

THE STORY OF SANNOX CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Introduction

In February 2012, a new chapter in the intriguing story of Sannox Congregational Church began when the site was purchased by the Sannox Christian Centre to establish a house of prayer and worship. While newness is very much in evidence as the vision unfolds, a strong desire is to rediscover the ancient paths and to build on the Christian heritage of Sannox. The aim of this paper is to give a summary of the history and to highlight aspects of that history that are important to bear in mind as the foundations of the project are built.

At the outset I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Stuart Gough and Jean Glen at the Arran Heritage Centre. Also the chapter on Sannox in William D McNaughton's *Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and the North-East of Scotland* and an additional paper for the Friends of Sannox has proved invaluable and has provided the basic framework and much of the source material. I certainly cannot improve on his setting of the scene here:

Its surroundings are the loveliest of any Congregational Church in this country and probably of any in the world. It stands less than a hundred yards from the sheltered beach, where gulls and oyster-catchers wheel and cry. A short distance away the peat-stained burn runs swiftly to meet the sea. As you walk up the little road sheltered by trees you glimpse behind Dundarroch Cottage a standing stone which bears witness to an age prior to recorded history. Behind you stand the hills, Suidhe Fhear ghais and Cioch na h-Oighe, with Caisteal Abhail and Cir Mhor at the head of the glen. Such is the setting in which Sannox Congregational Church stands, a place in which countless numbers have felt the need to say "Thank you".¹

The Ancient Paths

Many people have commented that Arran seems to be imbued with a spiritual quality that has its roots in the ancient past. In a recent book called 'Arran, A History' the author Thorbjorn Campbell writes in his introduction: "A supernatural aura certainly seems to linger on Arran.... it has almost certainly been a sacred island, a place of concentrated holiness... People would fall to their knees and worship in adoration and fear."² Quite apart from the well known stone circles at Machrie Moor, there are a great abundance of other ancient sites with chambered cairns and many more standing stones, including the one already referred to here on the site by Dundarroch Cottage. Just across the way in a field there is another upright standing stone. It is thought that this one was part of a full stone circle with the others being removed by farmers in the early nineteenth century. There is one lying down on the east side of the road that may have been part of the circle. These standing stones were erected between 3000 and 4500 years ago, perhaps at the same time as Abraham. There is much speculation about the nature of the worship practiced by these people. Was the same God who called Abraham into an eternal covenant with Him laying the foundations for the Christian faith we follow, at the same time reaching out to people all around the earth? Is our standing stone the response of our ancestors to this call?



¹ William McNaughton: *Sannox Congregational Church* p 1

² Thorbjorn Campbell: *Arran: A History*, p 1,2

Our standing stone represents an opportunity. It will be near the gatehouse and can act as an immediate pointer along the ancient path that led to its ultimate fulfilment and destiny in Jesus Christ the Rock of our Salvation.

The Irish Connection

It is difficult to say exactly when the gospel first came to Arran, but there is no doubt about where it came from. In the 5th and 6th century a number of Irish colonists settled along the west coast of Scotland. A good number of those are likely to have been Christians, but the great Irish missionary saints were very active too and it is they who are remembered in such names as Kilbrannon Sound (St Brandon), Kilpatrick, Kildonan, Kilbride (St Bridget) and Lamlash (St Molaise). It is recorded that St Brendan visited the Western Isles around 545 and he set up a monastery on Aileach which may well have been Arran. A possible location for this site was suggested in 1910 by JA Balfour³ as the cashel above Kilpatrick near Torr an Daimh which significantly means Hill of the Church. It has now been revealed that the site is much older than the 6th century, but we cannot discount the idea that if Brendan came to Arran he could have established his monastery at this existing site.

There are also three places with associations with St Columba. In Glen an t-Suidhe just north of the String there is a mound called Suidhe Chalumchille ('Seat of Columba') marking the spot where he is supposed to have taken a rest. Similarly in Kilpatrick, the settlement at Carmahome which in Gaelic is Cathair mo Challuim ('Chair of my Columba'). 'Cathair' in Gaelic is a borrowing from the Greek *cathedra* from which we get the word cathedral which refers to the bishop's chair. Finally at Thundergay north of Pirnmill there is a well called Tobair Challumchille (Spring of Columba). It is on private property and the owners claim that this marks the place where Columba found on a clear day that he could still see Ireland, so knew he must journey on northwards.

