

# GLIMPSES OF CHURCH LIFE IN OLD DAYS

## FROM THE RECORDS OF GARGUNNOCK PARISH

A copy of a paper read to the Stirling Natural History and Archaeological Society on  
18<sup>th</sup> March 1930 by the Rev. J.H. Horton-McNeil  
Minister of Gargunnoch from 1927 to 1934

(In the interest of readability I have created more paragraphs and added section headers. – JMcL 1999)

### Introduction

In this paper it has not been my purpose to prepare a continuing history of the parish of Gargunnoch. That would require much more study than I have yet been able to give to the old records in existence. What I should like to accomplish is to get some interesting glimpses of old conditions – of the place the church held in the life of the people two or three centuries ago – of the manner in which great national movements affected those who lived in a quiet country district – of the general tone of their religious and moral ideas – and of such human touches as the old records reveal.

### Sources of information

We have for guidance the minutes of the Kirk Session. There is a copy made in 1787 which is subscribed ---

*“This book from the year of God 1615 till 1660 was transcribed by Daniel McIntosh, Session Clerk, date as above, in consequence of an order from Sir James Campbell of Ardkinglass; George Moir Esq. Of Leckie; John Graham Esq. Of Meiklewood and James Richardson of Wester Culmore and Mr William Martin, minister.”*

Unfortunately the pages are wanting which cover the years from 1615 to 1625; and I do not know what has happened to the minutes of meetings from 1660 to 1698, a most interesting period in the history of Scottish religion. In 1698 we come upon the handwriting of the Rev. John Warden, who wrote up the records for some fifty years. The pages are frayed – the writing is faded – the script is not easy to decipher and presents a task that may be easier in the light of summer than the lamp-light we still have to use in the long winter nights in our Scottish villages.

Besides writing these minutes Mr Warden wrote a diary, addressed to his son, William Warden, sometime minister of Campsie, but of the nine original volumes only one has survived and by the generous courtesy of his descendants this has been handed over to the Kirk Session of Gargunnoch for holding in trust. It is from these minutes and that diary that I have drawn the material I have made use of in trying to prepare a picture of old times.

### New Kirk Session?

The minutes of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1625 give a list of Gentlemen and Elders being convened.

*“and citation being made, if there was any to object against any the said elders: none appearance being made to the contrary it was thought meet they should be received next Sunday after, being the seventh of August: which was done the foresaid day according to the order.”*

Upon the seventh of August 1625.....

*“the said day the Gentlemen and Elders being convened it was by common consent thought expedient that certain acts made in former times should be renewed again and public intimation made to the people that none might pretend ignorance”*

It is difficult to decide the significance of this entry – whether it was the original creation of the Kirk Session in Gargunnoch – or a new start made in the first months of the reign of King Charles I with the intention of giving the Church Courts a firmer control over the manners and ways of the people.

### **New minister**

At any rate it was not the beginning of the story of Gargunnoch Church. From notes made by the Rev. Alexander Silver, I see that there is a Presbytery record of the 12<sup>th</sup> day of April 1615

*“ the whilk day Mr William Justice producit ane missive letter direct to the Brethern from the Bishop of St Andrews bearing and in effect that the said Mr William is nominat and presented to the Kirk of Gargunnoch.”*

The judgement of the Presbytery is asked and, later, after edict and trial in the Church of Gargunnoch...

*“comparit Mr Alexander Seton of Gargunnoch, Thomas Tromhill (?) in Gargunnoch, Ad. Cunninghame of Chapelhorn (?), Henry Stewart in Leckie, Robert Johnstone in Culbeg and Wmc M’Johnkeine (?) in Culmoir, all Parishioners in Gargunnoch, for themselves and as commissioners for remenant of said Parish when they answered that they were well edifict with by Mr William’s doctrine.”*

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1615 by commission from the Bishop of St Andrews, George, Bishop of Dunblane, with the assistance of Mr Robert Muir and Mr John Narne ...

*“plantit the said Mr William Justice ordinar pastor in the said Kirk and gave him lawful ordination by imposition of hands.”*

Under the Episcopal regime Gargunnoch belonged to the see of St Andrews till in 1633 on the application of Archbishop Spottiswood, the lands south of the Firth of Forth were transferred to the bishop of Edinburgh with his Cathedral at St Giles

But there is no mention of Bishops even in these earliest minutes and we may infer that the Presbyterian party was then active and in the ascendant. One would like to break through the silence which hangs over the ecclesiastical controversies of that time. It is wonderful, indeed almost aggravating, to pass from the reading of ordinary histories to a perusal of these records and to find how absolutely they have managed to exclude any suggestion of the burning question that was agitating their own land. They were right, no doubt – the business of the Kirk Session was the affairs of Gargunnoch.

