

Our Church Building

This article by Martin Rogers, celebrating 40 years of the present church building, appeared in Contact in five instalments from June 2010 to February 2011

Forty years ago, there was an air of anticipation, if not excitement, among the members and friends of Rosyth Methodist Church. The year before, we had moved out of the previous building in Parkgate and a contract had been let for the building of a new Church. Whilst the new Church was being built, services were being held in the Parish Church and the various organisations were meeting either in the Parish Church or in other venues in Rosyth. Wesley House, the building which originally stood on the site of the new Church, had been demolished.

The foundations for the new building had been laid and the walls were rising from the ground. At the end of April the beams for the Church sanctuary area had been erected, and on 2 May a stonelaying ceremony was held. This took place at the front of the Church below where the large cross now stands.

The foundation stone was laid by the senior local preacher in the Edinburgh Mission Circuit, Mr J Strongman. The platform party seen in the photo below consisted of the minister, Rev Roger Tate (at the lectern);

seated are Mr Strongman, Rev Alan Cliff (Superintendent Minister), and Rev J Bland (Kirkcaldy Church); standing are Rev Frank Foxon (a previous minister of the Church), Father Daniel Boyle (St John & St Columba's RC Church) and the Rev Colin Preston-Thomas of St Andrew and St George Episcopal Church. Also present were Rev H Haddow Tennant, Chairman of the Scotland District, and Sister Sylvia Macey. Hazel Lawson holds the Guide flag. Hymns sung during the ceremony were "O God of Bethel", "This, this is the God we adore" and "Now thank we all our God". Refreshments were served in the Baptist Church after the ceremony. A major milestone had been reached and members were now looking forward to the opening of the new building.





Wesley House in November 1969

The building of the Church progressed steadily after that and the Church Trust turned their attention to the furnishings. Our minister at the time was Rev Roger Tate who, by Methodist Church standards, would probably be considered 'High Church'. I remember him saying something along the lines that if members of the congregation could gain spiritual uplift from what they saw in the sanctuary, he wouldn't mind if they didn't listen to his sermon! I wasn't a member of the Trust but I believe that Roger was the driving force behind the decision to commission the large mural in the Church and some of the sanctuary furniture.



Erecting the beams for the sanctuary area



Derek Seymour working on the mural

The artist who painted the mural was a Devon man, Derek Seymour. He served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War and whilst at Rosyth, met his wife-to-be and settled in Rosyth. He was a teacher at St Columba's High School and later at Robert Henryson School. I interviewed Derek before the Church was opened and, in his name, wrote a contribution on the mural for the dedication brochure. I have used this as the basis for this article.

Early Christian Byzantine artists endeavoured to enhance the majesty of Christ by painting him bigger than the humans surrounding him. In the Church mural Derek attempted to carry this to the ultimate with the 14 foot high head of Christ dwarfing the greatest technical achievements of man in the Rosyth area (the Forth Bridges and the Dockyard). The depicting of the lower section of the mural in a semi-abstract manner is in contrast to the more realistic treatment of the head of Christ, further helping to separate the real from the heavenly. The eyes are the most impressive guide to character and all features in the mural lead to the eyes. Christ's head is painted so that it will draw no one particular feeling or sentiment from the viewer. It must be almost expressionless, letting the onlooker extract his or her own mood or feeling from the face. The elongation of the head adds regality to the portrait and the choice of blue for a basic colour adds depth and a quality of mystery.

Modern methods of wall painting have, in general, not proved very durable and the method used in painting our mural is the same as the best of the many methods that were used by artists in the 15th Century which have stood the test of time. A layer of cement was first put on the wall and allowed to dry out completely. A fresco base was then added consisting of a lime-free plaster painted with a water pigment mixture. The painting was carried out when the plaster was only partly dried and this allowed the pigment to sink into the plaster layer. The final stage was completed with eggs and pigment, with water added for purposes of consistency only. A small amount of fine marble dust was added to give a matt finish.

In all, 3½ pounds of ground pigments and 19 dozen eggs were used and the whole project including preliminary work took about 300 hours to complete.

The mural attracted a lot of interest at the time with articles in local newspapers and an interview with Derek on the radio. It is not everyone's cup of tea but one thing for sure is that you can't ignore it!



Rev Roger Tate stands in front of the completed mural

The symbol of the fish was used in the furnishings, appearing on the pulpit fall and in a wood carving on the font. Derek incorporated some abstract depictions of fish in the mural ... How many can you find?



View from Queensferry Road on 24 September 1970

By September 1970, the building was taking shape, and there was growing excitement as the opening date approached. Sufficient money had been raised through fundraising, donations and grants to cover the cost of the new building, but there was no allowance for new furnishings. The Trust produced a shopping list of new items required (something like a modern day wedding gifts list) and invited organisations and individuals in the Church to donate the cost of these items. This seemed to work quite successfully although, sadly, no record was kept of the donors, which has raised problems for us when changes were proposed to the furnishings. So, if you know of any donations made at the time please let me know.

One item from the old Church which found a place in the new was the Hammond organ. This had been bought in 1962 after many years of fundraising. The pulpit and font came from the West Parish Church in Cowdenbeath, the pulpit being stripped back to the original wood to provide a lighter shade.

The remaining items of furniture were designed by Mr Tom Doyle of Markinch, senior art master at St Columba's High School in Dunfermline. His designs for the communion table, lectern and two wooden flower pedestals were constructed by the craftsmen in the Lord Roberts Workshop in Dundee.