Perhaps some of these saints made fleeting visits, but it is St Molaise who was probably the first to seriously evangelise the island. He was probably born in about 565 and was a disciple of St Columba. It seems likely he was also taught by St Blane on the island of Bute before he came to Arran. Clachan in Shiskine was possibly his base for a while, but his main centre was Holy Island itself where he lived in the cave that bears his name. Eventually he was appointed a bishop of Leighlin back in Ireland. He was greatly loved and after his death many pilgrims (mostly from Ireland) made the journey and crossed over on what became a significant pilgrimage route to the Holy Island.

This strong Irish connection on Arran suggests that here at Sannox it would be particularly appropriate to learn from and incorporate something of early Irish spirituality as the Spirit leads in our worship and way of life.

The earliest Christian site in Sannox itself was a chapel dedicated to St Michael. Nothing is known about it apart from the fact that it was known to be affiliated to the monastery at Kilwinning in the 14th century. It probably ceased to function soon after the Reformation. The dedication to the Archangel Michael tends to indicate a place of spiritual significance and one that is often contested. The only thing that remains of this chapel is an image thought to be of St Michael which can be seen by the wall of the Sannox burial ground.

³ Balfour, J A 'Notice of a cashel, an early christian settlement at Kilpatrick, Arran', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, vol. 44 Page(s): 90-101

Before 1800

I will cover the next 1,000 years of history quickly as there is very little to report that would be relevant for our purposes. After the times of the early saints, Arran may have suffered from Viking raids and it is likely that any early churches, of which there is no trace, would have been destroyed. It belonged to Norway until the 13th century. Sannox is a Viking name meaning 'sandy bay'.

In his book about Arran Angus Downie comments on the history of Arran that "*Like the happy country that it is, Arran has no continuous record of strife and warfare, and more than once has chosen ways of peace, while over the rest of Scotland the claymore was flourishing.*"⁴ I suspect that this has had some impact on the sense of peace so many visitors to Arran have experienced.

From the late Middle Ages onwards, Arran tended to follow the religious trends and was not at the forefront of the major changes at the time of the Reformation. Eventually two Presbyterian parishes emerged with Kilmorie serving the south and west, while Kilbride parish was east of a line from Lochranza to Dippin Head.

By the late 18th century, the Presbyterian Church was dominated by what was called Moderatism. This tended to place an emphasis on reason and was suspicious of any tendencies toward enthusiasm. Unsurprisingly, this led to a situation where the worship was of a cold and formal nature and the hearts of people were untouched. On Arran itself, Angus McMillan, minister of Kilmorie, who originally came from North Sannox declared in 1830 that "*Thirty years ago the state of religion in the island was exceedingly bad*"⁵. Another writer declared that: "*the condition of the people in morals and intellect at least, seems to have been exceedingly low. They were turbulent, superstitious, and otherwise degraded. . . . The belief in ghosts, brownies, and witchcraft was very prevalent. I remember my mother telling me that there was a belief prevalent, even amongst the 'godly' that evil spirits actually haunted the island.*"⁶

The beginning of the Sannox congregation



Into this dry situation, two vigorous young men came to Arran in June 1800. Their names were James Haldane and John Campbell. James Haldane was the younger brother of Robert Haldane and these two were leading figures in a move of God in Scotland that transformed the spiritual landscape and led to the establishing of Baptist, Congregational and Independent churches in the land. They were from a wealthy background and had served as officers in the navy, but gave up everything, even selling their estate near Stirling to release income for their evangelistic work.

