

## **Brodick Church Hall: A Brief History**

The Church Hall owes its existence to the same dispute over ecclesiastical property, which led to the building of what is now Brodick Parish Church, previously Brodick, St Bride's (1929-1932) and formerly Kilbride United Free Church, Brodick (1910-1929).

In 1900 the Free Church of Scotland<sup>1</sup> and the United Presbyterian Church<sup>2</sup> united to form the United Free Church of Scotland. A largely Highland minority of the Free Church refused to go into this union, continuing as the Free Church of Scotland. Here on Arran, with the exception of the Revd. J. Kennedy Cameron of Brodick, the other 5 Free Church ministers entered the United Free Church. Despite this lead from the majority of the island Free Church clergy, all the congregations were split over whether to enter the union, or stay out and remain loyal to the Free Church. At Brodick, which included Corrie, and at Lenimor, the Free Church congregations held on to the churches, whilst United Free congregations continued to worship in the Shiskine, Lochranza and Kilmorie (Kildonan) buildings, forcing their Free Church counterparts to make use of the school-rooms at Birchburn, Auchengallon, Lochranza and Kildonan respectively. At Whiting Bay a party from the United Free Church congregation originally held the church, only to be dispossessed by a group of Free Church folk. Shared occupancy on alternate Sundays was only settled after recourse to litigation through the law courts. Only at the South End (Bennecarrigan) was a totally amicable agreement reached, whereby both United Free and Free Church parties shared the use of the church and Slidderly School on alternate Sabbaths.

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<sup>1</sup> Came into being at the Disruption of 1843 when over 450 ministers and at least one third of the membership seceded from the Established Church of Scotland in protest at government interference in church affairs and asserting the Kirk's right to spiritual independence free from state control.

<sup>2</sup> Formed in 1847 by the union of two earlier secessions from the Church of Scotland over the issue of patronage, a system of appointing a minister, which gave the patron, often the local landowner, the right to present the minister to the congregation.

However, none of these situations was helped by the increasingly bitter legal battle fought between the two rival denominations at a national level. Initially in 1900, as the United Free Church was way and by far the larger denomination nationally, she claimed all the property and expected those wishing to remain loyal to the Free Church, to seek alternative places of worship. The Free Church remnant had other ideas. Claiming to be the true heirs of the Disruption of 1843, the Free Church took their case to the civil courts in order to attempt to regain possession of all former Free Church property. In 1904 the House of Lords upheld their claim, despite the fact that this meant the eviction of the vast majority of U.F. churchgoers, while the property was given to a tiny minority, which could never hope to use it all.

In order to address this preposterous situation the government was forced to intervene. By an Act of Parliament, a Royal Commission was appointed in 1905 to suitably reallocate all disputed property. The commission found in favour of the Free Church in seven of the eight parishes on Arran, as the statutory majority in these congregations had remained loyal to the Free Church.

The United Free Church was therefore forced to erect new churches at Brodick, Whiting Bay, Kilmorie (Kildonan), South End (Bennecarrigan), Shiskine, Pirnmill and Lochranza. Only in Lamlash did she remain in possession of the now <sup>ADAY</sup> derelict St George's Church. - NOWADAYS

Hence, sometime between 1908 and 1910, almost within a stone's throw of the Free Church at the Ross Road end, on an elevated position at Bennecarrigan Farm road end – marked today by a summer seat – the United Free Church erected a new corrugated-iron building. Although, quickly nicknamed the 'Tin Tabernacle'

by the folk of the South End, its official title was the 'Southern Mission Hall'.<sup>4</sup>

Like Bennecarrigan Free Church, it was only a mission station, having no status of its own to call a minister. In 1891, under the ministry of Revd. J.W. McDougall of Shiskine, the Free Church had established the Mission Station at the South End (Bennecarrigan) for the benefit of the people of the Corriecravie, Sliddery, Bennecarrigan, Glenree and Kilmory districts, who had furthest to travel to worship, either at Torbeg on the one side or Kildonan on the other. In this task he was helped a great deal by Revd. A.R. Findlay, 'formerly of Houston, retired and living in the locality'.<sup>3</sup> The Free Church congregation had originally worshipped in Sliddery School for two years, until the stone Bennecarrigan Free Church at the Ross Road end was built and opened for worship in 1893.

