

Origin and Growth of St Andrew's

The following document written by Mr. George Stewart, our first Secretary, and one upon who we may look as the real founder of the Church, gives very concisely the initial steps taken at the formation of our cause. This document written at the request of the office bearers is deposited beneath the foundation stone of the Church, and will be referred to later.

Origin and Early History of the Congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Sheffield

"It has always been considered an in possibility by those who originated the Presbyterian congregation in Sheffield to fix on any one particular as the cause of the starting of the congregation. There existed at the time a strong feeling on the subject in the minds of a few individuals who had been members of Presbyterian churches in Scotland, and it so happened that just when this feeling was about to be given expression to the Reverend George W. Adams, of Leeds, paid a visit to Sheffield with the view of ascertaining what church accommodation existed for the soldiers of a Scottish Regiment about to remove from Leeds to Sheffield. In the kind providence of God, Mr. Adams was brought into contact with a few of those individuals who were longing for the establishment of a church in which they might worship God after the for of their Presbyterian fathers, and the consequence was a more decided inclination to attempt the formation of a congregation.

"In the beginning of the year 1853 this feeling had spread so far as to justify the parties interested in calling a meeting of those likely to be friendly to the object contemplated. This meeting was accordingly held in the Royal Hotel on the 12th January 1853. The object of the meeting as stated in the minutes, was "To take into consideration the propriety of establishing a Presbyterian Church in Sheffield in connection with the Presbyterian Church in England." . Eighteen gentlemen, with Mr. Christall, of Manchester, attended the meeting, and a very friendly conversation and discussion arose, when all present expressed themselves favourable to the movement and a committee consisting of Messrs. Stewart (Convenor), Corsan, Murray, Wood, Hyslop and Carson was appointed to take some necessary enquiries as to the probable expenses to be incurred and the chances of success.

"The committee lost no time in entering on their duties, and through their convenor a lengthened correspondence took place with the Presbytery of Lancashire and Yorkshire, the home Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in England, the Revd. Mr. Adams of Leeds, and many others whom it was thought would be likely to give information and to aid in the accomplishment of the object of the committee. The result of this correspondence on the minds of the committee was a most decided conviction of the desirability of at once attempting to originate a congregation, and it was resolved to call a meeting of those friendly to the object to submit the correspondence and opinion of the committee. This second meeting was accordingly held at 17 Old Haymarket, on the 15th February 1853, when the convenor reported on the part of the committee: -

1. That the Committee had entered into a correspondence with the Presbytery of Lancashire, and read letters from Robert Barbour Esq. and the Revd. William McCaw and Revd. G. W. Adams, in all of which great encouragement was held out to the friends in Sheffield to proceed.
2. That he believed the Home Mission was prepared to find supplies for the pulpit for six months and to pay the expenses of the preachers to Sheffield; the friends in Sheffield finding a hall for worship and maintaining the minister while in town.

3. That the Presbytery of Lancashire had appointed a committee consisting of the Revd. Messrs. McCaw, Trail, Kemp and Adamas to communicate with the Presbyterians of Sheffield that Mr. McCaw was to preach in Sheffield on 20th February 1853, for which the committee had engaged the Council Hall, Norfolk Street, and that the Presbytery committee would meet in Sheffield on Monday, 21st February 1853.

"A lengthened conversation took place on this report, after which it was unanimously resolved to approve of what the committee had done, and to make every exertion to render the movement successful.

"According to these arrangements the first sermon in connection with the Congregation was preached by the Revd. William McCaw, of Manchester, in the Council Hall on 20th February 1853. That day is one long remembered in the history of this congregation. The Hall was crowded in every part and the result was deemed a most satisfactory one.

"A general meeting was held on the Monday evening, when from 30 to 35 gentlemen were present, and the Revd. Messrs. McCaw, Kemp and Adas. The meeting was both an interesting and enthusiastic one. Addresses were delivered by various gentlemen. Mr. Stewart explained the various steps taken by the committee, and entered fully into the correspondence between himself and the parties already named. Mr. McCaw explained the position of the Presbyterian Church in England, and after expressing the pleasure he felt at seeing so many friends in the Council Hall on the previous day, and at that meeting strongly urged the parties present to united exertion to render the movement respectable. Mr. Kemp followed, and urged the importance of good financial arrangements being made at the outset, and afterwards Mr. Adams explained what had been done in Leeds under similar circumstances. It was resolved at this meeting that the expenses of the congregation about to be formed should in the meantime be defrayed by collections at the church door every Sunday and by subscription to a Sustentation Fund. On this resolution being passed 17 gentlemen put down their names as subscribers to the fund, whose subscriptions amounted to £35.16s.0d. per annum.

"The congregation was thus fairly started, and a large committee was immediately formed to work the movement with vigour. The Council Hall was engaged for regular services every Sunday; meetings of the committee were held every Wednesday evening, and the subscription list to the Sustentation Fund was very much enlarged. The Presbytery and the Home Mission Committee supplied the pulpit with great regularity, and nearly the whole of the members of the Presbytery preached in turn in Sheffield.

"When the congregation had been nearly two months in existence it was deemed desirable that the Presbytery should be memorialised to constitute Sheffield a regular charge or church of the Presbyterian Church of England. This step was necessary to enable the congregation to be in a position to call a minister. Accordingly at a meeting held 27th April 1853, Mr. Stewart was requested to prepare a memorial to the Presbytery embodying the views of the committee. The following Memorial was therefore prepared and signed by upwards of 80 individuals on 30th April and 1st May 1853: -

"Unto the Reverend the Presbytery of Lancashire of the Presbyterian Church of England, the Memorial of the undersigned inhabitants of Sheffield and its neighbourhood

"Humbly sheweth

"1 That your Memorialists have for the last ten weeks enjoyed the great privilege of waiting on the ministry of members of your Reverend Court, from which they trust much benefit has resulted.