⁴ Angus Downie, *All about Arran*, p 34

⁵ Rev Angus Macmillan, *Revival of Religion on Arran*, quoted in *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol IV 1923 p 63

⁶ Charles L Graves, *Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan* 1910 pp 3-4

John Campbell is less well known, but he was also a remarkable character. As well as his passion for evangelism, he had a deep compassion for the poor and set up the Magdalene Asylum to rescue prostitutes in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Later he helped found the British & Foreign Bible Society and also became director of the London Missionary Society, twice making lengthy journeys in southern Africa to encourage the work there.



The only first hand record we have of James Haldane and John Campbell's first visit is tantalisingly brief. In Campbell's memoirs he states, *"I shall now relate some interesting circumstances which took place during a journey, which Mr. Haldane and I intended only for Arran, an island on the western coast of Scotland, about sixty miles in circumference. On the way to it, we visited the little island of Cumbrae, which is about three miles long, and has one good looking village, where we preached evening and morning, then went in a boat to the isle of Bute, which is about twelve miles long; — from thence sailed over to Arran, and preached in all the villages round it."*⁷

After their time in Arran, they moved to Kintyre where they had an adventurous time, raising the wrath of the Moderatist ministers and being arrested for preaching in the open air! They were eventually released and continued to preach and gain a number of converts. After this mission, Archibald McCallum was sent by the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home to work in Kintyre. However, he and his followers soon suffered from opposition. Several farmers around Carradale were told by their landowners to break their connection with McCallum or they would have to leave their farms by Whitsunday 1803. The families chose to leave their farms and three families crossed over to North Sannox where they had received the offer of a farm.

Just before these families arrived, McCallum went over to Arran along with John Campbell who later recorded that *"We spent an afternoon and a day. The people assembled to hear with remarkable readiness. We preached to them eight times, and they pressed us much to remain a few days longer, but we could not. However, it was settled that they would send a boat now and then for Mr M. At that place, the sea is only about six miles across"*⁸. The effectiveness of only four years of mission was evident in these excerpts from a report from McCallum to the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in December 1804:

I have been once more in the island of Arran. I wrote you formerly concerning the appearance of a revival there. Some of those with whom I conversed the last time I was there, are now walking in the ways of the Lord. One woman told me that her first convictions commenced four years ago, when hearing Mr James Haldane, at Lamlash... We set out on Saturday, the 24th November for ... Sannox, and having preached there, both of us, on Sabbath ... many were deeply affected... Those under concern came this day November 29th at the distance of eleven miles, and continued there all night, and accompanied us next morning to the place appointed for preaching, and they continued this night also for the sake of conversing with us. ... On Wednesday, after sermon, we formed a small church, consisting of about

⁷ Robert Philip, *The Life, Times and Missionary Enterprises of Rev John Campbell* 1841 p 285

⁸ *Missionary Magazine* 1803 pp 366-367

*fourteen members; six of them were formerly members of the church in Kintyre, who went there. There are also three fellowship meetings set up among them. Between this and the time before, it appears that there are about sixty persons awakened, eight of whom are received members into the above church. It is remarkable with regard to the dispersion of the Carradale people, that it was the means of forming two churches, and that in two countries, and the setting up of eight fellowship meetings. – This is the state in which I left Arran.*⁹

Another account of what happened at this time was written several years later by Angus Macmillan, the minister at Kilmoreie:

*But, through the tender mercy of God, the day-spring from on high visited it. Divine light arose on them that sat in darkness, and the cause of Christ has gained much ground in this part of his vineyard, since the year 1804. In that year, and the year following, many were awakened at the north end of the island, especially about the farms of Sannox and their neighbourhood. And although this awakening, as to its power and progress, was not of long continuance, yet a considerable number of the subjects of it testified, by their after lives and conversation, that they had undergone a gracious change. This day of small things was the commencement of the revival which followed. From this time, a change for the better might be observed in the religious sentiments and conduct of many among the people. Many seemed now to be awakened from the slumber of spiritual death; being disposed to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace.*¹⁰

