

The people of St. John's, Wick
- a congregational history.

by

Gordon Johnson

2nd edition; Wick,

The People of St. John's Scottish Episcopal Church, Wick: a congregational history of 150 years.

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Before the present congregation: 17th Century Episcopalians.

Because the Scottish Episcopal Church is part of the world-wide Anglican communion, there is a tendency to regard this national church as an offshoot of the Church of England. It is not, and never has been, but historical events brought English priests to serve within the Scottish church, to cope with a shortage of Scottish priests.

Here's a potted history, to help explain:

At the time of the Scottish Reformation, the one and only Christian Church in Scotland was Roman Catholic, and when the reformed church came into being in 1592 it was unsure how the new national church should be structured. Some of the early leaders wished to retain bishops, but without the title of bishop, and call them Commissioners. Others wanted to dispense with bishops entirely, as too easy to equate with Roman Catholicism. The national church for long afterwards had no such thing as a Presbyterian minister, and so for many people the reformation had little effect. There followed a long struggle between the ideas of Episcopacy (i.e. with a bishop (Greek: Episkopos, or overseer of an area) and Presbyterianism (where the local congregation had power through their representatives (presbyters, i.e. the minister or a senior elder)), with politics rather than religion determining which was in the ascendant at any time.

The monarchy was ambivalent, but preferred an Episcopal (with bishops) organisation, as it was more susceptible to political control by the king. A Presbyterian structure was viewed as anti-establishment, as it allowed more egalitarian decision-making, and while tolerated, the king actively sought to reinstate bishops, and thus make the churches of the entire island of Britain all the same basic structure.

King Charles 1 imposed on the Scottish Church a Book of Canons and Ordinal, and finally in 1637, a new prayer book, which caused another revolt against the Episcopal form of worship, and military battles were fought over the issue. Presbyterianism became the norm until 1661 when the Scots parliament passed the Recissory Act, which reverted to the 1637 position. When William of Orange became king he was anxious to win the support of the Scottish bishops, and met the bishop of Edinburgh, Alexander Rose, in London. The king said, "I hope that you will be kind to me and follow the example of England"(which had gone along with him). The Jacobite bishop replied, "Sir, I will serve you as far as law, reason or conscience will allow me." It was a bad answer, for Episcopacy was then disestablished and the Scottish church reverted to Presbyterianism again, at least in theory. Even by 1707 there were still 165 Episcopalian priests ministering in the parish churches of Scotland.

The Act of Toleration in 1712 gave protection to Episcopalians who were prepared to abandon the claims of the Stuart pretenders to the throne. Many clergy continued to support the Royal House of Stuart, so in 1719 a Penal Act came from Parliament whereby no Episcopal priest could legally minister to more than nine people at one time, unless he took an oath renouncing the exiled Stuart king and promised to pray for King George.

Following the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1745, the government army burned Episcopal churches or made their congregations demolish them, and a harsher Penal law came in 1746 reducing the limit to four people at a time.

Before the establishment of the United States of America, American clergy were ordained in London, and afterwards when the clergy of Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury as their

bishop, he sought consecration in England. The oath of royal supremacy proved too much to overcome, and instead he came to Scotland and was consecrated at Aberdeen in 1784. He was the first Anglican bishop to serve outside the British Isles, and this was the beginning of the world-wide Anglican communion of churches.

During the following century, the Episcopal church became democratised in Scotland, with the laity having ever greater say in the running of the church, including the election of bishops. This trend continues today, enriching the life and service of the church, nationally and locally.

Clergy of the 17th Century.

In Caithness, Wick's Episcopal clergy began with **Patrick Clunies**, M.A., a native of Ross - born about 1642. He was educated at King's College, Aberdeen, gaining his M.A. 17th July 1662. His ministry at Wick began before March 1682, and ended with his death in 1691. While he died locally, no identifiable gravestone survives.

He was succeeded by **William Geddes**, M.A., born about 1630, a native of Moray, educated King's College, Aberdeen (M.A. 1650). He began his career as schoolmaster of Keith in 1650, then was Tutor to Hugh Rose of Kilravock in 1652. His ministry at Wick began 23 Nov. 1659, then he moved in 1677 to Urquhart, Moray, but was back at Wick from 1692, dying there in 1694.

He built local connections by marrying Katherine Dunbar, daughter of John Dunbar of Hempriggs, but messed it up by failing to have their banns proclaimed - an astonishing lapse for a minister - and he was censured for this. He wrote several books, for which he got church permission to publish, but most never appeared in print.

From 1694 until 1730 the post appears to have remained vacant, possibly because of the anti-Episcopal pressures in Scotland at the time.

William Longmuir, another Moray man, born 1692 in Grange parish, was next appointed. His education again was at King's College, Aberdeen, 1708-1710; then Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1710-1712, gaining his M.A. in 1712. He became schoolmaster in Rothiemay in 1716, then was assistant priest at Rathven (Buckie) from 1723-1726, being priested in Aberdeen in 1725. He became priest at Rathven from 1726-1730, followed by his incumbency at Wick 1730-1734, after which he retired to the south, possibly due to ill-health. He returned to the priesthood in 1743, being the incumbent at Keith until 1769, when he may have died.

Wick's Episcopalian church then went into abeyance from 1734 for over 120 years, during a period when Episcopalians were regarded with suspicion, especially after the 1745 rebellion, when the established authorities viewed churches other than the Church of Scotland as of doubtful loyalty.

The formation of the present congregation: the Academy years

1855 saw the revival of Episcopalianism in Wick.

This event was stimulated by the building up of the presence of Englishmen in Wick, brought in through government appointments relating to the navy, customs officials, and the burgeoning harbour which was being expanded by the British Fisheries Society.

Most Englishmen were Anglicans - members of the Church of England - and the church nearest to their style of worship was the Scottish Episcopal Church, which had a bishop in Inverness but no congregations in Caithness. As a result, the small number of local people who favoured the Episcopal form of service, combined with Anglicans now resident in the area, formed a core of enthusiasts who wanted to establish a local congregation.

Bishop Eden, in Inverness, was sounded out about coming and preaching to a possible congregation. When he agreed, an advert was placed in the John O’Groat Journal of Friday 16th February 1855 - the day the Bishop arrived in Wick to prepare for the service which he conducted on the Sunday in Pulteneytown Academy (which is now the Assembly Rooms). The service was extremely well attended, and the Bishop next day consulted with the local Episcopal leaders, regarding setting up the congregation and providing “more frequently the ministrations of the church”.

The congregation obtained permission from the British Fisheries Society (who had built the Academy) to worship in a room of the Academy and this continued for quite a few years. There was one period when this was in doubt, for adverts were placed in the local paper between 16th March and 4th May 1865, seeking premises suitable for church services. As this was in a period when no clergyman was in post, it was unlikely to be to seek cheaper accommodation, so it may have been that there was a clash between the two uses of the room in the Academy. The problem appears to have been resolved, for services were resumed, and remained at the Academy until the church was built and opened in 1870.

Music at the Academy was provided by means of a harmonium, bought over a period up to 1858, and over the next few years bills were paid for new cat-gut, a cover for the harmonium, and its tuning at Aberdeen. Other bills covered items such as 18 hymn books, carafe & tumbler, chamber pot, advertising, and regulars such as washing floors and lighting fires.

Robert Eden, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, was an important figure in the north of Scotland right up to his death in 1886. Son of **Sir Frederick Morton Eden**, he was educated at Westminster and Christchurch, Oxford, graduating B.A. in 1827. He was appointed Bishop in 1851, and became Primus [leader] of the Scottish Church in 1862. He founded St. Andrew’s Cathedral in Inverness, and worked for recognition of Scottish holy orders by the Church of England, which at that time did not allow Scottish priests to officiate in Church or England parishes.

He became much respected in all church quarters.

The congregation in Wick were keen to have a church of their own, and around 1863 an appeal was put out, seeking promises of contributions to a building fund. This failed to attract enough commitment at that time, and in December 1866 a Church Building Committee was appointed to issue a fresh appeal for funds. The committee appointed trustees to take title to any ground and property purchased. These were: **The Bishop; Rev. Mr. Davies; Major Horne; and Mr. Bentley Innes.**

A lay committee was formed in June 1867 to further church matters. In the same month the Bishop let it be known that he would look favourably on an application to raise the current

mission status into an incumbency, and **Major Horne** and **Mr. Nimmo** were asked by the congregation to prepare such an application ; **Rev. Davies** was at that time Curate-in-charge. A constitution was written, and agreed to at a meeting of the congregation on 2nd August 1867.

At Wick, the family most involved in pulling together resident Episcopalians into a congregation was the **Horne** family of Stirkoke, who had moved back here when **Major James Horne** bought the Stirkoke estate.

James' father, **Donald Horne** of Edinburgh, a Writer to the Signet [top lawyers' body in Edinburgh], wrote to the congregation in June 1867 and said he had purchased a property for £135, and was willing to gift as much of it to the congregation as they needed on which to build a church. They leapt at the offer, and decided to ask for it all, in the hope of building a parsonage after the church was completed.

Before going on to discuss other prominent members of the congregation, we should list the clergymen who served for the first couple of decades. The title of "Incumbent" simply meant the priest in charge and responsible for the congregation at that time.

Incumbents:

Only fragments of church minutes now survive from the early years, but the first clergyman to be appointed at Wick was **Walter Bridge Arthy**, born in Chelmsford in 1822, and a Royal Navy Chaplain before he arrived at Wick in July 1857. He did not seem to fit in, for he resigned in December the same year, and it was not until January 1859 that his replacement arrived.

This was **George Aspinall**, born in England, but educated at Heidelberg University, getting an M. A. and Ph.D., so a clever man. Most of his career was in Scotland, and he remained at Wick until Christmas 1862, when he moved to Rothesay, and later to England. The 1861 census shows him as an unmarried lodger in Pulteneytown, with a fellow lodger in the accommodation being **William Smith**, minister of Pulteneytown parish church.

The only record we have of this period is a printer's account dated 19 July 1859 for printing bills announcing services in connection with the church. It was paid very late!

After **Aspinall's** departure it is clear that services continued, probably with clergymen sent from time to time by the bishop, for a surviving cash book shows that a harmonium was used for musical accompaniment, and payments were made for washing floors and lighting fires, presumably in the room used for services.

Getting back to the confusion with the Church of England, even some of the early church minutes at Wick continue this dubiety, talking of worship in accordance with the forms of the Church of England; and referring to it as "the Episcopal congregation, Wick", without mentioning the Scottish Episcopal Church.

However, a special collection taken in September 1860 was designated for "the Scottish Episcopalian Church Mission", so the clarification was starting to percolate through. In 1862 a cushion was bought for kneeling on at communion, and window blinds were bought - sunshine must have been getting in someone's eyes! - and covers for the pulpit and hassocks, the room having other uses in the school week.

Wick's next incumbent was **James Hunt**. This rather vague title at Wick was replaced in 1890 by that of Rector). **Hunt** was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he got his B.A. in 1852. After spells as a schoolmaster and a curate in England, he arrived in Wick in January 1863, but only stayed until October the same year. At that time he left to become a curate at St. James church, Oldham, Lancashire.

There are no church minutes to give details of his short ministry at Wick, but from other records it seems that the original appeal for promises of cash for building funds was issued in 1863, and did not get very far on that occasion, so perhaps he was disillusioned!

Alfred Eyles Davies was the next clergyman to take on the Wick charge, in July 1866. Alfred was born in 1801, the son of William Davies of London, and educated at Pembroke College, and St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, gaining his B.A. in 1824. He had long spells as Curate at Hungerford and then the Clydeside town of Greenock, then came to Wick. His ministry lasted a couple of years, ending with his death on 10th August 1868. Services thereafter were taken by the Rev. **John Horne** (Vicar of Earley, Berks., and brother of Major James Horne of Stirkoke) until another clergyman was appointed as Incumbent. At first we assumed Mr. Davies died in Wick, until a newspaper report [Northern Ensign, 29th August 1868] revealed that he had died at Glasgow, and was buried at Greenock, where he had been Curate before taking on his post at Wick.

Then comes a curious episode.

With the pressing need for another clergyman, a recommendation comes to the congregation from a **Mr. R. Horne** of Greenbank, Greenock, who suggests **Duncan Mackenzie, M.A.** This mysterious clergyman gets appointed almost immediately on a temporary basis from August 1868, so clearly had no charge to resign. The reason for this quickly becomes apparent, when church members start absenting themselves from church services to the point where the Vestry members become alarmed. It transpires that **Mr. Mackenzie** is intensely disliked by the congregation, to the point where the Vestry give him an ultimatum - "resign your charge immediately, or we shall write to the Bishop asking for your dismissal.". Mackenzie at once hands in his resignation on 14th Feb. 1869.

Despite some investigation, I have not been able to find out very much about Mackenzie. According to the major work on Scottish Episcopal clergy [[David Bertie: "Scottish Episcopal Clergy, 1689-2000"](#)], Mackenzie was ordained in 1826, but his only record of officiating in the Episcopal church is his short spell at Wick, 42 years later!.

Having been badly let down, the congregation were more careful before appointing his successor, who was **James Petrie**, a native of Tyrie, Aberdeenshire. He had been educated at London University, gaining his B.A. in 1865, appointed Curate in Bury, Lancashire, 1866-68, then St. John's, Aberdeen, 1868-69, when he moved to Wick where he served for 3 ½ years. He subsequently moved to Auchindoir, Aberdeenshire (1872-1881), then Alford (1881-1919). In 1880 he also became the Diocesan Inspector of Schools, serving in that post until 1919, and was a canon of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Aberdeen, 1913-1919. It is assumed he died in 1919, as he would have been aged 79.

James Petrie has another claim to fame - his family. Four of his sons followed their father and became Episcopal clergymen - in Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand, while another two became medical doctors - one in southern African missions, the other in Orkney.

With such a hard act to follow, the congregation sought the best, but few able men were keen to move to the top of the Scottish mainland, and it was not until 1873 that a suitable clergyman was found.

John Archibald, M.A. was born in Musselburgh, near Edinburgh around 1840, and educated at Aberdeen University, gaining his M.A. in 1869. He then trained at Trinity College, Glenalmond, Stirlingshire, where he picked up the Essay prize in 1870. His first post was at St. John's - but not Wick. It was St. John's, Over Darwen, Lancashire, England, 1871-1873. He took over at St. John's, Wick, in March 1873 and served for three years. From Wick he moved to Keith, Morayshire, and became Synod Clerk; Dean of Moray; and Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Moray. He also wrote several books between 1890 and 1907, mainly about the history of the Episcopal church in Scotland.

When he resigned from the charge at Wick, the vestry decided to "record the regret that he is leaving the congregation for another charge, but at the same time wish him health and happiness in the new sphere of duty to which he is about to remove."

The next incumbent was **George Sutherland**, born about 1832, son of an Udney, Aberdeenshire farmer **James Sutherland**. George went to Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1850-54, gaining his A.M.[M.A. today] in 1854. he then went to Trinity College, Glenalmond, the same year.

His appointments were as Curate in charge, Lundin Links, Leven, March 1861; Incumbent, Banchory, Kincardineshire, 1861-65; Incumbent, Tillymorgan, Culsalmond, Aberdeenshire, 1865-76, arriving at Wick 10th Nov. 1876, where he remained until February 1882 when he moved to Portsoy until 1903. He married Margaret **Cruickshank** of Culsalmond, where his first two children were born. Two others, named after their father and mother, were born in Wick, plus there were five other children after moving to Portsoy.

George was the author of "Outlines of Scottish Archaeology", published 1860 in Edinburgh.

James Connon, born Aberdeen 1854 (his parents Alexander **Connon** and Agnes **McFarlane** married in Aberdeen in 1853), was priested in 1881 in the Aberdeen & Orkney diocese, and his first charge was that of Burravoe, Shetlands, 1879-1882. It was from there he moved to Wick, where he remained until 1893. In the 1881 census of Yell South, Shetland, his 14-year old sister Agnes McKenzie **Connon** was staying with him. He married 15th January, 1885, in St. John's church, Elizabeth Munro Kirk **Horne** (1857-1935), daughter of John **Horne**, draper, and Elizabeth **Kirk**. At Wick, he was elected to the public library committee in 1887.

Children born in Wick: Mary, Alex and Agnes.

On 17th September 1893 he conducted the first Divine Service of Lodge St Fergus in the church, as Rev Connon was chaplain of that Masonic Lodge.

Later in 1893 he moved to Dudley parish church, Worcs., for two years only, before a 3-year spell at Pensnett in Staffordshire, then Quarry bank, Staffs 1898-1900. He then began moving north again, to St. John's, Edinburgh 1900-1901, then Auchindoir, Aberdeen from 1901 until he retired in 1908, dying 13th December the same year in Cults East, Peterculter parish, Aberdeen.

William Claxton Duncan studied at Cumbrae Theological College, 1879, made a deacon 1881 (Aberdeen & Orkney diocese), and priested 1882. Curate at Turriff 1881-2, he became incumbent at Tillymorgan 1882-1894, then came to Wick as Rector in 1894, staying for ten years, when he left to become curate at New Wortley, Leeds.

People - in at the start.

The Horne family of Stirkoke.

James Horne, born Edinburgh 11 Dec 1822, was one of three sons of lawyer **Donald Horne** of Langwell, 10 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh, a Writer to the Signet [a group of top Edinburgh lawyers who usually dealt with the government's legal matters]. James was educated at the Edinburgh Academy, 1831-34; entered the army [71st HLI 1843], spent much of his service in Canada, and retired in 1854 as a major, settling on the Stirkoke estate near Wick, where his grandfather, **John Horne**, had lived. He contested the county as a Conservative in the general election of 1866; married Constance Mary, daughter of **E.W.Shewell** of Cheltenham, and died 21st October 1874 at Stirkoke House, Wick.

