

***Blackbraes and Shieldhill
Parish Church
1864 - 2014***



***150
Years
Serving
The
Parish***



Scottish charity reference number SC002512

The compilation of this book could not have been completed without the help and assistance of a number of people within and outwith the church. To name them I would certainly miss someone out and that would be a travesty. To all members of the congregation who have supported the church over the years I give thanks for they have provided the thread of the story, a story of vision and faith.

J M Currie

INTRODUCTION

On 18th May 1843 51 of the Kirk's 1204 ministers signed a deed of demission by which they gave up the stipend, church and manse which their status as Established Church ministers guaranteed, and had thrown themselves upon the generosity of the thousands of parishioners already pledged to join them in a new Free Church of Scotland.

The argument between the contending parties in 1843 and before turned on the vexed question of patronage—that is who had the right to choose a new parish minister when a vacancy occurred. The balance between the rights of patrons, usually landowners, and congregations, had changed steadily over the decades. A growing number believed that the power had moved too far away from the people.

The first official Falkirk Free Church service was held in Cistern Lane on 9th July 1843 and the following month the congregation called Rev Lewis Hay Irving from Abercorn as their new minister. Within a year of his arrival Rev L H Irving had secured a fine new church building in Garrison Place approximately where the present Post Office stands.

Rev L H Irving and his congregation went on to inspire the building of new churches in Shieldhill 1864 and following the good work of Mr Aneas Rate, a missionary, a church in Bainsford 12 years later. His efforts in Camelon were ultimately successful after his death with the erection of Irving Memorial Free Church.

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Extracts from The Journal of the Falkirk Local History Society.

Autumn 1993. article - Disruption of the Church in 1843 by Ian Scott

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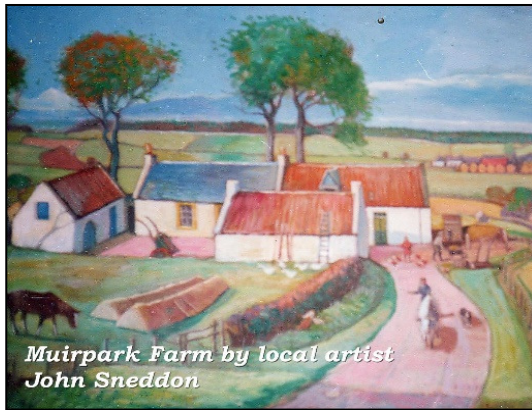
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IN THE BEGINNING

The story behind the building of a church in Shieldhill is founded upon the accounts given by articles in the Falkirk Herald and Linlithgow Journal dated December 23rd 1891 and a poem called Memories of Shieldhill Free Church written c1900 by David Thompson, California.

David Thompson's account tells of prayer meetings being held in a kitchen in the 'Old Row' and when the kitchen became too small they

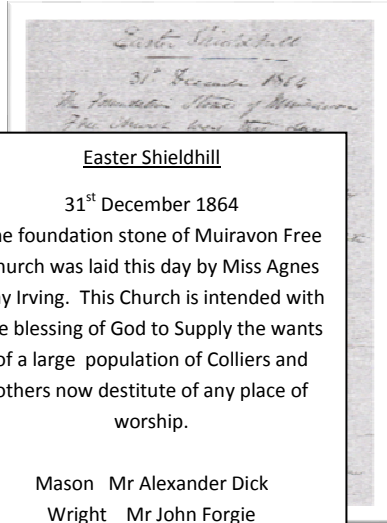


moved to 'Thomson's little hall'. As the number of worshippers grew the need for more space was met by using the Barn at Muirpark Farm. The Falkirk Herald of the 1st September 1956 mentions 'Muirpark Farm, Shieldhill was the first Shieldhill Church. The last

sermon was preached there 96 years ago, and the pulpit then used can still be seen.' The barn referred to was the building on the extreme left shown here in a painting by local artist Mr John Sneddon.

The village at that time consisted of a single row of cottages on the north side of the road with a few cottages along Main Street, add to that a cluster of cottages at Herdshall and Crosshall and further west at Wester Shieldhill we have an outline of households of these same worshippers.

The need for a church in Shieldhill was recognised by the Rev Lewis Hay Irving a Free Church Minister from Falkirk and together with family members became responsible for the erection of the church on Main Street, originally known as Muiravon Free Church. The foundation stone was laid on 31st December 1864.



Easter Shieldhill

31st December 1864

The foundation stone of Muiravon Free Church was laid this day by Miss Agnes Hay Irving. This Church is intended with the blessing of God to Supply the wants of a large population of Colliers and others now destitute of any place of worship.

Mason Mr Alexander Dick

Wright Mr John Forgie

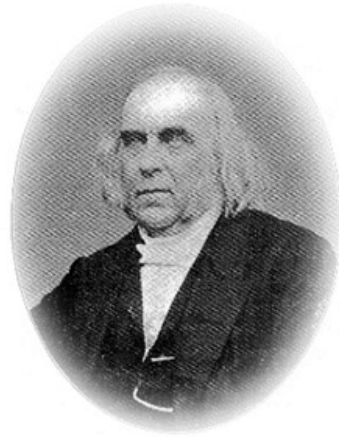
Trustees

John Miller esq. Millfield

Lewis H Irving

John Webster, Shieldhill

George Donaldson, Blackbraes



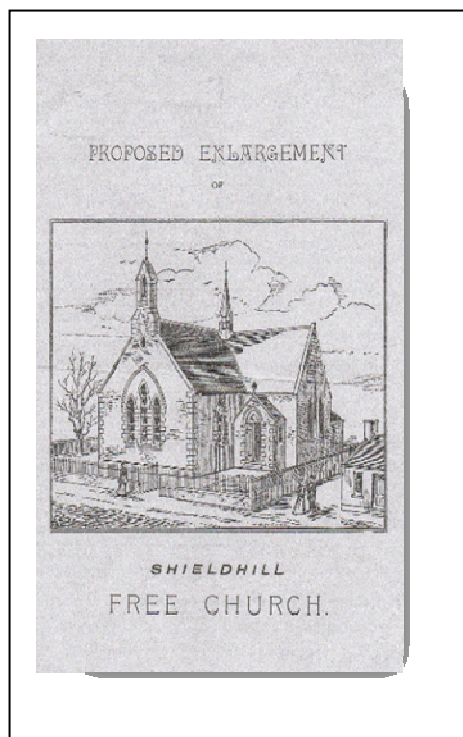
Rev Lewis Hay Irving – born in Edinburgh in 1806 became minister at Abercorn Church. The residents of Hopetoun House not only

worshipped there but had their own

private entrance and gallery. He married Isabella Carruthers who sadly died in 1836 shortly after giving birth to a daughter Margaret. He carried on preaching at Abercorn and in 1840 he married Catherine Cadell, in 1842 she gave birth to a daughter Catherine Cadell Irvine but it proved another heartbreak as the baby died in infancy. It was to Falkirk he was then called to preach staying at the Free Church Manse in Arnothill with his wife Catherine and daughter Margaret and by 1853 the family had grown with the additions of Isabella born 1844, Agnes born 1845, John born 1847, Christine born 1849 and Mary born 1852. John graduated and went on to become a Minister at Inellan a few miles south of Dunoon and later In Nice, France. He passed away in 1904 aged 57. The first born Margaret married David Peebles a local banker, he became noted for his involvement in the new church building at Shieldhill and its extension some years later.