By April 1806, Archibald McCallum was reporting that,

*The church in the Island of Arran consists ... of about 40 members, instead of 13 or 14 at its formation. There is something very uncommon among this church. Every family with whom I lodged when I was there last had family worship three times a day through the week. ... The people of the island in general come out well to hear sermon, and are particularly kind people. Our younger brethren labour chiefly among them one after another. The church is very desirous of having one settled among them, but they are not very able with regard to the things of the world ... Brother McKay is just now come from Arran, informing us of the comfortable state of the church there.*¹¹

Later in a letter dated 16th August, 1806, he says, "In the island of Arran, we witnessed a pleasant scene; about 60 lively disciples scattered among the villages, where we had never met with any before".¹²

It is especially interesting to note the reference to family worship three times a day. Clearly these folk were following the examples of David (Psalm 55:17), Daniel (Daniel 6:10) and countless others down the ages and we have felt that it is important to revive that practice here at Sannox.

Alexander Mackay

In January of 1806 Alexander Mackay, who had recently finished his studies at Robert Haldane's Theological Seminary, was sent to Arran. He had been born in the island of Easdale in Argyllshire and was Gaelic speaking. On the 10th of September he was

⁹ *Missionary Magazine* 1804, pp 46-47

¹⁰ Angus MacMillan, quoted at <http://www.fpchurch.org.uk/magazines/fpm/2002/July/article4.php>

¹¹ *Missionary Magazine*, 1806, pp 211-212

¹² Quoted by William McNaughton in *Sannox Congregational Church* p 7

ordained pastor and he was to remain in post until he died in 1856.

Those early days of the fellowship were challenging but also full of encouragement. Here is a moving description of their life together: *"All the services were conducted in the open air. There was no chapel erected then. We were quite inured to the holding of our meetings for public worship in the field. In very severe weather we found shelter in farm-houses and in corn-mills. We had a good attendance. Sinners were directed to the Saviour, and believers were edified. We had all of us much to learn, and not a little to unlearn. We took the Bible as our only rule, as to doctrine, ordinances, government, and discipline. We were in general, very happy in the fellowship of the gospel".*¹³

It was evident Mackay was putting down his roots when he married a local girl Janet McMillan in 1809. The fruit of their labours together is evident from this report eight years later: *"In Arran, I trust, the word of the Lord has been accompanied with divine power to the souls of a considerable number, within the space of twelve or fourteen years. A desire to attend public ordinances has been observable; prayer meetings have been established; family-worship very generally attended to; and in a few places Sabbath Evening Schools have been instituted. A considerable number of Bibles and Testaments have been brought into the Island. Attention continues to be paid to supply those who are in want of the Sacred Scriptures; and we are abundantly supplied with Bibles from Glasgow".*¹⁴

It is instructive to reflect that this fellowship was a dispersed community of poor working class folk in the northern part of Arran where each croft was a place of worship. They would travel by foot or by horse and cart on the Sabbath to the appointed place to worship. If it were not for the gospel, the inhabitants of these clachans in Sannox, Glen Chalmadale and Laggantuin would probably have had little contact with others. No doubt the Sunday gathering together afforded great opportunities for mutual encouragement and support in their lives which were often very difficult.

Another interesting aspect of the fellowship was that they accepted that their pastor would be away on missionary work - Mackay reports: *"I have visited some parts of Argyll every summer or autumn for ten years; and yearly do I see, that there is yet much land to possess; faithful labourers are indeed very few. In many parishes the sound of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is not heard, unless by an occasional visit from an itinerant".*¹⁵

The Macmillan family

Amongst the early members of the fellowship was Duncan Macmillan who was born in about 1773 in a croft near the Cock of Arran. His father Malcolm was an elder in the Presbyterian church and he was very suspicious of the new evangelical movement, but he allowed Duncan to attend the meetings with his sister Janet which was to have far reaching consequences. To start with, Janet soon became the wife of Alexander Mackay!

