

Extract from "History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733 - 1900 by Rev Robert Small D.D. Edinburgh 1904

AYTON, SPRINGBANK (ANTIBURGHHER)

THE earliest trace of this congregation's origin is found in a Minute of East- barns session, of date 11th February 1771. That day a petition from the members residing in the parish of Coldingham was laid before the session desiring some supply of sermon at the village of Coldingham. As there were fifteen miles between the two places the applicants were entitled to plead "that it was not in their power to give due attendance upon the dispensation of ordinances." Little was done for the time, but on 14th December 1772 the same parties came forward desiring a disjunction in order to erect themselves into a distinct congregation, and at next meeting it was agreed to submit the matter to the Presbytery, with the proviso that if the petition were granted there should be strict attention paid to the "marches." On 2nd March 1773 the Presbytery decided to disjoin, making Windilaw the boundary between Eastbarns and the new formation. On 15th August 1774 a reference came before the Presbytery of Earlston from the session of Duns bearing on the same cause. Some of their members on the east side had applied for a disjunction, that they might be annexed to Coldingham, a proposal to which that session was strongly opposed. The Presbytery was in difficulties, and referred the matter *simpliciter* to the Synod. They might disjoin from Duns, they said, but they could not annex to Coldingham, that place not being within their bounds. But by-and-by Duns had reason to be more seriously apprehensive. On 26th June 1775 the people of Coldingham intimated the ordination of three elders, and at the same time petitioned the Presbytery for permission to have their place of worship at Ayton. This was coming nearer Duns by a good way, though distant "about eleven measured miles." To strengthen the claim they were backed by a petition to the same effect from 15 members of the Established Church at Ayton. Two things were now decided on by the Presbytery - they would refer the question of what was to be done to the Synod, and they would write Mr White, the Antiburgher minister of Duns, as his interests were much involved. The Synod in September 1775 delayed their decision till another meeting, leaving the session of Duns time to bring up such objections as they might think fit, and in the meantime the Presbytery might grant occasional supply at Ayton. In April 1776 the Synod, in the face of a remonstrance from Duns, sanctioned the removal by a great majority. The congregation, according to their own records, on settling down at Ayton worshipped for a time in a large carpet factory. The building of the church has been assigned to 1781, but, as the feu-duty began to be paid in 1776, an earlier date is called for. It accommodated about 300, but the cost cannot be ascertained.

First Minister - JOHN TURNBULL, from Glasgow (now Cathedral Square). Ordained, 3rd March 1779, on a call signed by 43 male members, and after having been a preacher for nearly nine years. The stipend was £40, and to improve the position of the minister the people set about building a manse for him in 1783. On 23rd February 1790 Mr Turnbull had to be deposed for immorality. He afterwards removed to Glasgow, where he was restored to office with the sanction of the Synod in 1792. When in Ayton Mr Turnbull had figured as a controversialist in a "Review of the Anti- Government Scheme" directed against the Reformed Presbyterians, and now when disputes

arose in the Antiburgher Synod over the New Testimony he took a strong stand on the Old Light side, and was even described in one of the pamphlets of the day as "the tool of the Constitutionalists". When the crisis came he cast in his lot with "Dr M'Crie's party", and their handful of followers about Glasgow met for public worship in his classroom. As showing the spirit in which he acted at this time we may refer to a remonstrance he addressed to the Synod in 1804. "They read on until they found that it contained insults to the Synod and the members thereof, so they stopped, and appointed the clerk to remit it to Mr Turnbull, giving him to know that he will be attended to when he writes to them in a decent and becoming manner." He published a pamphlet about this time, entitled "Old Wine better than the Pretended New." In the Old Light connection Mr Turnbull preached frequently, and he was engaged for many years in Glasgow as a teacher of Hebrew and the Classics. In 1809 the Constitutional Presbytery appointed him to train the students in Hebrew, in which he must have been a proficient in his day, for he published a translation of the New Testament into that language for Jewish use. He died in Glasgow, 14th December 1818, in his seventy-sixth year.