Agnes had the honour of laying the foundation stone in 1864, her sister Margaret laying the foundation for the extended church 30 years later.

Rev L H Irving was appointed moderator and along with two elders were named commissioners by Presbytery to form a Kirk Session until such time as the congregation could choose elders for themselves. At this stage the services were conducted by students of divinity up until May 1891 when the congregation appointed their first minister Rev A Fleming Kerr, creating a church in its own right.



It was in 1891 that the minister and Kirk Session resolved to make provision for the increased number of worshippers by proposing to extend Shieldhill Church to provide for a Hall and to build a new Manse. The church built in a rectangular shape was to be extended by the addition of east and west transepts with a rear extension to provide a Hall costing £580 (£34,800 monetary value in 2010). A new Manse was built on Crossbrae costing £700. After donations from the congregation and friends there was still a shortfall of £730 (£43,800).

From the drawing above a spire is shown above the junction of the transepts and the main building. All that can be seen now is a base for such a spire.

B A Z A A R
IN AID OF
MUIRAVON FREE CHURCH.
—
UNDER THE DEEP BLUE SEA.

THE CORAL CAVES and SUBMARINE MARKET will be held in the TOWN HALL, FALKIRK, ON THURSDAY, FRIDAY, AND SATURDAY, 17th, 18th, 19th DECEMBER. The BAZAAR will be OPENED on the FIRST DAY, at 12 Noon, by
DAVID COWAN, Esq., Kersehill;
DAVID, PEEBLES, Esq., Redding House;
Rev. J. E. JOHNSTON, B.D.

SECOND DAY, at 12 Noon, by
SHERRIFF SCOTT-MONCRIEFF, Woodingshall;
Provost WATSON, Falkirk;
Rev. GEORGE CARRUTHERS, B.D.

THIRD DAY, at 12 Noon, by
WILLIAM JACKS, Esq., Liberal Candidate for Stirlingshire;
JAMES WILSON, Esq., Bantaskin;
Rev. GEORGE WADE, Falkirk.

The Decoration of the Town Hall will be of a novel and original character, and the Hall will be Transformed as completely as though it had been lowered into the Mighty Deep and have become a Subaqueous Market as by a Magician's Wand. King Neptune holds his Court each Evening, and in a Musically-arranged Spectacular Extravaganza, receives Representatives of the Nations, and awards to Britannia a Coronet of Pearls, and Crowns her Queen of the Sea.

The BAZAAR is Specially Designed by Messrs J. T. REACH & CO., of Leeds, the Eminent Firm of Bazaar Decorators.

ATTRACTIONS.—Ventriloquism, Feats of Magic, Decapitation Extraordinary, Phreology, Magical Illusions, Thought-Reading, Novel Electrical Exhibition, Galvanic Battery, Anti-Spiritualistic Seances, Magic-Lantern, Weighing Machine, Old Mother Hubbard, Photography, &c.

PRICES OF ADMISSION.—First Day, 12 to 4 P.M., 2s; after 4 P.M., 1s. Second Day, 12 to 4 P.M., 1s; after 4 P.M., 6d. Third Day, all Day 6d.

Fancy, Ornamental, and Useful Articles, Provisions, &c., will be thankfully received and acknowledged by Rev. A. FLEMING KERR, Shieldhill.

P R E S I D E N T

To raise this sum it was decided to hold a Bazaar, which was held in Falkirk Town Hall and lasted over 3 days. The decorations of the hall were left in the hands of Messrs J T Reach and Co. Leeds. The decorations transformed the Town Hall interior into Coral Caves and Sub Marine Market.

This event was meticulously detailed in a report in the Falkirk Herald of 23rd December 1891. What was evident in that report was the unstinting efforts of members of Rev L H Irving's family who through their efforts provided goods from as far away as Bengal and Tasmania. Entertainment at the opening ceremony was provided by a 60 strong children's choir from Falkirk Baptist Church which showed

the bond between both churches was alive and well. The daily programme was opened and closed in a rather formal manner with speeches from a number of Falkirk's notable citizens. Those who helped and assisted at each stall were given a mention together with a detailed list of merchandise that was up for sale. Members of Rev Irving's family had responsibility for an area of sale or amusement and the newspaper article was kind enough to mention the names of the people and where they were from.

The Coral Reef Stall was under the direction of Mrs Peebles, Redding House assisted by Mrs Gentles, Parkville; Misses Brown, Arbuthnot; Miss L Adam, Callander Road; Miss Charlesworth, London and Mrs Bell, Edinburgh. There is mention elsewhere of Mrs Wood, Bengal, Mrs Spence and Mrs Walker, Shieldhill and a donation from Mrs Storrar, Tasmania. Mrs Peebles, Mrs Bell and Mrs Wood were daughters of Rev L H Irving.

Sheriff Scott-Moncrieff as part of his address stated that Rev Fleming Kerr *'was fortunate in having Falkirk to come to for aid and assistance in the work he sought to promote. In Falkirk there was not only a number of long purses, but there was also perhaps, which was more important, a number of kind and generous hearts.'*

The Rev Fleming Kerr as an afterthought had mentioned that while he had been absent the previous night on important business he found that not only one lady but a great many had gone against his specific instructions with regard raffling. He had asked a friend as to what he should do, as the ladies, had ignored his decision and had begun to raffle.

His friend asked him how many women were involved, of that he was uncertain, and his friend then advised that if he was not able for one lady he did not know how he would be able for more. This observation was taken in good fun and no doubt while raising a few eyebrows was enjoyed by many and taken as some light relief from the general order of the day.

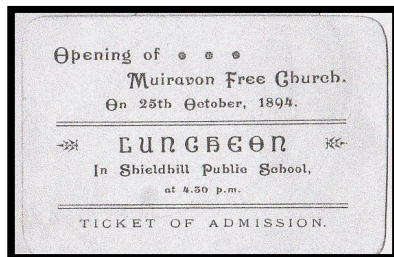
The total raised over the three days amounted to £300 (£18000)

After three years planning, fund raising and building the church extension was finally completed with the work carried out by a local contractor Mr William Walker from Redding.

To add to the importance of this occasion public worship was conducted by Reverend Professor A B Bruce on the 25th October 1894. An eminent preacher of his time and chairman of the Free Church of Scotland Praise committee he had been responsible for great changes in church music by initiating a joint hymnal for all Presbyterian churches. He said that *'their songs were very dull, heartless and mechanical. He wished they could offer to God a praise that came from the heart and praise that was tuned in good taste.'*

It is reported he preached to a large congregation, an eloquent and inspiring sermon from the book of Mathew. The Capernaum Mission.

A Soiree and Lunch was also held in Shieldhill Public School admission by ticket only. In the programme we are reminded of the agenda of the day,



preceded with a Psalm before a prayer led by Mr Hunter.

