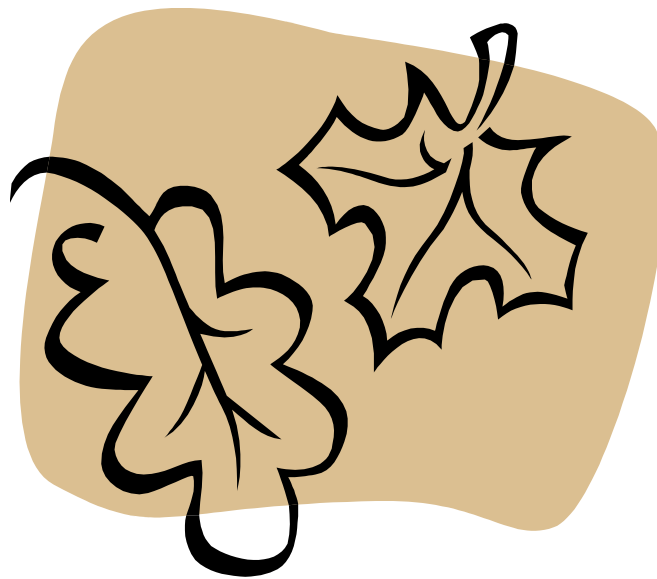


AUTUMN LEAVES

Volume 6



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Foreword

I have much pleasure in presenting the sixth volume of my *Autumn Leaves*, drawn mainly from the 1970s. There is no one particular theme.

This is actually a reissue, as the original volume six contained a number of scanned pages that were not easy to read. Please delete the previous version. The new volume also contains a couple of additional items – two further articles from “The Scots Law Times” that did not appear in the original. In some cases, I have added updating information in footnotes.

As always, I trust that my long-suffering friends will enjoy these contributions and will also forgive their many shortcomings. They do not pretend to be works of originality or of scholarship.

Alasdair Gordon

Hamilton
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Double and Triple - Aberdeen's Singular Churches ¹

In days when the churches in Scotland are working more closely together than ever before, Aberdeen's triple church must seem a strange relic of a bygone age. Nevertheless, this same church was, in its time, a remarkable and useful building and, externally has changed little since it was built.² In a very real sense, however, the triple church was the child of a double church at the time of the Disruption in 1843 when the Free Church of Scotland was constituted. Thus a few comments first of all about the history of the double church may help the reader to understand how, at one stage, five congregations worshipped in two buildings within a stone's throw of one another in the heart of Aberdeen.

The double church is the "mither kirk" of "toun kirk" of Aberdeen and, at the time of writing, contains two separate congregations - the West and the East (known as the North and East since 1954 as the result of a union with the former North church)³ St Nicholas churches. The original St Nicholas kirk was founded around AD 1060 and its building, at the time just prior to the Reformation, was said to be the finest parish church in Scotland. Between the nave on the west side and the choir on the east side rose the lead-covered spire built in 1513.

At the time of the Reformation (1560) the church was divided in two and the area underneath the steeple ("the crossing") became the common ground between the two churches and this arrangement still continues to this day. At the time of the division, parishioners were allocated to one of the two churches

¹ Reprinted with some minor amendments and added footnotes from the Liturgical Review, May 1974.

² This was the situation in 1974. One part is now a pub and other parts are ruinous.

³ Subsequently, the congregation reverted to the name of East St Nicholas. The two congregations united to become the Kirk of St Nicholas and were subsequently joined by St Nicolas Congregational church. The entire congregation is known as the Kirk of St Nicolas Uniting. The former West church is the place of worship. The East church has been redeveloped for wider church and community involvement.

by ballot. By 1732 it appears that the West church had become more or less a ruin and it fell into disuse as a building. In 1751 James Gibbs of London was ordered to commence renovation of the building and this was completed in 1755 giving the present West church. In 1828 the Court of Teinds divided the city parish of St Nicholas into six distinct new parishes - West, East, North, South, Grefriars and St Clement's. The West and East parishes were formally allocated their respective buildings within the "toun kirk" as would have been envisaged and the successors of these two congregations still worship back to back with the common ground under the steeple dividing them.⁴

In 1835 the East Church (the Pre-Reformation choir) was demolished and a new granite building was erected to the design of Archibald Simpson, of whom more will be said presently. Around the same time, the common ground which contains the pre-Reformation Drum and Collison aisles was opened up on the south side. In 1874, the East church was destroyed by fire and the old steeple was also lost. The church was subsequently rebuilt to its former design (also renovated in 1936) and a new granite steeple was erected to the design of William Smith. A carillon of thirty-seven bells was installed but was virtually inaudible from the outside and so remained unused until it was removed in 1953 and replaced by the present carillon of forty-eight bells. The tower also contains a chiming clock.

One very fine pre-Reformation fragment does still remain under the North and East church. It is the small granite-built chapel of St Mary (formerly Our Lady of Pity). It was built before 1438 as a mortuary chapel for the Gordon family. It fell into disuse and was "rediscovered" at the end of the last century and subsequently restored to the design of Dr William Kelly and others. The chapel is entered from Correction Wynd.

⁴ This was the position when the article was written in 1974. Only the West church is used now as a place of worship. There is a memorial to workers in the off shore oil and gas industry in the crossing.

All of this should make it clear that, historically, Aberdeen was quite accustomed to the idea of more than one congregation worshipping in the same building. Of course, Aberdeen is not exceptional in this respect; other cities had similar examples and indeed the High Kirk of Edinburgh (St Giles) at one time had four churches under its roof. There are many points of interest in the St Nicholas churches on which one could dwell. Such information is, however, easily accessible to visitors and so the main part of this article will now deal with the history of the triple church which is less well known generally.