Second Minister - ROBERT WILSON, from the parish of Eckford and the congregation of Morebattle. Ordained, 28th March 1792. There were better prospects now, the village having increased since the former ordination by about one-half. The stipend, exclusive of the manse, began at £45, but in 1799 it was £50, and in 1812 it was £60, with taxes paid and a horse provided for travelling to Presbytery and Synod. The people were sensible that this was inadequate, and were trying to do better, but found themselves unable. The membership at this time was about 140, and the opinion of the Presbytery was that though few in number they might do more and that they ought to adopt measures for that purpose. The parish minister, on the other hand, testified very characteristically of both congregations twenty years before: "They contribute with zeal, and many of them with a liberality ill suited to their circumstances for the support of their Ecclesiastical Establishments." Mr Wilson died, 17th February 1816, in the fifty-ninth year of his age and twenty-fourth of his ministry. The inscription on his family tomb stone is sadly interesting. The mother died, 7th May 1799, aged thirty-one, and her infant daughter, thirteen days old, followed on the 9th, so that they were buried together in the same grave. She left three boys behind her, the eldest about six, and all of whom in succession became students. Of these the second, Patrick, died in 1811, before his literary course at college was finished, aged sixteen. Robert, his elder brother, entered the Hall in the following year, and after attending two sessions died, aged twenty. At Mr Wilson's death in 1816 John, the youngest, alone remained, and his father hoped a kind Providence would watch over him. But he was not to be left long behind. He entered that season on the study of Divinity, and died soon after completing his third session, in the twenty-fourth year of his age. A brief Memoir of John Wilson is found in the Christian Magazine for February 1820.

Third Minister - JAMES STARK, from Cumbernauld, a cousin of Dr Stark, Dennyloanhead, and also of the Rev. Thomas Stark, Forres. Ordained, 13th April 1819. During the vacancy the congregation felt embarrassed, and could not undertake more than £80 of stipend, with house and garden, the membership being little more than 100, their debt £190, and the income from seat-rents £30, and from collections other £30. Such being the situation of affairs the Presbytery, when the call came out to Mr Stark, said they could not urge him to accept, though they had previously expressed their

willingness to do everything in their power to encourage and support the congregation. In 1836 the communicants numbered 130, of whom about two-fifths were from other parishes, the half of these being from Coldingham. The stipend was £80, and at that figure it continued all through Mr Stark's ministry, with the manse, and £6 for sacramental expenses. The debt was £250, but they had £200 of this free of interest. In 1862 a proposal for union came from the East congregation, the first formal attempt in that direction. They were about to build a new place of worship, and it occurred to them that the site of the West church would be eminently suitable if an amalgamation could be effected. A congregational meeting was held to consider the matter, and Mr Stark expressed his views and feelings, and then withdrew. His conviction would be that, though he were to retire, his people would not settle down contented under Mr Montgomery's ministry, and he would naturally wish further discussion arrested. Accordingly the proposal was declined, "as inexpedient in present circumstances." Six years after this Mr Stark, owing to the abatement of natural strength, yielded to the conviction that his work was nearly over, and his people, with harmony and kindly feeling, proceeded to provide him with a colleague. When a moderation was applied for Mr Montgomery came forward, insisting upon the union of the two congregations in Ayton, and when the petition was granted he lodged a protest and appeal, which, however, was not prosecuted.

Fourth Minister - WILLIAM WILSON, from Union Church, Kirkcaldy. Ordained as colleague and successor to Mr Stark, 3rd March 1869. His stipend was to be £150, and the senior minister was to have the occupancy of the manse for life. This was not to be long, as Mr Stark died, 21st July following, in the seventy-eighth year of his age and fifty-first of his ministry. It was the Fast Day, and he had been able to attend public worship. In the afternoon he had just finished the reading of a sermon in French, a language with which he was familiar, "when his head quietly fell back on the chair, the book dropped on the floor, and he passed away." One of his sons, the Rev. John Stark, was minister at Horndean. Mr Wilson on becoming sole pastor got possession of the manse, which was improved in 1871 at an outlay of £150, the people raising £100, and the Board allowing £50. On 9th April 1872 the new church, with accommodation for 400, and built at a cost of £1500, was opened by Professor Cairns, the opening collection amounting to £100, and it was entered free of debt. In 1877 the income from seat-rents and collections reached £238, and all went on smoothly for a course of years. The members at this time were 168, and there were five elders, one of them with Reston for his district, at a distance of three miles. The stipend was now £160, and at this level it kept till the close of 1884, when a supplement of £30 a year was felt to be imperatively required owing to the loss of wealthy members and other causes. The question of union was now pressed to the front by the Augmentation Board, but no scheme that could be suggested was acceptable to both congregations. The deputies who visited Ayton reported that the attachment of Springbank people to their minister was strong and that to press the matter further was inexpedient, and might be injurious. So augmentation grants, varying from £25 to £50, were made year after year, with right to the surplus. Meanwhile the membership was on the decline, till in 1892 it settled down at 130, and the stipend from the people was slightly under £100. But the fretting action of the current in the direction of union pertains rather to the history of Summerhill congregation. It is enough to state here that towards the close of 1893 it was arranged that Mr Wilson should accept the position of senior minister,

and retire from active service on a grant of £70 from the Synod Fund until he should be eligible for an annuity from the Aged and Infirm Ministers Fund. In this both minister and people were brought regretfully to acquiesce. But the adjustment has wrought for good, and has freed them from continuous embarrassment. The narrative is resumed under the heading of the United Church, Ayton.