As the Revd. McDougall subsequently entered the union of 1900 to become the first United Free Church minister at Shiskine, he continued to be responsible for the recently formed Bennecarrigan United Free congregation, until his translation to Farr in Sutherland in 1911. The United Free Church at Kilmorie (Kildonan) also became vacant in 1911, on the translation of Mr Donald MacDonald to Tongue. This resulted in a union being negotiated between the Bennecarrigan and Kilmorie congregations. In order to facilitate this, Bennecarrigan was transferred from the Presbytery of Kintyre to that of Ardrossan. The union became a reality on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1911, when the Revd. Alexander MacLean M.A. was inducted to become the first minister of the newly named charge of Kildonan and Bennecarrigan.

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<sup>4</sup> John A. Lamb, *The Fasti of the United Free Church 1900- 1929* (Edinburgh: 1956) p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> W. Ewing (ed.), *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1843- 1900* Volume 2 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1914) p. 115.

Mr MacLean, who had translated to Kildonan and Bennecarrigan from Kilbrandon, served for 7 years, before accepting a call to Kirkintilloch Park in December 1918. He was succeeded by Revd. Duncan Hamilton Neilson M.A., who was ordained and inducted to Kildonan and Bennecarrigan, on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1919. Mr Neilson served until 1925, when he translated to Glasgow Chalmers, to be succeeded by Revd. James Brand Scott, B.D., who translated to Arran from Crailing. Mr Scott was inducted on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1925, but his ministry was a short one, lasting until 30<sup>th</sup> September 1926, when he left Arran for Corsock. His successor in turn was the Revd. David Dale who hailed from Northern Ireland. Formerly a Congregational minister at Elgin, Mr Dale was admitted by the United Free Church General Assembly of 1926, and duly inducted to Kildonan and Bennecarrigan on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1927.<sup>5</sup> By all accounts Mr Dale was a very small man with great intellect. The late James Brown Senior of Corriecravie House, one of the Bennecarrigan Elders, used to remark that 'he was a dwarf in stature, but a giant in mind.'

In 1929, another union of churches, this time between the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland saw the union between Bennecarrigan and Kildonan broken, and a new union established with the Parish Church of Kilmory, under the ministry of Mr Norman MacLeod Wright, M.C., C.F. Kildonan meanwhile continued as a separate Church of Scotland charge under the ministry of Mr Dale.<sup>6</sup> Mr MacLeod Wright remained minister of Kilmory and Bennecarrigan until his appointment as Lecturer in Hebrew at the University of Manchester in September 1947. His successor was Revd. John MacFarlane who translated to Arran from Glasgow Martyr's West, being inducted to Kilmory and Bennecarrigan on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1948.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John A. Lamb, *Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland 1900- 1929* (Edinburgh: 1956) p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> From 1929 onwards known as Kildonan St Donan's.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Lamb, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* Volume IX (Edinburgh: 1961) p. 206.



From 1929 until 1949, under these various ministers, services were held in Bennecarrigan at 2.30 p.m. each Sunday. This late time of worship was due to the fact that the service time at Kilmory was fixed at 12 Noon. However, for the months of July and August each year, services at Bennecarrigan were at the more agreeable times of 11.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. This was possible due to arrangements made with visiting ministers, who were provided with free holiday accommodation for a month at a time in return for their services each Sunday morning and evening. The names of some of these ministers, such as Mr Smart of Carstairs and Mr Inglis of Penpont, are still fondly remembered by the older generations.

During the 1930's Corriecravie and Sliddery were very popular holiday destinations. Not only were there several Boarding Houses in the locality, but most people took in holidaymakers to augment their income. The late Bertie Black of Rowanpark, Corriecravie, often used to recount, how on summer evenings it wasn't unusual to see well over a hundred people making their way back from the golf course at Corriecravie to their various lodgings in the district. As a result, in those days when church attendance was the norm for most people in Scotland, summer congregations regularly packed out the 'tin tabernacle', and the revenue from this happy 'wind fall' ensured the next summer's pulpit supply.

