow recommended that in view of the increased water pressure since the engine was originally supplied that a new engine with a smaller cylinder to suit the exiting pressure should be put in. This would simplify the connection and consume less water. Messrs Melvin quoted £16 as the cost of supplying and erecting the new engine complete with connection and including the scrap value of the old engine. With some concrete and joinery work the cost should not exceed £20. If the organ did indeed come from Johnstone Castle then it is possible that the great Chopin himself may have played on it during his visit to the Castle in 1848.

Chopin's Visit to Johnstone Castle

Jane Stirling who was the sister-in-law of the 5th Laird George Ludovic Houston was a devoted pupil of Chopin. She became a pupil in 1842 and in 1844 he dedicated two nocturnes to her. After political upheaval in Paris in 1848 she and her sister Mrs Katherine Erskine brought him to Britain and arranged pupils and concerts to give him an income. On 2nd September 1848 at the invitation of Jane's sister Anne Houstoun (wife of Ludovic) he spent a month at Johnstone Castle. During his stay he visited many big houses in the area including Milliken House the home of William and Lady Elizabeth Napier another of Jane's sisters, and Glentyan House in Kilbarchan, the home of Captain James Stirling, who was one of her brothers. On 27th September he gave a concert at Merchants Hall in Glasgow which was a resounding success. He returned to Paris in November 1848 and died there of TB in October 1849 aged 39. Jane and her sister Katherine assisted him financially in the days before

his death and helped pay for his funeral, at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris which was by all accounts a magnificent occasion. So the great Chopin might just have played on the organ which has for almost 140 years played such a large part in the life of St. John's.

The Oak Furniture

Take time to admire the beautifully, carved, oak furniture. Search out the two brass plaques attached to the front of the choir stall on the south side and you will discover that the pulpit, desks and choir stalls were given to St. John's by Dame Mary Renshaw in memory of her husband Sir Charles Bine Renshaw who died on 6 March 1918. On the death of Dame Mary nineteen years later on 13th February 1937 the altar and altar rails were given in her memory by their son and daughters.



Charles Bine Renshaw was born to a well to do family in London in 1848. He studied law and commerce in Germany. As a young man he came to Scotland to be the director of finance at Glenpatrick Carpet Works in Elderslie. He married Mary the daughter of A.F. Stoddard and on the death of his father-in-law he became chairman of the firm. He was also an M.P. For West Renfrewshire [1892-1906] and a former chairman of the Caledonian Railway Company. In 1903 he became a baronet. He bought Barochan Castle near Houston in 1894. It had belonged

to the Fleming Family from the 13th century until 1863. Sir Charles rebuilt it in the Arts and Crafts Baronial style in 1896 incorporating the tower of the old castle and it was there that he lived until his sudden death in 1918. One of his recreations was gardening and he had a large collection of flowering shrubs in the grounds of the house.



Barochan House

As well as being a captain of industry and a pillar in public service, Sir Charles was also a faithful member of St. John's. He regularly read the lessons at the morning service and served as a long term vestry member. Described as strong and true, intensely humane and full of sympathy, he was always aware of the plight of the poor, sick and needy. It was reported at the time that his loss was keenly felt at St. John's with which he had been intimately associated ever since the church was built in 1874.

The Lectern

Another fine piece of oak furniture is the lectern. The brass plaque on the base tells us that the lectern and bible were given to St. John's in 1939 in memory of Wm. and Alice Finlayson by their son and daughter. There are also brass plaques in memory of members of the Finlayson family on the south wall.

The Finlaysons were linen thread manufacturers. They were the proprietors of Finlayson, Bousfield & Co. Flax Mill and Linen Thread Works. The mill was situated in Napier St. Johnstone on the site which is now Morrison's Supermarket. The Barbush Mill Linen Thread Works was established in 1849 and was in operation until 1966. In the 1800's linen thread was extensively used for sailmaking.