AYTON, SUMMERHILL (BURGHER)

ON 11th November 1777 the Burgher Presbytery of Edinburgh received a representation from some people in Ayton of their necessitous condition with respect to a gospel ministry, and craving that the Presbytery would appoint them diets of sermon. The Antiburgher congregation had scarcely got footing as yet, and the conflict of interests was to be regretted. Supply having been continued for about three years the congregational records land us among accounts for the new church, the money raised by the people for this purpose up to May 1782 being £184, and £125 was borrowed. The sittings were about 300.

First Minister - JOHN THOMSON, from Bridge-of-Teith. Ordained, 21st January 1783. The close came in this wise eleven years after. On 13th February 1794 the Presbytery met *pro re nata* to consider a letter from Mr Thomson containing the demission of his charge, and wishing the congregation all spiritual and temporal prosperity, both of which he had done so much to destroy. It proved a case of confirmed drunkenness, attended by "cruel and outrageous" treatment of his wife. Perhaps the saddest item in the evidence was a written declaration by Mr Thomson's father. The worthy man, an elder in Bridge-of-Teith church, had come to Ayton the summer before, intending, we may conclude, to spend the evening of life beneath his son's roof, for he accepted office as a member of session, but "in consequence of Mr Thomson's irregular conduct he had returned to the Bridge-of-Teith." Here now was his own statement, attested by the minister and session clerk there, "that he had seen his son John drunk at different times." On 11th March, the charge being found proven, sentence of deposition was pronounced. The accused compeared in the mood for resistance, but he did not hazard a protest. According to Dr George Brown he afterwards enlisted as a soldier, and was killed by falling from a rock at Gibraltar. The congregation now called Mr Hector Cameron, as did also Jedburgh and Moffat, but when the vote was taken in the Synod 59 declared for Moffat, 2 for Jedburgh, and none for Ayton.

Second Minister - DAVID URE, from Haddington (East). Ordained, 27th August 1795. There were big prospects now. Though the number of names at Mr Ure's call is not given that to Mr Cameron was subscribed by 304 members and 41 adherents. The Old Statistical History stated in 1791 that "the Burgher meeting-house is of rather a better appearance than the other, and the sect of Seceders who attend it are more numerous and of principles more accommodating to the times." The writer makes the stipend £60 or £70 a year, the minister being also provided with a house. The cause making progress, it was needful to enlarge the church, which was done in 1814. For this purpose £110 was raised, £44 from Ayton and £66 from other quarters, such as Reston, Prinderguest, Eyemouth, Foulden, and Chirnside. In 1836 the communicants amounted to upwards of 500, and about two-thirds of the people were in Ayton parish. By the erection of the additional aisle in 1814, which cost about £300, the church had sittings now for 560. The stipend was £100, with a manse and garden, £5 for sacramental expenses, and £3 for

taxes. Mr Ure died on the last day of the year 1845, aged seventy-three, as the tombstone, "erected by a few friends as a tribute of respect to their departed pastor," states. He was in the fifty-first year of his ministry, and for forty years had never been a single Sabbath laid aside from pulpit work. Of Mr Ure we find little to record beyond this, that he was kind in heart and placid in manner.

Third Minister - THOMAS MONTGOMERY, from Annan, who had been previously called to Rattray. Ordained, 20th September 1846. In the latter years of Mr Ure's ministry the membership had been much encroached on by the formation of churches at Chirnside and Eyemouth. Still, Mr Montgomery's call was signed by 243 members. The stipend at this time was £105, and the congregation was engaged in liquidating by degrees their debt of £250. In 1850 two of the members offered £20 if the congregation would raise another £100 within two years, and in 1853 the whole burden was removed, with the aid of £30 from the Debt Liquidating Fund. In 1862 an offer of £700 was accepted for the old church and manse, and the place of worship now occupied by the united congregation was opened by Dr Cairns on 14th July 1864, with sittings for 500, and built at a cost of £1300. This was followed soon after by the rebuilding of the manse, for which a grant of £200 was obtained from the Manse Fund, and the people raised £400. Mr Montgomery died, 21st January 1881, in the fifty-ninth year of his age and the thirty-fifth of his ministry.