In order to provide for these thirsty visitors on a hot summer's day, the Session Clerk Thomas McNeish of Heathcote Farm, used to send his three sons John, Tom and Peter from Sliddery to Bennecarrigan early on a Sabbath morning, to draw water from a spring situated just below the church. A milk pail and drinking cup were kept for this purpose and many a worshipper was glad of a refreshing drink of 'Adam's Ale', especially after a weary walk on the dusty road from Corriecravie or Sliddery.

Alas with the outbreak of war in 1939 the number of summer visitors dwindled away. Once robbed of this valuable source of income, it became harder to pay for summer pulpit supply, especially so after the war, when the cost of renting houses increased dramatically. Bennecarrigan Church had seen its heyday and with the roll falling to just twelve by the war's end, the writing was on the wall. The painful decision to close the building and for the congregation to travel the two miles to Kilmory to worship, although vehemently resisted by some, was eventually reluctantly taken. Those opposed to this really had little chance of halting this decision. For many years prior to this point, the congregation in any case had bi-annually been transported to and from Kilmory on Communion Sundays. When the local bus operator Donald Stewart of Corriecravie decided to worship in Kilmory instead of Bennecarrigan, as well as to provide a bus every Sunday for those likewise minded, closure became inevitable.

The closure of Bennecarrigan however, undoubtedly helped pave the way for a union between Kilmory and Kildonan, which was effected on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1954 on the induction of Revd. James Bisset. This union would have been problematic, had there still been a third place of worship.

They say 'it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good', and the Southend's loss was definitely Brodick's gain.<sup>8</sup> Arrangements were made for Brodick to purchase the now defunct church building and for it to be dismantled, transported and erected in its present location to act as a much-needed hall. No doubt negotiations were helped by the fact that the Brodick Session Clerk, Donald Brown and James Brown Sen. of Corriecravie, the Bennecarrigan elder, were brothers.

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<sup>8</sup> The money realised from the sale had to be returned to Edinburgh, as the funds for the building had not been raised locally, but come from a national fund set up in 1905 to provide churches and manses, in the wake of the aforementioned House of Lord's decision of 1904.

The work of dismantling began at the beginning of March 1950. There had been a long spell of cold weather prior to this and when it finally broke it was followed by several days of thick fog. John McNeish recalls ploughing during this time at Heathcote just on the other side of the glen from Bennecarrigan, normally within full view of the church. However due to the fog, he couldn't see the dismantling process, only hear the sound of hammering and banging wafting eerily across the Slidderly Water. When at last the mist cleared, the church was no more, giving the impression to the folk in Slidderly that it had just vanished overnight.

Now all that remains to show that a church once stood at Bennecarrigan road end, is a small raised foundation wall almost hidden in a clump of whin bushes. However, if you go into the session room in Kilmory Parish Church, you can still see a small table, which once acted as the Precentor's desk, complete with many marks made by James Brown's watch chain as he rose from behind it to lead the unaccompanied praise – proving that the marks of history are indeed sometimes hard to erase altogether.

The 'tin tabernacle' of course is very much still to be seen in its present location adjacent to Brodick Church. In its new lease of life as a church hall, it has served the St Bride's congregation, as well as the people of Brodick and beyond, extremely well now for sixty-odd years. A new extension was added on to it in 2002, which provide not only disabled toilet facilities, but also created a small partitioned room, ideally suited for meetings and for use by the Sunday School. The Church Hall remains vital to congregational and community life in Brodick, used as it is by numerous organisations, both church and non-church alike, often morning afternoon and evening. It also enjoyed a brief spell in its former capacity as a place of worship, when during the winter of 2008, with the church out of use due to restoration work being carried out on the pipe-organ, it acted as the congregational place of worship at Brodick for some six weeks.

It is also of note that although built as a temporary measure, the little tin building, not expected to have a long lifespan, has outlived the Bennecarrigan Free Church as a building for ecclesiastical use. In 2009 the now former Bennecarrigan Free Church was sold to private individuals to be converted into a dwelling house. Whilst it now lies empty and rather forlorn looking, awaiting restoration work to commence, the wee 'Tin Tabernacle' by comparison, freshly painted for the centenary celebrations, has never looked better. Nor can it ever have been held dearer in the affections of any congregation in its history, than by the current congregation of St Bride's.