

The beginnings of St Oswald's Episcopal Church, Maybole in the wider context of the resurgence of the Scottish Episcopal Church

(Part of a PhD thesis, 'Irish Protestant Migrants in the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway, University of Durham, 2007. Copy in the diocesan office and with Bishop Gregor)

When Rev Dr Anne Tomlinson arrived at Maybole Station in the summer of 2011 she asked for directions to 'St Oswald's Church'. No one could help her – no one knew where it was. She then said, 'The Episcopal Church', but that also drew a blank. But then someone said, 'Oh, do you mean the English Church?', and immediately arms waved and fingers pointed her in the right direction.

We are referred to colloquially as "The English Church", because we do attract many English people to our congregations, who down south belonged to the Church of England. We are of course a sister church to the Church of England, whose worship and ethos are very similar to our own, and together with them, and 160 other national churches, we belong to the worldwide Anglican Communion of some 80 million members. Did you know that there are more Anglicans in Nigeria than there are in England?

Another misconception is that in worship we are 'next door to the Church of Rome'. It is again true that we use candles, a printed liturgy, vestments and white surplices, and indeed some of our churches on the more extreme Anglo-Catholic wing would look more like Roman Catholic Churches than Church of Scotland. It might therefore surprise you to know that probably most of our adherents in the west of Scotland in the 19th century probably belonged to the Orange Order. So hopefully these are some intriguing bits of information which might keep you interested!

My own particular research, for which I was awarded a PhD from Durham University, set out to correct these notions. But it was also a family history project, and has helped me realise why some of my forebears left the Episcopal Church to become Presbyterians, and why I, after several generations away, returned to my own spiritual roots.

While it is true that as the 20th century progressed, the church did become more middle class and dominated by English migrants, in the 19th century this was far from the case. My research showed that it was far more industrially and working-class based than has been realised.

The main part of my thesis was made up of case studies of about 30 churches in the diocese, including St Oswald's, but before we look at Maybole in particular, I want to draw the bigger picture, because unless you know this nothing else makes sense.

Alexander Carlyle, a Church of Scotland minister and historian writing in the 19th century admitted that prior to the Revolution of 1688, most Scots were of the Episcopalian persuasion. But by the end of the 17th century the Episcopal Church in the west of Scotland had virtually disappeared.

Due to the disastrous policy of the Stuart kings in trying to force Episcopacy on a largely unwilling people, the Covenanted movement spearheaded the resistance and at times, physical opposition to this. The religious settlement in Scotland under William and Mary made Presbyterianism the form of government which would determine the national Church in Scotland.

A reaction set in against Episcopalianism which saw its clergy driven out (“the rabbling of the curates”). Its bishops withdrew to the north east of Scotland where for most of the 18th century they led as a “college” rather than as diocesans, the rump of the Church which was mainly confined to the highlands and the north east. Furthermore, the Church had become implicated in the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 and as a result suffered the destruction of most of its churches and severe legal restrictions on its clergy and people.

Episcopalianism had been most severely routed in the south west. The Covenanters had suffered considerably at the hands of Sir Robert Grierson of Lag, and at the Revolution of 1688 the whole area became Presbyterian. All that remained was a small “Episcopalian Society” which met clandestinely in various houses in Dumfries, and was supplied by occasional chaplains. The next nearest church to the north was at Ayr, some sixty miles from Stranraer. After the Revolution, many Episcopalian families like the Elliotts and Armstrongs moved to Ireland, seeking refuge in the Church of Ireland which, unlike its Scottish counterpart, had been established under the terms of the Revolution. Any remaining Episcopalianism would probably have settled down to accept the Presbyterian form of worship and church government in conformity with the rest of the region. The assimilation was so complete that neither the 1715 nor the 1745 Jacobite Rebellions found much support in the south west of Scotland.

By the middle of that century some of its clergy considered that the Jacobite allegiance had been misguided and disastrous. They renounced any loyalty to the Jacobite cause and committed themselves to loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty, praying for the King by name in their services. As a result they became “qualified” for legal acceptance, provided their clergy had been ordained in England or Ireland, and thus became known as “Qualified Chapels.” There were only three Episcopal churches in the west at this time: Dumfries, Ayr and St. Mary’s Glasgow. Dumfries and Ayr became “Qualified” and thus technically left the Scottish Episcopal Church, which only left St. Mary’s in Glasgow as the sole representative of traditional Episcopalianism in the west of Scotland. (A rival “Qualified” Chapel was built in Glasgow in 1750 – St. Andrews by the Green).