### **The Church requires re-building**

We find the Kirk Session, constituted or reconstituted in 1625, in 1626 taking up the question of the re-building of the Church. On the 30<sup>th</sup> July ...

*“because the House of God was thought altogether ruinous and because also of a motion that was made about six years before that time of a voluntary contribution granted by the Gentlemen and Heritors for building the said Kirk de more....the foresaid motion was again renewed and the foresaid heritors convened for the time”*

... and the promise received for the carrying out of this work. From such an entry it seems likely that a Church, altogether ruinous in 1626, regarded as needing rebuilding in 1620 must have been in existence at the time of the reformation.

### **Financial problems**

We have no records that the hand of man in troublesome times hastened the work of the hand of time. In any case, as regards the present Church, we know that it began to take its form on the site of an earlier Church in the year 1626, and that it was originally rectangular, extending East and West. In 1629 the Kirk Session found that more than 200 merks has been spent on this work beyond the sum contributed by the Gentlemen of the parish: and because the Kirk was ...

*“ to be apparelled within with a loft and common forms ”*

... it was suggested that in accordance with an act of parliament ...

*“stent masters should be chosen for stenting of the Parish”:*

... but as it was alleged that some persons would give more than any stent laid upon them, and that others would give more willingly than by compulsion, the minister accepted the burden of making trial of the liberality of every particular person. Mr Justice, who was still minister, was not too successful.

### **Robbing Peter to pay Paul?**

In the course of a Presbytery visitation in 1631 it was noted that ...

*“the poor’s money and penalties is found employed in the payment of the annual rent of two hundred and fifty merks as yet adebted, resting, and owing for the building of the Kirk and Kirkyard dyke”*

... and the visitors and Kirk Session ...

*“appoints the haill tenants in the Parish to be stented pro rata”*

... for the immediate payment of the said principal ...

*“that so the poor’s silver may not be misemployed”.*

### **The rebuilding of the church praised**

These visiting brethern ...

*“commends them for their zeal kythed in the new building of their Church and Kirkyard dyke, and especially the Gentlemen for their liberality in that effect, and therefore ratify the appointment made betwixt the minister and Gentlemen concerning a particular place to be allowed to every one of them for their seat and burial within the said Kirk, and ordains the particular designation to be insert and registrated in, not only the Session bookes of Gargunnock Kirk but also in the Presbytery bookes to stand a constant ground of the Gentlemen’s right forever.”*

### **Seating problems**

In 1644 the loft or gallery was enlarged, but the Kirk Session found

*“ that every lad was ready to take up the foreseats thereof wherefore honest men were disappointed, therefore it was thought fit that the next Sunday the minister by public intimation should discharge all lads from the seat; as also for defraying of the charges of the loft the minister was appointed to make public intimation that if any honest man desired a proper seat in the loft they should come to the Kirk Session and agree for it, and all others should be discharged therefrom in time coming”*

### **A new loft**

In time it was reported that the church was throng ...

*“and advice sought of what was the fittest way of enlarging the room thereof”*

... and it was found to be by erecting a loft in the east End

*“above the Laird of Leckie and Boquhan their seats whereunto the said Gentlemen being present condescending upon, with provision they might sit in the face the same themselves and their families. The Laird of Gargunnoch having built his seat and the Session taken notice of the same found it agreeable to their act approved of the same.”*

In 1660 we thus find the interior of the Church being put into the form, which we find today.

### **Another new loft**

As for the exterior, in 1701

*“Boquhan informing the Session that he desired to build a loft and a stair, and strike out a door thereto, and desires the Session to approve the same, the which they do providing it be always in his own room.”*

A month later the Laird of Leckie desired an extract of that Act giving this permission to Boquhan. The dignity of the Lairds probably required that each should have his own stair, and that there should be no jostling on the way.

### **And a bell**

In 1702, the bell in use being so small that its ringing could not be heard at any distance, a heavier bell was ordered from the official bell founder of St Giles: and a belfry sufficiently strong to support it was built on the North Gable. That completed the main outlines of Gargunnoch Church as it stands today.

### **Dispensing justice**

A Church is not only stone and lime, and to the general mind the interest of the examination of old records such as these will be turned on by the sort of life they reveal. We have nothing just like the old powers of the Kirk Session in our lives today. There were in existence old Baronial powers of administering Justice and Justices of the Peace, with two constables in each Parish, had been legislated for by James VI and I in 1609: while Cromwell in 1655 set up Justice of the Peace courts for

*“the repressing of all public and scandalous sins.”*

But it was to the Kirk Session that the ordinary man looked up as the real upholder of law and order. That body was able to control the migration of people between the Parishes, demanding certificates of character from every stranger, and expelling from the boundaries those who were judged undesirable or evil in their lives. Meetings were held practically every week, and it was not the case of the Court

waiting for pleas to be brought unto it: it was rather the case of a vigilance committee searching out every misdemeanour, and trying the hearts of the people.