Duncan married Katherine Crawford and they moved to a small farm called Achog at the north end of Corrie above the Cat Stone. They were a devoted couple described as especially kind to children. They had a large family of 12 children, but they lost four of their daughters in an epidemic in 1813. Two of their children, Daniel and Alexander, were destined to become the founders of Macmillan Publishing. Duncan died when the boys were only ten and four. Their mother Katherine had a profound and lasting impact

¹³ *Scottish Congregational Magazine* 1856 p 127

¹⁴ *The Christian Herald* 1818 p 67

¹⁵ *Ibid*

on their lives. Alexander many years later wrote in a letter: *My mother was a woman of very devout nature and habits, whose daily life was, as I believe, lived as in the conscious presence of God. She had a very noble, sweet nature, and a certain serenity and clearness of mind that I have hardly ever met with in any other human.*¹⁶ In the midst of all her household duties, she found time to read widely. She sang ballads and hymns and the promise of a song was a major behavioural motivation for the boys! She was broad minded too and when she heard zealous people speaking about those who held different views, she quipped that if they had the good fortune to reach heaven, they would have to put up with the company of many Romanists! Alexander recognised the huge benefit that the first evangelists in Sannox had on them: *"Whatever prosperity has come to us as a family is, in a great measure, owing to the effect they had on the moral, spiritual, and intellectual condition of my parents."*¹⁷

Duncan and Katherine were also great-grandparents of Harold Macmillan who was Prime Minister from 1957-1963. MacMillan always kept a photograph of the croft at the Cock of Arran on his desk to remind him of his humble upbringings.

Building of the church

In 1821 the Duke of Hamilton granted the church a building lease for an acre of land at Sannox. The congregation then set about raising the funds to build, which amounted to between £400 and £500. I have not been able to discover how many people contributed, but it was probably a large number. One sum of £50 was given by the Congregational Union of Scotland whose letter stated: *"Your Committee felt particularly for a sister church ... in the midst of a numerous Gaelic population, who have been for sixteen years meeting, summer and winter, in the open air, or in a small house, the residence of their pastor, which was not capable of holding a congregation to hear the gospel. It was not till now that they could obtain a grant of ground to build upon".*¹⁸

When it was finally opened in 1822 it could hold 200 people and it was in fact the only church between Lamlash and Pirnmill.

The emigration to Canada

Only seven years after the church opened, an event was to occur which had far reaching consequences for the congregation. It was the time of the Highland Clearances and the Duke of Hamilton encouraged the crofters to emigrate to Canada in order to make way for sheep. A considerable number of those who were members of the congregation decided to leave. The emigrants departed from Lamlash on the brig *Caledonia* on Saturday, 25th April, 1829, but before they did so, Mackay delivered his parting sermon to them, preaching from I Peter 5.7, *Casting all your care upon Him; for he careth for you.* In May 1977 a monument to this occasion was erected which had been paid for by descendants of those who emigrated.

Two years later some more of the congregation also left to join the first settlers in Megantic County Quebec. Mackay recorded these events wistfully in his family Bible:

"In the month of April 1829 a number of my dear Christian friends emigrated from this country to Canada, North America.

In July 1831 a number more followed them to the same part of that distant land. Among the number was Mr Daniel Henry, who labours as a Gaelic missionary in

¹⁶ Charles L Graves, *Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan* 1910 p 6

¹⁷ Charles L Graves, *Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan* 1910 p 3

¹⁸ *Annual Report of the Congregational Union of Scotland* 1822, pp 21-22

Inverness township and adjacent parts of Lower Canada."¹⁹

These emigrations reduced the congregation dramatically to only around twelve people and they were no longer in a position to support Mackay as a full time pastor. For a while he taught at the local school, but then the Congregational Union of Scotland provided for him to continue his work which was to include preaching tours throughout the Highlands. His annual stipend was between £40 to £50, £18 of which was from the Congregational Union, about £15 from collections at church and other donations and the rest was from renting a portion of the family home to summer visitors.

Mackay's ministry and missionary work

By 1836, the average attendance at worship during June, July, and August had risen to about 100 and in November, December, and January the congregation was about 50. Communion took place every week. Every Sunday there were services in Gaelic and English. Mackay also preached in Gaelic and English on Sunday evenings at Corrie, Brodick, and Lochranza.

