

James Haldane

The Haldane family is one of the most prominent aristocratic Scottish families and James, like his elder brother Robert were destined to a seafaring life. Their parents died when they were young and their uncle was a dominant influence in their lives. He was a ship's captain in the Royal Navy and Robert went to serve in



the Royal Navy, while James joined the East India Company at the age of seventeen. The family was the principal

owner of the Melville Castle one of the East India Company's ships, and it was intended that James would one day be its captain.

So far this was all fairly conventional but James Haldane also led quite a colourful life.

He fought a duel on St Helena after an altercation involving the throwing of a glass full of wine over him and his own angry retaliation. In the duel his pistol exploded in his face and his opponent's gun also misfired – so they called it quits.

On a later occasion in Portsmouth he single-handedly faced down a mutiny aboard a ship, sword and pistol in hand, and managed to calm the situation down.

On his second voyage to India he stayed in Calcutta where 'he spent six months enjoying the indulgent hospitality of a resident kinsman who introduced him to one constant round of excitement and fashionable dissipation'.

All this seems a very long way from evangelistic preaching tours in Scotland.

So what happened? Was there a dramatic conversion, a sudden vision, an inspiring sermon, the testimony of a friend?

What moved James Haldane from his aristocratic, naval career, to become a travelling evangelist?

Well let's hear it in his own words.

I never was acquainted with solid, rational happiness till my attention was turned to religion. My former merriment was really like the crackling of thorns under a pot. I was governed by passion, and under such a guide no wonder I missed my road... My present peace of mind does not arise from any vision or supposed new revelation I have received. I had a book by me which from prejudice of education, and not from any rational conviction, I called the Word of God,... and treated it with the greatest neglect, living in direct contradiction to all its precepts, and seldom taking the trouble to look into it.... I went on thus till, having much time on my hands when the Melville Castle lay at the Mother Bank, I began to think I would pay a little more attention to

this book. The more I read the more worthy it appeared of God; and after examining the evidences with which Christianity is supported, I became fully persuaded of its truth.

Against the advice of his uncle and his wife's family he decided to give up his career path and settled in Edinburgh with his wife and young family.

The adventurous spirit, however, did not leave him and was instead directed into his evangelistic activities all over Scotland. On a preaching visit to Orkney he visited all 29 inhabited islands. In Thurso his congregation grew from 300 on the first day, to 800 the following morning, 1500 that evening, then to more than 3,000.

He preached 'in hospitals, market places, churchyards, streets, and greens, on riverbanks and by the seashore'.

And he came to Sannox in 1800 along with John Campbell and this building is a direct result of their work that summer. As this display demonstrates it has borne witness for the last 200 years to God's love for this place and the warming of many hearts here.