### **Scale of fines**

It is interesting to note what the Acts of former times were which the Kirk Session, formed in 1626, sought to renew and the varied scale of punishments drawn up. Absence from church for two Sundays without lawful excuse or sickness meant a fine of 6s 8d – doubled for each subsequent fault, with public repentance upon the ordinary place. Drinking during the time of preaching is to cost both the giver and the receiver of the drink a similar fine with the same public repentance. Profaning of the Lord's day by working thereupon as bleaching of webs, leading of corn, and such like, was to be punishable with a fine of 13s 4d, and with the usual appearance before the congregation in the attitude of repentance; and no mill should go between six in the morning and six in the evening in summer, or between sunrise and sunset in the winter, under the pain of 20s, to be divided between the miller and the man who brought the grain.

For graver moral faults there were punishments ranging from two merks fine, which with appearance for three Sundays in the place of repentance, to fines of ten merks; while failure or inability to pay the fine entailed standing bare-headed and bare-footed in the jogs for six days at the time of the gathering of the people and the skailing. One quaint law is that people who gave in their names to be proclaimed should marry within forty days after the first proclamation under the pain of five pounds to be uplifted from the unconstant party; and a gage of this amount was to be lodged with the minister.

### **Witchcraft**

Among cases dealt with by the Kirk Session are cases of libel and scandal, and with suspected dealings with the power of witchcraft. A woman in the parish is accused in 1631 of going to another suspected of witchcraft to seek help for a sick cow. She confessed that she went to her, and the said Rosie bade her go home and go to some of her neighbours houses and seek from them the thing that slew the mice without speaking the proper name or suffering any other to speak the name of it. The poor cat was to be put thrice round the cow and then flung out at the door. The woman was also to take her left foot shoe and put it thrice about the cow, and every time to give the cow a clap with the sole of it. She was then to take some of the cow's milk and put it out at a hole of the house where no light came in, and take it from the outside and mix it with the water of a March or boundary burn, and bring it home and put thrice thereof into the cow's lug,

*“all of which she confessed she did and got the cat in William Swan's house, and within four days after had the fairest young cow. Because this matter was odious and uncouth therefore the censure thereof was referred to the visitation of the Kirk which was to be shortly thereafter.”*

When she compeared at the visitation,

*“After a grave reproof for her sin the Brethern ordained her to make her publick repentance upon the public place in her lining, and to be punished in her gear or goods at the sight of the Session who know her estate.”*

### **Other misdemeanours**

Other matters that draw the attention of the Session are the scandals arising from the light waits and from penny weddings. In 1643 an Act of the General Assembly is referred to and it is ordained that

*“None come to the house of the defunct except some 6 or 7 discreet friends invited for comforting the living till ten hours of the night. “*

While the Assembly of 1645, because of the great abuse at penny bridals by the multitude of people convened thereto, as also because of the lascivious carriage of men and women by promiscuous dancing and playing of pipers, ordained that

*“Every bridegroom or bride shall only have for all time coming every one of them three or four mess at the most, and that they have no pipers nor dancing, and whatever fails therein they shall forfeit every one a dollar for pious uses.”*

That there was need of all the care the Kirk Session turned to such gatherings, the many records on the pages of the old minutes seem to testify; though we must remember that a picture drawn from bare court records would not convey a fair picture of any age. That superstition and immorality were rife we may allow. That the Church sought to use her powers to overcome those we must admit. Whether she used her powers in the wisest way we may either doubt or dogmatise upon. Her sincerity we cannot question. She was set in her place to root out sin, and bring the sinner to repentance.

### **Punishment and pardon**

Changing the form, she was carrying into these times the old belief in the efficacy of penance. Confession that was no longer made to a priest was made in the face of the congregation. Satisfaction was exacted; but after she punished, the Church also pardoned. We have to carry this memory with us when we read of such cases as that of a prominent gentleman in the Parish occupying in two successive years the place of a penitent before the congregation, and then being nominated and elected to the Eldership.

### **Strict attendance requirements**

She sought to drill the people with the rough hand of the age to which she belonged. Inquisition was made as to the use of family prayers, morning and evening, amongst all the people. Attendance at services was compulsory – the hours of service were long. The Elder who is to be at the door to receive the poor’s money at Communion, even in Summertime, is to be there at his post an hour before sunrise. Note is to be taken of those absenting themselves from the afternoon preaching, and the sermon to be begun timeously so that the people may arrive home before it is dark. When the people are reprov’d for poor attendance at the weekly service at nine on Thursday mornings, they ask that the hour be changed to seven so as not to interfere with their work. If the thought could ever have occurred to one of that time that he or she might plead unworthiness or unfitness to come to Communion, I expect the church’s reply would have been that it was a duty to make oneself fit for it: they they had to come, and no lightness of touch was there to let them think of the duty as a conventional act.