Fourth Minister - JOHN G. DUNCAN, from Lochgelly. Ordained, 4th January 1882. During the vacancy a motion had been tabled in the Presbytery to take steps with a view to the union of the two congregations in Ayton, but as Summerhill was prepared to offer the minimum stipend of £160, and as union was believed to be impracticable, nothing followed. At the moderation Mr Duncan had 62 votes, and Mr David Gray, afterwards of Burra Isles, Shetland, 27; but one of the minority suggested that they should go forward unitedly, and the call was ultimately signed by 200 members out of a total of 229. But it was ominous when, on the ordination day, the Presbytery took up the desirability of opening a preaching station at Burnmouth, a fishing village two miles to the east, from which about one-third of the congregation was drawn. This was a matter with vital bearings on the interests of Summerhill church, and should have been disposed of before a call was proceeded with. The session, when the proposal was submitted to them for their consideration, urged that most of Burnmouth people were connected with some church, that regular mission services would create disregard for their own place of worship, and that, as there was a Sabbath school there already with ninety children and an efficient staff of teachers, an evening service once a fortnight by their own minister would be sufficient to meet the other requirements of the place. It was certain, however, that no such compromise would satisfy very long, and, now that the movement was taking practical shape, the only way in which Summerhill church could keep its hold of Burnmouth would be by the minister dividing the labours of each Sabbath between the two places. This, however, was not thought of, or was deemed impracticable, and things wrought on towards weakness and disaster. It seemed for a time as if nothing specific were to be done. Deputies from the Mission Board, who visited Burnmouth in February 1883, were confronted by a wide-spread opinion that the erection of a hall and the holding of regular services in the place would be hurtful to Summerhill church, which had some 70 members there, and a petition to that effect, with 122 signatures, was laid before the Presbytery. However, as meetings on Sabbath evening, it was said, would be welcomed, these were

formally sanctioned by the Presbytery a few months later, and thus a beginning was made. For other two or three years the membership of Summerhill church kept up, but the funds came short, though the stipend was returned at the old figure, and in the beginning of 1887 application had to be made to the Home Board for assistance. The seat-rents from Burnmouth were about £30 in arrears, and, though this was partly traceable to the failure of the fishing, lessening dependence on the mother church of Ayton may have had its influence. At the close of that year the membership, which had been returned at 260 in 1884, was down to 210, and the stipend was £105 instead of £165, a special grant of £40 having come in to make up so far for the deficiency. To meet the wants of Burnmouth with least injury to Ayton it had been suggested ere now that Messrs Wilson and Duncan might conduct services alternately at Burnmouth and hold a joint service alternately at Ayton, but this proposal was never adopted nor put to the test. At last, in December 1888, Summerhill congregation, prompted by financial difficulties, struck out a path for itself. The action of Duns Presbytery in relation to Burnmouth they declared to be the principal cause of their embarrassments, and they felt that they ought to take steps to conserve their own interests. Accordingly they unanimously resolved to sever connection with the U.P. body and apply for admission to the Free Church. The scheme had much to recommend it, the Free Church never having had a congregation in Ayton, but unlooked-for difficulties arose, and the Free Assembly of 1889 declined the application. The commissioners had been asked what grounds of complaint there were against their own Presbytery, and they spoke of irritation, which had long existed between them, having culminated in the Presbytery having set up a separate station at Burnmouth, and as for seeking admission to the Free Church, they said it was because there was no other for United Presbyterians to go to. When their own Presbytery became aware of the bold move on which the congregation had resolved they wrote them, expressing the wish for a friendly conference with the office-bearers, but were informed in reply that, as steps had been already taken to form new Church relationships, they must "decline the pleasure of a meeting with them as proposed." But now that the way was blocked for admission to the Free Church two or three of the managers, along with the moderator, were in favour of conferring with a committee appointed for the purpose, "the remainder of the office-bearers being indifferent," and, we may add, spirit broken. Friendly relations were then resumed with the courts of their own Church; but returning prosperity was not to be looked for. The income was now under £100 a year, and though grants of £50 were allowed the stipend was £200 in arrears, of which the congregation proposed to raise £100, and the minister was to remit the balance. In this trying position matters continued till 6th June 1893, when Mr Duncan gave in his resignation, which was accepted on the 27th, the congregation stating that, from the circumstances in which they were placed, they could offer no objections. The Presbytery deeply sympathised with him in the step he had been constrained to take, and expressed the hope that some other field of labour would soon open up for him. He now returned to the probationer list, and had charge of a station at Uphall for a time, but afterwards emigrated to Canada, and is now minister of a recently - formed congregation at New Denver, in the North-West Provinces.