In 1804 however, most of the legal restrictions were lifted from the Episcopal Church. They officially renounced Jacobitism, took oaths of loyalty and prayed for the king by name. Thus the way was opened for the two parts of the Church to become reconciled again. From a hundred years of looking inward and concerned mainly for their own preservation, the missionary challenge which was unexpectedly thrust upon them was something they had not considered and were ill prepared for.

So, at the beginning of the 19th century there were 4 Episcopal Churches in the west of Scotland with just a few hundred members between them. But by the end of that century, there were almost 80 churches with an estimated 100,000 Episcopalian population. Where did they all come from and how did the church react?

The growth was not through native Scots but through emigrants. Historians have simply said “English and Irish” without giving any indication of what proportion of each. The assumption is that most were English and one of their historians writing of the 19th century said so: “the Irish perhaps *less* numerous.” (Marion Lohead, *Episcopal Scotland in the 19th Century*, p. 223). It would be true to say that from the last decade of the 19th through the 20th century most of the incomers to the Church *were* in fact English, but what of previous decades?

My thesis brought to light “a forgotten people.” Not only most members today of the Scottish Episcopal Church, but even most historians have inherited a collective memory loss. The Irish were at times painful to deal with, and like all painful memories, some things are best forgotten and never spoken about. The purpose of the research was firstly to ascertain to what extent the Irish, as opposed to the English, were in fact the largest ethnic group of Episcopalians in Scotland at this period, and secondly, to see how the Church ministered to them in terms of church building, pastoral care and mission in general. To what extent the mission was a success or a failure, and if it was a failure (and in some respects it was), whose fault was it, and is “fault” even a correct term?

The Irish had arrived in Scotland, particularly in the west in growing numbers since around 1815. The 1830’s also saw a large influx which grew to a torrent after the famine years around 1846. In terms of their religious affiliation, there have been several wrong perceptions. Firstly, it is often assumed they were in the main Roman Catholics, thus in traditional Irish diaspora studies, Irish = Catholic. In recent years it has been established that probably one third were in fact Protestants. The second misconception is that the Protestants were mainly Presbyterians. I have argued that the majority, or

certainly half, were probably Episcopalians. They were members of the Church of Ireland, and as such sought out the Scottish Episcopal Church as being the sister to the Church of their baptism, and thus their natural spiritual home.

The clergy of the Episcopal Church soon realised that there were tens of thousands of Episcopalians out there making demands on the offices of religion. The Church was in the main unprepared for such an influx. It did not have the clergy, the buildings or the money. Its missionary efforts to meet the demand were indeed impressive and even heroic. If the Church was not prepared for the Irish, then it could be said that the Irish were not prepared for what they found in the Church! For the Episcopal Church in Scotland was a very different thing to what it was in Ireland! Irish Episcopalians were in the main “low church” which means an absence of ritual and an abhorrence of anything which savoured of “Popery.” The Scottish Church by contrast was on the “high” side and from the 1850’s onwards was embracing many of the ideas and practices of the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism, known contemptuously as “Puseyism” and “ritualism.” Many of the Irish were also members of the Orange Order, which was gaining strength in Scotland by the 1870’s and helped focus opposition against the “encroachments of the Church of Rome” in Church and State.

Ayrshire

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was only one Episcopal congregation in Ayrshire, and that was in the town of Ayr. In 1832 William Wilson, a native of Aberdeenshire, was sent by the Church to minister to “a congregation of 400, many of them poor Irishmen, meeting in the upper floor of a storehouse.” This was in Content Street at an area of the town known as Content near the present Wallacetown. It was the Irish area in Ayr, the Roman Catholic chapel of St Margaret’s (now the Cathedral), having been built because of the proximity of the Irish.

Although in some respects this was a “new incumbency”, it was in fact a fresh start for the remnant of a congregation which had survived since the Revolution and was now seeking to be readmitted back into the Scottish Episcopal Church. In an area hostile to both Episcopacy and the Jacobites, the congregation had only survived by leaving the Church in 1747 and becoming a “qualified chapel.”

Ayrshire was a staunchly Presbyterian county where the Covenanters were held in high regard. There is no evidence that the Roman Catholic Church survived the Reformation in Ayrshire. In *Webster’s Enumeration* of the population in 1755, there were stated to be “over 16,000 Papists in Scotland, but none in Ayrshire.” In the struggle in the Kirk for ascendancy between the Presbyterians and the

Episcopalians, Ayrshire had contested strongly for the Presbyterian form of church government and worship.

