

A  
BRIEF HISTORY  
OF ST MOLIOS CHURCH SHISKINE

This booklet is a brief history of church life in and round Shiskine, and in particular of St Molios Church.

The Red Church was opened for worship on 21st July 1889. This event testified to the faith and commitment of generations of Christian people. The expansion has continued. In 1962 a Guild Room and kitchen were added to the church. In 1964 the kitchen and Vestry were let out to the Board of health twice a week for physiotherapy. Thereafter the toilets were altered to ensure access, for disabled people and improvements to the kitchen and hall were carried out. The profits generated by this booklet will benefit the fund set up to enable improvements to the Church & Hall. The new manse was built in 1978.

Services on Sunday are well attended both by our members and visitors who flock to the island every year. The church of Scotland has adjusted ministry on the island so that since 2005 our parish has been linked not only to Lochranza and Pirnmill, but also to Brodick & Corrie. The arrangement is made possible by the appointment of a minister and a part-time Parish Assistant resident in Shiskine manse. The Minister and Reader conduct three services each on a Sunday, ensuring the tradition of morning worship can continue. Worship is always at 12:00 noon at St. Molios. Visitors to other churches in the linkage need to consult "The

Arran Banner" or the church notice board for times of services which vary.

The Sunday Club meets at the time of morning worship weekly during term-time and is open to children from four to eleven. Children join the congregation for some minutes, are addressed by the minister, and then leave for instruction by an enthusiastic team of leaders in the Church Hall. Children occasionally contribute a song or sketch during All Age worship.

The Guild meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 2.00pm in the Church Hall. The Guild is open to membership both of men and women. It chooses speakers to address the meetings following a theme given by the national committee on a three yearly cycle. In the current year it is "caring." This gives a form and focus to meetings which include a time of praise and worship. Anyone wishing to know more or attend meetings

please contact Helen Knight: 303704.

The church in Shiskine is also aware of the wider work of the Church. It supports Christian Aid and the work of the Fairtrade Organisation.

Our congregation benefits from the publication four times a year of a parish magazine, edited by Mrs Anne Whattam. Articles are written by members on a wide

variety of topics and it provides a link between the church and the wider community.

It has been my privilege to serve Christ in this linked charge for only a few months. During my illness the congregations, and neighbours have shown my wife and me much friendship and given prayerful support. It is not only practical evidence of faith in action but a wonderful testimony of the life of an active and spirit guided fellowship.

Andrew Barrie, my predecessor, completed his preface to the booklet first prepared for the church's centenary in 1989, with these words. I repeat them now:

"In a text very appropriate for a church in the midst of a farming community it is written by Paul: 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow!

For what we have received and are part of let us give thanks to God."

Rev. Barry Knight 2004

The beginnings of Christianity in Scotland are obscure. Ninian lived in Galloway during the fourth century. Kentigern, or Mungo spread the Word in Glasgow in the early 7th century. Northern Irish settlers who founded the kingdom of Dalriada about 490AD, came as Christians. Christian institutions were then largely monastic. This style of grouping monks within a fortlike structure each living in his own individual cell, was suited to the tribal structure of society. Family groups, or clans, were led by local chiefs and petty kings. They were often at war with each other and built hill forts for defence purposes. They are evidence of great tensions between tribes and clans, constantly at war with each other.

St Patrick was the great apostle of Ireland. Born in about 390 in South Wales, Patrick was the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest. Seized in a raid at the age of fifteen he was a slave in Ireland about six years. He escaped and fled to France living in a monastery. In 432 he was ordained a missionary, returning to Ireland where he worked for thirty years.

Patrick's name was not used in any of Arran's church dedications, but there is some small evidence of his activity here. The cashel of Kilpatrick appears to be a structure similar to typical early Irish monasteries built within a circular stone wall. But very little evidence has survived. If it was a monastery, then Patrick's association with it was probably short.

## Early Irish monastery: reconstruction by Liarn de Paor

At the foot of the road up to the cashel are the scant remains of Kilpatrick chapel. It was once held in high regard as a place of burial. Bodies were even transported from Ireland to be interred within the consecrated ground. There was a tradition that before burial bodies had to be carried over running water. The practice of bringing bodies over from Ireland came to an end when one ship, with a cargo of bodies awaiting burial, sank in the Irish Channel.