Mr William Walker the contractor presented Mrs Margaret Peebles with a silver trowel, she then proceeded to lay the foundation stone. Her feelings would have been mixed between pride

in being conferred the honour but sadness that her father Rev L H Irving was not there to see the results of his labours. The occasion was marked by the burying of a time capsule containing:- The Jubilee Number of the Free Church Monthly; Falkirk Herald dated 23rd December 1891; Scotsman dated 25th October 1894; Glasgow Herald dated 25th October 1894; Daily Mail dated 25th October 1894; Falkirk Herald dated 20th October 1894; Falkirk Mail dated 20th October 1894; Programme of the Luncheon; Programme of the Soiree; Luncheon Ticket; copy of a Pastoral Letter to the congregation soliciting contributions towards the Building Fund.

In the pastoral letter the minister said—" *It is the Almighty who hath made it necessary to enlarge the present Church. Shall we not look upon Him to make room for others who may be strangers to Him and His house?"*

When work was being carried out at the church in October 1965, Mr John Sneddon discovered the canister that had been hidden in the hollowed out foundation stone. It was opened in the presence of the minister and it was found to contain the documents referred to earlier when the original foundation stone was laid but in addition there were also documents placed there when the extension foundation stone was laid in 1894, including a pastoral letter from the minister appealing for funds to build the extension. It is worth noting that before the extension was built the building seated 170 and there was a membership of 195 plus 57 adherents over 18 years of age.

The minister said in his letter there was no room for children and went on to say: " *in such a large non-church going population we surely cannot afford to neglect children's claims upon us to a place in the house of God.*"

By 1907 the congregation had swelled to 230 communicants, 10 Elders and 12 Deacons. 270 children were recorded as being on the Scholars Roll attending Sunday School not only at Shieldhill but in mission stations at Wester Shieldhill, Reddingmuirhead and Blackbraes.

The Session Clerk at that time was Mr George Gray, Shieldhill; treasurer Mr Robert Heeps, Church Road, California; Clerk to the Deacons Court Mr John Bennie, Herdshill; Secretary of Young Men's and Women's Guild was Mr Robert Watt, Shieldhill. Sunday School Superintendents Mr Mathew Forsyth, Mr John Heeps, Mr Andrew Beveridge and Mr George Gray.



From a postcard dated

19th August 1905

Note - the small spire!

Rev A Fleming Kerr was succeeded in 1922 by Rev A Bathgate who continued to minister the parish until 1929. It was then the United Free Church in Shieldhill united with the Church of Scotland in California and in the next 15 years 4 ministers occupied the pulpit at Shieldhill, Rev J Grant 1930 – 1933, Rev Verral 1933 – 1936, Rev J Waugh 1936 - 1938 and the Rev G Watt 1938 – 1943 who left to take up a missionary post in South Africa, resulting in the appointment of the Rev. John Easton.

The Session Book entry for 13th February 1944 states...*'The Rev. John Easton to minister to Shieldhill Church as well as his own for the duration of the war and six months thereafter.'* Rev John Easton extended this period of ministry until September 1957.

Shieldhill entered into a linkage with Polmont South in 1957 with the minister at that time being the Rev. James Hood, this linkage lasted 3 years with a new linkage with Polmont North taking place in June 1961. Rev. Hugh Talman ministered during the few years of that linkage until the time of the Union of Blackbraes with Shieldhill in November 1963. During this period of linkage the congregation did not stand still but entered into a programme of renovation and redecoration.



Shieldhill Nativity Play 1956

In its 100 year history Shieldhill Church had never been in possession of a proper communion table and this was put right in June 1961 when a new communion table and minister's chair were dedicated. This service of dedication was led by the Rev James W Hood, minister of Lorne Street Church, Campbeltown who had been minister of Polmont South and Shieldhill until his translation in April 1961. The ministers Chair was given by Mrs Paterson and family in memory of her husband and their father, Edward Paterson, who was Session Clerk from 1936 until his death in October 1960.

BLACKBRAES CHURCH - CALIFORNIA

Let us step back in time to Tuesday 12th September 1865 where an event a short distance away at Cockmalane Church Road, California was to mirror that of Shieldhill. A new Church of Scotland building was in the process of being constructed.

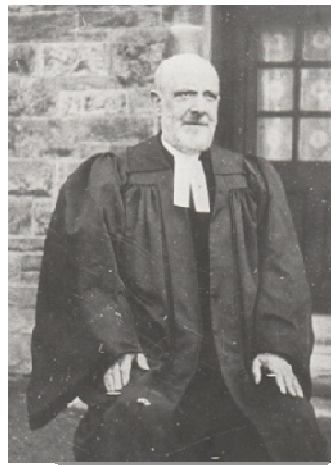
The foundation stone was laid by Mrs Russel of Blackbraes after prayers led by Rev John Ker. The site was kindly donated by Her Grace the Duchess of Hamilton. The cost of the building was met by generous contributions from Mrs Russel of Blackbraes, the late Duke of Hamilton and by others who fully supported this venture. The plans had been drawn up by Mr James Smith of Polmont Bank to a design that was reported as being well suited to the area. The building was designed to cater for a capacity of 300 with the option of a gallery which would provide room for an additional 100.

Prior to this the Rev W G Boag officiated as missionary of the district, preaching at mission stations and in parishioner's homes. The whole project would not be completed until a new house for the minister was built at a site in Reddingmuirhead. Rev W G Boag was to minister at California until 1871 when a new minister by the name of Rev W Beattie was appointed to the charge.

The worshippers at California came from Reddingmuirhead, Shieldhill, Wallacestone, Blackbraes and from the large number of isolated cottages in both South and North Muir and the surrounding district. It was an odd situation where worshippers would pass each other on the road between Shieldhill Church and Blackbraes Church and it was no surprise that when both churches united some still passed each other on the road going to their respective mother church. There was still great friendship and a sense of unity between these same parishioners when they worshipped together at joint services.



Teachers of Blackbraes Parish Church Sunday School Picnic to Westquarter 6th August 1896



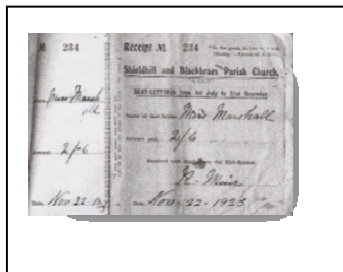
Rev. William Smith

Rev. William Smith born in Glasgow, in 1851 was ordained to the charge at Blackbraes in 1884 at the age of 33.

He moved into the manse at Reddingmuirhead with his wife Helen, daughter Elizabeth, two sons Andrew and William and His mother inlaw Elizabeth Hume.

Andrew followed in his fathers footsteps by going into the ministry. It is also noted that in 1900 he was the session clerk of Blackbraes Church. In the first year of Rev.William Smith's ministry he carried out 31 baptisms, the first baptism, the son of Mr James Elderdisse, aptly named William Smith Elderdisse. In 1893 he carried out 101 baptisms the majority of these being carried out in the families homes with as many as 7 baptisms from the same household.

The Committee of Management in 1902 was chaired by Mr John Dunsmuir, and the clerk and treasurer was Mr Robert Muir. Members of the committee were Mr Peter Beveridge, Mr Alexander Lyon and Mr Andrew Smith. This committee among a number of things were responsible for the content and distribution of the church magazine. The Magazine included such sensitive information as to the extent of monies paid by each member and whether they bought the Life and Work and paid their seat rent.