Apart from these responsibilities Mackay was usually away on mission trips throughout Argyllshire for up to seven weeks a year. Here is a description from 1839: (Mackay) *"was for seven weeks, in the months of July and August ... on a tour throughout Kintyre, in Knapdale, at Inverary, Dalmally, Tyndrum, Oban, Easdale, &c. where he preached fifty times besides many more private lectures and addresses. Many parts of that field have been for a long period much more the scene of missionary labours than the Highlands in general, and there more good fruit appears as a result. ... Many of these good people whom Mr Mck. again visited ... had heard no sermon since his last visit on the former year".*²⁰

Mackay continued to labour energetically in these ways until well into his 70's. It is interesting to read this comment on his motivation. *"We must seek to promote revivals in individuals, in families, in churches, in hamlets, in villages, in sequestered glens, on the mainland, and in all the islands"*. No doubt Mackay would have learnt much from the revival which occurred on Arran mostly in the south of the island between 1812-14 but I have not found any comments from him about what happened then. A description of that revival can be found at <http://www.sannox.org/about-us/the-history/arran-revival-1804-onwards/>

The Mackay family

All that we know about the Mackay's family life comes from the entries in the family Bible. Their children were Daniel (born in 1812), Catherine, (1814), Janet (1816), Neil (1819) and Isabella (1821). Tragedy struck when the Mackays lost both their sons in the space of two years. In the Bible Mackay wrote, *"On the 27th day of January 1835 my dearly beloved son Neil died of typhus fever after an illness of 16 days. He ended his pleasant days on earth in Glasgow and I brought his precious remains to Arran on the 30th and committed his body to the grave in South Sannox churchyard on the 31st, to rest in hope till the blessed morning of the resurrection, when I hope the body of my lovely son shall be raised and fashioned like unto the glorified body of his and my Redeemer - Job xix 25-27. I have mourned and do mourn for my darling lovely youth but, blessed be God, not as those who have no hope".*²¹

On January 7th 1837, Daniel died of fever at Blackheath in Jamaica where he had

¹⁹ Copy of page from Mackay's family Bible in possession of Sannox Christian Centre

²⁰ *Annual Report of the Congregational Union of Scotland* 1840 p 25

²¹ From Mackay family Bible

lived for 10 months.

The last entry in the Bible would have been a happier January when Catherine was married to John McKillop in 1844.

Final days

As he came to the end of his life, it is typical that Mackay was able to see blessing in adversity:

"The Lord has done great things here in days gone by, and he is still the same God, and is able to save to the very uttermost. The population is now thin and far-spread. Sheep farms, emigration, and lordship of the soil, have already done here, what they are at this moment doing all over the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, clearing out the habitations of men, for sheep and cattle. But what shall we say to these things? Though loss to our churches be great, very great, yet it is gain to the world. The principles for which we contend and toil to disseminate are thereby widely scattered, and whatever work we may have really done, although lost to the enjoyment of the eye, and in its immediate returns, and although the labourers may mourn, yet neither their work nor their reward is lost, for the one is enlarged to more extensive results, and the other thereby increased, ... Many have thus gone far hence from Arran, with the Bible in their hands, and Christ in their hearts, and have become a praise and an honour in the whole earth. The desert has been gladdened by their presence, and the distant vales have blossomed as the rose".²²

in January 1856 Mackay preached his jubilee sermon. His text was the same as the one he'd preached from 50 years before from Psalm 89:15 *"Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance"*. He died soon after on Monday, 25th February, 1856. He is buried in the Sannox churchyard where there is a prominent tombstone, the money for which was raised by public subscription.

Surely Alexander Mackay was a most remarkable man and as the project develops, I imagine him cheering us on from the grandstand (see Hebrews 12:1) and encouraging us in Christ likeness, perseverance, love for people and missionary zeal.