Wm. Finlayson was born in 1786 in Dunfermline, Fife. He and his wife Helen came to Johnstone sometime after 1823. They lived at 40 High St. before moving to Lilybank House in Brewery St.

James Finlayson was born about 1823 in Dunfermline. In 1861 he and his wife Rachel lived at Glencart House, Milliken Park. By 1871 he had purchased Merchiston House from John Stirling Napier. He was the James Finlayson who opened the Bazaar at the opening ceremony of the church hall in 1894.

Wm. James Finlayson [1848-1925] his wife Alice Kay [1856-1932] and their family lived at The Oaks Johnstone in 1901. The Oaks which was off Kilbarchan Rd, is now the site of a sheltered housing development. He was present at the funeral of Rev. McDermott in

1910. The lectern was given in their memory and there is also a brass memorial plaque on the south wall of the church.

Charles Kay Finlayson [1880-1940] and his sister Mary Kay Finlayson gave the lectern and bible to the church in 1939 in memory of their parents Wm. and Alice. There is a brass plaque in memory of Charles who died in 1940 and his wife Muriel Ellen who died in January 1947 on the south wall.

Three generations of the Finlaysons served on the vestry and were very much involved in the life and work of St. John's.

Merchiston House was built circa 1857 for John Stirling Napier the brother of Sir Robert John Milliken Napier of Milliken Estate. It took its name from Merchiston Castle in Edinburgh, the ancestral home of the Napier family. From 1871 the estate belonged to the Finlaysons. It was a fine house with formal gardens, tennis courts and woodlands. Fetes to raise funds for St. John's were held in the grounds. After the 2nd world war it was bequeathed to the Health Board and in 1948 it was opened as a hospital. The hospital was closed circa 2007 and the land is now earmarked for housing development.



Merchiston House

The Lectionary which is in use today was donated by Mae Goldthorpe in memory of her husband Robert 1929-2009.

The Chalice

The ornate silver chalice that is often used at the Wednesday service was gifted to St. John's in memory of Lady Anne Napier. The inscription on the base reads:

**From Lady Hay In Memory
of Her Mother Lady Napier
Who died at Penicuik
5th January 1902.**

Lady Hay was born Anne Salisbury Mary Meliora Milliken Napier. She married Sir John Adam Hay and was the second and eldest surviving daughter of Lady Napier. Lady Napier died at the home of her third daughter Aymee Elizabeth Georgina Milliken Napier, Lady Clerk, who married Sir George Douglas Clerk of Penicuik Midlothian.

Lady Napier was a faithful member of St. John's from its inception in 1873. It is recorded that she played the harmonium in the early days from the time when the congregation met in the Temperance Hall in McDowall St. She was born Anne Salisbury Meliora Ladeveze Adlercron in Moyglare, County Meath, Ireland in 1825. In April 1850 she married Sir Robert John Milliken Napier of Milliken. The estate was to the north of Johnstone and had once belonged to the Houstouns of Johnstone Castle. Sir Robert was directly descended from John Napier (of logarithm fame) of Merchiston in Edinburgh. He had inherited the Milliken

Estate, plus a considerable fortune which came from sugar plantations in the West Indies, from his Milliken ancestors. Although Lady Anne's life was one of great privilege it was not without its sorrows. By November 1859 she had given birth to ten children including two sets of twins. The first twins survived for only a few hours, the second twins died in infancy, two further sons predeceased her and her youngest child, a daughter, was committed to the Royal Asylum for the insane in Edinburgh. Only two daughters survived into old age. When her husband died in 1884, aged 66, their eldest surviving son Archibald inherited the Estate which was then sold in 1886. Thereafter, the new owner sold it off piecemeal. It is likely that at this time Lady Napier moved away from the Johnstone area possibly to be nearer to her family although she still retained a connection with the church as she was the aunt by marriage of Robert Speir of Culdees.