The receipt adjacent shows Miss Marshall paid two shillings and six pence for a six month rent from 1st July to 31st December 1926.

On the reverse side it states 'the Kirk Session respectfully intimate that Single Sittings may be obtained at 1/6 (8p),

2/- (10p), 3/- (15p), 4/- (20p) or 5/- (25p) for six months'. In 2014 the value of 5/- in 1925 would be about £15.

Do we know if the front seats were more expensive than the back or vice versa?

The Cutty Stool or Penance Stool or even the Naughty Step was traditionally placed at the front!

Rev William Smith died aged 74 on 12th February 1926 in the manse at Reddingmuirhead.

That day Rev W Smith was as usual in and out of the manse carrying out his pastoral duties and in the early evening when about to leave the manse he felt ill and collapsed and died soon after. His daughter Elizabeth who was married to the Rev William Simpson formerly a minister at St Modan's Church Falkirk was present in the house at the time of her father's death. He was survived by his wife Helen, daughter Elizabeth and son William. Another son Andrew who had entered the ministry died some time before. The Falkirk Herald reported that *'Mr Smith had for fully 40 years laboured in the Parish of Blackbraes, and during that long period devoted himself unsparingly to the duties associated with his charge, and to the interests of his people.'*

On 14th February 1947 a special meeting of Session took place to discuss the fact that due to a heavy snow fall the church had become isolated and the moderator had asked the clerk to review the situation. The snow had not only drifted around the church but had also penetrated between the roof and lined ceiling of the church. While drifts some 18 inches (450mm) had formed in the vestry and vestibule, it would not be possible for the church to open on Sunday 16th February as the Shieldhill – Avonbridge road was blocked by drifts man high. It would not be open for some days. Worshippers were advised to attend the service at Shieldhill Church. The next Session meeting was held on the 21st February 1947 and it was reported that snow had entered the roof void and had drifted halfway up the church to the west gable. There was no way of getting access to the roof space but it was reported they were confident the snow would not remain for long, but would slide down and dry out and this would not cause any serious damage. It was also reported in the minutes that in the early years of the century it was in a very dilapidated condition.

Rain entered freely and it was no exaggeration to say that umbrellas were sometimes necessary inside the church. The older parishioners still have a picture of the congregation sitting holding umbrellas during a service. Another session report in 1952 on the same subject reported that snow and wind had been playing havoc, the records of the previous five years showed the Kirk Session had been confronted with this same battle with the elements for a number of years.

THE UNION OF BLACKBRAES WITH SHIELDHILL

The Union of the Church of Scotland in California and The Free Church of Scotland in Shieldhill took place on November 1963. The first minister ordained to this new charge was the Rev Walter McGinty.

Both churches were fortunate to have strong family bonds and it was a great loss to Blackbraes church with the death in 1964 of James Bennet who had been Choirmaster and Organist for over 40 years. The following year Shieldhill Church members were saddened to hear of the death of their Senior Elder Adam Weir. The Bennet and Weir family members continued to be faithful servants to both churches.

On Friday 23rd April 1965 the Womens Guild presented Three One Act Plays in Shieldhill Community Centre. Mrs McGinty the Guild president thanked those who took part and all the backstage workers, namely Miss Jennifer Marshall, Mr Alex Christie and Mr Jim Allardyce. Mr Alex Miller for supplying the tickets and Mr Alan Churchill for providing the programmes.

Extensive work was carried out at Shieldhill in 1966 when the floor and the west transept windows were replaced. The new windows were installed by Mr J Brown, Glazier, California. The pews were all removed and the complete floor renewed under the guidance of Mr J Sneddon, Shieldhill, those with special skills volunteered their services.

Mr George Brown California redecorated the ceiling and walls ably assisted by Mr John Jamieson and Mr Robert White. The women of the Guild organised by Mrs McGinty came to the rescue in washing the new floor and tidying up before the pews were all replaced. At the Annual Stated Meeting of the church in 1966 Rev W McGinty presented a copy of a New English Bible to Mr George Brown, Mr Robert White and Mr John Jamieson in gratitude for the vast amount of work carried out by these three members in the redecoration of the Church. Mr Hugh Baird, treasurer submitted his report and noted that the church still owed £420 (about £5400) to the Church of Scotland but was confident that if the present rate of giving was to be maintained the church should have sufficient funds without resorting to a special appeal.

The Stated Annual Meeting for the linked charge of Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church held on 27th February 1968 reported that there were 540 members with 147 children in Sunday School 14 elders and 12 members on the Congregational Board. The income in 1967 was £1886 with the Womens Guild donating £35 and the income from the sale of Parish Magazines was £36. (£ 100 in 1967 would worth £1286 in 2005)

With regard to property the large 3 light window in the East Transept in Shieldhill and the round window in Blackbraes had been replaced. The ongoing struggle of several generations to keep the church property in a good state of repair continued.

The total debt outstanding on the loan received for renovation two years earlier in 1966 was £76 (£9700) and it was hoped this would be paid off that year. There was a consistent battle to keep the buildings in a good state of repair and this relied greatly on the skills of the many volunteers who came to the fore when the need arose. The Session could now see the way clear to embark on an ambitious

project at Blackbraes Church to provide adequate Toilet, Kitchen, Vestry and Session Room. 1968 saw the start of a Young Wives Group in both churches, the California group met on a Monday afternoon and the Shieldhill group met on a Tuesday evening. These groups came about by the efforts of Mrs McGinty who recognised the contribution these young women could make to the parish development.

In February 1969 following the resignation of Mr Edward Sneddon, from the post of Session Clerk the Kirk Session elected Mr F H Butcher to be his successor. Mr Edward Sneddon had served 9 years as Session Clerk and the Session recorded their appreciation of his service.

On 18th May 1969 a party of 24 members of the youth club gaily adorned with Straw Hats and Bowlers set out on a 6 mile sponsored walk. The walk passed through Wester Shieldhill, Snowhill, emerging at the reservoir above the Greyrigg Inn then through Blackbraes and California back to Shieldhill. The walk raised £13 for Christian Aid and when added to the door to door collection and Womens Guild donation the total sum raised came to £106.

It was in 1969 the Kirk Session appointed Mr Alex Christie as their new organist and choirmaster after Mr John McLuckie retired from this position. A concert was held in Shieldhill Church in honour of his service as Elder, Organist and Choirmaster.

In 1970 the Rev Walter McGinty intimated that he was moving to a charge in Alloa. As the first minister of the new united charge he had spent 7 years as the parish minister and had been popular both with the young and old and would be sadly missed by his parishioners. Rev Walter McGinty, his wife and four sons were to move to Alloa, Clackmannan before later moving on to Alloway in Ayrshire. It was while there that he pursued his love of Robert Burns by being the author of a book entitled Burns & Religion.

The congregation then proceeded to appoint a vacancy committee. Those elected were, Mr H Butcher, Mr J Sneddon, Mr H Baird, Mrs M Christie, Mrs N Glegg, Mrs M Peddie, MrJ Allardyce, Mr Logie, Miss M Aitken and Mr S Thompon.

The Rev W G Neill was selected as sole nominee by the vacancy committee and after preaching at Shieldhill morning service on 18th April 1971 he was duly elected. He was then preached in at Blackbraes Church on 16th May by Rev W C B Smith, MBE of Kilmichael Glassary.