The new Episcopacy introduced by the restoration of Charles II in 1660 was immediately and widely rejected in Ayrshire. In the Presbyteries of Ayr and Irvine, out of 57 ministers, 30 refused to submit and with others who joined them later, these ousted ministers continued their ministry in conventicles and field meetings even after they were declared illegal in 1665. Events led to rebellion and persecution, which was particularly felt in Ayrshire during the “Killing times” of the 1680s.

Given the hostility of native Ayrshire people to Episcopacy, it would be unlikely that many of them would have been part of Wilson’s congregation. It is more than likely that there were a few English among them, but the majority, being Irish, were part of that migration which had been going back and forth across the Irish Sea for many centuries. Indeed the earliest Baptismal Register of Holy Trinity shows that the majority were living in Wallacetown, were labourers by occupation and Irish by birth.

There had been much coming and going between Ulster and Scotland for centuries, and Ayrshire families were prominent in the Plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s. Those who came here in the 19th century, were the descendants of those who had gone there in the first place, so do not think that Scottish surnames indicates Scottish birth. When these descendants of the planters returned to Ayrshire, it was also economic forces and opportunities which attracted them. By 1830 a large part of the population of Ayrshire was Irish. The town of Ayr itself did not have a particularly large Irish population, and so it is probable that Wilson’s congregation was drawn in from the surrounding villages. But in Newton and Wallacetown, suburbs of Ayr, the immigrants were numerous. In 1837 it was said, “The inhabitants of Wallacetown and Content belong chiefly to the poorer class of Irish settlers, and consist of colliers, labourers, and weavers ...” In the village of Crosshill, out of about 1000 inhabitants in 1838, 800 were Irish or of Irish extraction. The majority of the workers at the coal mines at St. Quivox were also Irish. By 1851, 11 per cent of the county’s population were Irish-born.

It was the growth of Ayrshire in the nineteenth century into one of the chief industrial areas of Scotland which brought about the large influx of Irish migrants. The traditional agricultural economy itself was revolutionised by the implementation of new machinery, some of it invented in the county. Dairying was cultivated, and improved transport allowed goods to quickly get to the markets of central Scotland. But strides in agriculture were soon overtaken as the county’s economy diversified. In the early part of the nineteenth century, Ayrshire shared in the prosperity of the Scottish textile industry. In the 1850s

and 1860s, handloom weaving became depressed in the county, but power looms took their place in newly constructed factories; but in Ayrshire, heavy industry was also developing. The exploitation of the Ayrshire coalfield was favoured by the growing export trade to Ireland and by the building of the railways. By 1840 some 345,000 tones of coal were being exported annually from Troon, Ardrossan, Irvine, Saltcoats and Girvan. By the 1840s the iron industry was being developed, especially in North Ayrshire, where coal and ironstone were being worked. By 1869 there were 40 blast furnaces in Ayrshire. Ayrshire became second only to Lanarkshire as an iron producing area. Along with blast furnaces an engineering industry grew up. Between 1840 and 1900 the face of the county had been transformed.

As a direct consequence, the size of Ayrshire's population grew from 50,000 in 1700 to 254,000 in 1901. Many of these were newcomers, especially the Irish and their children, and to care for their spiritual needs, the Episcopal Church began several Missions, some of which were short lived and others became established as permanent churches. My case studies looked at the origins and early growth of the South Ayrshire churches of Girvan and Maybole, followed by those of North Ayrshire at Ardrossan, Irvine and Dalry. Other missions were attempted in various other towns, which never evolved beyond the early stages, but indicated that the numbers and needs were abundant throughout the county.

Maybole (St. Oswald's)

The beginnings of the Maybole church, the ethnic origin of its congregation and its initial progress were similar to Girvan's and from its founding in 1847 until 1911, the same clergy served both churches as a joint incumbency.

From the close of the nineteenth century to 1837, the population of Maybole doubled from 2,000 to 4,000 due to "the influx of Irish weavers." Like his Girvan neighbour, the parish minister, the Rev. George Gray described the Irish of Maybole in disparaging terms: "The introduction of manufactures ... has led many of the operatives into habits of dissipation, and the Irish in particular ... are but too generally drunken and filthy in their persons and houses."

Apart from agriculture, the main trade in the village was weaving. "The influences of Glasgow and the proximity of Ireland have drawn to the town and every little hamlet a great population of hand-loom weavers ... who are mostly Irish." (Gray)

Maybole was considered to be the home of Orangeism in Scotland, a lodge being formed here by the end of the eighteenth century. A company of Ayrshire Militia, the Loyal Carrick Volunteers, had been involved in suppressing the United Irishmen's Rebellion, and during their time in Ireland joined the Orange Order. When the regiment returned to Maybole in 1799, the lodge allowed civilians to join it from the local population. Marshall says, "There would have been no shortage of potential recruits given the sizeable Ulster Protestant community in the area and this lodge was, in all probability, the first in Scotland."