"2. That the expectations of the Memorialists in endeavouring to establish by God's blessing a Presbyterian Church in the town of Sheffield have been much more than realised by the comparative success which has already attended the movement.

"3. That in order to complete that success it appears to the Memorialists to be desirous that the Station in Sheffield should at as early a date as your Reverend Court may deem fit be constituted a regular Charge or Church of , and in connection with the Presbyterian Church of England so that a Minister may be appointed to labour permanently in the field, and may be set over them in the Lord.

"4. That your Memorialists will at the proper time be prepared to guarantee a Minister a stipend of at least £100 per annum, and pay all their own expenses of rent etc - in addition.

"Your Memorialists therefore pray that it may please your Reverend Court to grant that at some early day the Station at Sheffield may be constituted a regular Charge or Church of, and in connection with the Presbyterian Church of England.

"At a subsequent meeting of the Committee it was agreed that the stipend named in the Memorial should be increased from £100 to £150 as the minimum, and at the next meeting of the Presbytery the Memorial, so altered, was very kindly received and its prayer granted.

"The Congregation having been thus fully recognised, turned its attention very seriously to the procuring of a suitable Pastor.

"There were, as might be expected many anxious meetings on this most important subject, but fortunately by the blessing of God, the Congregation was ultimately enabled to come to a perfectly unanimous decision. By a concurrence of circumstances which were evidently the leadings of Divine providence the Reverend James Breakey, minister of Carryduff, was induced to supply the Sheffield pulpit for two successive Sabbaths on the 2nd and 9th October 1853. His services were so acceptable to the Congregation that it was unanimously resolved to take the necessary steps to give him a call to be the Pastor of Sheffield. Previous to the congregation being in a position to accomplish this, however, it was necessary to take steps for admitting members into the church, and accordingly the Presbytery appointed a temporary Session who held a meeting at Sheffield on 22nd October 1853. At this meeting and a subsequent meeting held on the following day 59 individuals were admitted as Church members, 39 of whom had been previously members of other Churches or Chapels.

"The preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, a Congregational Meeting was held at which it was unanimously resolved to give a call to the Revd. James Breakey, and Mr. Stewart and Dr. Wood were appointed a deputation to the Presbytery to ask them to name a day on which to moderate in a call to a minister as Pastor of the Congregation. The deputation was authorised to state to the Presbytery that the Congregation would be prepared to guarantee their minister £200 per annum. The deputation accordingly waited on the Presbytery on 2nd November 1853, and the following extract from the minutes of the Presbytery explains what was done:

"A deputation consisting of George Stewart Esq., and Dr. Wood appeared from the recently sanctioned Presbyterian Congregation at Sheffield, and applied on their behalf for the appointment of an early day to moderate a call. The Presbytery resolved to meet for that purpose in the Council Hall at Sheffield on the 15th November 1853 at 8 p.m.; the Revd. R. Walsh to preach and preside."

"The Presbytery accordingly met at Sheffield on the 15th November 1853, when a unanimous call was given to Mr. Breakey.

"After mature deliberation and consultation with his friends Mr. Breakey was enabled to see his way to accept the call, and the usual steps having been taken by the Presbyteries of Lancashire and Belfast, the 24th January 1854, was fixed as the day of Mr. Breakey's induction into Sheffield.

"The Revd. Mr. Sloan of Chester, preached the induction sermon, and the Revd. Mr. Tait of Manchester, delivered the charges to minister and congregation. In the evening Mr. Breakey was welcomed to Sheffield at a soiree held in the Cutler's Hall, which was attended by upwards of 600 individuals.

"The Congregation next turned their serious attention to the erection of a church. Previous to the induction of Mr. Breakey £800 was subscribed by members of the Congregation towards the Building Fund, which sum has since been very much increased. A site having been secured on the land of Mr. T. B. Holly, in Hanover Street, Mr. Thomas Flockton was chosen as architect for the church. The plan which he submitted was unanimously adopted by the congregation. The church is estimated to cost £3,000, towards which upwards of £2,000 has been promised. In this sum are included liberal subscriptions from Robert Balfour, Esq., of Manchester, and other friends at a distance, as well as from the annexed lists.

"The foundation stone of the church is fixed to be laid by the Master of the Britannia Lodge of Freemasons (Dr. Wood, one of the Elders of the church) according to the ancient Masonic ceremony, on Tuesday next the 10th July, at 12 o'clock.

George Stewart, Secretary.

"Sheffield, 7th July 1855."

In June 1855, Mr. Stewart was requested by his fellow office bearers to prepare a short history of the congregation to be placed under the foundation stone of the church to be laid by Dr. Wood of which the foregoing is a copy of the document thus deposited.

At the same time Dr. Wood was authorised to procure a collection of current coins and newspapers of the day, also to be placed in a bottle under the stone.

Invitations were issued to all the local ministers for the ceremony, also to the subscribers in Manchester and other places.

In the evening the inevitable tea meeting was held in the Bath Saloon and although it is not on record, we can imagine there would be much rejoicing on this occasion, and the fact that five tea urns had been purchased does not dim the vision.

The church was erected by Janes Powell of Brookhill.

A. Watson