The design of the communion table was intended to convey the idea of Christ's hands upholding the board. Mr Doyle designed and constructed the cross on the communion table which is built up in facets of steel plates anchored by a stainless steel rod so giving the whole structure movement. This symbolised the need for the work of Christ to be seen as applicable to the many facets of our changing social structure.



Mr Doyle also constructed the wooden cover for the font which incorporates a fish, one of the earliest Christian symbols.

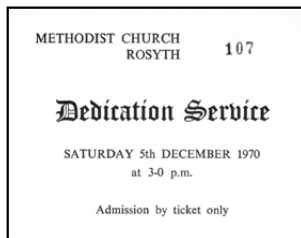


The new pulpit fall, made by Mrs Cameron of Dunfermline, was designed by Mr Derek Seymour, the man who painted the mural, and this continued the fish theme.



Over the years, various changes have been made to the chancel furniture and the layout of the chancel. The Hammond organ was replaced in 1985 by a Viscount Domus organ and this in turn was replaced in 1997 by the present Allen organ. In 1999, new pulpit and lectern falls were donated in memory of Chris Slater. The pulpit was removed in 2005. Two new lecterns were introduced last year with the existing lectern being remodelled to provide smaller table-top lecterns in the Church and in Room 4. The font was replaced this year with a new wooden moveable one which incorporates the bowl and cover from the previous one. New furniture has been introduced at the back of the Church in the form of a welcome table, the cabinet for the audio system and memorial book, and the book cases for the hymn books and bibles. The table, cabinet and font all reflect the design of the communion table.

During 1970, the congregation had watched the site for the new Church premises being cleared, the foundations being laid, the walls being erected and the finishing touches being put to the building. The date of the opening was fixed for Saturday 5 December.



It was not possible for everyone to fit into the sanctuary for the service despite the stage being pressed into service as well. Each family was allocated one ticket and those who did not have a seat in the sanctuary were able to join in the service in the hall by means of a closed circuit TV link.



Provost Crawford and Rear-Admiral Ridley with Rev Ian Cowie (Parish Church) and Rev Colin Preston-Thomas (Episcopal Church) following



Mrs Dutton at the door of the Church with the architect Alan Mercer; VIPs lining the path



Group of ministers

Back row: Rev Roger Tate, Rev Norman Robertshaw (Granton Methodist Church), Rev Frank Foxon (former minister at Rosyth)
 Front row: Rev Tom Dutton, Rev Haddow Tennant (Chairman of Scotland District)

A number of VIPs were invited for the occasion including the Provost of Dunfermline, the Port Admiral, and representatives of churches in the circuit and from Rosyth. The opening ceremony was performed by Mrs Eva Dutton, wife of the former minister at Rosyth, Rev Tom Dutton. It was during Tom's time at Rosyth that the building scheme had been conceived and launched. The hymns sung during the service were "All people that on earth do dwell", "We love the place O God", "Be with us gracious Lord today" and "O Thou whose hand has brought us". After the service, a high tea was provided in the Parish Church Hall.

The cost of the new premises and furnishings was £35,000. The sale of the Church in Parkgate raised £14,000 and various grants were received including a large one from the Rank Trust. Over £11,000 was raised

by the congregation and organisations either by direct giving or fund-raising. Two fund-raising schemes which ran for a long time were the collection and sale of waste paper and the sale of morning rolls. For the latter, a team of volunteers were responsible for collecting 200 dozen rolls from a firm in Alloa and distributing them to customers' houses in the early hours of a Sunday morning.

It was good to have our own Church premises again and the congregation and organisations settled into their new surroundings. The initial plans had envisaged a much larger suite of premises but this had needed to be curtailed for financial reasons. The result was that the new premises were virtually at full capacity from the outset and it was difficult for the various departments of the Sunday School to meet separately. The answer? To build an extension!

The previous part of the article led up to the 40th Anniversary of the opening of our Church building on 5 December 2010. There was another impending anniversary – that of the opening of the extension to the Church – and this final section completes the story.

The initial plans for our new building had envisaged a much larger suite of premises. Although we were raising a considerable amount of money ourselves, the project relied heavily on a grant from the Rank Trust. The Property Department in Manchester made it clear that the Trust could not provide the money which was required for the original scheme and that it would have to be curtailed. Consequently, when the new building was opened, it was already very fully used and it was difficult to find suitable accommodation for the five departments of the Sunday School.

It was not feasible to embark on another building plan immediately, and it was not until 1979 that plans were drawn up for an extension to the building to provide three new rooms and the Crush Hall area. The cost was £42,000 – more than the cost of the original building – that was inflation for you!



Visit of Rev Dr Kenneth Greet: Rev Barrie Cash is on the left and Rev H Haddow Tennant (Chairman of Scotland District) in the centre

Work began at the end of 1980 and was completed shortly before we had a visit from the then President of the Methodist Conference, Rev Dr Kenneth Greet, who preached at our Anniversary services in early March 1981. Anne Cash, the wife of our minister, formally opened the extension on 29 March, so come March it will be 30 years since the extension was opened.



Cutting the cake to mark the formal opening of the church extension: Anne Cash and John Cowie (Senior Steward)

Two years after it was opened, funding was obtained from the Manpower Services Commission to run a Voluntary Help Centre in our Church. This employed two people who had their office in Room 3 and it ran for two years. It was through the activities of the Voluntary Help Centre that the Parahandies Club came into being at the end of 1983. Another new project was the serving of snack lunches which, at its peak, operated three days a week.

This article has been about our Church building, but of course, as a Church (or Society as we used to be called) we have been around a lot longer. In March 2016 we will be celebrating our Centenary – a good excuse for another series of articles!