In May 1836, a local man, Henry Thornton wrote to the Rev. William Wilson at Ayr,

There are a number of members of the (Episcopal) Church ... in this town and they have not had an opportunity of receiving the benefit of the ordinances of their Church. They are very desirous of having the services of the Church administered in this place, and they take the liberty of requesting you to come and see them. They are like sheep without a shepherd; for although they were inclined to attend the Established Church here, want of accommodation prevents them. They are strangers in a strange land; and they may literally say that they have hung their harps upon the willows, when they think upon Zion. They therefore entreat that you, Reverend Sir, would so far condescend as to let them have the pleasure of your services for a few times.

The following year, it was stated that there were 214 Episcopalians in the town, and Wilson had obviously conceded to their request as "Episcopalians have the occasional services of the minister of that persuasion at Ayr."

In that year Maybole witnessed religious clashes, involving the Irish, similar to those which had taken place at Girvan some years before. Orange Episcopalians in South Ayrshire had two adversaries: firstly there were Irish Catholics, where the sectarian tensions of the old country were translated to the towns of Scotland as Orangemen clashed with Fenians and Ribbonmen. Secondly there were radical Presbyterians both Irish and Scottish who joined under the banner of reform and Chartism. There were outbreaks of violence when these two groups combined forces to fight with local Orangemen. This seems to have happened in Maybole in 1837 when the *Weavers' Journal* addressed "the Operative Weavers of Maybole": "Fellow operatives, it is time we were laying all our petty differences aside ... May we not, whether churchmen or voluntaries, Calvinists or Arminians, members of the Catholic faith

or of the Episcopal Church of England (sic), support our principles without injuring our mutual friendship.”

By 1846 the number of Episcopalians in Maybole had grown to over 400, William Wilson wrote, “Most of whom are either natives of Ireland or the children of Irish parents of the established church in that country.” A similarly worded petition, to that for Girvan, containing 40 signatures was sent to Bishop Throter asking for a clergyman and the establishment of a church.

The earliest services, commencing in 1847, were held in a rented room in a small building in Abbott Street near the old Collegiate Church. But the same depression in the weaving trade was to hit Maybole, so that in 1870 when William Gallacher took charge of the church, “it was almost extinct. There were not more than five or six communicants.” Gallacher built the numbers up again, generous funds were raised for a permanent church by a poor congregation, and the school was continued. The H.M. Inspector for Church Schools Report for 1870 stated, “Under most discouraging circumstances, arising from the extreme poverty of the population ... this large school is, on the whole, in a satisfactory condition ... The master has been successful with his two pupil teachers.”

Whereas Girvan had a church building by 1857, Maybole had to wait until 1883 before it could enjoy the same. An Appeal to the S.P.C.K. at London in January 1882 contained this information: “The congregation was formed in 1847 and consisted at that time chiefly of persons engaged in the hand loom weaving trade, originally members of the Irish Church who have settled in Maybole with their families. The weaving trade having greatly fallen off, its place has been taken by an extensive development of the leather and shoe trade which has brought considerable numbers of Irish and English workpeople ...” This is reflected in the Church Registers which show that almost all the older Irishmen whose burials were recorded between 1884 and 1911 had “weaver” as their occupation, whereas almost all the younger men in the Baptism Register had “shoemaker” as their occupation.

The present St. Oswald’s Church building was opened in 1883, “a neat little Chapel, a building in many respects a model of what a mission Church should be.” Although the numbers of English and Scottish born in the congregation were increasing as the century progressed, the church still retained its strong Irish element and even as late as 1890, “the Christmas Festival for the children attending the Sunday School was held in the Orange Hall.”

But the twentieth century did not see a congregation numbering anywhere near 400 as it had been in 1846, nor has it come anywhere near that number since.

Table 9:2

Attendance at St. Oswald's Church, Maybole, 1904 - 1961

| Year | Month | Matins | Evensong |
|------|----------|--------|----------------------------|
| 1904 | November | 35 | 75 |
| 1911 | March | 26 | 46 |
| 1913 | March | 32 | 28 |
| 1921 | March | 41 | Discontinued after 1916 |
| 1937 | March | 21 | - |
| 1941 | March | 15 | - |
| 1951 | March | 21 | - |
| 1961 | March | 17 | - |

Source: St. Oswald's Church, Maybole, Register of Services 1904 - 1961

The Church Registers for Maybole from 1884 show smaller numbers compared with Paisley and the Glasgow churches, but 50 families were identified on the 1881 and 1891 Censuses giving an indication of trends in the 1880s. These will now be considered as an indication of how St. Oswald's was changing and would continue to do so as the twentieth century progressed. Three generations of some families have been discovered, giving an interesting picture of the continuity of some of the older families.