The Ciborium

The silver ciborium which holds the communion wafers at the Eucharist was given to St. John's by Mrs Catherine Allen in memory of her husband William who died in August 1971. Cathy was brought up in Johnstone. Following her marriage to Bill Allen they lived for a time in Glasgow. After moving to Kilbarchan in the late 1950's, they were for the remainder of their lives members of St. John's. Cathy was a keen member of the Mother's Union and Bill served on the vestry. He was also a great model railway enthusiast. Many members of the congregation will recall the model railway being on display in the church hall at fundraising events. Mrs Allen died in June 1997.

The Candlesticks

A brass plaque on the wall beside the reredos tells us that the tall candlesticks behind the altar are:

**Dedicated to The Glory of
God and In Loving Memory
of Frederick and Mary Burton,
December 1981.**

Their daughter Mae has for many years been an active member of St. John's and was for many years involved with the Sunday School as a teacher and then as superintendent.

The candlesticks on the altar table were donated in 2005 in memory of Norma Witherspoon Murdoch by her husband Kenny and her family. Norma was baptized and married in St. John's and was for many years a teacher in the Sunday School.

Before leaving the chancel observe the original, decorative, Victorian, floor and wall tiles beside the altar. The tiled floor throughout the church still exists but was covered with carpet for ease of maintenance and for the conservation of heat. What a stunning floor the original must have been!

The Memorial to Reverend William McDermott

As we stand at the foot of the chancel steps we are facing the beautiful west window. The colours in this window are stunning especially when seen in the light of the afternoon sun. The subject is "Suffer the Little Children" and the inscription at the bottom of the window reads:

To the Glory of God and the dear memory of the Reverend William McDermott the first incumbent of this church 1873-1910 this window is dedicated by his many friends.

Following Mr McDermott's death a memorial fund was set up and rich and poor from throughout the district made donations to it. For this reason it is often referred to as "The Penny Window". The fund amounted to £330/7/6 and Messrs. Powell & Sons of London were given the commission for the window at a cost of £215 + £15 for carriage and fitting.

A memorial tablet to Mr McDermott was also placed in a prominent position on the wall between the chancel and the Lady Chapel. It is made of marble with a fine brass plaque. The plaque has an intricate decorative border of clover leaves, symbolic of the trinity. A further memorial to Rev. McDermott was a small extension to the vestry.

A brass plaque in the vestry reads:

The enlargement of the vestry is part of the memorial to Rev. William McDermott. Erected in the year 1913.

The Lady Chapel

We now turn left to the south transept an intimate space where the midweek service is held on a Wednesday afternoon. This area, known as the Lady Chapel, takes its name from the striking stained glass window



depicting the Virgin Mary which brings light and colour to this corner of the church. The window came about because of a legacy of £1,000 that was given to the church following the death of Cathie Laughlin in 2007. Cathie was a stalwart of St. John's and very much involved in the life of the church. She was a vibrant and friendly person so the modern, colourful design of the window is an appropriate memorial to her. It was designed by Richard Gibb, the son of John and Muriel Gibb for many years dedicated members of St. John's. Richard studied the art of stained glass at an evening class and enjoys it as a hobby. He put a lot of work into the window and before it could be installed permission had to be sought from the diocese, Renfrewshire Council and Historic Scotland. It is a fitting memorial to an ordinary Johnstone woman.



The Bishop's Chair

Turn now to the north transept and note the bishop's chair. This fine, hardwood armchair has a carved, pierced back, inset with a smoked grey marble medallion, above a solid seat which is flanked by carved and pierced arms. It was donated to the church in memory of Mrs Fanny Stirling of Beechmount, Ulundi Road, Johnstone. The memorial plaque is dated 9th September 1941. Mrs Stirling was the wife of John Stirling a Johnstone solicitor. The law firm of Stirling and Mair still exists in Johnstone today.

The bible on the Prie Dieu in the north transept has an inscription which reads:

**To The Glory of God,
In Memory of
Samuel Kerr Fleming**

This bible was given, by his widow Mary, 1966. Mr Fleming was for many years a member of St. John's Vestry and choir.