Rev W G Neill was born in Edinburgh and completed his studies at Edinburgh University before going to New College where he gained his Divinity Degree. He had just completed his Probationary year at Crown Court Church, London. The Rev. W G Neill was married and he and his wife had a young son.

It was a time of transition but the congregation did not stand still. It had been two years since their last sponsored walk, and the walk on Saturday 24th April 1971 was a bit more ambitious instead of 6 it was to be 20 miles, part of a Braes Churches initiative. The route taken by those brave 39 souls from Shieldhill took passed through Wester Shieldhill, Slamannan, Limerigg along past the Black Loch to Avonbridge. The Avonbridge Church Hall opened their doors to provide a safe haven from the cold blasts. Mrs Law and many helpers from Redding and Westquarter Church had a warm meal of soup, pies, sausage rolls and sandwiches ready to feed nearly a hundred walkers. Young people from Redding and Westquarter Church merged with the walkers from Blackbraes and Shieldhill and were described as 'one large, happy, often blistered family.'

The total sum raised for church funds was £121. The guide level per sponsor was stated at 2 pence per mile.



Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church 1985

Kirk Session above Congregational Board below





Shieldhill Church Choir 1890



Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church Choir 1980



1st Shieldhill Girl Guides above c1930

Below Brownies & Guides 1985



The new Hall at Blackbraes Church was completed on 9th September 1971. They had started work by demolishing the old hall in May 1970 but it had been a long road to get there since consent was originally sought from Presbytery in June 1968. The Hall consisting of a vestry, meeting hall, kitchen and toilets had also a new oil fired heating system which served both the hall and the church. A social evening followed the dedication of the new facilities.

1975 proved to be another distinct chapter in the life of the church with another vacancy, Rev W G Neill intimated his intention to move to Ayr and the vacancy committee were subsequently charged to seek a new minister. The Interim Moderator was Rev Charles Heriot and the locum tenens appointed was Mr David Leitch who first occupied the pulpit on 13th April 1975. He was a well known figure in the Falkirk Area had been a tireless worker within the Scout movement and a popular candidate for pulpit supply. He had just completed a locum tenens position at Kerse Church, Grangemouth before coming to Blackbraes and Shieldhill. During this vacancy period it was recognised that every effort had to be taken to remove any burden of debt and to ensure all the property was in good condition.

Again the congregation were busy meeting these targets and the condition of the church property was once again high on the agenda. Proposals were presented to and approved by the Congregational Board to enlarge the existing hall at Shieldhill and to provide new kitchen and toilet facilities, with the existing hall being doubled in size. The existing Manse on Crossbrae upon inspection showed that a considerable sum of money was required to bring it up to an acceptable standard. It was therefore decided to sell the Manse but retain part of the land fronting Crossbrae and erect a new house designed to the current standards and similar to new Manses built recently in the area.

The vacancy committee having gone through the process of hearing applicants for the vacancy decided that the Rev J M Patterson would be presented as sole nominee.

In their deliberations after visiting the parish the Rev J M Patterson and wife Margaret kindly agreed to accept in the short term a local authority house in Hallglen until the new Manse was ready. The new Manse was built by Fernlea Builders, Shieldhill and it was not long before Rev and Mrs Paterson made the last leg of their journey from Hallglen to be the first occupants of the new Manse.

The Induction service was held on 28th June 1976 at Blackbraes Church and Rev J M Patterson was preached in at a joint service at Shieldhill on 4th July 1976. Mrs Margaret Patterson being an active member of the choir played an important part in the congregations continuing love of music. Her contribution to the Womens Guild cannot go unnoticed and like many ladies of the Manse she took an active supporting role in all church organisations preferring to work unnoticed in the background. In 1979 a cantata penned by Jean Butcher entitled 'Thy Kingdom Come' was performed in churches in 14 locations as far afield as Edinburgh and Penicuik and in the following year she wrote 'The Seeker' which proved just as popular.

The Church and Shieldhill Primary School continued to have a close working relationship. The first recorded school service held in the church was held in 1963 with Rev Hugh Talman being the common link. 16 years later that link still survived when there was a reverse situation. The school held an Easter Service within the school conducted by the pupils themselves. Primary 6 pupils under the guidance of Mrs Kay Brown (a name the congregation was going to hear of a lot more) composed their own Easter hymn.

It was not only the Church Choir who were starting to go places. In March 1982 the Men's Club ventured to Kirk o'Field Church, Edinburgh for their annual get together and a few months later visited Kincardine Church.

In November a select few represented Blackbraes and Shieldhill at a General Knowledge Quiz in Bainsford Church.

The minister, Rev John Paterson reported that “ *It’s not so much that those who aren’t going , wish they were – more one thinks, that those who are going are wondering why!*”

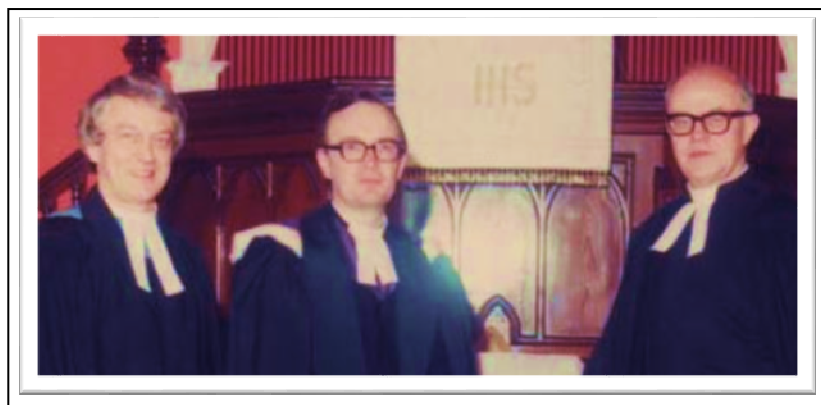


In 1983 our missionary partner Miss Marion Stewart being home on leave took the opportunity to visit and take a leading part in morning worship both at Blackbraes and Shieldhill. She presented the church with a tapestry which became known by members as the Malawi Cross.

The minister’s dog Bing became a well known figure in the village, where Rev J M Paterson went Bing was never far away. He even had his own page in the magazine entitled ‘From Our Pet Reporter’. At the Shieldhill Children’s Day pride of place beside the minister in the front of the procession walked Bing straining at the leash.



The 20th Anniversary Service was held on the 4th March 1984 and it was on this occasion that Rev W McGinty preached the sermon, Rev W Neill read the lessons and prayers while Rev J M Paterson presided over the Lords Supper. There was an informal reception held in Blackbraes Church in the afternoon.



Rev W McGINTY Rev W NEILL Rev J M PATTERSON

**Photo taken on the 4th March 1984 at the
20th Anniversary of the Union.**

At the Anniversary service held in Shieldhill Church that morning there was a full congregation with Rev J M Paterson's subtle humour the last Hymn *God of Mercy, God of Grace* was sung to the Anniversary Waltz. The reception at Blackbraes at 2.30pm was even more of a surprise for the visitors as the three ministers' wives cut the anniversary cake also to a full church hall. An evening communion service was then held in Blackbraes Church.