*“In 1648 compeared Thomas Shirray before the Session, and being questioned as to why he did not come to Communion he alleged that some persons in the Parish of Denny especially two brethern of the Muirheads set upon him with swords on a market day outside the ports of Stirling and had wounded him very sore to the great effusion of his blood and hazard of his life, and because as yet he had not received civil satisfaction he could not condescend to pardon them and was therefore afraid to come to the Lord’s Table. The truth of this alledgement was well known, and the danger of his life he was in. But withall he was informed that howsoever it was lawful for him to pursue the wrong in civility, yet he had sinned much against his own soul to Christ; malice and hatred in his heart he had refused such an offer of Christ’s mercy; whereupon he confessed his fault before the Session and humbly promised by God’s grace not to do the like again.”*

### **Collections and appeals**

There are other matters of interest in these old books. One knows that the Church in the old days took care of the poor. All ordinary collections and the fines received from those under discipline went to this purpose, save when a misuse such as that of paying for the interest on the debt for the building and repairing of the Church turns up; but it is challenged and corrected.

The congregation receive appeals then as today for collections for wider purposes; for ransoms for some persons taken captive by the Turks; for men spoiled in Dunkirk; for those ruined by the wars in

Ireland; for the distress in Argyleshire consequent on the recent troubles; for clothes for the Scottish Army in England. There are local matters dependant on them also – the building of a bridge over the burn at Gargunnoch; the starting of a Parish School in 1652, and the complaints of the schoolmaster in 1654 that in spite of all the promises nothing had been done as regards his salary.

### **Other matters**

It would take me more time than I have managed to give to the subject to present a picture showing all that is of interest in those times. We should like perhaps to see other aspects of the lives of the people than those which brought them into the light in the ecclesiastical records, but we cannot blame the Kirk Session records if we are disappointed in that way. We do see the Minister bringing the solemn League of Covenant to the notice of the people, debarring those who have been mixed up with the Duke of Hamilton's movement or who have signed any band, from signing it. Leckie is suspect, but clears himself. The Minister has to extend the days more than once, as many have not yet signed. There is no mention of Cromwell's presence in Scotland or of General Monk's campaigns. There is the shortest mention in a long minute of the Restoration of King Charles II to the throne;

*“Notice being come of keeping a day of thanksgiving for the King's safe return the twenty ninth of May, advertisement was to be made thereof the next Lord's Day preceding and the people exhorted to bountifulness in their offering to the poor that day, 19th June.”*

### **100 years on – the minister's diaries**

There is a gap in the records from 1660 to 1697. Instead of trying to follow the minutes from the latter year onward, I should like now to give you a glimpse of old conditions as shown in the part of the diary of the Rev. John Warden which has survived. This means moving on for a century to the eve of Prince Charlie's crossing of the Forth on his southward march. Unfortunately, Mr Warden's diary breaks off in May 1745, and it is not until the 13th September 1745 that Prince Charlie arrived in Leckie, to find that the Laird (Moir) had been taken out of his bed the night before by Dragoons from Stirling Castle, and carried away prisoner. The Lady of Leckie did the honours, and entertained the Prince to dinner; and from Leckie he sent off his demand to the city of Glasgow for £15,000 with all that was due to Government, and whatever arms the city held.

But it is of other things the Rev. John Warden has to tell us in his diary. I think, however, that there is great interest in this step onwards from the middle of the seventeenth century to a period a century nearer our own time; and also in the mere changing of the light thrown on the life of the Parish from that given by the minutes of Kirk Session, to that coming from those outpourings of the Minister's mind, eager in his task of influencing, of guiding, and of uplifting his people.

### **Heresy hunt**

The volume we have of Mr Warden's Diary covers the years 1738 to 1745. It was written by one who had been settled in his Parish for forty years; whose name had once been brought into the notice of the wider world in connection with a heresy hunt, when he, with three others – Hog of Carnock, Brisbane of Stirling, Hamilton of Airth – was haled in 1721 before the Assembly's ...

*“Committee of the Church for preserving the purity of doctrine”*

Their answers were thought satisfactory. It may be that this experience of being dragged into prominence had its quietening effect on the Minister of a retired Parish. Certainly in these later days of his ministry, while he gives expression to critical opinions on outstanding figures in the ecclesiastical world, there is generally an unwillingness to pass judgement, and a shrinking from other interests than those of his immediate spiritual work.