The War Memorial

In September 1919 a member of the congregation donated a memorial tablet to those members of the congregation who had fallen in the Great War. With regard to the design it was decided that it should harmonize with the plate erected to Rev. McDermott. It was placed on the north wall and it is a brass plaque mounted on dark wood with 31 names inscribed on it.

To The Glory of God and in Grateful Memory
to the Following Members of this Congregation
Who gave their Lives in the Great War.

James Boyle

Cam Hdrs

Richard Boyle

Royal Scots

James Bright

HLI

Daniel Cameron

NZ Exp Force

William Cardie

Cam Hdrs

Charles Cardie

A&S Hldrs

Alfred Dell

Royal Engineers

David Douglas

Seaflth Hldrs

Joseph Findlay

A&S Hldrs

Edward Gilmour

Scots Guards

Alex Gilmour

KOSB

Joseph Howie

Seaflth Hldrs

Robert Howie

A&S Hldrs

William Howie

HLI

George Howie

Seaflth Hldrs

John Huey

A&S Hldrs

James Hacket

Scots Rifles

Andrew Hamilton

KOSB

James Irvine

A&S Hldrs

James Johnstone

RN Division

Eric Robert Donaldson

Longton *RN Vol Reserve*

James Archibald Kerr

A&S Hdrs

Daniel Kerr

Australian Expd Force

Robert Kerr

Gordon Hldrs

Thomas Kerr

Gordon Hldrs

William Kennedy

A&S Hdrs

Thomas Love

A&S Hdrs

Charles McLaughlan

A&S Hldrs

Daniel Smiley

Royal Scots

James Thomson

Scots Rifles

John Russel Wardle

Glas Yeo

“FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH”

The Memorial Windows

To the left of the War Memorial is a fine stained glass window in memory of Major John Russel Wardle of the Queens Own Royal Glasgow Yeomanry who was killed in action at Gallipoli, Turkey on 2nd January 1916. Major Wardle was born on 25th December 1878 in Staffordshire. As a young man he came to Glasgow where he worked as an analytical chemist. On his death he left a widow and two young children.

Adjacent to this window is a window in memory of Gerald Mahon Glover who was a former choir boy at St. John's. Captain Glover was killed in action on 25th July 1921 at Hillah in Mesopotamia. He was born in 1891 in Kent and like his father before him he was a career soldier. He was unmarried. His brother Frederick Arthur Glover was the Johnstone town chamberlain and a life long vestry member, possibly the longest serving member in the church's history, having been re-elected on numerous occasions as treasurer and lay representative. He was first elected in 1912 and served almost continuously until he retired for health reasons in 1956. Mr Glover's wife Norah was the daughter of John and Fanny Stirling of Beechmount Ulundi Rd.

Rev. Stanley Wade

It is appropriate to mention here Rev. Wade and the part that he played in the Great War. Stanley Gilbert Wade was born in England and spent much of his early life in Canada before coming to St. John's as a curate around the time that Rev. McDermott was taken ill in 1907. Following Rev. McDermott's death he was instituted as rector in May 1910 but his time at St. John's was cut short by the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. In March 1917 he asked the vestry for leave of absence to take up temporary war work with the army and then in 1918 he was released for service as a chaplain for a further year. Sadly he was seriously wounded and due to the severity of his injuries he felt unable to return to his duties at St. John's. He tendered his resignation in March 1919 owing to the state of his health due to wounds received in France. It was noted that the congregation appreciated the sacrifice which this entailed after serving his country so well. He died in Bournemouth in 1955.

Rev. William Edwards

Rev. William Edwards had been covering for Mr Wade during his war service and he was inaugurated as the third rector of St. John's in May 1919. He was a steady hand at the tiller for 20 years from 1917-1937 and after Rev. McDermott he was the longest serving rector of St. John's.