Columba was the great missionary to Scotland. He was related to some of the most powerful tribes in Ireland. In 563 Columba, already a distinguished Irish monk, transferred his activities to Scotland, establishing his base on Iona. His main mission was to the Picts who lived in much of mainland Scotland, and whose king lived at Craig Phadraig in Inverness. He may have visited Arran, for a few place names show signs of his presence. So in Glen an t-Suidhe marking the spot where the saint rested is Suidhe Chalumchille; and at Carmahome, in Gaelic Cathair mo Challuim the saint may have lived for a while, and Tobair Chillumchille marks the spot where the saint may have quenched his thirst as tobair is Gaelic for well, or spring. He was born in Donegal in 521, a son of the powerful O'Donnell clan and could boast royal descent from both parents. The original parish names of the island also hint strongly at an Irish influence: Kilbride and Kilmory. The first was named after Bride,

Ireland's second principal saint, Brigid or Bride. She was fifth century Abbess of the monastery of Kildare and owed much of her popularity to the fact that she shared her name with the Celtic goddess of poetry, medicine and smithwork in pre-Christian Ireland. Bride's name is retained in the dedications of Lam lash and Lochranza Parish Churches.

The other parish name, Kilmory, Cill Mhuire, the church of Mary, shows that at this time women had equal status with men as saints. In Celtic society women held a high position socially at a time when descent was more certainly traced through the mother rather than the father.

It is in the sixth century that Molios comes on the scene. Molios had royal blood on both sides of his family. His mother was Gemma, daughter of Aedan mac Gabhrain king of Dal Riada. His father was Cairell, king of Dal Fiatach, Ulster and Man. The date of his birth is uncertain perhaps around 570 AD. He was probably in his late teens when he came to Holy Island forgoing a royal career. Molios had no wish to become king. He wished to pursue a pastoral career. Before this he knew he must prepare himself spiritually for the task by turning his back on privilege and become a hermit. He chose a cave on Holy Isle in which to be alone with God.

His name occurs in different forms. Originally Laisren, which has the element Lais meaning light or flame. Then Molios, and the genitive form Molaise. The prefix 'mo'

was used by Gaelic speakers to denote a special relationship with God. Although his baptismal name was Lais, or Laisren, the prefix 'mo' (my) was added to give the meaning "my dear Lais", or 'Lais, beloved of God. 'This practice is seen in the place name Kilmacolm Cille mo Colm meaning 'The Church of (my) Columba, loved by God.' Molios' name was pronounced not as today 'Mollyoss' but as Mo-lash a form remembered by older people on Arran today. Molios gave his name to the island we now know as Holy Isle, in Gaelic Eilean Molaise, (sounding like Ellen Molash-e) which in a truncated form, came to be applied to the village opposite: Lamlash.

In 1908 the cave on Holy Isle used by Molios as his place of retreat was thoroughly investigated revealing a kitchen refuse heap with the remains of limpet and oyster shells, bones of ox, pig, sheep and deer. It would appear the young evangelist ate well. There was evidence of a protecting wall necessary against the ever present wind and a flat stone on the cell floor which probably served as a table. Down below the cave alongside the shore path is a large boulder with seats carved from each of its four corners, and a powerful spring nearby still delivers cold and refreshing water. There are faint remains of crosses carved within the cave which may testify to the satisfaction of pilgrims seeking bodily cure by contact with the miracle-working saint's cave. There are also runic graffiti carved by Norsemen who knew of this cave as a useful shelter.



On the western side of Arran at Clachan association with Molios made it a popular place for burial. There are traces of a footpath connecting Lamblash with Clachan and names suggesting its use by pilgrims, for instance: Cnoc na Croise (the hill of the cross). For centuries tradition held that Molios was buried at Clachan. A visitor to the graveyard in 1872 remarked on the 'curious old effigy' popularly known as St Molios' grave'. He was describing a carved grave slab. This visitor was not convinced it depicted Molios and thought it was more likely to be that of an Abbot perhaps from Saddell monastery just across Kilbrannon Sound. His conviction was based on the style of clerical robes pictured on the slab, which were very different from those of the 7th century. The old tradition may have been the reason why a church was built here in 1708, and replaced in 1805. It is this second building whose ruins remain to roof height today. Congregations were so large this church also boasted a gallery, to which access was by way of an outside stair. This stone slab was removed from Clachan to St Molios church in 1889 both to help preserve it, and to complement its dedication to the saint it was thought to portray.