The funeral service was taken by a Church of England priest from Wiltshire, **Rev. Mr Buckley**, rector of Sopworth, who is noted in the press report as a brother-in-law of the deceased.

At the time of his death their eldest living son, Edward, age 17, was studying at King's Colege school, London, but returned to be one of the pall-bearers at the funeral.

James Horne had been a Deputy Lieutenant for Caithness; chairman of the Prison Board; chairman of the Police Committee; and Chairman of the Parochial Board of Wick. He was instrumental in the raising and management of the Rifle Volunteers in Caithness.; and he encouraged the formation of a Curling Club in Wick, forming a curling pond on his estate for the Club to use. He usually presided over the annual curling dinner.

About two years before **James Horne**'s death he lost two children in quick succession: the eldest son, Donald, aged 16, and their infant daughter.

Major Horne was a master mason in the St Fergus lodge of freemasons.

The family has many links to Caithness, for his father **Donald** [20 May 1787-23 June 1870] had been apprenticed to **James Horne of Langwell**, his uncle [died 29 Sep 1831, aged 79], who in turn was the son of **William Horne**, tacksman of Scouthill, Watten.

A brother of **James** was **Rev. John Horne**, a clergyman who for many years was Vicar of Earley, Berkshire. It is also assumed that **R. Horne** of Greenbank, Greenock, was another family connection.

James & Constance's third son was **Henry Sinclair Horne**, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., Royal Artillery, who was created Baron Horne of Stirkoke (and granted £30,000) for his services as a general in the first world war - the only artillery officer to command a field army in WW1. He is credited with perfecting the "creeping barrage" which proved effective in clearing the path of advancing troops. During WW1, he almost invariably attended Church on Sundays, regardless of how busy he frequently was. Equally invariably, he recounted the details of the sermons in his letters to his wife. After his death in 1929, **Harry W. Blackburne**, late

Assistant Chaplain-General, First Army, BEF, wrote to "The Times", saying in part, "*At the close of these services he spoke a few words himself, and they were words his hearers could not readily forget. There was nothing fanatical about his religion, he was just a broad-minded Christian gentleman, who had clear convictions as to the value of religion and its bearings on life. Many chaplains who served in the First Army, as well as myself, will be grateful if you will allow this tribute to one whom we all admired and loved, to appear in your paper.*" [extract courtesy of Don Farr, biographer of General Horne].

At St. John's, the altar cross is in memory of him, with the inscription on the back reading: "*In memory of Henry Sinclair, Baron Horne of Stirkoke, GCB, KCMG, born 1861, died 1929. RIP.*"

His father, **Major James Horne**, in moving to Caithness, had been a leading light in forming and progressing the new Episcopal congregation at Wick, so the family background had much to do with the General's Christianity. **Major Horne's** name appears in almost every vestry minute for many years, and he was a strong financial supporter of the congregation too.

He died 21st October 1874 at Stirkoke House, and the Wick harbourmaster's logbook for 26th October describes his funeral thus:

Seldom if ever has a larger funeral procession been seen in Caithness.

His wife **Constance** became involved with other ladies in running fund-raising and social events, and was also keenly interested in the choir. She died while living in London in 1906, but was buried at Wick.

Major James Horne had two brothers, **John** and **Thomas Elliot Ogilvie**. **John** went to Balliol College and became a Church of England clergyman, and later took a post at Cumbrae College, dying in 1878. **Thomas** joined his father as a Writer to the Signet, was a J.P. for Caithness; became Lt. Col. commanding Midlothian Coast Volunteer Artillery; married **Priscilla Moore** at Fort George about 1835; lived in Edinburgh & died 1884.

John Macdonald Nimmo was a solicitor who moved to Wick from his home town of Dundee in 1859, taking over the premises of another solicitor, Mr. **Barclay**. Unmarried all his life, Mr. **Nimmo** devoted much of his spare time to the church, where he served as secretary and treasurer for many years.

As his original place of business was in Sinclair Terrace, the street where the first Pulteneytown Academy stood (where the services were held), and one street away from where the church was later built, most of the vestry meetings were held in his office. He took a large part in the deliberations of the church, and he is commemorated by a prominent brass plaque in the church, reading: "*In memory of **John McDonald Nimmo**, solicitor, Wick, for many years a faithful and attached member and office-bearer of this congregation, who died 20th May 1890. Erected by a few friends.*"

About ten years after setting up, he moved his growing business to Brim's Buildings, then some years later moved again to a new building - Ebenezer Place, where he remained. His early career was helped by becoming factor to Mr. **Sutherland** of Forse, near Latheron. The tenants admired Mr. Nimmo for his straightforwardness and integrity. He was also a Justice

of the Peace clerk, and Burgh Fiscal; and for a time Dean of the Faculty of Caithness Solicitors.

His church interests did not prevent him displaying his patriotism by joining the volunteer force - 2nd Caithness Rifles, and he was soon promoted to sergeant.

His obituary in the local paper describes him: *“In private life he was a very sociable character, fond of profitable conversation, and had many friends. Latterly, owing to indifferent health, his private life was more retired, and the business was chiefly carried on by Mr. P.L. Morrison, whom he a few years ago assumed as a partner.”*

His eulogy was given by Rev. **James Connon**, who said: *“For a quarter of a century, Mr. Nimmo has taken such a deep and warm interest in the affairs of this church; and not of the congregation only, but of the church as a whole ... much of his time and money were devoted ungrudgingly to Christian purposes ... his honest and upright conduct gained for him the respect and esteem of all with whom he came into conduct.”*

When he died at his home in West Park, **Sheriff Harper** adjourned the court for the day, out of respect for the deceased. Mr. Nimmo had three unmarried sisters, all living together in Fife, whom he named as executors of his will.

Hamilton Russel, born in Edinburgh in 1801 - son of an architect - educated there, and became a Writer to the Signet. He was in legal practice in Edinburgh for many years, where he built up an excellent reputation, “looked upon as a gentleman of high professional attainments, well-skilled in the conduct of cases before the Supreme Court, and accounted a conveyancer of more than average ability and knowledge.” He married 29 April 1839 **Mary Poole Blackburn** of Durham (who had been born on St. Kitts), daughter of the **Rev. T.B.Blackburn**.

He was appointed Sheriff Substitute after the death of **Sheriff Forsyth** by drowning in the Loch of Watten in 1849, and despite the advice of many of his Edinburgh friends “on no account to go to Caithness”, he accepted. In 1844 he had declined a high judicial appointment in Malta. He stayed in the post until he retired in 1880, and died 18 June 1881. His widow died 23 April 1883.

He was spoken of as a sound and shrewd judge. Scarcely any of his decisions was reversed in the Court of Session, unlike many others in his field. On occasion his judgement was altered by the Sheriff-principal, then on appeal to the Court of Session, **Sheriff Russel’s** judgement was confirmed; and this circumstance gave the public confidence in **Sheriff Russel’s** decisions.

He had a keen, clear and powerful intellect: *“He was a good judge of character; and knew well how to administer justice quickly and pointedly to certain litigants in the Small Debt Courts who were very often before him. He also used his influence towards closing public houses in the district. He was an able speaker, being fluent, vigorous and extremely pointed. He was always ready to give his services to promote any object of a useful or benevolent tendency to the local citizens if it did not clash with his official duties.”* He was noted as an amiable and kind-hearted gentleman. A keen walker, he often walked to the Small Debt Courts at Lybster or Thurso.

He was a good Latin and French scholar, later learning Spanish and Italian; and keen on sketching and painting, capturing coastal scenes in water-colour. He got involved with local art exhibitions in 1868 and 1874; and he was active in organising the Royal Naval Reserve in Caithness, as well as other volunteer armed services. In politics, he was inclined to Liberalism. At one point he had been Joint Convenor of the County, along with **Sir George Dunbar**.

He was interred in the New Cemetery, where his only daughter was buried in 1872.

Charles William Peach was born in September 1800, Wansford, Northamptonshire, and despite having never lived within sight of the sea, joined the revenue coastguard in 1824. Moved regularly in his work, he married his wife, **Jemima**, in Cley, Norfolk, and became very interested in fossils and geological specimens, becoming so knowledgeable that he gave a paper to the British Association, and became highly respected in the field.

Gradually getting promotion, he moved north in 1849 to Peterhead as Comptroller of Customs at that port. He then moved in the same capacity to Wick in 1853, which gave him the chance to explore the geology of the area. In so doing, he introduced himself in Thurso to the famous local baker, **Robert Dick**, whose fossil collections were by now well known. The pair hit it off and did a fair bit of fossil hunting together.

Peach made a discovery of Silurian fossils in Durness, Sutherland, but all the time his health was not very good, and during 1861 he took retirement rather than face an impending administrative upheaval. He left Wick in 1865 and moved to Edinburgh, where he appears still with his wife and unmarried daughter **Jemima** in the 1881 census. He died there on 28th February 1886.

The lack of church minutes deprive us of details of Mr. Peach's activity in the congregation, but he is one of the major contributors to the church's funds, according to the cash book.

Captain John Tudor, a retired Royal Navy captain, born around 1796 in England, was the second Royal Navy Harbourmaster at Pulteneytown harbour, and another of the early pillars of the congregation. He had been appointed in 1854 after the first had shown a disastrous attitude towards civilians. Tudor did the job admirably, and in 1860 was made an honorary burgess of the Burgh of Wick. At the town council, the Provost made the proposal, saying, as reported in the local paper: "***Captain Tudor** had resided for several years amongst them, and had always shown as great a desire and willingness to aid in any measure which tended to promote the prosperity of the burgh as he did in that of Pulteneytown, with which he was officially connected; and he had always acted as if the interests of the two towns were inseparably connected. He had always shown the greatest commiseration for the unemployed tradesmen of the place, and had been at no little trouble in procuring donations to the fund now being raised for their relief.*"

Captain Tudor went on to receive gallantry medals in March 1861 for leading a crew of nine volunteers the previous year in going to the aid of the crew of the "Maria" of Leith in Sinclair's Bay, off Ackergill; having already participated in another rescue with the Wick lifeboat of the crew of the "Eve" of Aberdeen in September 1859. He received awards from the RNLI, and a silver medal from the Board of Trade for each rescue, presented by **Provost Alexander Bruce**. The Provost was invited to do the honours by **Richard Boyd**, Collector of Customs [and a fellow member of the congregation], who had made the initial report that had led to the awards.

Captain Tudor was married to a **Margaret Cartwright**, also English, and in the 1861 census her sister **Mary** was also living with them at Pulteney House.

While the church records do no more than show his financial contributions, the press reports indicate his true Christian nature in leading a rescue at the age of 64. Captain Tudor's house was one of the buildings visited by the young **Robert Louis Stevenson** on his visit to Wick in 1868 as a trainee civil engineer to his father. The 17-year-old did not appreciate Wick and told his mother so in a letter reporting on his visit, but he had little interest in civil engineering, as his later career made clear.

Richard Boyd was Collector of Customs at Wick, moving here in the late 1850s. He was Irish-born around 1821, married in an Anglican ceremony in Waterford, Ireland, 2nd January 1846 to **Susan Hodges** of Waterford, while he was working for the Customs at Ross, Co. Wexford. Their children were born in Ireland, the Isle of Man, Whitby in Yorkshire, Ireland again, then Wick, demonstrating the movements occasioned by the customs service. At least two of his sons followed him into the customs service.

Successor to **Captain Tudor** at Pulteney House as agent of the British Fisheries Society and harbour Master was **Gilbert Bryden Rutherford**. Born in Roxburghshire, 28 March 1815 (but baptised in Barnes, Surrey, 7th May 1815), he became a midshipman at an early age and gradually rose through the ranks, becoming commander of the "Powerful" on the river Clyde. His ship was to be sent to the Crimea, but the orders were countermanded and his ship was ordered to the West Indies instead. On his return, the ship was reckoned by naval experts to have been very well managed, and **Rutherford** was commended. He had also been commander of HMS Melbourne on the China station.

In 1865, **Captain Rutherford** was appointed to the post at Wick, and this made him also chairman of the Pulteneytown Commissioners. His position with the harbour ceased in 1879 when it was transferred to a local trust. The Pulteneytown estate was sold by the British Fisheries Society in 1892 to a Mr. **John Usher** of Norton for £20,000, and **Rutherford's** involvement became purely honorary, with the real work done by the factor of the estate, Mr. **Crowe**.

Captain Rutherford became a Justice of the Peace, and also Sheriff-substitute; and was promoted to Vice-Admiral in the mid-1870's.

When he died, on 13th March 1895 he was interred in the new Cemetery, Wick, with full naval honours. All the shops in Pulteneytown closed for the funeral, and ships in harbour flew their flags at half-mast. The procession made a halt at St. John's church, where the coffin was carried into the church by the Coastguard and instructors.

In his obituary, he was described by **Sheriff McKenzie** thus: "*He had a high character, honesty of opinion, and high sense of personal honour, distinguished by great kindness of heart.*" **Provost Smith** added that he was "*impressed with his integrity*".

Alexander Mitchell, a native of Blairgowrie, was appointed Chief Constable of Caithness in February 1859. Born in 1827, he had started with the Metropolitan Police and progressed to become Superintendent of the Tweed River police before coming to Caithness. He married a Kent woman and had a large family.

In August 1859, riots broke out between local residents and highlandmen who were engaged in the herring fishing. Mr. **Mitchell** organised a band of special constables, and heading the party himself, the disturbance was eventually quelled.

He was, over the years, credited with a diminution of crime in Caithness. He was also Procurator Fiscal and Inspector of Weights and Measures. Extensively read, he could write with facility and effect; and under the pen-name "**Magnus Harold**", he contributed letters to the John O'Groat Journal. He was a Liberal in his politics, and a keen curler.

In religion, he gave his active support to St. John's. His obituary declares that "*he was of a genial, sociable temperament and much esteemed in private society; and in many circles his well-known figure, vivacious conversation, and telling anecdote, will now be much missed.*" He received a testimonial on retirement, just a few weeks before his death, but he had been officially off work through ill-health for about 6 months, and called in for short periods to keep in touch with the work of the force. At his retirement he was presented with a piece of inscribed silver plate marking the esteem in which he was held by the members of the force in the county.

He died at his residence, Gowrie Cottage, Janetstown, Wick, on the Sunday afternoon, 15th June 1884. He left a wife, 4 sons and 5 daughters.

Mr. Bentley-Innes, as he is commonly referred. This appears to be **Frederick Stock Bentley**, b. 1837 Yorkshire, who married **Henrietta Innes of Thrumster** (1837-1896) in London, 2nd December 1863, and at her urging changed his surname to Bentley-Innes. He appears in the church minutes on a few occasions, mainly where a "big name" is required, such as a trustee for the new church property. He was English by birth, the son of a brewer in Yorkshire. He shot himself at his residence in Belgravia, London in 1877.

Henrietta was the daughter of **Henrietta Sinclair Wemyss** (died 1837, soon after daughter's birth) and **Robert Innes**, 4th son of **James Innes**, who married in 1836. He died in 1852. **Garden Duff Dunbar**. He was born **Garden Duff**, of Hatton, but after marrying **Louisa Dunbar** she persuaded him to change his surname to **Duff Dunbar**.

Benjamin Dunbar, plumber in Pulteneytown, and sometime living in Moray Street (the same street as the church) was a member of the congregation and also one of the contractors putting up the church building, and later the parsonage. He was married twice: first to **Elizabeth Fitzpatrick** in Barony parish, Glasgow, 10 Sep 1854, and later - around 1870 - to **Eliza Campbell** who was born in Kent. All the known children of both marriages were born in Wick, except his son George Edward who was born in Ireland. George was convicted twice in 1872, once for breach of the peace, in November, and for assault in late December. Benjamin (said the John O'Groat Journal at his death in May 1907) "*was very well known and popular in Wick and Pulteneytown, his genial disposition making him a general favourite with those who met him in business or recreation. He carried on the business of plumber for many years until he retired in ill-health. He was a member of the Freemason Lodge in town, and took an interest in most public movements. He was connected with the Episcopal Church and the funeral services were held there [conducted] by the Rev. Mr. Hellawell.*"

Another local man active in the congregation for a while was **James Earle**, a shoemaker, born in England around 1810 (his age fails to increase by ten years in consecutive censuses, thus causing doubt as to accuracy). He married **Christina Malcolm** 19 July 1839 in Wick, and they had one son John in 1839. The son married Margaret Stevens in Thurso, 1861, and

had a daughter named after John's mother. **James** was dead by the 1881 census, when his widow was still living at the family home at 56 Grant Street..

Charles Lee, Captain and Adjutant, 1st Caithness Artillery Volunteers, was active in the vestry deliberations for some years. Born in England, around 1817, as was his wife **Cordelia** who was three years younger,

Sir John George Tollemache Sinclair, M.P. (1872-1884), 3rd bart., vice-lieut, Caithness. Born 8 Nov. 1824, he was sometime in the Scots Fusilier Guards, and wrote a military history. He married on 22nd Nov 1853 Emma Isabella Harriet Standish (died 1889), but the marriage ended in divorce in 1878, after the lady's indiscretions with another military gentleman. Sir John died in 1912.

The ornate lectern in St. John's church, still in use every Sunday, bears a plaque saying "*presented to the Wick episcopal church by **Sir Tollemache Sinclair of Ulbster, bart., in memory of his very dear and much lamented father the late Sir George Sinclair, bart, 1790-1868. He was a father to the poor - Job XXIX 16, and earnestly strove throughout his life humbly to imitate Christ. He was nearly a constant resident at Thurso Castle for the last 30 years of his life and was M.P. for Caithness in several parliaments. Byron - who was his schoolfellow correspondent and friend - called him The Harrow Prodigy.***"

Caleb Cox and family were recorded in October 1869 as leaving Wick, and the minutes give recognition that **Miss Cox** had "*efficiently and steadily conducted the music on Sundays*", along with Mrs. **Horne**, and during Mrs. **Horne's** absence. The vestry at the same time asked Major **Horne** "*to convey to Mrs. **Horne** their thanks for her past trouble with the music, and hoped that she would continue*" [her work with the church music].