The 1979 Christmas Edition of the Church Magazine had a very interesting piece entitled 'A Small World'.

Inserted by Rev J M Patterson it was written as follows. - When Mr Alistair Ridland was talking to friends about his recent experience of taking services in our Churches, one of them said..... "*Blackbraes*", *I've heard of that place.....*" she went away and produced the following verses which had been found among the effects of a Mr John Lawrie formerly of Blackbraes and at one time Captain of the B B in Leith (around the 1930's)

She was able to say that this same family at one time had a seat in the Scots Kirk in Jerusalem dedicated to the Parish of Blackbraes.

BLACKBRAES MEMORIES

Gone are the happy days,
I spent in old Blackbraes,
Guddling in the Eldritch Loch,
And gathering hips and slaes,
Off early in the morning to Falkirk
 through the Glen,
To count the hutches coming up,
To be filled by oor ain men.

On Sunday dressed up in oor best,
We spieled the Greyrigg Brae
Then on to Geordie Watsons Tent,
To sing , and kneel and pray,
Or to attend the auld grey kirk,
That stands at Cock Ma Lane,
My heart aye warms to memories dear,
When I think o' hame.

1st Shieldhill Guides held their 75th Anniversary Thinking Day Service in Blackbraes Church In February 1985 and Sharon Robertson, Claire Thain and Susan Sweeney were chosen to attend the International Camp in July of that year. Leaders Mrs Wilma Mason, Mrs Helen Patterson and Mrs Myles also attended the camp

In October 1985 the Inbetweeners started and by the spring of 1986 they became well established by being able to raise funds for N.S.P.C.C. and being in the position to provide a group to entertain the Womens Guild and take part in the Morning services during Christmas.

In October 1985 another period of refurbishment of Shieldhill Church was required. This time with the help of the Manpower Services Commission, the church only needed to provide the materials. Those who had previously been unemployed were now engaged in painting and decorating the church from floor to ceiling. At this time the Congregational Church in Meeks Road, Falkirk was about to be demolished, Shieldhill Church benefitted from being in receipt of their pews and their pulpit. The pulpit was on the large side but was tailored to suit Shieldhill by Mr John Reid who trimmed the original structure down to fit the front of the Church. Sharp eyed parishioners would notice that the pews were still numbered as they were received but the numbering was not sequential. The cross that sits high above the pulpit was kindly manufactured and gifted by Timber Components, Redding. To complete the work the roof was retiled which was financed by a special appeal and a sizeable donation from the family and friends of Mrs Nancy Anderson, given in her memory. A small plaque was placed on the wall near where she sat in her unfailing attendance at church. This plaque was dedicated to her memory at a morning service on 14th December 1986.

On 26th October 1985 a social evening was held in Shieldhill Church Hall in order to present Mr Hugh Butcher with a gift, in appreciation of his service as Session Clerk over the last 16 years. Mr James Currie was appointed his successor. 1985 was indeed a year of change.

The introduction of Mission Praise did not replace but was in addition to the use of the Church Hymnary for praise.

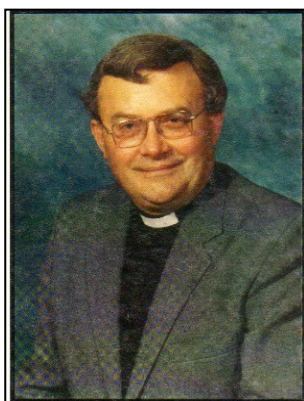
On 30th May 1987 the Womens Guild trip took the ladies to Hawick for a full day at a cost for the day of £8 included morning coffee and high tea.

It was in October 1987 that Rev J M Patterson announced that he would be retiring at the end of that year returning with his wife to his home in Edinburgh which left a huge gap the membership knew would be difficult to fill.

Presbytery appointed Rev Hugh Ormiston as Interim Moderator together with Rev John Holland and Mrs Lorna Duncan as locums. The congregation were allowed to call a minister with a stipulation that they had to be over 55 years of age. Rev John Holland had been a parish minister in Haggs and Dennyloanhead, and then Ardentenny while Lorna Duncan, a mother of four, occasionally a supply teacher was a Presbytery Reader. They both endeared themselves to the congregations of both churches during the vacancy.

Mrs Wilma Mason a former Guider with 1st Shieldhill was promoted to Division Commissioner, in 1988 she reported in the church magazine that the Thinking Day Service held in Blackbraes Church was attended by Girl Guides, Ranger Guides, Brownies but also Scouts, Cub Scouts and the local Boys Brigade to the extent that the church was full.

The Vacancy Committee having been appointed advertised the vacancy and were soon in a position to go out and hear five of the ten applications that were made. The last of these visits meant an early start for the committee as they set out for Stoneywood Church, Aberdeen. After hearing the Rev James Andrew McMullin preach the group continued on to the Manse for further discussions. After receiving hospitality there from Mrs Valerie McMullin, in the form of what was to become her renowned cream sponges the committee returned to Shieldhill for a vacancy meeting.



Rev J A
McMullin

After discussion and agreement Rev J A McMullin was invited to preach as sole nominee, he and his family were then asked to visit the parish before any commitment was made. He did indeed preach as sole nominee on 17th April 1988 and after a standing count, was confirmed as minister of the Parish. Rev J A McMullin had preached at Stoneywood, Aberdeen and prior to that at Loughbrickland and Scarva, County Down, Northern Ireland. The induction service was held in Shieldhill Church on 15th June 1988. The service was conducted by Rev John Watson, St Helens Church, Bonnybridge.

On the 6th Feb 1989 Rev J A McMullin was appointed Army Cadet Chaplain to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlander Cadets, a similar position to the Army Cadet Chaplaincy he had held in Aberdeen. His existing engagement as a Chaplain in Butlins Ayr continued. This chaplaincy he took as part of his holiday entitlement. This 'working' week could mean dealing with anything from judging the Glamorous Granny competition to counselling the bereaved.

In 1992 Mrs Janet Pearce resigned her position as Clerk to the Congregational Board since she felt due to ill health she could not carry out her duties to the standard she wished. Mrs Jean Butcher who had been standing in was elected to the vacant post. It was recorded at the time that Mrs Janet Pearce had set a high standard in her administration and implementation of her duties as Clerk to the Congregational Board and it was fitting that Mrs Jean Butcher her replacement would be able to continue the good work.

The church within the Parish continued to thrive and it was a crushing blow to hear that a property survey carried out by independent Structural Engineers to Blackbraes Church in September 1990 declared the church building unsafe and it would require to close.

California School together with the Community Centre was let as a place of worship until the Main Church building was removed and the Church Hall declared safe for continued use.

History was made on 4th June 1992 when the Falkirk Presbyterial Council Summer Rally was held for the first time in Shieldhill Church a fitting tribute to Mrs Valerie McMullin in her final year as Blackbraes and Shieldhill Womens Guild President. Mrs Valerie McMullin had been President of Womens Guilds for 28 years of the 31 years she had been married. She was more than happy to be passing on the baton to the new president Mrs Janet Weir and vice president Mrs Lorna Coulter.