The figure is of a priest wearing eucharistic vestments. It is in relief and shown standing within a trefoil shaped niche. On the right side a crosier shows he was probably an abbot. He is dressed in a style typical of a thirteenth century churchman. It might even be possible to hazard a

guess at his identity. For in the thirteenth century a prominent . abbot called Thomas had died, and his burial may have been recorded in this way. For Shiskine did have a link with Saddell.

When Somerled, Lord of the Isles, founded Saddell monastery in the 12th century he gave it various grants of land from which to derive an income. One of these grants was part of Shiskine then as now very fertile, productive land.

On the Isle of Islay two tiny islands at the edge of the small, freshwater Loch Finlaggan where the power base of the Lords of the Isles. Looking at these two scraps of land it is hard to imagine just how powerful was the Lordship, virtually a kingdom, founded by Somerled, which ruled the Western seaboard from Kintyre to Lewis for four hundred years. These Macdonald chiefs had wrested control from the Norsemen, and then adopted and improved upon their maritime skills. From Finlaggan the Lords of the Isles met kings from Scotland, England and France on equal terms. Arran's churches were already administered by the Diocese of the Isles created in 1134 at the height of Norse domination. Its official title was Sodor and Man. The name Sodor derived from the Norse name for the western isles: Sudreyar, (south isles).

In the Battle of Largs (AD 1263) the Norsemen under their king Hakon were defeated by Alexander III yet

Arran's churches remained under the control of the See of Trondheim until the middle of the next century. From then on until the Reformation in 1560 Arran accepted the authority of Iona. Many of the older churches in Arran appear to be too small to accommodate their congregations. Churches at this time did not offer sittings, and it was normal to stand throughout worship. Infirm members could bring small milking stools with them. Jenny Geddes outraged to witness a Mass being conducted in St Giles Cathedral after the Reformation in Scotland, flung her stool at the priest. In smaller churches it was a common practice to provide a tent to keep the worshippers forced to stand outside, at least reasonably dry.

The first church at Clachan was built in 1708 and dedicated to St Michael. The name is preserved in several local place names, i.e. Balmichael (farm of Michael). An earlier chapel on the site is shown on Bleau's map (dated 1654) and was dedicated to St Molios. The minister at preached at Clachan once a month and three times a month in Kilmory. Bryce noted that on other Sundays the members were perfectly content to worship in the Free Church, where they were also welcome. But a communion would only be celebrated at Kilmory.

The islanders owed allegiance to the House of Hamilton. After the Reformation they happily adopted the reformed church along with their overlords. But by the

significant year 1843 the island had been subjected to the hugely unpopular clearance of whole villages to suit the whims of the present Earl. The people of Arran showed their disaffection in the only way they could, by rejecting the established church in favour of the newly formed Free Church.

The Disruption of 1843 was largely a national display of opposition to patronage, whereby a landlord, laird or patron exercised his right to impose (or intrude) a minister into his parish. The Free Church believed it was the right of the congregation to select a suitable candidate. On 18th May 1843 a sermon was preached by Dr Welsh, the retiring Moderator of the General Assembly in St Giles Cathedral. His sermon ignited the spark which had been smouldering for years. Four hundred ministers and a vast number of elders streamed out and swept down the streets to Canonmills attracting cheers from a large crowd which had gathered in anticipation. This was the beginning of the Free Church.

The Clearances had upset the life-style of thousands in the Highlands and Islands. Arran's landscape is dotted with the ruins of former villages. No longer could the Duke automatically command the loyal support of the islanders. Churches were emptied, and the Shiskine congregation repaired to the 'preaching cave' at Kilpatrick, taking with them William McKinnon as their preacher and pastor, a cottar who had been hard hit by the brutal land reforms.

From Kilmory church, the mission church in Lochranza and the church in Clachan the Free Church took most members. They remembered bitterly how Mr Crawford had been presented to them against their will. Lamlash alone remained loyal to the established church. In 1874 a law was passed by Parliament banning lay patronage. The Free Church was built in 1847 and the manse a year later. In 1848 there was a sacramental fast of the Church of Scotland in Shiskine. It was hailed 'as pleasing proof of the better feeling now prevailing that many from the Free Church attended, and obligingly lent us their tent for the occasion.'