Genealogical records show a child **Mabel Clara Adelaide**, born 15 Dec. 1867 Wick, which names Caleb's wife as **Ellen Driscoll Niel** (maiden surname). Other children identified are **Matilda Constance** b. 6 Sep 1865 Wigtown, and **Winifred Blanche Victoria**, b. 17 Jan 1874, Perth. The birth announcement in the Northern Ensign named **Caleb Cox** as Collector of Customs, 1 Bexley Terrace, Pulteneytown, so it seems the Customs men got moved around a lot, apparently to avoid building too close a relationship with local people.

Charles Gray Spittal, sheriff substitute at Wick, advocate, M.A.(Edinburgh), born Edinburgh 13 Feb 1836, son of **Sir James Spittal**, who was Lord Provost of Edinburgh 1833-1837.

Dux of Edinburgh Academy in 1847, **Charles** went on to the university for his M.A., and became an advocate in 1860. He was appointed Sheriff Substitute at Stornoway, 1871-1880, then was at Wick from 1880 to 1884, before moving to the County of Selkirk, based at Selkirk, 1884-1891, dying 4th August 1891. He married **Rachel Harvey** in 1864.

Albert J. O'Rorke, born in Ireland, was a Royal Navy lieutenant, married a Portree girl, had a daughter born in Stornoway in 1876 then one in Wick in 1878. As Acting Commander of HMS Brilliant, he moved with his duties, and the family were in Inverness by 1881, but he contributed in cash and kind, serving on the vestry for several years.

Another naval person active in the congregation for a few years was Lieut. Commander The **Hon. Walter Hylton Jolliffe**, in command of HMS Antelope in 1881.

A local landowner at the latter part of the 1800s was **Sir Francis Tress Barry**, who in November 1881 bought the Keiss estate from the **Duke of Portland**. Born in London in 1825, **Francis** married **Sarah Douglas Herron** of Willenden, Kent, 4th June 1851. He became M.P. for Windsor 1890-1906, but was a keen excavator of prehistoric remains in Caithness, digging up at least 25 broch sites at his own expense between 1890 and 1904. After his death approximately 1,500 objects were donated to the National Museums of Scotland, and most have remained in storage. His idiosyncratic approach however led him to disregard, and discard, any pottery found, and the archeological profession for a century thereafter was puzzled that apparently no pottery was made or used in Caithness in prehistoric times! New excavations in the last few years have now found evidence of pottery, correcting this assumption.

John Ross was a local Pulteneytown man, a master dyer, who played a strong part in church affairs. He married a Stonehaven, Kincardineshire, girl, **Margaret Helen Wright**, and they had a large family in Pulteneytown, where they lived in Dempster Street. **John** was active in the vestry for some time.

William J. Soddy was an officer of the Inland Revenue, from Cornwall, who married an Aberdeen girl - **Jessie Fraser Dunn** in Stonehaven in 1865. Their first two children were born in England, the next two were born in Wick, and another two were born in Stonehaven after the family moved from Wick in the mid-1870s.

Mr. William R. Laffery was born in London around 1850, as was his wife **Mary** (5 years younger), and their two daughters **Amy** and **Ethel**. They moved to Wick 1880/1881, where they ran the Rest Cafe, Bridge Street, Wick. It is unclear how long they stayed in Wick. Other members of the congregation are mentioned, but little is known about them. They include **Lt. John R. Ayles**, in charge of the coastguard R.N. Battery at Wick, born England around 1826. He boarded with shoemaker **George Craig** in Dempster Street; **Benjamin Cork**, surveyor of taxes, born in England around 1853, lodging with fishcurer **Robert Hamilton** in Breadalbane Crescent in 1881; **Elizabeth Watkins**, governess, Banniskirk House, Halkirk. In 1881 she had two New Zealand-born orphans named **Smith** in her household; **William Clyne** (probably a fisherman - there were several of this name in the period); **John Sedgwick**; **Hugh Stewart**; **John Stewart**; **John Bremner**; **W.F.Ireland** (1882-); **David Burnet**, collector of customs (1882-); **Mr. Smith** of Ackergill Tower; and **William Reynolds** of the coastguard. **George Todman** appears near the end of the century. He was an Inland Revenue Officer originally from England, but had been posted for several years to Campbeltown before being moved to Caithness.

The extant church records include a burial register starting 1871. It lists a number of children of church members: between 1871 and 1882 there were - **Joseph Soddy**, son of **William J. Soddy**; **Sara Elizabeth Walrond Russel**, daughter of Sheriff **Hamilton Russel**; **Matilda Dunbar**, daughter of **Benjamin Dunbar**, plumber, and also his son **Robert Innes Dunbar**; **Gertrude Charlotte Horne** and **Donald Kenneth Horne**, children of major **Horne of Stirkoke**; **Christina Manson**, daughter of **James Manson**; **Mary Sutherland**, daughter of **Rev. G.Sutherland**; **Alexander John Ross**, son of **John Ross**, dyer; **Jane Reynolds**, daughter of **William Reynolds**, coastguard service; **Jane Eleanor O'Rorke**, daughter of lieutenant **O'Rorke**; **John Malcher Mitchell**, son of chief constable **Mitchell**; and **Florence Mary Gann**, daughter of **James Gann**, coastguard service.

Adults dying in the same period included: **Henry Pyatt**; **Thomas D. Meston**, age 70; **James Horne**, age 51; **Edward Grey Bryan**, age 26, of Thurso, son of **Revd. Bryan of Somerset**;

Alexander Doull, age 82, retired civil engineer; **William Dunbar Sinclair**, tea planter, India; **Ann Boyd or Pyper**, age 74, of Dundee, who died at Wick; **Margaret Gibson**, age 84, of Pulteneytown; **Hamilton Russel**, age 81; **Helen Flamson or Coates**, age 43, wife of **William Coates**, confectioner; **George Sackville Sinclair-Wemyss**, age 27, of Southdun; and the widow of the late Sheriff **Russel**: there are many more listed.

The register of marriages at St. John's starts in 1861 with **George Hay** and **Elizabeth Sarah Peach** on 6th December, then **Ellen & William Schmitt** on 7th June 1862.

There is then a gap until June 14th 1871, when **William Brown** married **Alice Catherine Rutherford**.

Malcolm McGregor and **Isabella Sutherland** were wed on 4th December 1873, then **John Archibald** and **Jane Robina Anne Boyd**, June 7, 1876. On 2nd Dec 1881, **Harry David Sellman** married **Elizabeth Isabella Riddell**; and **William Warnock Mellon** married **Esther Mitchell** on 13th May 1883. **Alexander Geils** and **Margaret Ann Dunbar** married on 29th April 1884; **Arthur Stephen** and **Christina Grant** on 4th Sept. 1884; **James Connon** and **Elizabeth Munro Kirk Horne** on 15th January 1885; **William Alexander** and **Dolina Taylor Macgregor** on 11th December 1889; **William Ross Sutherland** and **Georgina Ganson** were married at Keiss, 20th March 1891; **Alfred James Blackman, R.N.** and **Agnes Evans** on 7th October 1899 at St. John's.

Another sailor, **William Parsons, R.N.**, was married to **Annie Matilda Watson**, 12th February 1902 in a house in Pulteneytown.

Paupers.

Not everyone connected to the church was necessarily recorded in the church documentation. There were paupers who would seldom merit recognition among the great and the good in the membership. Fortunately other sources are available, such as the Register of the Latheron Poor House, which catered for Latheron and Wick parishes. From 1910 the religious affiliation of pauper changes from simply Protestant or Roman Catholic to include *Protestant - E.C.*, or *Episcopal Church*, or occasionally *C of E*, often a misunderstanding for *Scottish Episcopal*.

Here we find **Christina Ireland McLeod**, single, aged 23, has one child (1910); **Donald Sutherland**, single, aged 65, a cooper (1910 and 1911); **Andrew Lyall**, a law clerk, who appears frequently in the register up to 1914 (legally closed for more recent dates); **William Docherty**, age 40, labourer and his wife, **Mary Daris**, aged 58 (1911). In 1913/1914 is found **Richard Naylor**, aged 62, widower, labourer, of Latheron parish, listed as Protestant (C of E); plus another two labelled Protestant (E.C.), both of Wick parish in 1914: **William Bain**, single, aged 59, a cooper, and **Alexander Phimister**, married, aged 69, a dairyman. All such archives remain closed to public scrutiny for 100 years under acts of parliament.

Erecting the church and parsonage.

The building plans envisaged a church in Moray Street to accommodate 150 worshippers, instead of the 100 originally considered. Estimated cost was £900, and all sittings were to be free, relying on the offerings for ordinary expenditure. A major point in the appeal was that there was no other Episcopal congregation within 100 miles of Wick. A circular was

prepared, and a letter was sent from the secretary to those who had offered to help 3 years previously.

In April 1868 the building committee had plans from architect **Alexander Ross**, at which point it was decided to reduce the capacity (probably based on architect's costings of the building) from 150 to 100 persons. In July 1869 it was reported that tenders had been accepted, work had started, and soon the building would be ready to be roofed. Mason was **Daniel Miller**, Pulteneytown; wright (i.e. joiner) was **John Bain, jr.**, Pulteneytown; Plumber: **Benjamin Dunbar**; slater: **Donald Ross** of Thurso.

The church building was opened 13th May 1870 by **Bishop Eden**, and the parsonage in 1879. The architect for the church was Mr. **Alexander Ross** of Inverness, who had designed the Inverness Episcopal cathedral. When it came to designing the parsonage, he was at first asked to design it to fit a specific budget, but when he came up with a design exceeding that, and did not deign to amend it, a new architect was chosen - a Wick man, **Donald Dunbar**, whose family were in the joinery and building business, and who had recently changed over to be an architect. Although he was an elder in the Free Presbyterian church, a precentor there and attender of three services every Sunday, he was chosen to design the Episcopal parsonage, and did so satisfactorily. He died 30th May 1915, aged 86.

Gas was introduced to the church in late 1880, installed by **Benjamin Dunbar**, plumber. Pavements were laid in Francis Street in the summer of 1901, and the congregation had to pay £14-17-0 as their share of the cost. The **Bishop** provided £10, and the congregation raised the rest by donations from individuals.

People: clergy and activists of later times

Clergy to 1963

George Victor Hellawell studied at Queen's College, Birmingham, 1891-1893, and became a deacon in 1893, before being priested in 1894 at Worcester, being curate at Stamber Mill, Worcester from 1893 to 1895. He was then curate at Medomsley, County Durham, 1895-98, then St. Stephen's, Sheffield, 1898-1901; Seaton Delaval, Northumberland, 1902-1905. He was then rector at Wick from 1905-1909, then moved away before returning to the Wick congregation, 1923-1931. In the interim he was rector at two Blackburn churches in succession, then curate at another in Blackburn, over the period 1909 till 1915. He then became rector Cuminestown, Aberdeenshire 1915-1917, then New Pitsligo, Aberdeenshire 1917-1923. After his second incumbency at Wick he returned to New Pitsligo 1931 until his retiral in 1936 (dying in 1937 or 1938). He became a Fellow of the Incorporated Guild of Church Music in 1905.

Alexander Beith Caird, M.A. studied at Glasgow University 1891-1896, then Trinity College, Glasgow, 1896-1900, then St. Stephen's House, Oxford, 1903. Deacon 1903, priested 1904, he became curate at Dunfermline 1903-1908, before being appointed priest-in-charge at Stranraer 1908-9. He then became rector of Wick, 1909-1919, then licensed preacher in Brechin Diocese, 1919-1920, then rector at Muthill, Perthshire, 1920-1930, and finally rector at West Linton, Peebleshire, 1930-1944, when he retired. He died 4 Sept. 1946.

Adrian Claude Ashworth gained his theological training at Lincoln Theological College, 1908. Made deacon in 1910, Priested in 1911 (Exeter), he was made curate at Littleham,

Devon, 1910-1914. He was chaplain of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, 1914-1917, serving at various sites. He was then a licensed preacher in the diocese of Southwark, 1917-1920. He became Rector of St. John's, Wick 1920-1922, then Rector of St. John's, Inverness and assistant priest at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Inverness, 1922-1924.

George Scott followed **Hellawell's** second ministry at Wick, arriving in 1931 and leaving in August, 1942. Mr. Scott was born in 1896 and studied at Edinburgh University Theological College 1920, and Durham University, gaining his L/Th. in 1923. Deacon in 1922, he was priested in 1923 (Aberdeen & Orkney diocese). He was curate at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Aberdeen 1922-24, then curate-in-charge, St. Martin's Dundee, 1924-29. He was then appointed curate at St. Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, 1929-1931, at which point he took on the Wick charge as rector. The John O'Groats Journal news report of 21 Aug, 1942 said he was leaving to go to All Saints, Woodhead of Fyvie, Aberdeenshire, but the clerical directory says he was curate at Montrose, 1942-46, then rector at Muthill, 1947-1968, when he retired.

Shortly after **Rev. Scott** left, the vestry minutes in October 1942 record that they would take note of the strong opposition to the re-appointment of **Rev. Scott**, and would advise the bishop against such re-appointment. Presumably the bishop had been considering this due to lack of a suitable new clergyman, for a long period ensued before **Rev. Webber** was appointed.

During the vacancy most of the services were taken by the **Rev. George Allen Fisher Pearson**. **Rev. Pearson** had served mainly in Somerset, but his final charge had been as Priest-in-charge at Rutherglen, 1940-1941, retiring in 1941. The Wick vestry in Nov. 1942 proposed that he be asked to accept the vacancy, but a week later they are recommending to the bishop that candidates aged between 30 and 50 be considered, so presumably **Rev. Pearson's** earlier retirement precluded a permanent appointment.

Leslie John Webber became Wick's clergyman with a welcome party in the church hall on 12th May 1943, staying till 1947. Educated at Durham University, he gained his B.A. in 1926. He attended Edinburgh Theological College, 1937, then deacon and priested 1938 (Aberdeen & Orkney diocese). He was assistant curate St. James, Aberdeen, 1938-1940; then curate-in-charge St. Ninian's, Edinburgh, 1940-1943, when he moved to Wick as rector. He became rector of St. Andrew's, Greenstead, Colchester, Essex in 1947. He died in early 1951.

George Ernest Williams studied at Victoria University, Manchester, and St. Paul's Theological College, Essex, becoming a deacon in 1924 and priest in 1925 (Grafton). He was a member of the Bush Brotherhood, Australia, 1924-1927. He became vicar of Eureka, New South Wales, Australia, 1927-1928, followed by rector at Nabihe, Australia, 1928-1933. He then moved back to England as priest-in-charge, St. Luke's Glossop, Derbyshire, 1934-1937, then chaplain at Sulby, Isle of Man, 1937-1939, then vicar of Foxdale, Isle of Man, 1939-1945, though he was also an RAF chaplain 1940-1943, he became vicar of Barrow upon Humber, Lincolnshire, 1945-1947, before moving to Wick, where he remained from 1947 to 1948; at which point he went to become vicar of Blackmore, with Norton Mandeville, Essex.

David Henry Vincent Michael was born in 1912. He attended the University of Wales, 1932-1935, gaining his B.A. in 1935. Next he attended St. David's Theological College, Lampeter, 1935-1936. He became a deacon in 1939, priest in 1940 (Waikato), and was assistant curate, St. George's, Frankton, Hamilton, New Zealand, 1939-1940. He was priest-in-charge, Holy Trinity, Ngaruawaria, New Zealand, 1940-1942, then was C.F. (chaplain to the forces), to New Zealand Forces in the Pacific, 1942-1945.

He moved to England as priest-in-charge, St. Michael's, Middlewich, Cheshire, 1945-1946, then assistant curate, St. Helen's, Northwich, Cheshire, 1946-1948. He then came to Wick as rector in 1948, staying until late 1953 when he resigned, having failed to attend the two previous vestry meetings. The vestry informed the bishop that if the rector wished to be formally relieved of his duties before February they would be willing to acquiesce. In 1954 he took over as priest-in-charge at Thurso, where he stayed until 1961. He then moved to England as an Educational Religious Adviser, with permission to officiate from the Diocese of Birmingham.

Arthur Alastair Malcolm Sandeman, born 1914, attended St. Chad's College, Durham, 1935-1937, and Chichester Theological College, 1937-1939. Made deacon 1939, he was priested 1940 in the Windward Islands, having taken up the post of curate at St. George's Cathedral, Kingstown, St. Vincent, 1939-1940. He then moved to become curate at All Saints Cathedral, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 1940-1942. He next moved to be curate at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Quebec, Canada, 1942-1943, then curate at St. Dunstan's, Cranford St. John, Middlesex, England, 1943-1946, then curate at Swanage-cum-Herston (in the charge of St. Mark's), Dorset, 1946-1949. He was curate at St. Luke's, Woodside, Croydon, Surrey, and honorary chaplain, Canterbury Cathedral, 1949-1952, then curate at St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington, London, 1952-1954; at which point he took over as rector at St. John's, Wick, on 8th April 1954. He became vicar of St. Augustine's, Stockport, Cheshire, in 1956.

The **Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Thomas Hanney, the Most Reverend bishop of Argyll and the Isles**, (Primus 1952-1962) conducted a communion service at St. John's on the morning of October 11th, 1959, which was also the church's Harvest Thanksgiving service. The evening service that day was taken by the **Rev. Hector Downie**, a former choir boy at St. John's, and now priest-in-charge of Grantown mission church, Strathspey (from 1959-1961).