John Blacklock and the Highland College

After Mackay died, there was a period of four years when the congregation was without a pastor but on May 11th 1860, John Blacklock who was a student at Glasgow Theological College and was a Gaelic speaker was ordained and appointed here. He soon began to make an impact and was greatly appreciated as this delightful episode shows: *"A few summer visitors from Glasgow, profiting greatly from his ministry ... had it impressed on them, that the labours of the young minister, in his itinerating tours to his various preaching stations, would be greatly facilitated and eased by his journey being made on horseback. A subscription was begun. Friends from various parts of the country residing on the island during vacation time, generously responded; others spoken to heartily entered into the matter, and soon money enough was collected to purchase a fine young pony and handsome saddle gear, along with nine sovereigns for the pony's keep during the winter".²³*

A particularly significant development was that from around 1873 to 1878, he ran the "Highland College" here at Sannox. Funds were raised to support young Gaelic speaking

²² *Scottish Congregational Magazine* 1852 p 231

²³ Quoted by William McNaughton: *Sannox Congregational Church* p 17 & 18

men who were trained as evangelists. Most of them later became pastors of Baptist or Congregational churches.

It is interesting that directly across from Sannox, YWAM have their training centre at Seamill and it was good to bring some students over here in June 2012. Perhaps there might be future opportunities through YWAM of recovering something of what was achieved through the Highland College. Will the "New Highland College" be an aspect of the work here?!

In 1878 Blacklock also started to pastor at Oban Congregational Church and around October of that year, he left Sannox to go and minister full time in Oban.

Allan Cameron McDougall and impact on visitors

Allan Cameron McDougall, a Gaelic speaker from the Ross of Mull, was ordained pastor of the church on 6th November, 1878. He himself was a product of the Highland College at Sannox. Dundarroch which had previously been a stable block was converted into a home for the McDougall family.

A major aspect of the ministry of the church became that of reaching out to the growing numbers of holiday makers who came especially during the summer. Many of these visitors presented a marked contrast to the working class folk who were the regular members. There were University Principals, College Professors, doctors, ministers, and men and women distinguished in science, art, letters and law. It is very striking that the visitors and indeed the preachers included many from different denominations. For example, George Adam Smith who was Principal of the University of Aberdeen, worshipped and preached here as did Dr John Henry Jowett. They would preach to huge congregations in the open air at the side of the church. Jowett wrote a book of daily meditations called *My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year*. Here is the start of his entry for January 5th:

*"An inheritance incorruptible." I am writing these words in the Island of Arran. To-morrow I shall leave the land behind, but I shall take the landscape with me! It will be with me in the coming winter, and I shall gaze upon Goat Fell in the streets of New York. The land is a temporary possession, the landscape abides!"*²⁴

Here is another meditation from his book, *Things that Matter Most*:

*From the supreme height of the fells, on the island of Arran, there comes rolling down the granite slopes a gloriously alive and vitalizing stream. They call it "The White Water," and it is well named. It gleams on the slopes like the whitest foam. Out at sea, when everything else was obscure, I could see the white water running on its ceaseless errand. It feeds the bracken, it nourishes the stalwart heather. The White Water endows its haunts with its own loveliness. And the white water of the eternal love, ceaselessly flowing from the holy heart of God, brings with it power to make everything lovely, and at last to present everything spotless before the throne.*²⁵

The abolitionist Dr Christopher Newman Hall, who wrote a tract simply called *Come to Jesus* which was translated into 40 languages was another visitor and preacher, as was Andrew Bonar, the brother of Horatius who wrote *"I heard the voice of Jesus say"*. On one occasion when Bonar was preaching here, the Rev Melville Scott who was Archdeacon of Stafford, was in the congregation. In his biography called the *The Force of Love* his son recalls the occasion:

"Never to be forgotten was the sermon preached in the little kirk at the mouth of Glen Sannox by Dr Andrew Bonar from Psalm xxxvi. 6, "Thy righteousness standeth like

²⁴ John Henry Jowett, *My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year*, Fleming H Revell Company 1914 p 5

²⁵ John Henry Jowett, *Things that Matter Most*, Fleming H Revell Company, 1913

the mountains of God, the judgements are a great deep." Often would my father's voice break in the morning reading of the Psalms as those words were recited on the seventh of each month, and I knew that his heart was among the Arran hills."²⁶

It is also possible that the tune to George Matheson's famous hymn "O love that wilt not let me go" was written on Sannox beach. Matheson wrote the hymn at Innellan in June 1882 not far away on the Argyllshire coast. He asked a well known composer Albert Peace to write a tune for it. Here's the story of what happened to him...