### **Conditions of the time**

To us in the Parish the changes, and the unchangeability in things about us, are matters of the greatest interest. The names of the farms and estates we read of in these old pages written two or three hundred years ago are the names we are using still – Leckie, Boquhan, Gargunnoch, Meiklewood, Kepdarroch, Culmore. But there have been changes; the world has opened out; there is not the same concentration of interest that drew all together into a close community.

With Mr Warden's pages before us we try to think ourselves back into the conditions of that time about two hundred years ago. Walking round the manse we can trace the narrower limits of the old house in which the minister's family grew up – we can see the same change in the Lairds' houses also. The names of the Lairds are still in the sederunt list at the regular and frequent meetings of the Kirk Session. There is no mention of other mode of travel these days than by riding on horseback from place to place.

As Mr Warden's years increase, and rheumatic pains stiffen more and more his back and knees, he finds the riding to Campsie to take part in the Communion Services of his son's Parish becoming ever a more formidable undertaking. Before he has to give up the task altogether, he has his servant mounted on his saddle behind him to keep him from falling off. He has to give up his attendance at the General Assembly in Edinburgh in a year when as Moderator of the Presbytery of Stirling he is specially charged to represent the Presbytery's position with regard to the Erskines and the other seceding brethren because he feels that when the date comes round he can no longer hope to ride even a quarter of the way.

There are not details enough to tell us much about the conditions of living, or the prosperity of the Parish. When speaking of the preparations for the yearly Communion Service, he tells us of having at one time 900, at another 1000, examinable persons in the Parish, including servants and the young – which suggests a population about double what exists today.

### **Weather**

As for the seasons, the weather then seems to have been as unreliable as it is today – and those who speak of our climate changing for the worse will find descriptions in these old days that might bring back to mind quite recent memories; frost and snow and cold on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1740, as if it was winter.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September of the same year he writes;

*“Who, but he who is judicially blinded, must and does see that God is angry, ordinances visibly deserted, divisions and contentions on the growing hand, famine threatening, besides visible and extraordinary things falling out; these weeks past we have had almost constant great rains threatening to rot the barley that is cut down and yet in the fields. And last night we had such a deluge of rain as our bridges here were swept away, and the houses near our burn filled with water, so that in the middle of the night people were obliged to fly out of their houses and carry their little ones with them. And yet constant sinning and no returning to the Lord. And with the rain on 11th and 12th inst. We had a very grievous shaking of the ripe corn, so that famine both on man and beast is threatened. And with all these no holiness with the most.*

*In 1740 for the space of 10 or 11 weeks we had a most violent storm of frost. The wild beast died, strong men froze, the poor were starving. This reached all of Europe.*

### **Warden the man**

But such notes are glimpses opening out as we go through the diary. It is with the work of preaching, preparing for the great seasons of Communion, visiting in the Parish, that the mind of the writer is mainly concerned. As the years covered by this volume go on the work of visitation becomes more difficult – the pains in the back and knees give rise to more frequent reflections on the vileness of the body, and the grace that can use his poor powers for the work of the Church.



There is certainly no other interest in life that gets a real place in these pages beyond the work of his ministry: the preparation of his sermons: the retreat to his favourite haunts to examine himself, to probe the condition of his soul, and restate the particulars of the work of grace under the headings that marked the preachings and the moralising of his time. The son in whom he delighted so greatly seems to have had some idea of lightening the range of his interests, or of his reading at any rate.

*“You gave me”* writes Mr Warden, *“the Adventures of Gil Blas, a Romance, you pressed me to read it for my diversion. I did so, but, oh, poor food for an immortal soul!”*

His own mental work is all concentrated on what will help his preaching.

*“I am still the poor wracked creature as to texts. I know I am here sinfully anxious and too much inclined to have a number of sermons wrote out ere they be preached: but I know the Lord pities me and therefore gives texts and sermons on them when and as he pleases.”*

### **Communion season**

It is the great season of Communion that especially engages his thoughts. We know the fashion of these days when the crowds gathered from the surrounding Parishes; when from the Thursday to the Monday the Churches were filled with the Preaching Services; when in a little Parish like Gargunock there might be twenty or more different tables to be served. There was much to rouse the anxious care of the minister's heart, There was the hospitality of the Manse – Mr Warden speaks with a note of regret of the family being too much taken up with Martha's part. There was the fear of some of those scandals which marked at times these gatherings of men and women – and drew the satire of poets and critics. One thing that strikes anyone going through these pages is the absence of that sad note that is so often dominant in the old Kirk Session records – the cases of discipline which fill page after page of the minutes of their courts. There is but one reference to discipline in this volume, where the shrinking of the minister's mind from fording the repeated compearance of the guilty before the congregation gives a hint perhaps of a delicacy of thought that shuts out such subjects from any notice in his book. That he can give thanks that his fears of scandal have not been fulfilled may suggest that not all these gatherings were marked by the unworthy events and scenes which have come to be generally associated with them.