Rev. Eric Frank Walter Knight was born in 1919, and educated at St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, South Africa. Made Deacon in 1951, he was priested in 1952. His first appointment was curate of Knysna, Cape Province, South Africa, 1951-1955; next rector of Victoria West, Cape Province, 1955-1957; then rector at Beaconsfield, Cape Province, 1957-1959. He arrived in the UK at an unknown date, and took up the post at St. John's, Wick, in January 1961, leaving in 1963 to become rector at Girvan, 1963-1968, at which point he became vicar of All Saints, Charlton, Salisbury, Wilts.

From 1963 to date St. John's has been served from Thurso as a joint charge.

The congregation: WW1 to 1950.

Due to members of the congregation moving into and out of Wick, but not being present at the time of the 1901 census, we have less information on some of the families who appear in the church records in the first decade of the 20th century. Census records are now closed for 100 years, so no more family data is available to us at this date.

Some of those who were elected to the vestry and to various committees remain only names at this point; people such as Mr. **Parnell Gale**; **Mr. Teeling, R.N.**; **Col. J.H. Henderson** of Bilbster, whose daughter Peggy married Lieut.-Commander Robert Rollo Gore-Brown, R.N. at the church on 14th July 1926, her spouse was a nephew of Lord Rollo.

Others: Mr. **Picker**; Mr and Mrs. **Percy Mayo**; **William Bridger** (elected to the vestry in Sept. 1944 after Mr. **Mitchell** had left the district); **Chief Officer Hopkins**; Mr. **Collins**; Mr. **Mogford**; organist **Miss Alice Dunbar**, and **Mrs. Campbell**, both of Moray Street, and **Miss Edith Hopkins**; Mr. **Prudens**; **Sheriff Stuart**; and **Miss Merriman, of Argyle Square**; **Mrs. Brown**; **Miss Wookey** and **Mrs. Gilbertson**. Most of these ladies served on the congregation's Central Funds Committee.

Other names appearing in the minutes up to 1917 are Mr. **Bertie Smith**; **Mrs. Fred Smith**; **Miss Dolly Bridger**.

Interestingly, one of the donors to the church in the early 1900s was the **Duke of Portland** - why? What was his connection with the congregation? He had sold his Keiss estate in 1881, but did he own more land in the county?

In April 1917 two red silk velvet alms bags were presented to the church by **Sheriff Trotter**, and were used for the first time on Easter Sunday. Sheriff **Trotter** appears regularly in the communicants list, and appears to have been quite generous in his donations.

During the First World War, St. John's seemed to run as normal, with no mention in the minutes of the war and its effects. However, memorial plaques on the walls show how war was hitting the congregation.

One bronze plaque reads "*pro patria, in patria. To the beloved memory of **Kenneth James Duff-Dunbar**, D.S.O., lieutenant commander, Royal Navy, younger son of **Garden Duff-Dunbar** of Hempriggs. He was killed at the age of 29, on the 19th August 1916 in command of H.M. Submarine E16 of the Harwich Patrol Flotilla, while attacking the German battle cruiser squadron in the North Sea. With him died the officers and ship's company. "Others they saved, themselves they could not save" - Heligoland Bight, 28 Aug 1914; Dogger Bank, 24th Jany 1915."*

Another wall plaque says: "*In ever loving memory of my darling husband **Sinclair John Colley Baikie**, who lost his life for king and country on the 21st Feby. 1917 aged 34 years and 2 months. Erected by his sorrowing wife and three children."*

Organist for part of the 20th century was **Charlie Ball**, father of **Ronnie Ball** in the present-day congregation. The organ required to be pumped while in use, and a young man was always the organ pumper, who sat at the side of the organ, out of sight of the congregation. One Sunday after the sermon Charlie began to play, but the only sound was the rattle of the keys. On looking round the side of the organ, he discovered that the pumper was fast asleep. In a stage whisper, heard by everyone in the church, Charlie said to the offender: "Wake up, you bloody fool!", to the consternation of the priest, the amusement of some of the congregation, and extreme embarrassment of Charlie's parents. The pumper in question is thought to have been Clarence Sutherland, but without certainty.

Church membership numbers have not varied very widely over the years, but exact figures for much of the first half-century or so are not available. Full lists of communicants and state of the congregation figures are extant from 1923 to 1929, and up to WW2 were consistently around the 75 mark, with around 60 as communicants, the others being children and adherents.

The war did not seem to materially affect the congregational life apart from expanded numbers of worshippers, but increased numbers of confirmations were held, several of which included members of the armed forces. In 1943/4 there were 51 communicant members of the congregation (81 in total) with another 19 who were Church of England members regularly worshipping here, mostly forces personnel.

In September 1943 a revised church constitution was drawn up and agreed, and signed by the Rector and 35 members.

The Sunday School had been restarted as a branch of the League of Light, an Episcopal Church of Scotland organisation. It featured special services of admission, membership cards and badges. It was held weekly on Sunday afternoons, and the Sunday School, choir, and youth fellowship together performed a very well done nativity play, raising £3.00 for the Aberlour Orphanage.

Fund-raising continued throughout the war, with sales of work, etc. and the church finances at times were excellent.

At the beginning of the war, a breach was made in the boundary wall behind the church hall, to allow access to an air raid shelter, and in 1947 the vestry decided to contact the appropriate government department with a view to having the wall repaired. The next meeting decided to contact the County Clerk about the matter.

Another effect of the war was that the church hall was designated as one of five Wick Burgh Rest Centres. Apparently there were 9 staff, with accommodation for 18 persons, the plan being to help with air raid casualties, mainly people who had to leave their damaged homes. As the provision was in total for 385, so more than enough for what actually occurred.

World War 2 resulted in some communicants or members of their families losing their lives, but those for which we have records are those where a wall plaque was placed in the church. One case was **Kenneth Duff-Dunbar**, son of **Mrs. Kenneth Duff-Dunbar** of Hempriggs, and the church's Lay Elector. She gifted a new organ to the church, and the plaque is affixed to the organ. It reads:

*In memory of **Kenneth James Duff-Dunbar**, born 21st November 1916, killed in action 6th August 1944, this organ was given by his mother.*

An only child, **Kenneth** had been a captain in the 7th Seaforth Highlanders, and died in the Normandy campaign. He had also served in North Africa with the 5th Seaforths.

At that year's AGM, his loss was recorded by the Rector, who said "*he so gallantly gave his life on behalf of his country. Our hearts go out in deepest sympathy with his mother and grandmother in their irreparable loss. He was a good man, a devout churchman, a devoted son, and a gallant soldier.*"

The Rector also recorded another loss, a former member reported missing in action – **Jack Humphrey**, who had been brought up in the congregation and was very popular. Jack was a flight sergeant in the RAF, aged 24, a member of the crew of a Sunderland flying boat. The aircraft attacked a submarine (believed destroyed), but was damaged and came down in the sea 40 miles off the coast of France. He was the youngest son of **Mr. & Mrs. J. G. Humphrey**, Kenneth Street, Wick. His loss and that of another young lad of the congregation, the presumed organ pumper **Clarence Sutherland**, who died in the final stages of the war, are recorded in the Rector's annual report in Sept. 1945. "Caithness and the War

1939-1945” notes that Private Clarence Sutherland, 1st Airborne Division, was killed 10th May 1945 as a result of an aircraft accident 10 miles north of Oslo, Norway. As a civilian, he had been employed by D R Simpson, ironmongers, and lived at 25 Saltoun Street.

The deaths of two of the oldest members of the congregation, **Marjorie Horne** and **Eliza Shaw**, were also mentioned in that report. Among those leaving Wick during the year were **Commander Lewty** and family, Mr. **Langton** & family, and Mrs. **Angus**.

In May 1941 the church’s Central Funds Committee decided to hold a monthly garden party for the troops, with Miss **Connon** appointed as convenor of a committee, coopted by her, for this end. It was also decided not to ask members of H.M. forces and their wives to contribute to the freewill offerings. The Central Funds Committee also authorised some expenditure, including new blackout blinds for the church hall. In August 1942 the Vestry decided that proper blackout curtains should be obtained for the church.

In 1943 the new incumbent, **Rev. J.L.Webber** - chosen by the dean of Elgin - was inducted as rector at a ceremony in Edinburgh Cathedral on 30th April, and on the following Sunday 2nd May 1943, exhibited his licence to a crowded church at Wick and received the keys of the church from the Lay Representative. A few weeks later, Mr. **Webber** was asked by the vestry to draw up a revised church constitution, which was approved by the bishop and came into force in September 1944. It was in use until an updated version, based on a standard format approved by the diocese, was adopted at the AGM in December 2005.

In October 1943 a Youth Fellowship was formed at the church, and well-attended meetings were held in the rectory throughout the winter months on Sunday evenings after Evensong.

One vestry meeting, on 17th February 1944, was interrupted by an air raid warning, leading to a misunderstanding over a question of the organist, **Mrs. Lizzie Louisa Gilbertson**, proposing to resign, which the vestry decided they did not want to happen. It transpired later that she had actually tendered her written resignation, rather than asking about resigning, but the secretary had had to rush off on official duties before this was made clear. At the next vestry meeting this circumstance was explained and the resignation accepted with reluctance; a letter to this effect was sent by the secretary to **Mrs. Gilbertson**, and arrangements were made for a presentation to her for her long and faithful service. The rector’s 1946 annual report mentioned the death of the same **Lizzie Louisa Gilbertson**, who had been organist at St. John’s for some 30 years. Afterwards the organ was played by Mrs. **Webber**, the incumbent’s spouse. The next organist after Mrs. **Webber** was Miss **Audrey McVey**, (daughter of local optician **Frank McVey**) in 1947. In 1949 **Charlie Ball** agreed to temporarily take over as organist, and in 1952 he persuaded **Mr. Keith Farrant** to assist by playing on alternate Sundays, work permitting. **Miss Annette Bulpitt** was one of two organists before leaving with her family for Sussex.

Organ blower at the start of the war, **Clarence Sutherland** (aircrew, died aged 18 in plane crash in 1945) left for England, and his duties were taken over by **Derek Ball**, **Ronald Ball**, **Eric Ansell**, and occasionally **Brian Ansell**.

One family active in the choir for generations were the **Waltons**, **George** (grandfather) who came to Wick from Dundee in 1904 to set up Wick’s first telephone exchange, in 70 High Street - Nicholson’s buildings - in the family’s flat, **Bruce**, his son, and **George**, son of **Bruce**, covering almost 50 years of choir service.

1944 also saw the installation of an anthracite stove for heating the church, and in December 1947 a gas heater was installed in the hall of the rectory. In early 1948 a light was asked for the lectern and an electric heater in the east end of the church to give a more even temperature in the organ area.

The Rector, in 1944, while congratulating the congregation in many aspects, pointed out that he was the sole person looking after the church grounds, yet it was not part of his official duties. He quoted an advertisement in the Church Times - "Incumbent, tired of gardening, seeks a living where he may perform his proper duties as a clergyman."! By 1947 an arrangement had been made by **Rev. Williams** with **Mr. McAdie** to cut the lawns and keep the borders tidy, for the sum of £1.00 per month. **Mr. Williams** offered to pay half of this, with the congregation paying the other half. This arrangement did not last very long, and in 1952 male members of the congregation were asked to form work parties to help tidy the grounds.

There is also mention of members of the congregation staffing a canteen, which presumably was for military and civilian war personnel. The Rector thanked members for their help with the Red Cross, British Legion, and the Caithness Moral Welfare Society - a body which the church subscribed to for many years.

A story appeared in the John O'Groat Journal at the end of 1944, telling of a nativity play performed in the church. The play had the title *The Magic Window*, and there is a list of all the players: **Eric, Brian and Keith Ansell, Edgar Ball, Kathleen Finch, Audrey and Ada Langton, James and Sheila Mackenzie; Frances, Audrey and Kenneth McVey, Norah Matheson, Jeanette Miller, Elizabeth Wallace, George Walton, Doris Webber, and the Rev. L.J. Webber.** Mrs Webber was on the organ. The collection was sent to the Aberlour Orphanage.

That Christmas eve the choir performed at the carol service, and then went on to repeat their carols at the RAF sick-bay, which was housed in the Dunbar Hospital during the war.

A clergyman named **Rev. David Railton, M.C.**, helped out with services during the vacancy in early 1947 and seemed appreciated - he was given a Parker fountain pen as a thank-you gift, and was much praised -, but local records say nothing of his background, and he was not listed as a Scottish Episcopal priest, so it could be presumed he was a C. of E. clergyman who was visiting Wick. There was no church AGM report recorded later in 1947, where we might have found clarification, and there was nothing in the Bishop's files either. A search of his name has now shown that he was the **Rev David Railton**, Church of England army chaplain in WW1, born in London in 1884 as the son of **George Scott Railton**, a Salvation Army commissioner (and second in command to Willaim Booth) from Angus, and grandson of **Lancelot Railton**, a Methodist minister.

David Railton conceived the idea of having a "Tomb of the Unknown soldier" in Westminster Abbey. After noticing the grave of a Black Watch soldier in France marked simply "An Unknown British Soldier" he passed his suggestion first to Earl Haig, but received no reply. He next offered his notion to the Dean of Westminster, Herbert Ryle, who took it forward. The idea came to fruition on 11th November 1920 when a randomly selected unknown British serviceman's body from France was interred in the tomb. The permanent stone covering, with inscriptions, was added one year later. A similar unknown French soldier was buried in the Arc de Triomphe in France, also in November 1920.

Having worked the rest of his career in England, with his last two years, 1943-45, as the Archbishop's Visitor to the R.A.F., **David Railton** retired to Ard Rhu, Onich, Inverness-shire, in 1945, and died 30th June 1955 as a result of a railway accident at Fort William station, where he fell from a moving train while moving his luggage to the door, and died of his injuries. He is buried in St. Bride's Scottish Episcopal churchyard, North Ballachulish, as is his wife Ruby, who died in 1966.

His memory has recently been acknowledged in two ways. First, in November 2016 by the presentation of a banner to St. Bride's Church by army veterans, in honour of his determination to recognise the sacrifices of the fallen. The banner was handed over by Rev Railton's grandson, Jim Railton, at the morning service. Secondly, in June 2017, by a special ceremony organised by the British Legion Fort William branch and attended by Salvation Army representatives, in June 2017. He was survived by his widow, one son and four daughters.

One daughter, **Dame Ruth Railton**, founded the National Youth Orchestra.

Among St. John's active members in the later 1940s and early 1950s were: **Mr. Bruce Walton; Mr. Graham Walton; Miss Cannon; Mrs. Humphrey. Miss Audrey McVey** who was organist for a time, but left to join the nursing profession; **Hector Miller, Mrs. R. Sutherland; Mr. H. Faint; Mr. Hall; Mr. H. Wilkinson; Mr. Branigan; Mr. Charlie Ball** (organist 1947-1954) & **Mrs. Ball; Mrs. Gilbert; Mrs. Gordon; Mr. & Mrs. Matheson; Mr. Shand.**

Mr. Favorant was on the vestry for a short time before leaving Caithness, but he had acted as Lay Reader and also Organist, so St. John's had been much indebted for his help. In 1947 the vestry granted permission to the rector to use the shed by the church hall as a garage for his car. The shed would need to be converted by the installation of doors facing the street. When the rector left in 1948, the church repaid him the cost of installing the doors. We note that today the doors of the stone-built shed face inwards, not out to the road, so perhaps he changed his mind about the direction.

The vestry in 1947 agreed to loan the church lawnmower to Wick Golf Club, free of charge on the basis that the golf club kept it maintained in good order, but later that year attempts were being made to have the church grass cut by someone from the golf club. The matter seems to have been unresolved, for in August 1948 a Mr. **Harper** of Argyle Square was being employed to cut the grass around the church and clean the path at the west end of the church grounds. The question of the grass cutting remained a continuing problem for years afterwards, and the maintenance of the lawn mower was also a difficulty, as was its winter storage.

In 1946, as a war memorial, an apparatus for playing the sounds of a church bell was installed in the church, which involved a gramophone and an amplifier, but this kept needing attention and repair. In 1950 its future was in doubt when the electricity in the church was switched from D.C. to A.C., and by 1958 was seldom used. It was proposed to sell the apparatus, and use the cash for an alternative memorial. Local electrician Mr. Finlayson offered £20 for the apparatus, and this was accepted.

The Wick Youth Club donated £5.00 for the use of the church hall at the end of 1947, for which the vestry was very grateful. The donation was added to the church's Sustention Fund.

In December 1947 the vestry also agreed to the purchase and laying of felt for the altar steps and if possible, the church aisle; and recommendations for improvements to the church lighting were sought from a local electrician. A minute of May 1948 records gratitude to Mrs. **Hildreth** for the gift of the altar carpet. Master **George Walton** was organ blower in 1947 and he was voted 5/- per month for Sundays and choir practice times.

At the end of May 1948, **Major Hildreth**, M.B.E., tendered his resignation as Lay Elector, after points of principle arising between the Rector and **Major Hildreth**. His resignation was accepted, and the vestry expressed its confidence in Rev. **Williams**.

Major Hildreth soon afterwards became **Lt.-col. Hildreth**. He was succeeded as Lay Representative by **Mr. A.F.McVey**, who had been treasurer for several years. **Col. Hildreth, of Barrock House**, was elected to the vestry again for 1976-77. He and his wife were pictured chatting to the Queen Mother at The Assembly Rooms in 1977. He died in 1999.