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Summerhill congregation wished regular supply in their vacant state, and were proposing that their next minister should also work the station at Burnmouth, but under the control of the Presbytery there was the opening

out of a simpler and more excellent way. A basis of union with Springbank congregation was framed and the terms heartily approved of. At this point their history merges in that of the United congregation.

AYTON (UNITED)

THE basis of union between the two congregations, as suggested by the Presbytery on 31st October 1893, were that they should combine on equal terms, and that with this view Mr Wilson should retire from active duty altogether. This was on the understanding that he would be allowed an annual grant of £70 from the Synod Fund, but they stated that they could not go forward with any such petition unless there was the clear prospect of a happy and harmonious union. The terms, as already stated, were heartily approved of by Summerhill congregation, and after discussion they were also agreed to by Springbank congregation, though a number refrained from indicating any opinion. The Presbytery felt that there was not sufficient cordiality here to warrant further action, but at a meeting on 13th March 1894 memorials in favour of immediate union were received from both congregations through their respective sessions, the one from Summerhill being signed by 95 members out of 102, and that from Springbank by 85 out of 117. The Synod having agreed to the Presbytery's request with regard to Mr Wilson's retiring allowance, the congregations met separately on the evening of 10th June under the presidency of members of the Presbytery's committee, when findings in favour of immediate union were unanimously adopted. They then met together, and were declared one united congregation, the membership being 212. They were to worship in each of the churches on alternate months for the time, but Summerhill, as the larger, was ultimately fixed on for the regular place of meeting.

First Minister - DAVID SMITH CAIRNS, M.A., son of the Rev. David Cairns of Stichel, grandson of the Rev. David Smith, D.D., of Biggar, and the second of three brothers who are ministers in the U.P. Church. Ordained, 14th March 1895. When the union negotiations were going on the hope was expressed that the united congregation would be self-supporting, but £140 was the sum named when liberty of moderation was granted, and the membership was given at 194. Some years ago Springbank property was disposed of for £220, and the proceeds became available for improvements on the actual place of worship, and other side purposes. The church has since been pulled down, but the manse remains, the life occupancy having been granted to Mr Wilson at the time he retired, and also £10 from an endowment which belonged to his former congregation. Summerhill manse is occupied by Mr Cairns. Mr Wilson was recently placed as an annuitant on the Aged and Infirm Ministers Fund, and the allowance from the Synod has ceased. The membership at the close of 1899 was 216, so that the ground lost after the union was consummated has been more than regained.

BURNMOUTH (UNITED PRESBYTERIAN)

BURNMOUTH is a fishing village in the south-east corner of Ayton parish with a population of 400. It had a public hall opened, to accommodate 300, on 23rd May 1888 by Principal Cairns, who was born not far from that neighbourhood. It was to be used for public meetings as well as Sabbath services, and the station was to be wrought by a student under the Recess Scheme. For four years there had been sermon at Burnmouth on Sabbath evenings, conducted sometimes by the agent of the Coast Mission, and for a

time at least Mr Wilson of Ayton supplied once a month. In February 1885 a deputation from the Mission Board suggested that instead of a service in each of the Ayton churches the two ministers there should preach alternately on Sabbath evenings, the one at Burnmouth, and the other hold a joint meeting at Ayton, so that both places might be regularly served. This, however, could have been nothing more than a provisional arrangement, and was never carried into effect. In December 1888 Mr A. M. Moodie, probationer, now minister at Stevenston, Ayrshire, was appointed to labour at Burnmouth. About a year afterwards the average attendance was reported at 100 in summer, and nearly double that number in winter. In June 1891 we find that the preacher stationed at Burnmouth was supplying there in the forenoon and exchanging with Mr Duncan of Ayton in the evening; that some 50 of the people were beginning to pay seat rents at about sixpence a month; that there were 50 names on the roll of regular adherents, two of them being elders; and that they hoped to contribute £25 a year towards expenses. On 20th December 1897 the station was congregated, with a membership of 81, and on 30th January a session of four members was constituted, two of whom had been elders in Summerhill, Ayton. The hall, moreover, was now their own property, having been secured on behalf of the mission through the efforts of a committee of Presbytery. The £290 of purchase money was raised partly by donations and partly by a sale of work at Burnmouth.

First Minister - ALEXANDER URQUHART, from St Nicholas Church, Aberdeen. Ordained, 28th April 1898, the people promising £75 of stipend from their own resources. The membership was 108 at the close of 1899.