Of the type of feeling and of thought that filled the mind of this minister in the midst of his work, we can take such examples as when he dedicates each member of his family to the same Christ, God, and Covenant, that, as he writes to his favourite son, ...

*“You, they and I may be the Lord's for Him, like Him, governed by Him, led by his Holy Spirit, that at last we may meet in glory and be ever with Him. My constant cry is, poor me, oh how dark, dead, unbelieving, unconstant, weak and unholy and sinful am I. I ever see more and more my need of another's righteousness: I rejoice in it and the riches of grace, but , alas, how soon is my faith and hope shaken. If ever I come to glory, it must be by another, and surely not by anything in me, or that be done by me. Surely we must be monuments of grace if ever we are anything to purpose.”*

In such thoughts, spoken over and over again, we have the tone of the religious speech and thinking of his time: and they give us a fair portrait of a Parish Minister's mind in these days.

### **Problems with the seceders**

But Mr Warden was not allowed to pass untouched by the greater questions of the time. He had his share to take in the controversies which gave rise to the first great Secessions, though his part was to try to seek peace and ensue it. With other Brethern of the Presbytery of Stirling he was commissioned to wait upon Mr Ebenezer Erskine, and to write to him with a view to negotiations for the return of the Seceding Brethern. Things had, perhaps, already gone too far and minds become too embittered and settled on their way. The mission proved fruitless – the letters asking for meeting and discussion went unacknowledged. We can understand the soreness of feeling in the minds of the remaining ministers of the Church of Scotland. The Synod, considering the actions of the seceding ministers ...

*“have ordered to be laid before the next Commission their continuing to intrude into congregations by pretending to hold fasts there, their licensing others to preach, and taking upon to reverse sentences of Presbyteries against scandalous persons, on these persons making a secession from this Church and associating themselves to them.”*

*“But my constant lamentation is,” says John Warden, “how these men have ruined religion in its life and power. It’s not now the great things of Christianity, but doubtful disputations as to the way of settling congregations, railing and lying wherein most of their followers are employed.”*

Mr Warden has in later days – after preaching in Stirling – a conversation with Mr Ebenezer Erskine,

*I told him I should be glad to cast in my poor mite to prevent any sentence against him and his brethern, would he give me any encouragement: upon this I proposed he and they should condescend to forbear going about the country pretending to keep fasts, and forbear baptising children from other children while they had not orderly testimonials. But though you would think he would have thanked me for my concern, I had nothing from him but the most indecent of reflections on myself and bitter reflections on ministers of this Church. I stayed but five minutes with him observing nothing of a Gospel flame in him.*

Perhaps one will find from a study of the documents on the other side that all the bitterness is not on the one side. Certainly if we could decipher history truly we should also find that all the lofty enthusiasm for Christ’s Church and Christ’s charity is never only on one side. We may note these moods and feelings, and turn with relief to the hope that these divisions have had their day and ceased to be, and were but broken lights, staining the white radiance of a wider truth and a greater mission.

### **Other religious influences**

From other movements also there came a wave of influence into this quiet parish. England and Scotland were being greatly stirred by the preaching of George Whitfield, a minister of the Church of England. Mr Warden had read a diary written when that preacher was 25 years of age: notes that it consisted much of when, where, and how often he preached and of notes of congregations of 20, 30, 50, yea 60 thousand persons.

*“Scarce does he ever preach but he says it is with power to the conversion of many. I shall be loath to say more, only I think there are a great many ‘Ego’s’ and ‘I’s’ in it; and he seems to be too hasty in his conclusions as to providences, influences, and persons”*

Three years after he had noted these remarks, he tells of Mr Whitefield's coming to Scotland and preaching in Stirling, when ministers and persons of all ranks attended his sermons.

*"I have not heard him, but those who have do not admire the matter of his sermons, nor do I those he has printed, but he has a singular energy and force in his way of delivery which is very taking. He preaches extempore, and constantly twice every day, sometimes thrice. I forbear to say more about him, I have and design it for years, what he calls God's dealings with his soul in converting him and bringing him to the ministry. He speaks of his natural state, and all that I shall say is that I wish he had more distrust as to his being brought into a gracious condition. I might say a great deal more but I forbear.*

### **After effects**

Mr Warden was afterwards to feel some of the effects of that preaching in his own Parish; or at any rate the effects of a spiritual movement of which that preaching was one of the signs. In 1742 there came one of those startling seasons of religious revival which still the hopes and fears of many. Mr Warden gives this description of it.