Mrs. Duff-Dunbar (senior) of Hempriggs was a generous benefactor of St. John's throughout her long association with the congregation, and also an active participant in church affairs. She is recorded in January 1948 as having donated a bible for the lectern, and the secretary was to write, thanking her and wishing her a good recovery from her illness. However, her death came later in 1948 and was mentioned in the vestry minutes, where they recorded "*the general sorrow and loss sustained by our church in the passing of a much beloved lady and benefactress to St. John's church.*"

In September 1948 the vestry decided to write to Mr. **Hector Downie** (a Caithness-born man who was a teenager in the St. John's choir during the war), congratulating him on his impending ordination and conveying the vestry's best wishes for his future. His induction service at Stornoway was attended by the Rector from Wick. In December 1953 the vestry sent a telegram of good wishes to Mr. Downie and his wife on the occasion of their marriage on December 2nd. Mr. **Downie** served in a number of Scottish Episcopal churches, but died at Stornoway in 1964. He visited Wick in August 1963, when he took services at St. John's on two Sundays.

The congregation: 1950-1963

In 1950 the vestry decided that all the hymn books should be gathered at the back of the church and laid on a small table. This practice is still in use today, with the hymn books and liturgy books laid out on the pew next to the door.

Lay Reader at Wick in the early 1950s was Mr. **Keith Farrant**, and when the bishop arranged in June 1953 for the rector to take services at Thurso on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, Mr. **Farrant** agreed to take services at Wick when his work allowed it.

When **Rev. Michael** resigned, **Mr. Farrant** said that he would take a service at 11.30 am every Sunday until the locum tenens arrived. The bishop had said he hoped to have a priest ready to come for a few weeks from the beginning of March. The locum tenens was **Rev. Ivan Mavor**, itinerant priest with the diocese between 1951 and 1958. The vestry in April 1954 recorded that he had been a great success as the locum. **Mr. Farrant** left the area in April 1955.

In March 1961 the vestry authorised payment to the diocesan itinerant priest, **Rev. B.S.T. Simpson**, for his expenses when visiting St. John's, and the vestry noted how much these visits had been appreciated.

Mrs. K.I. Duff-Dunbar was appointed hon. secretary of the vestry in 1952 and continued until she resigned in 1971, feeling she was unable to continue to do the job properly. The vestry in January 1954 expressed their regret that **Mr. & Mrs. Ball** were leaving Wick, recording their gratitude for **Mr. Ball's** work as organist and saying how much they would be missed.

In September 1954 the vestry agreed with the rector's suggestion that the altar rails should be moved from just in front of the altar to the entrance to the sanctuary. In mid-December the minutes state that the inner east wall was taken down and rebuilt, and other necessary work undertaken.

In January 1955 the rector noted that *"On Wednesday 12th a very severe blizzard swept the north of Scotland, cutting off all rail, road and air services for two days. Much snow fell during the next few days and a helicopter rescue service was instituted for the sick and starving."*

The next month, he also described, *"An even worse blizzard than last month cut Wick off again from the outside world. The rector, who was away in London, was unable to return for Sunday the 20th. In any case, the snow was too deep for people to get to church. Intense cold."* Snow was again troublesome in late March. The first snow of winter arrived on 15th October 1955.

Mr. Harold Faint was secretary and/or treasurer for a number of years in the late 1940s and the 1950s, only resigning as treasurer in August 1959 as he and his wife Dorothy were leaving Caithness. His long service and willing attention to many matters were much appreciated by the vestry, and a party was given in the rectory for **Mr. and Mrs. Faint**, at which they were presented with a nest of tables, one suitably inscribed.

Mr. Faint in return handed over to the vestry a silver paten in memory of his parents who had been members of the congregation for many years. The inscription reads: *"Presented by Harold and Dorothy Faint in loving memory of George and Elizabeth Faint. September 1959."*

The George Faint mentioned was Chief Officer of the local Coastguard in 1930 (see photo in John O'Groat Journal Christmas Number, 1930, of Wick Rocket Apparatus and crew)

At the 1957 congregational meeting, the work was acknowledged of **Mr. Faint, Mr. Riley** and **Commander Gilbert** in organising services on those Sundays when no priest was available.

During the vestry meeting on 30th May 1955, the rector turned on his radio so that the meeting could hear the BBC recording of the presentation of new colours to 1st battalion Cameron Highlanders at Balmoral by the Queen. The speech of thanks at the ceremony was made by **Colonel David Leslie**, a former worshipper at St. John's church, and eldest grandson of the late **Col. Horne**.

A gift of a green gothic set of vestments from St. Mary Abbot's church, Kensington [**Rev. Sandeman's** previous church] was reported. They had previously offered to provide new altar rails, but these were not required. These green vestments are still in use today.

At the same meeting the rector proposed that no memorial tablets be placed in the chancel of the church, and this was agreed. His further proposal of discouraging further memorial tablets in the body of the church was postponed for further consideration.

Dr. Doris Mackintosh (known to her friends as "Mack") joined the vestry in 1955, and in December 1960 the vestry meeting was held at her home in West Banks Avenue. Presumably neither the church hall or rectory was available at the time. In October 1961 when a new carpet sweeper was required, **Dr. Mackintosh** offered to give one to the church, and this offer was accepted. A keen member of the congregation, when she died in 1980 she left a legacy of £1,000 to St. John's, which was set up as a memorial fund in her name.

From May to September 1955 no permanent organist was available, and various members of the congregation had played at services over the period. At a later meeting **Commander Gilbert's** services as temporary organist were specifically recognised.

The rector had handed in his resignation to the secretary a few days before the vestry met, and he left the meeting while discussion took place of that event. The vestry accepted it with much regret, and spoke gratefully of what the rector had achieved during his short ministry at Wick.

Mr. Sandeman's letter requested an earlier departure date than the stipulated one, but the vestry were concerned that this might make matters difficult for the bishop, and at their next meeting decided to leave this point in the bishop's hands. The bishop decided on a leaving date at the end of January 1956. There were no church services on 11th November 1955, as the rector was preaching at 6.30 evensong in Canterbury Cathedral on the invitation of the Dean, the **Very Rev. Hewlett Johnson**.

There was a long hiatus in the incumbency, as the bishop failed to find any suitable candidate for the post; and the congregation's financial position was not much improved, as most of the rector's salary was paid by grant aid from central funds, rather than local sources.

In a number of Sundays during the vacancy, the congregation had matins and a broadcast service from the radio. On other Sundays, various clergymen appeared, including a Royal Navy chaplain, an RAF chaplain, and the bishop himself. Local man **Rev. Hector Downie** came on several occasions when visiting his home town.

A Sunday School was started in January 1957, with three children from one family, under **Mrs. Riley's** charge. By mid-February there were a dozen children attending it, and **Mrs. Napier** was assisting **Mrs. Riley**. Mrs. Riley also organised the children's Christmas Party that year.

In the summer of 1957 a new lawn mower was purchased - a Suffolk Punch, removing the continual maintenance problems of the other motor mower.

The bishop arranged for the church to have the services for two weeks in late July of a naval chaplain, and it was agreed for him to reside in the rectory (of which at the time, the ground floor was rented as a furniture store to **Mr. Grover Clyne** at 12/6d per week).

The bishop also arranged for a possible candidate for the vacancy to come and preach in December 1957, but the congregational meeting decided not to offer the post to the candidate.

Mrs. Glander, one of the vestry, submitted her resignation from the vestry in June 1957 due to her having difficulty attending church services, but the vestry, appreciating her service to the church, managed to persuade her to remain on the vestry as was reported in April 1958. **Mr. William Glander**, meteorologist in charge at Wick Met. Office since 1947, and a keen amateur photographer, ran a film show in the church hall in Dec. 1957, in aid of church funds. He retired from his post at Wick Airport in 1964, and died in 1980.

The annual church sale was held in the BB hall at the end of November 1957.

The April 1958 vestry meeting was called for members to meet **Mr. Fentiman**, Secretary and Treasurer of the R.C.C. of the Episcopal Church in Scotland. He explained the present position of the church in Scotland, and outlined the various funds which congregations were asked, and expected, to support. Questions from the floor centred on a possible joint priest for Wick and Thurso, which he said was a matter for the bishop, but an increased stipend for the joint charge would not be sanctioned by the authorities in Edinburgh.

In October 1958 **Mrs. Gilbert** resigned from the vestry, and **Commander Gilbert** resigned as organist, as they were leaving Caithness. **Commander & Mrs. Gilbert** left a parting gift - a beautiful prayer book to be used by the officiating priest. Other members of the congregation had given the **Gilberts** a present of sherry glasses and a pyrex dish. Their departure was greatly regretted, for they had done so much to help the congregation in the time they were here.

For two years, those ending Dec. 1958 and 1959, there was no annual congregational meeting but members of the congregation were encouraged to attend as observers at vestry meetings during the year.

Mr. Gibbon joined the vestry, and **Mrs. Gibbon** agreed to be organist at that time. In March 1961, the new rector said he was arranging for assistant organists to relieve Mrs. Gibbon on two Sundays every month. With there now being two services each Sunday, it was more difficult for her because she had a little boy.

A letter from the bishop, dated March 7, 1959, was read to the vestry, saying that he had arranged for **Rev. D.H.V. Michael**, of Thurso, to take a communion service on April 5th at St. John's. The vestry decided to write back and thank him, but to point out that while **Rev. Michael** was the only clergyman available to the bishop, St. John's were the last people to be told of the arrangement being made. It would appear that **Rev. Michael** was still not looked upon kindly by St. John's members.

In March 1960, **Mr. William John Doloughan** (admitted by the bishop as Lay Reader for St. John's on 31st January) was invited to join the vestry, and he accepted. In 1961, after the new rector was appointed, the vestry recorded their thanks to **Mr. Doloughan** for all the service he had given to the church since he had come to Wick. He had taken weekly services, preached sermons, and started confirmation classes for both boys and adults, and this was all appreciated.

The rector reported in December 1962 that the sanctuary box had been stolen during the church sale. At this time **Mr. Doloughan**, former lay reader at the church, had notified the

vestry that he wished to gift something to the church, and the vestry considered that a new sanctuary box would be an appropriate gift. At mid-1963 the vestry noted that a suitcase of items belonging to him had been deposited at the Excise office in Wick, for collection.

Mr. J. Gibbon became treasurer in June 1960, in succession to **Mr. Riley** who was leaving Scotland, but warned that at times his work took him away from Wick for several weeks at a time. Also in 1960 repainting was done of the exterior of the rectory and the church railings and gates, except the gate to the hall and garage as it was in poor condition and needed replacement.

In June the vestry also decided to record their appreciation of all the work done for the church by **Miss Janet Henderson**, soon to become **Mrs. Gardener**, and a telegram of congratulations was to be sent to **Mr. & Mrs. Gardener** on their marriage on June 21st at Preston. Pleasure was also expressed that the couple were coming to live in Wick.

In Dec. 1960 it was decided to erect a standard Scottish Episcopal Church sign in the church grounds after Easter 1961.

The vestry meeting of January 1961 was held at the home of **Mr. J. Gibbon**, hon. treasurer, and present at the meeting was the **Rev Eric Frank Walter Knight**, to whom the vestry offered the living of St. John's. He accepted, and agreed to officiate at services the next day (29th January) for which he would be paid the standard fee. He was instituted as rector by the bishop on 12th March.

September 1962 saw the first mention of possibly having electrical heating in the church, when the rector undertook to explore this option. At the next meeting it was reported that one new fire had been purchased, and the possibility of oil heating was mooted.

The church cleaner, **Mrs. Peggy Walton**, died in September 1962, and the vestry asked their secretary to write to her husband **Mr. George Walton** and express the church's appreciation of her generous work for St. John's. A retirement gift of £12.00 which had been planned for her was agreed to be handed to her husband, and a cross of flowers had been sent to the funeral from the congregation.

Mrs. Knight had taken over the cleaning of the church, but in March 1963 the vestry were told she wished to do it voluntarily. The vestry felt this would be unfair and urged that she accept 7/6d per week from 1st December 1962; and £4-10-0 should be paid to her for the months of September to November.

Mr. & Mrs. Gibbon (he the church treasurer, she the voluntary church organist) left the district during 1963. They were given a presentation of two framed pictures of Wick painted by **Major Simpson, R.S.A.**

In June, **Mr. Bulpitt** agreed to be the new treasurer, and in 1970 became vestry secretary until he left the district in 1977..

The congregation linked with Thurso, 1963-

The vestry on 8th May 1963 received the rector's resignation with regret. The vestry recorded that **Rev. Knight** had been helping out at the Thurso church for 18 months during

their vacancy, yet he had kept up his visits to parishioners at Wick, and **Mrs. Knight** had helped in numerous ways. **Mr & Mrs. Knight** were given a presentation of a coffee percolator - which they had requested - by **Mr. Bulpitt** on behalf of the congregation at close of the service on 14th July.

The rector told the vestry on 8th May that the bishop was coming to Wick on Sunday 19th May and wished to meet the vestry regarding the vacancy, so he advised that no advert be placed for the vacancy meantime.

Rt. Rev. Duncan MacInnes, M.B.E., M.C., Bishop of Moray, Ross & Caithness, 1953-1970, (died 9 Aug 1970), came to tell the vestry of the necessity of linking the two parishes of Wick and Thurso under one rector. With Thurso having the greatest need for a rector, the new rector would have to be appointed to Thurso, where they also had a new rectory specially built but not yet occupied.

He suggested that Wick find £150 towards the £800 stipend, and he would suggest to Thurso vestry that they find £350 towards the stipend. He did however state that Wick could still appoint a rector on their own initiative. He also suggested that rather than sell their rectory it would be best to let the Wick rectory in the meantime so as not to preclude this possibility.

Two applications for the tenancy were received, and the let was granted to **Mr. Hyde**, Assistant Director of Education for Caithness. He gave up the tenancy a year later, on moving to Aberdeen. The next tenant was a **Mr. Scott**, who eventually purchased the building at a much reduced price as a sitting tenant.

In mid-June, the bishop brought to meet the vestry the Rev. **Charles Henry Attwater** whom he was suggesting for the joint rectorship. After discussion of the terms of the appointment, **Mr. Attwater** was brought in and introduced to the vestry members, who found him acceptable.

The new rector would not take up his post until later in the year, as **Rev. Knight** would leave after the June vestry meeting and **Rev. Attwater** had to serve his notice at his former post in Stirling.

His first meeting with the vestry, as rector, was on 25th September 1963. The new rector, **Charles Henry Attwater** was born in 1930, attended Kelham Theological College 1954-1959, and was priested 1960 at Sheffield, where he became curate at St. James' and St. Christopher's between 1959 and 1961. He then became curate at Stirling, 1961 to 1963. His service at Wick and Thurso lasted from 1963 to 1967, when he moved to become vicar of Narborough, Norfolk.

His successor was **Rev. Stewart Adam Thomson Mallin**, born 12 Aug 1924, a former baker, who had attended Edinburgh theological college 1959-1961, made priest 1962. At all his charges, he gave much practical help to his congregation by cooking and baking things for church events, and also making marmalade. He was curate of St. Andrews Cathedral, Inverness, 1961-1964, then itinerant priest of the diocese, 1964-1968.

He took over the joint charge of Thurso and Wick in 1968, leaving in 1977 to become rector of St. James, Dingwall with St. Anne, Strathpeffer, 1977-1991. A description of Stewart and his attitude to life is given by John Green (a member of St. John's from 1973, who moved to Inverness), in the short biography of Canon Mallin written by Sonia Cameron Jacks

(published Inverness, 2012, by For the Right Reasons. On his departure he received a gift from the members of St John's. It was handed over by Mrs Duff-Dunbar and Mr George Bulpitt. When he made a return visit and preached in St. John's in October 1980, there was a very good turnout of the congregation.

He was Dean of Moray, Ross & Caithness, 1983-1991. Officially retired in 1991, he then served as Priest-in-charge of St. Paul's, Croachy, Strathnairn from 1991. He died suddenly on 21st January 2000.

There is little detail about the lives of individual church members, so here we include simply the names of those who served on the vestry in the 1960's.

Vestry members in the 1960s were, with posts in brackets: **Mr. John Bain (Jack) Banks** (from 1964), 26 Seaforth Ave, Wick; people's warden to 1977, priest's warden 1977-1991, who died suddenly in late 1991; **Mrs. Marjory Banks** (from early 60s) 26 Seaforth Ave., later lived at 2 Henrietta Court, Wick; **Mr. George Bulpitt** (from early 60s - treasurer; then secretary 1970-77; resigned when appointed to a post in Shoreham, Sussex. The congregation entertained the Bulpitts at a departure social, which was appreciated.); **Miss Connon**, (daughter of **Rev. James Connon**) 5 West Banks Terrace, Wick; **Mr. W.J. Doloughan** (lay reader); **Mrs. K.I. Duff-Dunbar** (secretary), Hempriggs, Wick; **Mr. Faint** (treasurer); **Mr. John Falconer** (treasurer), Roseneath, Scalesburn, Wick. **Mr. Falconer** in 1972 resigned as treasurer and from the vestry, as he and his family were moving to Hamilton - they later moved to the USA; **Mrs. Margaret Gale** (from 1965; treasurer), 61 Girnigoe St., Wick, now 10 Ackergill Crescent, Wick; **Miss Gardner**, 43 Grant St., Wick; **Mr. J. Gibbon** (treasurer); **Miss Glander**; **Mrs. Joan Lapwood**, The Camps, Wick; **Mrs. Macdonald** (resigned 1965 on account of her baby); **Dr. Doris MacIntosh** (Lay Representative 1971/2), 36 West Banks Ave., Wick; **Mr. Bill Mitchell** (Lay Representative 1966/7); **Mr. Riley**; **Mrs. Mary Stewart**; **Miss Woodward** (left before May 1961); **Mrs. Elizabeth Woolcombe** (wife of **Commander Woolcombe** of the Coastguard, and Lay Representative 1968/9). They left Wick in 1969. At the time of writing, **Mrs. Woolcombe** is a 90-year-old widow living and gardening at Golspie; **Mrs. Mackenzie** (1966-); **Mr. David Miller** (from 1969).