In October 1992 it was decided to purchase Junior Praise to enable the children to take a greater part in morning worship. A request to the Kirk Session for more hymns from Mission Praise was declined as the minister and elders still wished the inclusion of Psalms to maintain a Presbyterian influence. Sunday School Children would now attend all morning services with the exception of Communion. At the end of the Sunday School Session 1991/92 Mission Praise books were presented to Kerry Jones, Lucy Gaudus, Shelley Coyle, Brian Gourlay and Craig McArthur on leaving the Beginners. Sarah Jones was presented with a Good News Bible having reached 100 attendances. Certificates and a pen were given to Aileen Telfer, Adele Telfer, Gordon Strachan and Stephen McGowan.

On 8th December an evening Communion at Blackbraes had only 5 worshippers including the minister. It was therefore decided reluctantly by the Kirk Session to discontinue evening communion services. During the year of 1995 two elders died. Mr Richard Martin and Mr Robert Coulter were both very active members in Kirk Session and within the wider Parish. Both from California they had served their districts steadfastly without fear or favour but the church had lost two true and faithful servants.

Rev J A McMullin intimated that he would be retiring towards the end of 1996. Rev J A McMullin and his wife Valerie and their two daughters who as part of the church family had contributed greatly to the wider work of the church within the Parish. They would be sadly missed but not forgotten by their friends in Blackbraes and Shieldhill. Their move to nearby Polmont meant that they were still in contact with the many friends they had made during their stay in Shieldhill and those contacts remain unbroken.

Rev J A McMullin was to be the last minister to preach at both churches following a decision of the Presbytery of Falkirk which meant that Blackbraes Church would close upon the retiral of Rev J A McMullin on 4th October 1996.

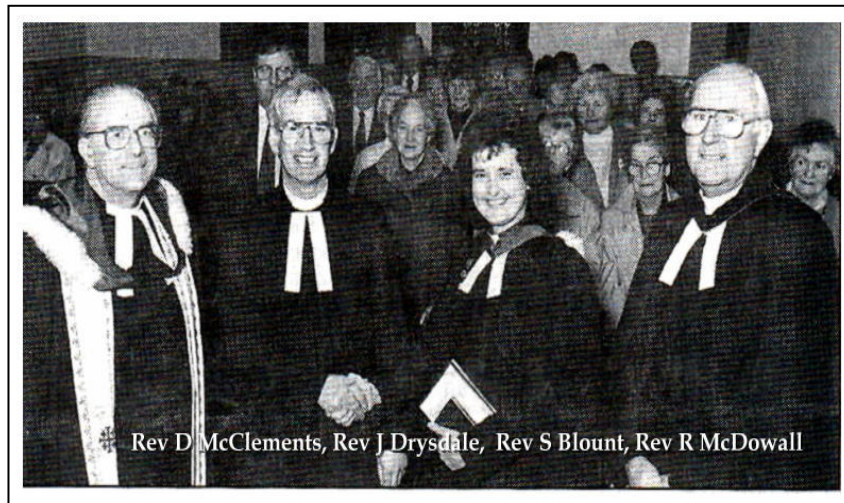
Once again the vacancy process began but on this occasion it was conditional not only that the Church be allowed to call a minister over the age of 55 but it would also require to be a joint appointment with the Prison Service and this was to be reviewed after 5 years. With the closure of Blackbraes Church the locum minister would preach at Shieldhill only. The interim moderator appointed was the Rev Ronald McDowall, a former minister at Laurieston linked with Redding and Westquarter. He was a popular appointment as he had a long association with the Church. The locum appointed was the Rev Eric Murray who soon became a welcome figure to the pulpit. Heartily welcomed by the adults and both him and his mysterious battered sports bag became adored by the children. His children's addresses became a point in the service looked forward to by the adults and children alike.

It was a lovely sunny day when the Vacancy Committee travelled down to Largs to hear the next candidate for the charge. Rev James Drysdale, a former minister of Abbey Church, Couper Angus.

At the time of the Interview he was without charge but had previous close association with St Columbas Church, Largs.

Having heard Rev James Drysdale preach and after a full and frank interview the Vacancy Committee in conjunction with the Prison Service decided to invite him to preach as sole nominee on 26th October 1997 at Shieldhill Church.

This date is remembered with mixed feelings since that same day Mr John Jamieson a former elder and church beadle died. He was only too willing to lend a hand and give support when required without expecting recognition, he was a fine example of a true and faithful servant.



Rev James Drysdale was inducted by the Rev Mrs Sheila Blount, Moderator of Falkirk Presbytery on 20th November 1997. He was also welcomed to his new charge by the presbytery clerk Rev Duncan McClements and Interim Moderator Rev Ronald McDowall.

Rev J Drysdale was joined by Isabel, to whom he had been married for 36 years. At that time their daughter Lesley lived in Scone and their son Stuart lived in New Zealand.

Rev J and Mrs Drysdale both had a musical background having sung in choirs both on stage in Glasgow and also in churches with which they had been associated.

The joint chaplaincy with the Prison Service opened up a new form of outreach for church members as the minister was supported by those members who joined him for worship in Polmont Young Offenders Institution before the Sunday morning service at Shieldhill.

A gift scheme was promoted in conjunction with Polmont Young Offenders Institution which allowed the young men of the Institute to pass on these gifts to their parents, brothers, sisters or friends at Christmas.

Over 118 items were received as part of this scheme at a time when there were over 400 boys being held in Polmont.

In the first few years of Rev James Drysdale's ministry the church continued to develop with the organisations continuing to grow and contact with the Prison Service became a routine part of church life. As the new Millennium came and went the church remained a focal part of the community.

On 9th February 2001 the church lost a valued member when Mrs Jean Butcher died. She was referred to as the teacher and Music Maker. Mrs Jean Butcher had been Organist and Choir mistress for many years and wrote many hymns especially for children. She penned "The Seeker" and "Peter the Fisherman" cantatas that the choir had performed at many churches throughout the area. She was always prepared to work hard for the church and had a clear purpose in all that she did. Her direct and caring manner often saw the Church through difficult times and consequently she would be surely missed.

In November 2002 the church became Aid Receiving from the National Church. Presbytery imposed a 3 year 2 month renewable tenure. This was the result of a full time chaplain being appointed by the Prison Service.

The Braes Area Review was initiated with the first meeting held in Redding and Westquarter Church. The concept of Team Ministry was first discussed. A 10 year Plan for the Braes Churches was being written by Presbytery which would determine the future for each church in the area. A number of possibilities were discussed of which one was that the future of Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church would link with Muiravonside Parish Church.

The retiral of the Rev J Drysdale took place in January 2006 and as a mark of the congregation's appreciation of his service a social was held in Shieldhill Church Hall, when the hall was filled to capacity.

Since the vacancy led to a Church linkage, agreement was sought from both churches on the Basis of Linkage. Agreement was reached with 106 voting for the Basis of Linkage with 2 against. Historically this situation would have been controversial but it was with some sense of relief that there was such an overwhelming level of approval which was extremely positive. It was however of no surprise to those who knew the congregations as many ties had been forged over the years through working relationships or family connections. It may indeed have been a sign from the past since Shieldhill Church had originally been called Muiravon Church!

Mr Arthur Priestly was appointed the Interim Moderator with Mrs Sandra Mathers as locum.

The contributions made during this difficult time by Mr Arthur Priestly, Mrs Sandra Mathers and her husband Rev Daniel Mathers was immeasurable.