Rectors Through the Years

In its history of just over 140 years there have been 14 rectors at St. John's all energetic and devoted clergy who brought their own unique gifts and talents.

1873 – 1910	William McDermott
1910 – 1917	Stanley G Wade
1917 – 1937	William H Edwards
1937 – 1939	Harold I Wilson
1940 – 1945	Percy R Herford
1945 – 1949	Thomas Sinclair
1949 – 1960	Jack Deighton
1961 – 1970	Joseph R McLellan
1970 – 1976	Duncan J E Sladden
1976 – 1985	Kenneth T Roache
1986 – 1991	John T Murray
1996 – 2006	Shelley A Marsh
2007 – 2016	Donald M Orr

From its inception the church has had a strong choral tradition. At the time of Rev. Wade the choir was twenty strong with an equal number of men and women. On one occasion during the incumbancy of Rev. Edwards in the 1930's, St. John's choir travelled to London to take part in a Festival of English Church Music which was held at Crystal Palace on Friday 21st July 1933. In June 1953 a trust fund for the choir was set up in memory of Edwin and Isabel Young.



Memories of a Choirboy in the late 1950's

Canon Deighton was the rector at the time. Soon after my parents joined the church he came to visit us. He always travelled locally by bicycle. When he saw my brother and I he said that we would look very well in the choir and so it was that we became choirboys at St. John's. In those days there were approximately a dozen choirboys and about half a dozen each of male and female choir members. The boys wore a black cassock, a white surplice and a white ruff. Tom Craig took up his post on 1st February 1956 and was organist and choirmaster at St. John's for almost 50 years. He expected high standards of behaviour from the boys. Every Sunday the choir sang at Matins and Evensong and Evensong was followed by choir practice. On Easter Sunday there were four services and Mrs Deighton provided a special treat, a cooked breakfast. But it was not all about singing, I suppose part of the attraction was that the boys were paid for every service that they attended. The rector kept an attendance register and the boys were paid 1d per service. A wedding was a bonus as they were paid 3d for that and of course there was extra income to be made at the scramble. Another incentive was that before evensong on summer Sundays there was always a game of football in the church grounds.

Note: to this day there are allowances of 20p per mile available to clergy for maintenance of a bike.

World War 2 Memorial

It seems strange that there is no memorial to the dead of WW2. The gates and railings which had been removed during the war were replaced at a cost of £50 in 1948 and in March of that year it was suggested that the gates be re-erected as a memorial to the members of the congregation who died in WW2. The vestry considered that this was inadequate and that a plaque should be suitably inscribed in the church. The secretary was to make a list of names. In June it was proposed that the question of a memorial be held in abeyance. There is no further reference to it but it can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the church was experiencing severe financial difficulties at this period of its history. By July 1949 major repairs were required to the church building. The heating system required a new boiler and the organ was fitted with a new electric motor. In September 1950 it was reported that there was dampness in the church walls caused by leaks in the roof. At the AGM of the congregation held on 17th March 1952 the rector Canon Deighton explained that during the last year an unprecedented repair bill had been carried out in connection with the church roof. This amounted to the sum of £1,481 and had all been paid. A loan of £400 had been received from the diocese of which £200 had been repaid. In spite of the heavy expenditure they were able to show a credit balance of £434/4/7 which included the outstanding loan of £200 from the diocese. Every member of the congregation was due thanks for this excellent state of affairs

but special thanks were due to Mr Speirs of Elderslie, Mrs Cunningham of Craighers, Mrs Stirling and Mr Noble for large donations.

Some more recent gifts to St John's include the following:

For over 50 years a brass baptismal jug has been in use for baptisms. It is inscribed:

**In Loving Memory of
Frances Maud Greer
Presented by her Husband and
Daughter Rosemary 1963**

Mr Greer was a member of St. John's Vestry.