Mrs. Gardner, 16 Newton Road Wick, was collector from the congregation for the Clergy Stipend Fund for many years, and retired from the task in March 1964. **Dr. Mackintosh** offered to make the collection for one year, and this was gratefully accepted by the vestry. She was also Lay Representative for several years in the early 70s.

Also in March 1964 **Mr. D. Bruce**, treasurer of St. Peter's, Thurso, wrote to the Wick vestry explaining that extra car costs pertaining to the rector, for a heater and safety straps, had amounted to £30. He suggested that Wick pay £6 towards this, but Wick vestry decided to contribute £10. **Mr. Bruce** died in 1969, and a memorial service was held at Thurso.

The church cleaner, **Miss Henderson**, resigned in May 1964 and **Miss Sutherland** took on the position the following month. She in turn resigned in 1969 and a **Mrs. Tate** agreed to take on the work. Today the church is cleaned by a rota of members.

The church in November 1964 redeemed its Pulteneytown Estate feu duty obligation for the sum of £38.5.0, and so would in future have no annual feu duty to pay.

In August 1968 the vestry agreed that a token gift be given to **Mr. David Bruce** in recognition of his service in acting as organist for the last two years. In the same month **Mr.**

Ian Russell, Barbara Place, Wick, was thanked for putting up coathooks in the church vestibule, as authorised in June. They were a great convenience, said vestry members. In April 1970 he was thanked for building a cupboard over the fuse box & switches at the back of the church. He had also offered to treat the wooden flooring and pay for the materials. In March 1972 and at the AGM later, he was again thanked, this time for his redecoration of the church hall. **Mr. Russell** retired from the vestry in 1974, and the **Russell** family moved to Dundee in 1976.

A gift from Canada came in 1970 with the offer of an annual donation of Can\$500 (Canadian dollars) from a **Miss Dunn** during her lifetime, in memory of her brother **Stuart Dunn, R.C.A.F.**, who was killed in a flying accident near Wick. His funeral service had been held at St. John's and he was buried in Wick cemetery. Payment would be made on 1st December.

Centenary of opening of church, and onwards to the 150th celebrations.

Centenary celebrations of the opening of St. John's church, Wick, were held on Wednesday 24th June 1970, starting with holy communion at 8 am and 11 am, then a festal evensong at 7 pm followed by a meal at the Station Hotel. The bishop, **Rt. Rev. Duncan McInnes**, who was accompanied to Wick by **Mrs. McInnes**, gave the sermon. He died later that year. The Sunday School choir entertained with hymns and chants beautifully sung. The organist for this special occasion was **Mr. Charles Ball**, grandfather of the organist of the time (**Miss Jennifer Ball**, a pupil at Wick High School), and he had come all the way from Brora for the service.

The church building had been newly painted, and had a new heating system and new lighting, and had excellent floral decorations for the important event. After evensong the company moved to the Station Hotel for a good meal, with grace said by the bishop. There was also a centenary cake, suitably inscribed, donated by one of the church members.

The following Sunday, the preacher was a certain **Rev. John C. Hadfield** (who was to become Rector in 1977). At that time he was itinerant priest of the diocese of Argyll & the Isles, and visited on several occasions over the next few years.

In November the annual Sale of Work was held, with the stalls under various ladies of the congregation, and a large raffle organised by Mr. David Orrel with prizes donated from the congregation.

Members added to the vestry in the 1970s included: **Mrs. A. Gardner**; **Mr. Ian Russell** (People's Warden); **Mr. Douglas Woodall** (Priest's Warden), Westerlea, Janetstown, Wick; **Mrs. Elizabeth Woolley** (organist 1972-; Lay Representative 1974-76; treasurer 1972-76; secretary to Rev. Mallin; left Caithness 1977; given presentation by the church; died 1979); **Mr. Tom Phillips**, 20 Fountain Square, Haster, Wick; **Mr. Alex. Gant**, 5F, the Airport, Wick; **Mr. John Green**, Kynance, Roadside, Reiss, came on to the vestry in 1973, replacing **Mrs. Gale** who resigned. **John** became the new organist at the end of 1974, at Mrs. Woolley's suggestion, with her becoming his deputy. He was later elected as Treasurer in December 1977, resigning in 1982 from that plus the organist position on his taking up a post with the Highland Regional Council in Inverness.. He reported that **Mrs. Jennifer Ferguson** would take over as organist with **Mr. Duncan Gray** as deputy.. **Mrs. Clark** was on the vestry in the 70s; **Mr. Ian Ryder** (left 1979); **Mr. John McKenzie**, Haster (1977-1982;

Priest's warden 1979-; **Mrs. Speed; Mr. Alistair Lamont** (Secretary 1979-1982, when he and his family moved from Lybster to Stromness).

A "thank-you" letter was received around this time from the Windward Isles, acknowledging St. John's financial contribution towards their appeal for help.

Mrs. K.I. Duff-Dunbar resigned as Secretary in May 1971, after many years in the post, feeling unable to continue in the task. The vestry paid tribute to her excellent work over the years and accorded her a vote of thanks in appreciation. In December 1978, the vestry discovered that although their membership, including office-bearers, should not exceed eleven, a total of twelve had been elected at the AGM. The vestry agreed to act on a suggestion by the rector that Mrs. Duff Dunbar be made an honorary life member of the vestry in recognition of her long and invaluable service to St. John's. This would honour her and at the same time solve the number of vestry members problem. The secretary was to be asked to write to her inviting her to accept this honour.

Organist **Miss Jennifer Ball** sent a letter of thanks to the vestry in April 1972 for the congregation's gift of £20 to her in recognition of her services. She had purchased a new watch, and added the inscription "*from St. John's*". She was elected to the Vestry in December 1977, and resigned during 1980.

The **Miller** family, long standing members of the congregation, offered in 1972 to pay for the text to be inscribed around the arch over the chancel entrance. The previous lettering had been lost due to replastering after a dampness problem. The family were asked to wait while the arch and roof above were checked to ensure that no dampness was now present, but for month after month there were delays in getting the diocesan architect to do the necessary examination, and a tradesman to check the condition of the roof above. Repairs were indeed needed, and the lettering would need to be done on boards fixed to the archway. It was expected in 1976 that the lettering would be done, but work was still not completed until the following year, when the boards were delivered to the church hall and Mr. Gulland volunteered to paint the lettering, which he did at his home. The rector visited the Miller family to update them on progress.

In October 1972 the vestry expressed its thanks to **Mr. Dick Lapwood** for supplying and laying paving stones round the church paths.

Nurse Gardner (Miss Gardner), of Grant Street, was thanked by the vestry in June 1973 for the donation of a piano and stool for the church hall. The Secretary was asked to write a letter of thanks and to express their regret that illness had prevented her from being with them at worship and that she was much missed. The Secretary was also asked to write to **Mrs. Janet Gardner** to say how she was missed through illness; **Mr. Albert and Mrs. Janet Gardner** both died in 1973, as did **Nurse Gardner**, who left a sum of money to the church. **Mrs. Gardner** resigned from the vestry in December 1972, and her long service was acknowledged at the AGM. In particular she was noted for baking cakes for the annual Sale of Work. **Mrs. Ruth Woodall**, Westerlea, Janetstown, Wick was also to be written to, to express the vestry's thanks for her and her husband's fund-raising efforts at the whist drives in the church hall. **Ruth and Douglas Woodall** also ran the bridge club for many years.

In the 1972/3 year, St. John's was able to dispense with augmentation (central assistance with stipend costs) and also managed to pay the full quota asked by the diocese.

In 1975 the Wick and Thurso vestries got together in the Royal Hotel, Thurso to hear about and discuss the Representative Church Council report, "Crisis in the church". The members were addressed by **Canon McHardy** and **Mr. W. Cowan** on points contained in the papers. After 4 meetings, comments and suggestions from the vestries were forwarded to the diocesan authorities.

In June 1977 the vestry recorded their thanks to Messrs Banks, Green and Gulland for repairing the path from the road to the church hall.

The **Venerable John Collingwood Hadfield**, M.A., was born in 1912 in Lancashire. he was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, 1931-34, taking his B.A. in 1934 (M.A. 1938); then Wells Theological College, 1934-35; deacon 1935, priested 1936 (Manchester). He became curate at St. Chad's, Ladybarn, Manchester, 1935-1940, then priest-in-charge, 1940-1944. He moved to become vicar of St. Mark's, Bolton-le-Moors, Lancashire, 1944-1950; then vicar of St. Anne's, Belfield, Rochdale, Lancashire, 1950-62. He then moved to Scotland as rector at Rothesay, 1962-64, then became itinerant priest of the diocese of Argyll and The Isles, 1964-77, and was also canon of St. John's Cathedral, Oban, 1964-77. He was in addition diocesan adviser, religious education in day schools for the diocese, 1966-77; and synod clerk 1973-77. He moved to become priest-in-charge, Thurso and rector of Wick, 1977-1993, and was Archdeacon of Caithness, 1977-93. He died at his home on 24th February 1993 and was buried at Bower cemetery - being the mid-point between his two charges in Caithness. By chance, as his coffin was being lowered into the grave, two RAF Tornado aircraft flew low over the cemetery. **Bishop George Sessford**, who was present at the graveside, was heard to remark: "*Typical of father John - he even managed to arrange a fly-past!*"

He was married to **Margretta** ***** and they had 3 sons and 3 daughters, one of whom **Bridget** was priested in 2004, another is in South Africa, married with a family of 3. Two sons joined him in serving in the priesthood - **Christopher John Andrew Chad**, born 1939, and **Jonathan Benedict Philip John**, born 1943, B.A. 1964 (Univ. Coll., London), priested 1969 (Argyll & the Isles). A third son lives in Ireland.

After his death, his long service was recognised by the donation by his widow of an engraved window in St. John's, inscribed "*John Collingwood Hadfield, Archdeacon of Caithness, Rector of this charge, 1977-1993.*" In Thurso in 1994 a painting was gifted to the St. Peter's church by his family as a memorial to him. It is a painting of St. Peter holding the keys of Heaven, and is by local artist **Hazel Cashmore**.

It is also worth noting that his appointment as Archdeacon of Caithness was a revival by the bishop of an office not held for 300 years. His predecessor was **Alexander Gibson**, Minister of Bower from 1659 to 1692.

On 1st February 1978, **Rev. Hadfield** held a requiem eucharist at Wick for 3 people who had died on 28th January during a severe snowstorm at Ousdale, on the Ord of Caithness. The three were **James Bruce**, his wife **Christine Ann Bruce**, and **George Cameron**. The bodies of the **Bruces** were brought into the church at 3 pm that day, and given a burial service at St. John's the next day, with interment at Wick cemetery. **The Bruces** were a young couple with three children who lived at 6 Forss Road, Thurso. **Mr. Bruce**, whose parents lived in Wick, was cub scout leader for the 1st Scrabster sea scouts, and a former secretary of Thurso Round Table. His wife was a keen badminton player for Viewfirth Ladies. **Mr. Cameron** lived in Dingwall and was the general manager of the Norscot Hotel Group, in charge of all five hotels in the group.

On 23rd April 1978 the diocesan bishop - **The Right Rev. George Minshull Sessford** - made a visit to the Wick and Thurso congregations. At this morning service, the bishop dedicated the finally completed Miller memorial and rededicated the organ, which had been renovated, cleaned and tuned the previous fortnight; and also dedicated the 4 new Caithness Glass windows (3 on the north wall of the nave, plus the westernmost window on the south wall of the nave).

Right Reverend George Minshull Sessford, M.A. was born 7 Nov 1928 in Aintree, Lancashire, son of **Charles Walter Sessford** and **Eliza Annia Minshull**. He attended St. Andrews University 1949-51 (M.A. 1951), then Lincoln Theological College 1951-53. Deacon 1952, Priest 1954 (Glasgow & Galloway). Career: Curate, St. Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, 1953-58; Chaplain to Anglican Students, Glasgow University 1955-58; Curate-in-charge Cumbernauld, 1958-66; lecturer, Jordanhill Teachers Training College, 1958-61; Rector, Forres, 1966-70; Bishop of Moray, Ross & Caithness, 1970-93. Retired 1993, died 21 July 1996. Married:(1) 1952 - **Norah Hughes** (died 1985). issue - 3 daughters. (2) 1987 - **Joan Gwendoline Myra Black**, widow of **Rev. Charles Wilfred Black**, hon. asst. curate at Poolewe.

He was succeeded as Bishop by **Gregor MacGregor**, M.A., B.D. who was born in Glasgow, 17 Nov 1933, son of **Gregor MacGregor** and **Jean** ***** Educated at St. Andrews University, 1961-67 (M.A. Social Science 1964, B.D.(hons.), 1967; St. Mary's College, St. Andrews, 1964-67. He entered the Church of Scotland ministry from 1961-73 at Dundee then Stromness where on 30 Sept 1973 he demitted his charge and joined the Scottish Episcopal Church, working in a non-stipendary capacity in Glasgow & Galloway diocese, 1974-75 and Diocese of St. Andrews, 1976 where he became deacon and then priested in 1977, doing non-stipendary work with St. Andrews and East Neuk Ministry team, 1978-81. He was appointed rector at Glenrothes, 1981-86; then vice-Provost, Cumbernauld Cathedral and Priest-in-charge St. Andrew's, Millport, 1986-87, before becoming Rector at Dollar, 1987-90; then Missionary Priest, St. Luke's, Edinburgh, 1991-94. He then became bishop of Moray, Ross & Caithness, 1994-98, when he retired, but suffered a severe stroke a few days after retiring, and never fully recovered before his death in Edinburgh, 29th June 2003.

He married 1956 - **Elizabeth Jean Harris** - and they had 3 daughters and 1 son.

In March 1974 a letter from Captain Keirle of the Church Army intimated that he would again be walking from John O'Groats to Land's End as an act of witness, and would like to meet some of the St. John's congregation and hold a short service. This was done on 23rd April with the support of the vestry.

1976 was the centenary year of the Representative Church Council, and it was meeting for three days in May in Inverness. The **Archbishop of Canterbury** was to be present, and a presentation to mark the occasion was to be made. It was to be a Caithness Glass bowl/goblet, suitably engraved by St. John's member **David Gulland**. At the meeting, Caithness Glass pieces were presented to the Archbishop and other bishops attending, while sales of extra commemorative goblets at the conference and afterwards defrayed the cost of the presentation items.

David Gulland, born Edinburgh, 15 March 1934, was Rector's Warden for three years, and Lay Representative of St. John's in 1978. On 3rd September 1978 he gave an account of proceedings at the Representative Church Council held at Perth in June. David was Vestry Secretary 1977 until mid-1979 when he and his family left Caithness to live in Galloway. He

had moved to Wick in 1970 to set up and run the glass engraving department of Caithness Glass. He and his wife Pam moved to Dumfries in 1979, where he ran his own glass engraving business, with his work including church windows all over Scotland. He died at Dumfries, 27 July 2013, aged 79, survived by his wife Pamela and his three children, Louise, Jacqueline, and Charles, and their families.

On 29th October 1978 the Wick and Thurso congregations met together at St. John's for a Harvest Evensong, with 55 people attending. A similar Choral Evensong with both congregations at Wick was held on 28th October 1979.

Prayers for the dead were said on the afternoon of 15th January 1979 for Mrs. **Selina Forbes** who died that day and her body was brought to the church. A requiem eucharist was held on Sunday morning (17th) and her burial was at Wick cemetery in the afternoon.

Another burial was held on 31st March for **Ronald Moss**, who died 29th March 1979.

At the March 1979 Vestry meeting, in accordance with RCC decisions, an appointment was made of a surveyor (or architect) to carry out quinquennial inspections of the church buildings. He was **Mr. Duncan Mackenzie** of 8 Ross Street, Tain, and his first inspection was to be in the summer of 1979. He became ill before the due date, and the vestry appointed his partner, **Mr. May**.

Bishop George visited Wick on 20th May 1979 at which he confirmed two adult candidates - **Kenneth George Sinclair** and **Jane Annetta Moss**.

On 1st July **Mrs. Ruth Woodall**, as Lay Representative, gave an account of the Representative Church council held at Dundee in May. Ruth held the post for quite a number of years, until a reorganisation caused the demise of the Representative Church Council. She was later elected Lay Elector for the congregation.

A Requiem Eucharist was held on 10th October for **Mrs. Alexandra Miller Ball (nee Sinclair)**, first wife of Ronnie Ball, died 6th October 1979, with her burial and interment at Wick cemetery in the afternoon. She had been on the vestry and retired from that in 1974.

A shortened matins and holy eucharist, lasting 40 minutes in all, was held on 16th December 1979 when a broken electricity cable meant no heat or light was available at the church. Also in that month the vestry thanked the rector for paying for an extra 47 copies of the liturgy, and **Mr. Kenneth Sinclair** and **Mr. Harmsworth** for meeting the cost of 40 new copies of the prayer book. **Mrs. Marjory Banks**, the church cleaner for a number of years, declined to accept any extra payment for her work, and the vestry agreed to give her £24 per year to cover cleaning materials (previously paid for by herself). She retired from the post in March 1991, and the vestry, having noted that she had received a brooch and flowers some years before, voted to present her with a cheque for £50 as another "thank-you" for almost 30 years conscientious and caring service in taking care of the church.

The first technical survey of the church buildings was carried out by the appointed expert, **Mr. Hay of Tain** in late 1979. This was to be, at a minimum, once every 5 years, appropriately known as a quinquennial survey. After discussion of the survey report, **Mr. John Mackenzie** and **Mr. John Green** agreed to visit the building with tradesmen, and after the vestry agreed the contract they also agreed to ensure that the work to the building was done satisfactorily before payment was authorised.