Table 9:3

Ethnic origin of Burials at St. Oswald's, Maybole, 1884 - 1911

| Age | Irish | Scots | English |
|------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Over 60 | 58% | 28% | 14% |
| 11 – 59 | 20% | 60% | 20% |
| 0 – 10 | 100% | - | - |

All child deaths were Irish, indicating the poverty of the people and highest mortality rates among them.

Table 9:4**Ethnic origin of parents of children buried at St. Oswald's, Maybole 1884 - 1911**

| Age | Irish | Scots | English |
|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| 11 – 59 | 60% | 20% | 20% |
| 0 – 10 | 49% | 26% | 25% |

Source: St Oswald's Church, Maybole; Census for 1881 & 1891

The Register of Baptisms from 1884 to 1887 gives the ethnic origin of the parents as follows: Scots (70%) Irish (23%) and English (7%). The Confirmation Register for 1887 shows all the children to have been born in Scotland, although 20% had Irish parents and none had English parents.

The *Burial Register* had the greatest proportion of Irish, showing 60 per cent among the older people, but none among the infants. The next generation, as represented by parents having their children baptised, showed that the Irish had decreased to 23 per cent of the population; while the third generation, as represented by children confirmed, showed that none were born in Ireland. A comparison with Paisley, for example would show that whereas although the Irish in Paisley were still arriving in the 1880s and 1890s, even if in decreasing proportions, the Irish in Maybole were not being replenished by major new waves of migrants. The English at Maybole were still a small proportion by the end of the century, but were growing among the younger parents. The largest group were Scots born, but among them were a large number whose parents and grandparents were Irish.

In all my case studies I actually found the beginnings of the churches more interesting than their continuing story. That may indicate that I am something a pioneer myself, rather than a settler, but all too often, once the building is up and the congregation settled, it all settles down to a routine of anniversary soireees and Christmas and Harvest services.

Conclusion

Apart from these case studies, there is evidence that there were attempts to form Missions in various other parts of the county, but nothing much appears to have come from them. Thus, Bishop Wilson recorded in his *Journal* in August 1864, "I opened a School room as a temporary place of worship at A... Iron works near Stewarton. There was a fair attendance of people who are chiefly Irish labourers employed at the iron works." He goes on to say that the same Mr MacKinnon who conducted services at Dalry on Sunday afternoons, did so at Stewart on Sunday mornings. *The Scottish Ecclesiastical Journal* mentions a visit of the Rev. E.J. Jonas to Catrine "in compliance with an expressed desire, had

Evening Prayers with a sermon in a Churchman's house, and at the same time administered Baptism." An indication that there were isolated Episcopalians and communities around the county can be seen by scenes such as these: "In the parish of Sorn the last parish in the west of Scotland in which Episcopacy was given up, the first Episcopal service to be conducted in 200 years was performed in a house which had once been the old Episcopal Church. One old man, who came from Mauchline to attend the service stated that although he had been in Scotland for 49 years and attended the Established Kirk, no Episcopal place of worship being near him, he never ceased to read his Prayer Book on Sundays and hoped to die in the faith of the Church."

Ayrshire seems to have quite a considerable Episcopalian community, initially in the south of the county at Girvan and Maybole in the first half of the nineteenth century, and then predominating in the north part of the county in the second half. Ayrshire is unique in the diocese in that it was the only county where there were no schisms, and so neither the English Episcopal Church, nor the Reformed Episcopal Church, had any churches in Ayrshire. In part this must be attributed to the fact that Ayrshire's Episcopal churches were not very "high" and thus ritualism was not so much of an issue. Where ritualistic clergy did minister, as occasionally at Irvine, "numbers went down considerably" and so the point may have been made. "High Churchism" is of course a relative measurement, and even Dalry's "higher" ritual, would not have been considered so, in the light of the "more advanced" ritualism as parts of Glasgow and Lanarkshire.

The initiative for mission did not come from the Bishop or the Diocese, although they were keen to respond positively when situations arose. Initiatives came locally, from priests like William Wilson who planted the churches at Girvan and Maybole. The downside of this was that the fortunes of the Missions often rose and fell depending on the availability of certain clergy. One other interesting fact is that in Glasgow and Lanarkshire, more of the churches founded for the Irish have all since closed, all the other churches in Ayrshire have continued till the present.