A condition of the Basis of Linkage meant that the sale of the Manse that was built in 1976 would be sold and a new Manse purchased by both congregations in a locality suitable to both churches.

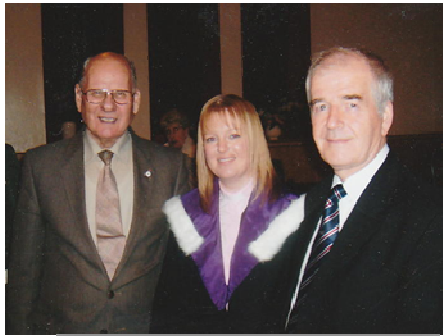
Mr Hugh Baird elder and treasurer for many years died on 15th February 2006. Having had a wonderful gift to administer the Churches finances for a long number of years his death was a huge loss to the congregation.

A further blow occurred during the vacancy when former elder and Session Clerk Mr Hugh Butcher died on 11th November 2006 and like Mr Hugh Baird he was part of the team who nurtured and guided the church through many difficult and trying times.

Rev Robert Allan made a moderatorial visit from Presbytery on 21st October 2007. At this service he presented Mr James Currie with a long service certificate having been 30 years an elder in the Church.

The Vacancy Committee having gone through the process of interviewing and hearing candidates preach decided unanimously to nominate Rev Louise McClements as sole nominee.

Having preached at Shieldhill Church at 10am and thereafter at Muiravonside Church at 11.30am on 28th October 2007 Rev Louise McClements was unanimously elected to be the new minister. The Ordination and Induction was held in Muiravonside Church on 17th January 2008 and the Church social in Shieldhill Church the following evening.



Rev Louise McClements with her two session clerks Mr Archie Orr from Muiravonside Parish Church and Mr James Currie from Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church.

17th January 2008

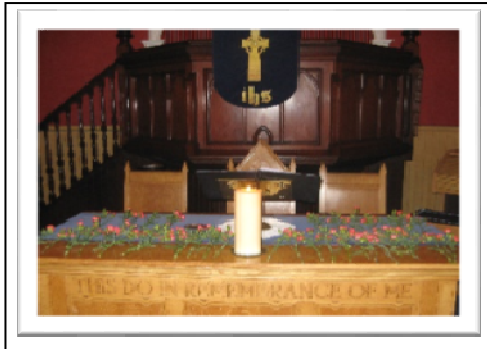
A new beginning for the two churches, as the linkage became effective. They welcomed the new minister and a new manse family who each took an active part in the ministry within the Parish. The children Sophie and Victoria soon became members of a new group, for younger



people calling itself the Apprentices. This group was aimed at those who were in the 'secondary school' age group and a step before church membership.

Change also meant four Sunday School teachers handed over the leadership to a new team. The women had given 135 years' service among them. Mrs Mary Conn 39 years, Mrs Reah Calder 39 years, Mrs Elsie Smith 30 years and Mrs Ann Henderson 27 years. Their work with the children did not go unmarked as the Minister on behalf of the congregation presented them with a token of appreciation at the end of the Sunday School Session in 2008.

Through the interest of the Apprentices the church was registered with the Fair Trade Foundation. As an off shoot to The Women's Guild established with funding from the Church of Scotland Guild Projects Fund a new group entitled Rendezvous. This was not limited to church members but was open to anyone in the community focusing on providing an opportunity to gather together in the afternoon for some light entertainment and fellowship, and of course the compulsory cup of tea or coffee.



On 7th December 2008 the first Bereavement service was held which was well attended by those who had recently been bereaved or those seeking comfort and a time of reflection and remember a loved one.

In the spring of 2009 two former ministers died the Rev John Patterson and the Rev James Andrew McMullin, were both remembered for their contribution to the work and witness of the Church within the Parish.

Monica MacDonald, Reader in training started under the supervision of Rev Louise McClements in 2010 for a three month period bringing with her the experience of a South African ministry. The congregation were to learn and in time support the work being carried out at The Place of Restoration, in South Africa. A charity promoted by Mrs MacDonald and her husband Rev C MacDonald where young people either abandoned, abused or orphaned received support.

In June 2010, Mr James Currie the Session Clerk having served 30 years as clerk to the Kirk Session decided it was an opportune moment to step aside. Mrs Lorna Coulter was duly appointed Session Clerk with Mrs Rena Moore as her deputy.

November 2010 Mrs Elizabeth Orr awarded a ministry placement under the guidance of Rev Louise McClements. Elizabeth or Liz as she preferred to be called came from Bathgate and had been an elder at Bathgate High Parish Church for 22 years before she had the call to serve the Church ministry. Her placement over the four months saw her involved in pastoral work within the community including hospital visitations and worship at the Haining Nursing Home.

The return to Shieldhill of Mrs Kay Brown was welcomed by the many who knew her from her time teaching at Shieldhill Primary School. This time she was the pupil rather than the teacher. Mrs Kay Brown mentioned in our school link in 1979 and was equally pleased to be amongst old friends. Her placement of 4 ½ months with Rev Louise McClements saw her sharing worship and duties at both Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church and Muiravonside Parish Church.

In September 2013 Mrs Amanda MacQuarrie, a graduate candidate training for full time ministry was the next candidate the congregation adopted into the Church family. This placement was to be for a period of 15 month and it became a privilege for the congregations of both Churches to have both the Rev Louise McClements and Mrs Amanda MacQuarrie sharing and leading worship.

A wind of change had indeed taken place. From a time when no women were elected to the eldership to a time two women lead worship. Words that have been said before and you will no doubt hear again from the membership, "We know the road they are travelling and we want to be with them on that journey."

**BLACKBRAES AND SHIELDHILL PARISH CHURCH
ELDERS - 2014**

Date of ORDINATION

Mr J M CURRIE	28th August 1977
Mr W McKINNON	17th January 1982
Mrs L COULTER	26th November 1989
Mrs M McILVANEY	26th November 1989
Mr J PEARCE	26th November 1989
Mrs H CALDER	28th May 1995
Mrs M CONN	28th May 1995
Mrs A HENDERSON	28th May 1995
Mrs J PEARCE	28th May 1995
Mrs E SMITH	28th May 1995
Mrs B CURRIE	23rd May 2004
Mrs C JONES	23rd May 2004
Mrs M ZACKS	23rd May 2004
Mr R THOMPSON	21st December 2004
Mrs N JACK	13th April 2008
Mrs C MOORE	29th November 2009
Mr R PATERSON	29th November 2009
Mr A ROBERTSON	29th November 2009
Mrs C BAKER	16th June 2013
Mrs Y ELDER	16th June 2013
Mr J KERR	16th June 2013
Mr D McCLEMENTS	16th June 2013
Mrs E PATERSON	16th June 2013



*Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church
Congregational Board 2009*

Back row – Mr R Glass, Mr R Paterson, Mrs E Smith,

Mrs C Jones, Mrs N Jack, Mr W McKinnon, Mrs L Coulter,

Mrs M Conn, Mrs R Moore and Mr A Robertson.

Middle row – Mrs A Henderson, Mrs R Calder, Mrs B Currie and
Mrs M Zacks.

Front row – Mr R Thompson, Rev Louise McClements
and Mr J Currie.