A Christian Unity service for Wick was hosted by St. John's on 23rd January 1980. As **Rev. John Hadfield** was absent at an Inter-church Relations Cttee. in Edinburgh, the service was conducted by **Rev. A.A.Roy** (Bridge St. Church of Scotland), assisted by **Father John Symon** (St. Joachim's R.C. church) and **Rev. T.G.M.Robertson** (Wick Old parish Church of Scotland). The address was given by **Captain Derek Tyrrell** (Salvation Army, Wick), with several other ministers in the congregation.

Mr. K. Sinclair was added to the vestry in 1979. **Neil Thompson, Harrowfield, South Road, Wick** came onto the vestry in 1983, having moved to Wick with his family in July of that year to work for Highland Regional Council.

Deaths in 1980 included **Dr. Doris Mackintosh**; 92-year-old **Mrs. Chean**; and chronically ill **Mr. Hector Miller**. **Mrs. Speed's** non-member husband also died that year, and a sympathy letter was sent by the secretary on behalf of the congregation.

Peter MacDougall, Green Gables, George St., Wick, joined the vestry in November 1980 and his wife also joined and they were soon elected to secretary (**Margaret**, 1982-) and treasurer (**Peter**, 1983-), posts which they held with distinction for the next 20-odd years. **Mr. Lawrie Bell** came onto the vestry at the 1981 AGM, resigning in May 1983 when he moved to Kingussie. He was replaced by **Mr. Edward Gale**, who left the vestry after a few years. He died in 1995.

In February 1982 **Mrs. Jane Sinclair** was appointed the representative for Partners in Mission, in place of **Mr. Lamont**; and **Mrs. Brenda Green** joined the vestry in 1982, only to resign the following year when she moved to Inverness with her husband John and family. **John James** and **Mrs. M.Banks** joined in March 1983. A vacancy in July 1984 was filled by **Mr. Bill Brock**, assistant manager at the Bank of Scotland. **John James** resigned at the 1995 AGM due to moving south with his family, and the **Rodger** family also moved south around the same time.

In August 1982, the rector reported that **Professor Gordon Donaldson** had been invited to become Archivist to the Episcopal Church and would be visiting the rector the next week. The secretary was asked to provide a note of the earliest date of vestry and congregational minutes.

A report on the rectory showed that it required structural repairs costing thousands of pounds to rectify, and so the vestry appointed **Mr. MacDougall** to negotiate the possible sale of the rectory to the sitting tenant, **Mr. Scott**. A price was sought for a fence between the rectory and the church hall, and between the rectory and the church. After negotiating a likely price with the tenant, the matter was referred to the bishop for approval. A delay ensued, worrying the vestry, and it took a visit by the bishop in February 1983 to clear up the situation, when the bishop visited the rectory and was shocked by its condition. The trustees were the bishop, the rector, and representatives of the Horne and Harmsworth families. The bishop asked that the diocesan architect, **Mr. Nick MacIntyre**, make a visit shortly, to see the rectory for himself. After his visit he recommended a price double what had been provisionally agreed with the tenant, and the tenant said he was not interested at that price, and would want certain repairs carried out as soon as possible. The vestry agreed to write to the bishop and express their opinion that the architect's figure was unreasonably high in the circumstances. In July 1984 approval was given by the bishop to proceed with the sale after appointing a solicitor for the church.

At the 1983 AGM, thanks were expressed for the work of **Andrew, Philip and Jane Green** (who had moved to Inverness with their parents) and **Karen Lindsay** as servers at Sunday services.

In December 1984, the treasurer reported a donation of £280 from **Mrs. G.Watt**, Haster, being the amount she received from the sale of a knitting machine she no longer required. She considered that the church should benefit from the sale. The vestry appreciated the thoughtful act and wrote to thank her accordingly.

In March, 1985, the Rectory house, no. 8 Moray Street, was sold to the sitting tenant, **Mr. A.W. Scott**.

Mr. L.B.(Dick) Lapwood was voted on to the vestry in December 1985, and **Mr. Neal Harris**, manager of the Mercury Motor Inn - now the Norseman Hotel - was invited, through his keen interest, to join the vestry as a non-voting member from October 1986. He unfortunately left the district within the year.

Member numbers at May 1986 were 32 adults and a number of children.

Roof repairs costing over four thousand pounds were carried out in the summer of 1986, and the contractor's bill referred to *the English church!* Several other contractors used the erroneous term around this time.

During a long period of illness of the rector in 1987, the locum for many weeks was **Canon Kenneth Strachan**, who had also filled in on other occasions. Afterwards **Canon Strachan** declined payment of expenses and instead proposed that an equivalent amount be donated towards books for the library of the Cathedral of the Isles, Millport, for the benefit of those visiting for a retreat. After a lively debate, the vestry agreed to this idea and sent the appropriate amount to the provost of the cathedral.

More roof repairs – mainly slates - are noted at October 1987, to the tune of £100.

In November 1988 **Miss Rhona MacPherson** and **Miss Carol Sim**, both primary school teachers, were added to the vestry as non-voting members.

The church interior was repainted during 1989, including prior repairs to plaster, at a cost of nearly £2,000. The contractor's estimate called the church St John's Anglican Church, but Peter McDougall, the treasurer must have spoken to them, as the invoice has been altered to St John's Episcopal Church.

A Thurso firm did repairs to the leaded glass windows in the same year.

Further roof slate repairs were required in 1990.

Mrs. Jeanette Harper was elected to the vestry in November 1989, and **Mr. David Rudhall** was coopted in 1990 and 1991, but he unfortunately died during 1992 when he collapsed and died while in his boat, fishing for crabs. A substantial collection taken at his funeral was handed over to the RNLI shortly afterwards. At the 1992 AGM **Mr. Peter McCoy** was co-opted to replace him on the vestry.

Funerals in 1990 were held for **Mrs. Cadman** and **Mrs Walton**.

In 1990 there came a warning from the diocesan architect, **Mr. Andrew Wright**, that a considerable amount of work was needed on the fabric of the church over a period. Also the rector thanked **Father Donal Browne** for all his assistance during the year (while the rector was ill). **Father Browne** had been parish priest at Glenurquhart, but retired to Caithness and was living at Ham Farm, Brough.

At the 1991 AGM **Mrs. Liz Millard** was voted onto the vestry. Church Organist **Mrs. Jennifer Ferguson** was added to the vestry in 1995. In September 1996 a small cheque was voted to be sent to **Mr. David Spratt**, the relief organist who was always so willing and helpful at all times. Shortly afterwards he returned south to a teaching post in Carlisle.

Following the death of the rector in February 1993, a new rector was sought, and in the meantime a locum tenens was provided in the figure of **Rev. Gordon Tyson** of Tasmania, Australia, who was able to start in May 1993 as a non-stipendary priest with only accommodation and travel costs provided. He stayed for nearly a year, before returning to Tasmania. He is now rector of St. Stephen's, Wynyard, Tasmania. **Father A. Donal Browne** would continue to assist in the meantime, with the approval of the bishop, as he had been helping during Archdeacon **Hadfield's** illness. He asked for assistance with the communion, and invited **Neil Thompson** who agreed to help, provided the vestry were in agreement, which they were. **Neil** was licensed as a Special Minister of the Eucharist by **Bishop George Sessford** during the Sunday morning service at St. John's on 13th June 1993.

Archdeacon Hadfield's family had wished to purchase the existing parsonage at 4, Sir Archibald Road, Thurso, prior to his death, and wished to continue with the purchase. The valuation was £33/34,000, and the joint vestries agreed to this sale, as the property was not up to current standards set by the diocesan authorities. A new parsonage would require to be purchased to suit the modern standards, at an estimated cost of £60/65,000. The bishop attended a vestry meeting to discuss the matter, and, taking into account St. John's parsonage fund and money set aside for major repairs by the St. Peter's, Thurso congregation, it was estimated that there would likely be a shortfall of around £7,000 plus legal etc costs to be funded by the two congregations.

Matters were delayed for many months waiting for a waiver from **Lord Thurso**, necessary for selling the existing parsonage, and suitable properties were seldom on the market (4 bedrooms, etc.) at a price the churches could afford.

1993 was a time of large expenditure at St. John's. There was a payment of £3,000 to John Sinclair, joinery contractors for work on the church hall. This was the provision of steel profile sheeting on the outer walls. David Risbridger supplied fittings for the sink and waste drains; Malden Timber of Thurso installed the kitchen units, etc., while Gunn & Mackay did electrical work. Allans of Gillock provided gutters and downpipes, presumably for the hall – as handyman Peter Hendry did church roof repairs and cleared rhones and downpipes a few months later.

Grover Clyne, Moray Street, supplied and fitted cushionfloor floorcovering in the hall at nearly 700 pounds total, and the hall was also redecorated. As there was also a large architect's bill, that was probably connected with the hall exterior cladding, which still functions well today.

In February 1994 Hayes & Finch of Coatbridge supplied a sanctuary light, a silver plate ciborium; a crystal glass cruet; a brass lamp holder and a red sanctuary lamp glass.

During the vacancy there was a joint vestry which met to consider various matters, with **Father Tyson** and **Father Browne** assisting. **Father Tyson** told them that he and his wife (and daughter **Bronwyn**) would be leaving near the end of January 1994. After his departure, the joint vestry met in March 1994 under the chairmanship of the Dean, **Robin Forrest**, who informed them that four enquiries had been received for the vacancy, and he listed the names and details of each. Two were selected as possible candidates and invited to visit the parish in the near future. In the event only one candidate, the **Rev. Richard Martin**, took up the invitation.

In March 1994, due to strong interest in the property at 5 Naver Place, Thurso, which was being considered for purchase as a parsonage, an offer of £44,100 had been made and accepted, and there were legal fees of about £900 as well. In addition, gas central heating would have to be installed. Costs were split Wick one third, Thurso two thirds.

At St. John's, with the vacancy causing more use of the reserved sacrament, and with **Neil Thompson** licensed to dispense the Reserved Sacrament, it was suggested an Aumbry be obtained. This is a cupboard for holding the sacrament and associated items, and as **John Gray** and **Alan Jones** of the Thurso congregation both attended a woodwork class, they suggested making one and donating it to the church, an offer gratefully accepted by the vestry. Other items were donated as follows: Sanctuary light - **Neil and Mary Thompson**; crystal cruet - the choir; ciborium - **Peter & Margaret MacDougall**. These were dedicated in March 1994 by **Father Donal Browne**.

Despite concerns over the financial cost of a new clergyman, **Rev. Richard Martin** was agreed upon and instituted on Sunday 11th September 1994 at St. John's (and the previous day at Thurso), with a lunch afterwards in the church hall.

Rev. Richard Martin, born 1934, was educated at Rhodes University, South Africa, gaining his B.A. in 1954; then Emmanuel College, Cambridge (B.A. 1957, M.A. 1961); then Wells Theological College, 1957. He was made deacon at Portsmouth, 1959, and priested 1960 at Bloemfontein, S.A. Career: curate, St. Mary's, Portsmouth, 1959; curate, Bloemfontein Cathedral, 1960-63; rector Wepener with Dewetsdorp, S.A., 1963-69; rector Odenaalsrus, S.A., 1965-68; rector, St. Hugh's, Port Elizabeth, S.A., 1968-77; chaplain, St. Bede's Theological College, Transkei, S.A., 1977-80; rector, Hillcrest, Natal, S.A., 1980-87; curate, Ascension, Aldershot, Hants, 1987-94; priest-in-charge Thurso and rector, Wick, 1994-99; He became an hon. curate at Diptford (etc.), Devon, 1999.

His wife, Dorothy, died in 2017, and her funeral was conducted in St. Ninian's church, Invergordon, on June 12th.

September 1994 also saw agreement to use the 1982 (blue book) Liturgy in place of the 1970 (grey book) Liturgy. No decision was made on which translation of the Bible should be used. At the same meeting, at the request of the Rector, it was agreed that **Mr. Alan Finch** be licensed as a Lay Reader at St. John's, Wick. He had previously been licensed at St. John's, Inverness, but relicensing was required at a different church.

At the midnight mass service in 1994, among the congregation were TV personality **Philip Schofield** and his wife Stephanie, who had married at Ackergill Tower in March 1993 and had returned to celebrate Christmas in Caithness. On another occasion of a Christmas midnight mass service the rector was astounded to have a congregation of over 70 mainly

“well-heeled” people. The reason turned out to be a Christmas House Party at Ackergill who had all come to the service.

The church in July 1995 received a bequest of £1,000 from the Miss Marion A. Sinclair Wemyss Trust via Bishop George Sessford, as part of a bequest for the benefit of certain charges in the diocese. The money sent to St. John’s was to include the cost of adding the deceased’s name to her mother’s gravestone. Miss Sinclair Wemyss (born 1881, died 1st Jan 1982) latterly lived in Inverness and died in Craig Bunain hospital, Inverness.

The congregation in 1995 lost **Mr. Matthieson** who latterly lived at Hempriggs Residential Home, as well as **Edward Gale**, a former vestry member. At the AGM **Rhona MacPherson** wished to stand down to allow someone new to be elected. The AGM elected **Mrs. Lyn Ball** (2nd wife of **Ronnie Ball**), and **Mrs. Margaret Gale**; and proposed a book token be presented to **Father Donal Browne** to recognise his 60 years in the priesthood. **Donal** and his wife left Thurso in October 2001, moving first to York and then on to the small village of Wolfertown, on the Sandringham estate, where he died soon thereafter, on 23rd March 2002. During the 1980s and 1990s, a frequent visitor to St. John’s during the summer months was **sir Ralph Anstruther**, who owned land at Watten and who was Equerry to **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother**. His presence in the church usually indicated that the **Queen Mother** was in residence at the Castle of Mey.

The church hall was repainted in October 1996.

In passing, the church was from time to time over the years used for some concerts by the Wick Choral Society, who usually made a donation to the church from the proceeds of their concert.

The AGM in January 1997 saw the rector regretting that the **Brock** and **Finch** families would be moving away from the area shortly; but he welcomed the arrival of **Mr. Richard Murray** and **Mr. & Mrs. Reid** to St. John’s. While other officers were re-elected, **Neil Thompson** stood down as Alternate Lay Representative due to business commitments, and **Mr. Richard Murray** took his place. In 1998 the Alternate Lay Representative was **Mrs. Jennifer Ferguson**, and **Mrs Sarah MacLean** was elected to the vestry to provide a younger member. A new altar cloth was purchased in March 1997 from the regular supplier of altar requirements.

The funeral of **Maureen, Lady Dunbar of Hempriggs**, was held in the church on 27th March 1997. Donations were invited for the Parkinson Disease Society, in memory of Lady Dunbar.

During the year a section of the plasterboarding of the west wall had been stripped off to expose the areas of dampness, with the east wall also to be stripped, and this to be examined by **Mrs. Lyndall Leet**, a Thurso architect already deputed by the diocesan architect to work on the Thurso building. In April 1997 **Mrs. Leet** was appointed as architect to St. John’s, as the Dean had indicated that a local architect could be appointed. She would do the quinquennial inspection and report, which was now due. She reported in September 1998 that while Historic Scotland had a 2-year waiting list for grant-aid, it was worth putting in an application now, and get their views on the proposed work. On no account should cement be used in the pointing of stonework if we are to obtain a grant, and breathable paint should be used on all internal walls. A letter was to be written to Historic Scotland, who replied that they were unable to help as our building did not meet the high standards they require. The

vestry and also Mrs. Leet were surprised at the statement, as they had not seen the church, and Mrs. Leet said she would write to them herself. (Note: **Mrs Leet** died in Wick in 2017.)

In August a hatch was cut in the vestry, presumably from a quinquennial observation.

At the end of December 1997 an election in church made **Mrs. Joanna Elizabeth Lapwood** the new Lay Elector, following on from **Mrs. Ruth Woodall** whose 3-year tenure was up. In late 1997 the rector was involved with a Church of Scotland minister in a proposal to hold joint services once a month for anyone in the Lybster, Dunbeath and rural area who would like to attend. Unfortunately the Kirk Session at Lybster would not agree to the proposal, so it was dropped.

The two vestries at Wick & Thurso reported that the financial situation was such that when the present rector left, the two congregations may not be in a position to call a stipendary priest, so the congregations should consider a non-stipendary priest. The vestries recommended a joint committee to look at the problem.

In the same vein, the 1998 annual sale of work was recommended to be cancelled due to poor attendances and the increased hire cost of the Assembly Rooms, and it was decided to increase the number of coffee mornings instead. Mrs Lyn Ball had suggested selling tea towels with scenes of St. John's and other local places printed on, and this was approved for implementation. Several hundred were obtained from a supplier, and these proved popular, selling well.

In 1998 **Mrs. Jennifer Ferguson**, the organist, left the congregation to join St. Joachim's Roman Catholic church.

In August 1998 a fee was arranged for payment to **Mr. Craig Campbell** as interim organist. Craig continued as organist until he commenced his studies at the University of St. Andrews. **Mrs. Lyn Ball** began preparing to take over as organist when Craig was at university. She started in 2001, with Craig performing at the organ during his university vacations, until he moved to England to carry out his industrial placement in 2004.

During 1998 the church building became Category "B" listed, so that repairs have to be done to specified standards, but possibly grants might become available. In December, slates were repaired on the church roof: a continuing expense over the years.

During 1998/9, discussion was held by the two vestries with **Mr. Murray Watts**, who was proposing a priestly appointment for the two churches and shared with the Wayfarer Trust. It was decided to explore this option further, in consultation with the Dean.

Mr. Ken Aird resigned from the vestry at the beginning of 1999, but it was decided not to replace him. In March **Rev. Graham Tyler** asked **Sarah Maclean** if she would continue choosing the hymns after the rector departed. She was willing provided the vestry agreed. They did. **Rev. Fran Davies** would take communion to **Mrs. Spink** whenever possible as the lady was unable to attend church. The Dean visited Wick in late March and was satisfied with what he found.