*"about two months ago," he writes, indicating a date about April 1742, "there has been strange work in Cambuslang, some few miles beyond Glasgow to the South. This yet continues. These people seem to under great conviction of sin, and it has reached children of 12 and 14 years of age. There is a remarkable outward change in the practice of many, but what makes it suspicious like as to many, is their crying and shrieking, fainting and falling into convulsions. Yet when I think how distress and agony of soul very much affects the body, here I find myself very much obliged to be very sober-minded. The like takes place at Calder by Glasgow and at Kilsyth, and with you at Campsie, only with you not so much noise and crying. But I desire to be modest and wait the issue, for sometimes the Seceders who follow the deposed ministers cry it down and give hard names to it; and I forbear to judge hard of them, only wish the Lord may pity them."*

Some of his own communicants went to Kilsyth, and

*"eight or nine of them, all young women only two young lads" came back affected by the spirit of revival, crying out because of sin, particularly their unbelief, though others were in confusion.*

As the summer goes on the Spirit gains ground in Gargunnoch itself. The people demand a week-day's sermon and there is such a crowd they have to leave the Church and hold the service outside.

*"at one service such was the concern of a throng congregation that they could not refrain weeping aloud in such measure that I could not be heard though I spoke higher than ordinary. I have seen some of them since who in the midst of deep concern for show the greatest desire after Christ and salvation by Him, and fervour in embracing Him with the*

*most lively resolves after holiness for times to come and fears that it should be otherwise."*

### **Suffer the little children...**

A little later comes the note

*"I cannot but observe to you that several young ones between 9 and 14 years of age have with bitterness cried out because of sin and for Christ, and are observed to be reading the Bible, singing psalms, and praying when herding the cattle. Nota. That most of those who cry are young women. We have in this congregation 60 who have been under visible concern, and I am assured there are many more."*

In August, on a Sunday,

*"there could be no restraining the congregation's crying, many were so, and those who did not cry were filled with tears".*

These signs still perplex the minister's mind.

*"One thing causes thoughtfulness to me, their spending so much time in social duties, as whole nights and days and not going to their own homes." Again he notices more particularly "the conditions of many infants from five years old to ten. They have laid aside their childish playing. They meet for prayer. They have great emotions in their body, yea, such fightings as a strong person cannot hold them, and these they fall into not only at the public congregation but at their homes; they love one another: when parents did not allow them houseroom fearing mismanagements, they are ready to take the fields. If they meet with those they think religious they flock about them . . . . When I call them to me and ask them what makes them so uneasy, some say it is sin and fear of God's wrath, others state it is desire after Christ, and some others say they know not. I never was in greater difficulty what judgement to form."*

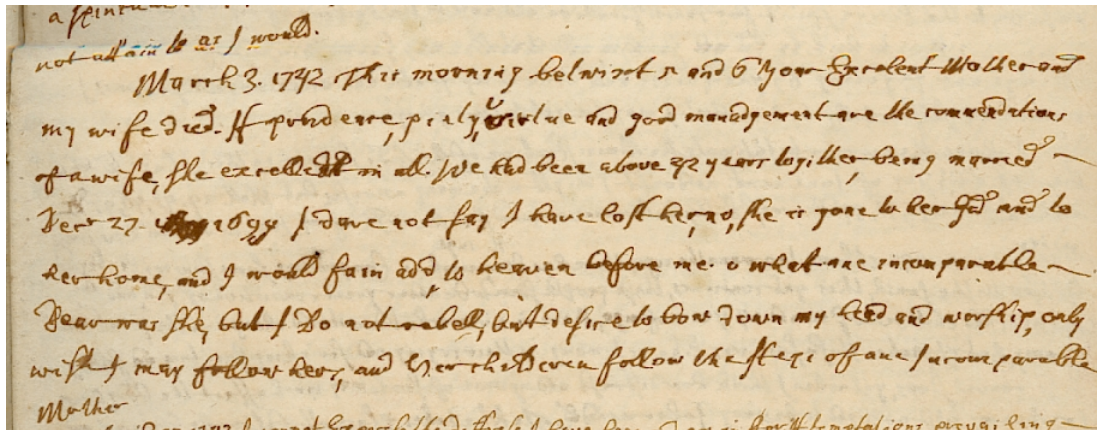
### **The Rev Warden's family**

Yet he goes on patiently trying to guide the spirits as his own light leads him: and in the following year tells of the addition to his Communion roll of no less than 55, most of them young, but 2 over 60 years of age. To this picture of the children in his Parish he adds one of two little ones in his own manse.