It was decided to build a new church in Shiskine in 1886 and a committee was duly set up. It was, at first intended, to build a chapel of ease to replace Clachan church which was becoming leaky. The book of account shows that donations came from far and wide. Specially from Glasgow and Edinburgh, but also from further afield. Many donations were from Arran, and in 1888 a sum of £250 was given by the Duke of Hamilton. The fund rose slowly as many donations were small. After two years building started, to a design of Sir James Burnet, and was completed in eighteen months. The total cost was £ 1,900, the fund closing in 1895 after a spate of concerts and other fund-raising activities. Plans had not originally included a bell, but a special meeting of 1889 agreed on this addition at a cost of £30. It actually cost £70.

Services were conducted by the Kilmory minister on Sunday afternoons, the first by Rev. Duncan Black. He was followed in 1902 by Rev Andrew Kennedy and in 1915 by Rev Duncan Connachar, the first minister of the parish to own a car. The last minister under this arrangement was Rev Norman McLeod (from 1926) because in 1929 the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland were reunited. Into the re-united church in 1929 were gathered the majority of Presbyterians forming four fifths of the Protestant members of Scotland. Shiskine's Church of Scotland now had two buildings sharing one minister. Services were held in St Molios during the summer only. In 1958 it was decided to sell the former UF church in Torbeg. It was bought by the Hall Committee and is now Shiskine Public Hall.

The manse of Torbeg was built for the United Free church in 1910. The first Church of Scotland minister to occupy it was Rev Dr. W. J. Jack. During the incumbency of Rev Donald MacGregor the much larger Inglewood was gifted to the church by Miss Agnes McBride whose uncle Sandy McBride was shopkeeper in Shiskine. In 1978 Inglewood was sold to the Grassie family and the present bungalow built behind the church.

The first child baptised in St Molios was Archibald Ferguson, of the Lakin. In the early days of the 20th century psalms were sung unaccompanied, led by a

strong singer called the precentor. The first precentor was William MacMillan, Tormore, who later emigrated to Canada in 1916. Alexander Macalister who farmed Swallowbrae then became Precentor in the UF church and was succeeded by his son Angus.

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Since the 1950s weddings, baptisms and funerals have come to be conducted within the church. Formerly these ceremonies usually took place in private homes. Local undertaker Peter McArthur told me that many years ago funerals took place at home. After death the deceased was 'coffined' and lay in the house until the funeral. The minister would then be called to offer prayers as the deceased was laid in the coffin. In the middle of the last century there was no hearse, so after the funeral a coffin was conveyed to the graveyard in a minibus, or dormobile and later in a hearse provided by Arran Transport. In former days it was the family's responsibility to carry the coffin, sometimes long distances from home to graveyard. A glass of whisky before setting out and at the end of the journey were considered an essential precaution in severe conditions. Within the past two years I have conducted funerals in a garden and in the work yard of two prominent local people.

Occasionally a burial took place at night when the interment was lit by torchlight. It used to be the practice for the animals of a deceased farmer to be freed before

the funeral. One very snowy day this practice was observed but the animals were never seen again, presumed drowned in a hill loch. It used to be the custom for a bride and groom to make arrangements to set out simultaneously from their homes and the ceremony to be conducted at the spot where they met. The celebrations then continued with a reception and meal in the bride's house.

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#### FORMER MINISTERS OF THIS PARISH

Rev Duncan Black	1882 - 1902 (Kilmory)
Rev Andrew Kennedy	1902 - 1914 (Kilmory)
Rev Duncan Conachar	1915 -1926 (Kilmory)
Rev Norman M Wright	1926 - 1926 (Kilmory)

Rev John Bain	1916 - 1917 (Torbeg)
Rev Donald Ross	1918-1925
RevDrW J Jack	1926 -1934

Rev John S Fulton	1935 -1945
Rev Charles Cooper	1945-1951
Rev Donald MacGregor	1952-1960
	(Moved to St Molios in 1958)
Rev Alexander McCrae	1961-1967

(Then in 1968 Shiskine was linked with Kilmory)



Rev Richard Fishwick            1969 - 1977

(Then in 1977 Shiskine was linked with Lochranza and  
Pirnmill)

Rev Robert Walker            1978 - 1983

Rev Andrew Barrie            1984-2000

Mrs Jean Hunter            2001 - 2002

Rev Barry Knight            2002 -

Sales of this booklet contribute to the Church Hall  
Restoration Fund.

Donations

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