In May 1999 more slater work was required, this time on the chancel roof. The unsafe stone cross, one of three on the roof of the church, was taken down and lead fitted at the same time,

at a cost of several hundred pounds. In September painterwork was required to windows and doors at the church, costing nearly 600 pounds.

The diocese elected a new bishop in September 1999.. He was **Right Rev. John Michael Crook**, B.A., born 11 June 1940, son of **John Hadley Crook** and **Ada** Educated University of Wales (St. David's College, Lampeter), B.A. 1962. College of Resurrection, Mirfield, 1962-64. Deacon 1964 (Stafford for Lichfield); Priesthood 1965 (Lichfield). Curate, St. John's, Horninglow, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs., 1964-66; Curate, All Saints, Bloxwich, Walsal, Staffs., 1966-70; Rector, St. Michael's, Inverness, 1970-78, and Rector St. John's, Inverness, 1974-78. Chaplain, ACF, 1973-78; Rector, Aberfoyle, Doune and Callander, 1978-87. Canon, St. Ninian's Cathedral, Perth from 1985. Rector, Bridge of Allan, 1987-99, Synod Clerk, diocese of St. Andrews, etc., 1997-99. Elected Bishop of Moray, Ross & Caithness, 1999 to date. Married: - 1965: **Judith Christine Barber** - 1 son, 3 daughters.

In September 1999 **Mrs. Sarah MacLean** resigned as secretary of the vestry as she and her family were moving to Ross-shire, and **Mrs. Margaret MacDougall** resumed the post of secretary.

A revision of the church roll, particularly looking to members not present for some time, found that **Mr. & Mrs. John Banister**, owners of Ackergill Tower, have chosen to attend Bridge St. Church of Scotland, and **Steven Copinger** wished his name removed from the roll. This left 27 on the roll, of whom 20 are regular attenders and 7 who are unable for various reasons to attend church but some of whom help the church financially.

In January 2000 **Dr. Richard Stanley**, a physician at Caithness general hospital was added to the vestry. Richard's wife Sue, although not a church member, was unwell for some time and in the prayers of the church. She suffered a stroke and died within a few hours in early 2005, and her funeral was held in St. John's.

While there was no apparent need at present for a Child Protection Officer, due to the lack of a Sunday School, it was later discovered that **Mrs. Jenny Gregory**, the C.P.O. at Thurso was willing to act for St. John's also, and the vestry decided to pursue this option. The vestry also donated £50 to the Hospital Chapel Fund.

A lengthy series of discussions were held over many months regarding a request to instal in the church a plaque in memory of **Col. Hildreth's** late wife, **Kate**, at the instigation of the trustees of the late **Col. Hildreth**, who died April 1999. The plaque was presently situated in the field where she had been killed in a riding accident, but his will requested it be moved to the church. The vestry had earlier decided that no more memorials be placed within the church, and most still opposed the idea. The bishop suggested the plaque might go in the church porch, but this was later discounted, as was the idea of a plaque in the church grounds. Eventually the trustees found another site for the plaque, and the church was no longer involved.

Mrs. Margaret McCoy died in March 1999, and **Neil Thompson's** parents, frequent visitors to St. John's when here to see the family, died within weeks of each other in 1999/2000.

In June 2000 a donation of £50 was received from **Rev. & Mrs. E.Littler** of Harwich, with a letter saying how much they enjoyed the 2 weeks they spent in Caithness. They have since become regular visitors to Caithness, and Rev.Eric Littler (now retired and living in Warminster) returned in July 2005 to officiate for three weeks.

At the Jan. 2001 AGM, vestry secretary **Mrs. MacDougall** referred to the death of **Mrs. Marjory Banks**, a very loyal member of the church who although latterly unable to attend services had supported the church financially. She also welcomed new members **Kay and Ivan Britton**. As the office of Lay Elector has now been abolished, the lay representative or alternate will carry out the necessary duties. She also thanked **Neil Thompson** for the beautiful Processional Cross gifted to St. John's in memory of his late father and mother, a tribute appreciated by everyone.

Rev Graham Tyler in January 2001 referred to a likely candidate for the vacancy, **Rev. John Stevenson**, who along with his wife **Jane** would be visiting the area on 11/12th February. The Thurso congregation were to meet him in the Pentland Hotel on the Saturday afternoon. He would preach at Wick on the Sunday morning and he would meet the congregation at a buffet lunch in the church hall afterwards. Representatives of the two churches would afterwards meet with **Murray Watts** of the Wayfarer's Trust to discuss financial arrangements. The Trust offered partial funding of the rector's stipend for two years in return for his assistance at the Freswick site on a regular basis.

The vestry in February unanimously favoured the appointment of **Rev. John Stevenson** to fill the vacancy, although he might not be able to start until September. He was presently based in Israel, where he and his wife were directors of Stella Carmel Anglican Retreat House and conference centre, Anglican National School, Jerusalem. In May the vestry heard a talk by **Mrs. Jenny Gregory**, child protection officer, Thurso, on the nature of her work. She was thanked and the vestry announced that two persons at Wick would now cover the work at St. John's. **Miss Rhona MacPherson** would be child protection co-ordinator and **Mrs. Lyn Ball** would act as Independent Person in this context. Mrs. Gregory left the ladies with some relevant literature.

A large tree fronting Moray Street had become hollow and unsafe. Tenders had been received for removing the tree and further tree pruning in the church grounds, but the Highland Region Forrestry Officer, **Mrs. Janet Scott**, had said no work was to be done prior to an inspection by her office. She visited the site and confirmed that the offer from the Environmental Forestry Service, Ardgay, would meet with her recommendation, and so their tender was accepted.

The vestry met with **Rev & Mrs. Stevenson** after morning service on 8th July to finalise a few matters prior to the Stevensons arriving in September. As they had their own new car, the parish car could be sold and the proceeds distributed between the two charges. They also confirmed that redecoration at the rectory would be unnecessary.

Rev. John Stevenson was born in 1939 at Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Education: Stewarton primary/secondary school; 2 years at family farm; Glasgow University 1960-64, M.A. 1964. started career as a teacher in Ayrshire after training at Jordanhill, Glasgow, finally rector of Moffat Academy from 1976-1990. St. John's College, Nottingham - Certificate of Christian Studies, 1987. Edinburgh Theological College, 1990-92; Deacon 1987, priested 1988 (Glasgow). Honorary Priest-in-charge, St. John's, Moffat, 1986-92; Priest-in-charge, Gretna, Langholm & Eastriggs, 1992-95, then moved to work in Israel as Director of Stella Carmel Retreat House & Conference Centre, 1995-1998; Principal of the Anglican International School, Jerusalem, 1998-2000; then part of a team setting up Alexander College, Jerusalem, for clergy training, 2000-2001; St. John's, Wick, and St. Peter's, Thurso, 2001, retired Dec. 2004, but continued in post as a retired priest on a basis of 75% input for 50% of stipend,

with the enthusiastic support of both congregations. Married to **Jane Dawson Alexander** in 1968. Family: Will, Ewan, and Ellen.

Arrangements for the Collation Service for the **Rev. John Stevenson** on Saturday 15th September 2001 at the Thurso church were as follows: The service to follow the 1982 Liturgy; Representatives; **Peter MacDougall**, Priest's Warden, Wick and **Mrs. Eileen McLellan**, People's Warden, Thurso would stand before the Bishop to welcome the priest; **Mrs. Ruth Woodall**, lay rep., Wick, and **Mr. David Fraser**, recently retired churchwarden, Thurso, would present a Bible; **Mr. Richard Stanley**, Wick vestry member and **Mrs. Charlotte Lowe**, Thurso vestry member, would present oil of anointing; **Mrs. Lyn Ball**, vestry member, Wick and **John Stillwell**, Priest's Warden, Thurso, would present a lighted candle; **Mr. Neil Thompson**, minister of the sacrament, Wick, and **Ian Widdowson**, minister of the sacrament, Thurso, would present the bread and wine. After the service, there would be a light buffet in the Royal Hotel.

At the 2001 Christmas Eve midnight mass service, a new set of white priest's vestments and matching altar purse and veil were dedicated. They had been made and presented to the church by **Mary Thompson** using silk material purchased on a visit to India the previous October.

Rev John Stevenson served St. John's until he retired and went to live in Moffat in September 2006

At the January 2002 AGM **Richard Stanley** was elected Lay Representative, with **Ruth Woodall** as Alternate, and two new members were elected to the vestry - **Mrs. Kay Britton** and **Mr. Gordon Johnson**, both recent arrivals retiring with their spouses from the Aberdeen area. At the August 2002 vestry the appointment of a Health & Safety Officer for the church and church hall was filled by **Neil Thompson**, who then investigated the legal requirements and drew up a health & Safety Policy document, later approved by the vestry and by the local authority's Health & Safety Dept.

Tarmac was laid between the roadside pavement and the church hall entrance in 2002, a vast improvement on the old stone slabs which were becoming hazardous.

In Nov. 2002 the vestry agreed to a joint bank account with Thurso, which would gain better interest rates for the Wick congregation.

Bishop John (John Michael Crook, b. 1940, bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, 15 Sep 1999 – 2007, when he retired), asked that each congregation hold a meeting to discuss the ordination of women bishops, and in February 2002 such a meeting was held at St. John's and the idea met with general approval.

In 2003 **Mrs. Ruth Woodall**, with her retiral from the vestry, was awarded a special long service certificate, presented by the Bishop, marking her very many years of working for the church in many different ways. Others retiring were **Ruth's** husband **Douglas**, and **Mrs. Margaret MacDougall** finally retired as Secretary after 20 years, joining the vestry as an ordinary member replacing **Mrs. Jeanette Harper** who took over as the new Secretary. **Mrs. Eunice Bradley** joined the vestry replacing **Mrs. Joan Lapwood** who retired through ill-health.

Mr. Peter MacDougall gave notice that he intended to retire as Treasurer the following year, allowing time for a successor to be prepared. **Mrs. Eunice Bradley** agreed to take on the post of Treasurer at the next AGM. **Mrs. Margaret Gale** was elected People's Warden in succession to **Douglas Woodall**.

In October 2003 the bishop welcomed **Peter Darmady**, **Richard Stanley**, and **Andrew Wilson** to the lay posts of Special Ministers of the Sacrament, joining **Neil Thompson** in this role at St. John's. Following this, at the 150th anniversary service in 2005, **Richard** and **Andrew** were admitted to the Scottish Guild of Servers, whereby they wear a cross on a ribbon round the neck, as well as their cassock and surplice, as indicative of membership. **Peter** preferred a less formalised style of duty as a minister of the sacrament, and both choices were agreeable to the Rector.

At the 2004 AGM, **Mrs. Brenda Herrick** replaced **Mr. Ivan Britton** as Alternate Lay Representative.

Another move towards improving the accessibility of the church was the idea of replacing some of the pews with comfortable chairs, to suit elderly and infirm parishioners. The proposal was put to the congregation, and the majority were in favour, with a number indicating a willingness to purchase chairs for the church in memory of a deceased loved one. Enough chairs were gradually purchased to replace several rows of pews on each side of the church

Rev. Graham Reginald Tyler, born 1925, and who had served as an RAF navigator in Lancaster bombers during World War 2, arrived in Caithness in 1959 to be a health physicist at the Dounreay nuclear plant; He was ordained Deacon in 1995 at Thurso, and appointed as hon. assistant curate for the two congregations. He helped with services at Wick during vacancies, and eventually was ordained by **Bishop John** to the Presbyterate (i.e. priested - made a priest) at St. Peter & the Holy Rood church, Thurso, on 19th February 2005, the day before the 150th anniversary of the founding of the congregation at Wick.

On Sunday 20th February 2005 **Bishop John** led the celebratory anniversary service at St. John's to mark the 150 years since the founding of the congregation, and the inauguration of a new Sunday School was another duty performed by the bishop at the same time. The service was followed by a special lunch at Mackay's Hotel, attended by members and friends, as well as **Father John Allan** of the local Roman Catholic congregation and the newly ordained **Father Graham Tyler** was given a place of honour next to the Bishop. He was applauded by all when welcomed by the Bishop. He was to take his first service as hon. associate priest at St. John's the following Sunday. Graham's service in that post was short, as he died on 7th March, 2006.

The next incumbent came all the way from Tasmania. She was **Rev. Wendy G. Knott**, daughter of a Church of England priest. She was formerly a senior professional librarian working at the University of Tasmania library in Hobart, before embarking on her new calling. She worked with a group of charges in the Hobart area until she sought a charge in the UK. Caithness managed to attract her attention, and her application was well received. She began her ministry in Caithness in December 2006. Her collation was held at St. Peter and the Holy Rood church, Thurso, on 14th January 2007, officiated by the Most Rev Dr Idris Jones, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and refreshments afterward were in the Pentland Hotel.

Wendy remained the incumbent for both churches until her retirement in 2017. St. John's organised a retirement lunch for in the church hall after morning service on 11th June, where she received several retirement gifts. Another gift was handed over at the end of the morning service by the Poltney Handbell Ringers, who had performed during the service.

Wendy had also been a keen member of the St. John's Singers, a small group who performed in church occasionally and gave an annual concert in the church. She had also encouraged the introduction of a Traidcraft monthly stall after the church service, when fair trade products are sold at cost price to benefit small producers in Africa and Asia.

At the suggestion of **Dr. Richard Stanley**, the church instituted a routine over the summer months of opening the church visitors every Wednesday afternoon. While few passers-by have availed themselves of the opportunity, it did offer useful press publicity for the church, and a selection of tourists have called in, as have some local residents.

The church took part in the national Doors Open Day scheme from 2010, on a Saturday in September, with limited success. By 2014 the number of visitors was so few that the Vestry decided to discontinue participating.

In 2011, it was suggested that alterations be made to the Church Hall to provide easier access to the toilet for disabled persons, particularly those with wheelchairs. A helpful joiner was employed and made the requisite alterations. This involved making a new doorway into the kitchen, and dispensing with the short corridor, incorporating it into the toilet area, the original door now becoming the entrance to the toilet facilities. This redesign was reckoned what should have been done when the hall was first built! In the course of the work, part of the woodwork was found to be pencilled with the name of a Glasgow joinery firm and the date 19 May 1912. It was assumed to be the time of building, but the church minutes do not mention this. Research in a local newspaper revealed that the building was opened by holding a sale of work on June 26th 1912. It was described as the Church Room.

Former Treasurer, **Peter John MacDougall**, died on 17th March 2012 in Riverside Care Home. His widow, **Margaret**, survived until 14th December 2016, when she died in the same Home.

Peter's files of accounts had remained in their house, and came to the church in 2017. After judicious weeding of minor bills, and duplicate and extraneous documents, the records were passed to Caithness Archives for safekeeping at their new home within Nucleus (the National Nuclear Archive) near the airport.

Work on the roof of the hall store/shed saw the slates repaired/replaced in 2014, and at the same time missing slates were replaced on the church roof, stopping the leaks into the church.

Several stone crosses had fallen from the church roof over the years, and in 2014 a French stonemason working temporarily in Caithness was able to carve one replacement cross at a reasonable price, the cost defrayed by donations from members of the congregation. It remains in store at present due to the high cost of lifting it to the roof for installation.

The railings around the church grounds are in a dilapidated state, but would be too expensive to replace without considerable financial help from outside. The street gate to the front door is askew and so does not close properly, and the double gates on the main road are at present unusable. A thorn hedge was generously planted by **Andrew Wilson** several years ago, but

this is still too immature to act as a true deterrent yet. A portable ramp is held in the vestibule to assist wheelchair users to enter the church.

Fundraising is a perennial task to supplement the weekly givings of the small congregation, and several ventures have become staples. A single sale of secondhand books (all donated) has become a successful four-per-year event, and an annual bazaar and other fund-raising events have had a similar impact. While coffee mornings had tailed off and were stopped, they were revived a few years later and remain well attended.

A county-wide organisation called Befriending Caithness was formed, to encourage friendships for lonely people, and our church volunteered to be one of several hosts for a free get-together for the lonely and their befrienders. It happens monthly, catered by church members, and is extremely well attended.

The idea of a toilet attached to the church building was revived and is now at the stage of active fundraising, with a Toilet Launch Fund established, linked to a dedicated bank account. A child-sized plastic toilet sits at the back of the church to receive donations. In 2018 the plans, drawn up by a Thurso architect, were ready and planning application submitted to Highland Council.

The retirement of **Rev Wendy Knott** in June 2017 forced the churches of Wick and Thurso to face the fact that they could not financially support a full-time priest, and discussions were held with **Bishop Mark Strange** (b. 1961; **Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, 2007- ; Primus, 2017-**). He eventually was able to provide **Rev Chris Mayo (Priest-in-charge, East Sutherland and St Andrew's Tain)** to take charge of the priestly duties on an occasional basis, with services otherwise taken by the local priory using the reserved sacrament. The bishop's plan was to bring in a trainee priest for Wick and Thurso when she got to the stage of an appointment; half of her stipend to be paid by the diocese, half by the two charges. **Bishop Mark** was shortly afterwards (27th June 2017) elected Primus – presiding bishop - of the Scottish Episcopal Church, a signal honour after only ten years as a bishop.

Almost immediately after his first service at St. John's, Rev. Chris Mayo was placed by the bishop on sick leave, as he had been unwell and overworking. He has remained off duty for many months, and the vestry has had to provide for the weekly services, partly by using the reserved sacrament, and partly by the occasional pastoral assistance of Rev David Balfour and other retired priests when David was not available.

Long-standing and much-loved member Ronnie Ball, a retired policeman died on 8th May.

On 10th May, a first Animal Service at the church was conducted by Miss Judith Crow, a member of the priory. People were invited to come and bring their animal pets with them. It was quite well attended, having been widely advertised, and no major mishap was reported!

This history of St. John's and its people naturally has no end at present. The congregation remains small in numbers but healthy in its attitude and Christian giving, although finances remain very tight.