*"1744. On the 29th January last I spent some time with my two grandchildren who are in my house, Helen and Margaret Warden, when I opened up to them their misery as they were able to bear, taught them the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour, spoke to them of the great advantages of early religion, sought their consent to be the Lord's, which with tears they seemed to grant, and thereafter kneeling with*

*them and taking them by the hand, in the most solemn manner I gave them to the Lord.*

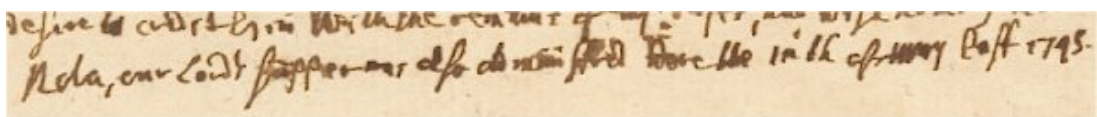
He is now getting old. He had lost the partner of his life some years ago, and his tribute to her on the morning of her death is a beautiful one



*a fine  
not attain to as I would.  
March 3. 1742 This morning betwixt 5 and 6 your Excellent Mother and  
my wife died. If prudence, piety, virtue and good management are the commendations  
of a wife, she excelled in all. We had been above 42 years together, being married  
Decr 27 1699 I dare not say I have lost her, she is gone to her God and to  
her home, and I would fain add, to heaven before me. O what an incomparable  
dear was she; but I do not rebel, but desire to bow down my head and worship, only  
with I may follow her, and her children follow the steps of an incomparable  
Mother*

*“March 3, 1742. This morning betwixt 5 and 6 your excellent mother and my wife died. If prudence, piety, virtue and good management are the commendations of a wife she excelled in all. We had above 42 years together, being married December 27, 1699. I dare not say I have lost her, as she has gone to her God and to her home, and I would fain add, to heaven before me. O what an incomparable dear was she; but I do not rebel, but desire to bow down my head and worship, only wish that I may follow her, and her children follow the steps of an incomparable Mother.”*

He is getting towards his 70<sup>th</sup> year, and the trouble afflicting his back and his knees gets more acute. Feeling that he cannot visit his Parishioners as he ought to, he gets his nephew William Warden, ordained as assistant and successor, a settlement that at first brings bitterness and difficulty. There is a party who oppose the election, with the Laird of Leckie as their head. I believe that afterwards the estrangement of the families was healed by the marriage of descendants from either side. Things settle down in the Parish as the assistant plods on with his visiting work. Mr John Warden himself lived on we know till 1751, but the last entry in this volume reads,



*before the altar by the Minister...  
Nota, our Lord's Supper was also administered here the 15th of May 1745.*

*“Our Lord's Supper here was also administered here the 15th of May last, 1745.”*

## Conclusion

We read over these pages with interest and with respect. Side by side with the picture which we draw from the formal records of an ecclesiastical court, where the details have to be entered which prove the weakness and the sins of men and women, we are well to have this other picture drawn for us by one who has filled his place among the quiet Parish Ministers, taking no great place in the public notice of their time, but serving their Church with their heart and their strength, forming the links of the golden chain of faith and devotion which holds the generations together and binds humanity to the feet of God.

---

### *Footnote*

*Reading through this booklet for the first time I was much taken by the personality of John Warden. His devotion to his religion seemingly during every waking minute of the day is something we are not aware of in his counterparts or lay persons during these more modern times. Perhaps it is there but we're not aware of it. I was under the impression that the one remaining volume of his diary had gone to the Records Office in Edinburgh but one day, about a couple of months after Rev. Catherine Hepburn had left for Fettercairn, she paid a flying visit to the village and left, for me, a large brown envelope. On opening it I found the John Warden diary, bound in vellum, yellowed with age and practically oozing with history. Reading it is difficult as you have seen because his writing is spidery and some of the punctuation, words and spelling are foreign to us nowadays. However, also in the envelope was a handwritten transcription of the diary by the descendant of his who presented it to the Kirk Session back in the 1920s. Unfortunately his is almost as difficult to read! But at least it gives an alternative source of clues when one is attempting to read the original, something I intend to do over time and transcribe to hard disk.*

*John McLaren  
Nov. 2001*

The new church building of 1626 was rectangular with a loft at the west end. This was enlarged in 1644 but in time the church was “throng” and the solution to this was to build another loft at the East end above the seats for the Lairds of Leckie and Boquhan.. The same Lairds then requested that they might have the front seats of the new loft and that was agreed on.

In 1702, soon after the Rev. John Warden took up his post here, it was found that the bell in use was so small that its ringing could not be heard at any distance, a heavier bell was ordered from the official bell founder of St Giles: and a belfry sufficiently strong to support it was built on the North Gable. That completed the main outlines of Gargunock Church as it stands today.