Two of the wooden offering plates which are in use every Sunday at St. John's have the following inscription:

**In Loving Memory
Of Evelyn Lindsay
Devoted Member
Of St John's
Presented by her Daughter 1982**

The Prayer Books

These are inscribed in memory of Sidney Harrison who died in April 1999 and was for many years a faithful member of the church and a vestry member.

The Hymn Books

Hymn books were donated as part of the legacy left to St. John's by Cathy Laughlan who died in 2008 and part of the legacy left by Lottie Harper who died in 2014. They replaced the previous hymn books which had been donated by members of the congregation in memory of friends and family members. Before he died in 1998 Lottie's husband Gordon had said to her, "You won't forget my wee church." Lottie had been brought up in Howwood and came to St. John's after her marriage. Gordon and his brother Jack had a lifelong association with the church. They both served as vestry members and as choir members over the course of many years.

The White Embroideries

On the pulpit and lectionary are the white embroideries which were worked in 1978 by Kathleen Philip and Molly Hart. They were keen needlewomen and were members of the ladies sewing group.

The Missing Bell

If you look at the church roof you will notice that there is a structure that resembles a bell tower but there is no bell. A member of the congregation recalls an incident in the 1970's when the then chairman of the buildings' committee went up onto the church roof to investigate a leak near the pulpit. He discovered that the water was getting in through a gap in the slates where the bellpull had been positioned. Another member recalls older members of her family talking about the bell. It appears to have been removed at the same time as the railings when the metal was requisitioned for the war effort during the second world war. The railings were replaced after the war but for some reason the bell never was. Around 1950 a member of the congregation offered to replace it and it was agreed that the vestry would look into the matter but nothing came of it. It was put on hold possibly because the church was in severe financial difficulties at that time.



The Church Hall

Throughout the years the church hall was central to the social and religious life of the church. A thriving Sunday School as well as the Girls' and Boys' Brigade met in the hall. Other groups included the Mothers' Union, the Men's Club, the Young Wives Club, the Band of Hope and the Badminton Club. During the 2nd world war the hall was requisitioned by the ATC which brought some welcome income. Then in the fifties and early sixties when Johnstone High School was situated across the road in Floors St. the education authority used it as a gymnasium again generating much needed income. By the early 1990's the church, the rectory and the church hall were all in need of repair and refurbishment, the church roof being a particular cause for concern. The state of the church finances meant that there was no money for the repairs and even more seriously there was not enough income to support a full time rector. It was decided that the only way forward was to sell the church hall. The hall became a children's daycare nursery and the rectory became the social space.

In the early days the challenge was the establishment of the church building and the growth of the congregation.

The people of St. John's came from all walks of life. They were amongst the wealthiest and the poorest in the district. In the early days there were some very wealthy, landed families but the majority of the congregation were ordinary working people, a great many of whom were miners, millworkers and factory workers. In the days before the freewill offering scheme when the church was first

established membership was by subscription and by all accounts the vestry members spent a considerable amount of time going door to door collecting the money. Apart from that life as a vestryman was very similar to today. Throughout the years there was always some sort of a crisis or financial challenge.

Repairs, maintenance and improvements were always on the agenda. You will notice that the vestry members were referred to as vestrymen. No women were on the vestry until around the time of the second world war. Mrs Cunningham of Craigends was elected in 1946 and served for many years prior to her death in 1959. The women were nevertheless valued members of the church community being very much involved in frequent fundraising events such as sales of work and fetes.

Throughout the years successive generations of the people of St John's have given generously of their wealth, their time, and their many talents and this tradition of devoted service continues to this day.

As we proceed down the aisle the eye is drawn to the high beamed oak ceiling and the beautiful west window which is particularly stunning when seen in the light of the afternoon sun.

Countless people have taken this path before us on Sundays after morning prayer, matins, holy communion and morning prayer as well as baptisms, marriages and funerals.

■ We will now leave, as we entered, by the North Door.





The Church of
St. John the Evangelist



Johnstone