*Dr. Peace was in the habit of always carrying in his pocket a copy of the words for careful study. Sitting one day on the sands at Arran, he was reading "O Love that wilt not let me go" when the tune came upon him like a flash, and, taking out his pencil, he dashed it off in a few minutes.*²⁷

George Matheson always said his hymn would not have got very far without this beautiful tune which Peace called St Margaret after that saintly Queen of Scotland. It has been the favourite hymn for thousands including US President Calvin Coolidge.



Peace was staying at the time in the manse at Brodick, so the beach at Brodick might initially seem to be a more obvious candidate, but local tradition holds that the beach of inspiration was Sannox. The church would have had been visited by other people Peace knew, so it is very possible he had taken a trip up here.

Albert Peace on Arran - possibly at Sannox

All these examples underline the extraordinary influence of the church which with its unique location and by God's grace has impacted and inspired so many people, particularly with regard to Christian creativity.

McDougall was a quiet man who was held in high regard by all and he remained as pastor for a total of 54 years retiring in 1932.

Recent History

The next pastor was Renwick Wiseman who ministered until 1945. Before he came to Sannox, he had pastored for a number of years in Canada. He was the first non-Gaelic speaking minister at Sannox. He was gifted musically and introduced hymns to the church. Apparently they had only sung psalms previously in church, but as we have already seen (page 7) hymns and other Christian songs would have been sung in their homes. At all events, the great significance of the Psalms for the church here is an interesting link with the early church on Arran - it is known that in some Irish monasteries they chanted all 150 each day! So it is important that the reading and singing of Psalms should have an important place at Sannox today.

There was a brief incumbency by Dr John Safeley who died in August 1947. Safeley's wife's brother was James Morrison Rollo Gladstone, a retired Canon from the Episcopal

²⁶ Melville Scott, *The Force of Love*, Bemrose & Sons 1899, page 150

²⁷ Keir Jamieson: *Peace Perfect Peace*, 2012 p 14

Church and he came to live with his sister in the Manse. In the absence of any immediate replacement for Safeley, Gladstone began to conduct services and in effect become the pastor. He quickly became greatly respected and loved in the community. However his bishop did not approve! Certainly at that time it was most unusual to have an Episcopal clergyman serving in a Congregational Church, but on the other hand it was completely in the flow of what had happened in the history of the church which had welcomed so many Christians from different denominations. Gladstone continued in this way until 1962 when Allan Cameron McDougall returned to the Manse in his retirement and took services again until his death in 1966.

After McDougall's death, services became more occasional. A vital person in the fellowship in the post war period was Jane Nixon who lived at "Averton" in Corrie. It was she who took care of the affairs of the church which included arranging people to take the services. Many of them stayed at her home when they came. Here is William McNaughton's comment about her:

Janet was a Scottish "character" who lived under the discipline of the Gospel. A woman of independent mind, a strong sense of justice, outspoken and fearless in her convictions, rarely idle, she had friends in every part of Arran. She gloried in the little fellowship whose influence was far wider than many a city church by reason of the numerous visitors from all over the world who valued the Services of Worship in a setting of unparalleled beauty where no other House of God is to be found for some miles.²⁸

She resigned as secretary and treasurer in 1972 and was succeeded by Annie McDougall, a sister of Allan Cameron McDougall who lived at Dundarroch until her death in 1976. At this stage sadly there was no longer a viable congregation to meet regularly, but some services continued in the summer months and the renovation of Dundarroch and the birth of the Sannox Christian Centre meant that at least some activities were able to continue especially for groups staying at Dundarroch.

Now with the formation of the Trust and the purchase of the site a new chapter begins. What a legacy to build on!

David Pott
November 2012

²⁸ William McNaughton: *Sannox Congregational Church* p 20