The story of the inception of the triple church is straightforward enough. It was built to accommodate three Disruption congregations, the Free East, West (both from the St Nicholas double church) and South (coming from the South parish church in Belmont Street which had originally housed a Relief congregation).

The triple church is roughly T-shaped, with the right hand of the horizontal forming the East building, the left hand forming the West and the vertical the South. The steeple, which is common to the three buildings is sited at the right angle between the West and South churches and originally the West church entered underneath the tower. The East and West churches were of similar size and design with approximately 1,100 sittings each while the South church contained 1,300. The East church originally entered from Belmont Street and the South church from Schoolhill (the present entrance to East and Belmont). Apart from the steeple, the three churches had no common ground internally as was the case in the St Nicholas church and they functioned as three entirely independent congregations. Latterly, the former East church, more recently East and Belmont church and now united with a neighbouring (South) congregation to form St Mark's, has been the only church of the original three to be used as a place of worship. Now, as a result of arbitration following

the recent union with the South church, it too will cease to be a place of worship and thus a remarkable chapter in the ecclesiastical history of Aberdeen will be brought to a close.

At the time of the Disruption there was a tremendous boom in church building as there was throughout Scotland. No doubt the thought of a triple church would have endeared itself to the traditionally thrifty citizens of Aberdeen since it was obviously much cheaper to build three churches in one than three separate buildings on different sites. Also, the concept of more than one church in one building was, as we have seen, not new in Aberdeen.

An excellent site for the triple churches was purchased in 1843 at the corner of Belmont Street and Schoolhill at a net cost of £540. Three trustees for each of the congregations were appointed to see to the erection of the new building. The trustees were very fortunate in that they obtained the services of Archibald Simpson as the architect of the project. Simpson was without doubt a man of genius and artistic sensibility who has left his mark on Aberdeen.⁵ His work includes Bon Accord Square and Crescent, East St Nicholas church, the Music Hall, the New Market (demolished 1971), the Scottish Episcopal Cathedral, the old Infirmary (Woolmanhill) and the east part of Marischal College quadrangle. His brief on this occasion was to build a triple church with a common spire as soon as possible within a limited budget. This was no easy task but Simpson was equal to it. He not only produced a design very quickly but also used some building material that was unusual for a church, particularly in Aberdeen, namely brick. Aberdeen, being a "granite city", had few buildings constructed of brick except in some of the poorer areas where use was sometimes made of hand-made bricks of Ferryhill clay.

⁵ See *Archibald Simpson Architect: His Life and Times* (David G Miller [2006])

The actual churches were built mainly of granite and sandstone with some brick facing whereas the common spire was built almost entirely of bricks which apparently were mainly salvaged from the demolition of some poorer houses. Whilst this does not sound very attractive, in fact Simpson's spire is generally agreed to be the finest in Aberdeen and is a local landmark. Simpson built this unusual spire after the design of the twin spires of St Elizabeth's church in Marburg. If it is viewed for the first time from close up, the result may be slightly disappointing as the eye is taken immediately to the "naked" brick which is not generally pleasing to Scottish tastes. If, however, the spire is viewed from, say, Union Bridge or from Rosemount Viaduct, it will be obvious why it is rightly claimed not only to be the finest spire in Aberdeen but the finest brick spire in Europe. Its proportions must be almost perfect giving a wonderful "soaring" impression. In fact, the spire is a "dummy" and the tower contains neither a bell nor an inside stair.

Of the interiors of the three churches, only one can now be seen in anything like its original form - namely the former East building, more recently East and Belmont church (following a union with the former Secession church in Belmont Street). The interior here has been substantially altered but essentially it is still a Simpson church. It is built in a style favoured in Aberdeen namely long and narrow with a fairly shallow gallery running the full three sides of the building and supported by iron pillars. Towards the end of the last century, major renovations took place to the design of Dr William Kelly. This involved closing the door on Belmont Street and building an apse on the same wall to accommodate an organ. Also, the church itself was now entered from the former South building which had been converted into a suite of halls and other offices. An interesting feature of this conversion is the very large and spacious entrance vestibule that was created at the north end of the former South church. It

occupies about half of the original area of the latter and from it one can enter the area of the church, the lower hall, session room etc. A central cantilevered staircase leads up to a four-sided gallery from which one can enter the church gallery, the upper hall and other offices. This arrangement is quite a contrast to the cramped and badly lit vestibules found in many churches.

Nothing of the original interior of the South church now remains. Externally, some of the windows were covered over but most of them can still be traced. In the East and Belmont church the pipe organ which, of course, is a later addition, is skilfully concealed behind a magnificent fretted oak screen in perpendicular Gothic style ⁶ by Alexander Marshall Mackenzie who designed the world famous granite west frontage of Marischal College. The church also has a very fine timber roof and is bright and pleasing as a place of worship. The war memorial in the vestibule is by Huxley Jones and is both discreet and handsome.

The former West church (now semi derelict) which was to become the High church was taken over by a Congregational church in 1947. Major alterations took place at this time including the removal of the gallery and so this building was changed internally beyond recognition. It ceased to be a place of worship some years ago and has been decaying ever since. It was bought by a speculator in 1972 and the intention is to convert it into flats.⁷

It seems remarkable that the total building cost for the three churches was less than £7,000 and that the whole structure, with the exception of the steeple, was completed within seven months. This remarkable building was, however, to undergo further interesting changes of circumstances. In 1865, the Great North of Scotland Railway Company began the construction of a

⁶ Sadly, the screen and the organ were subsequently wrecked by vandals.

⁷ Many suggestions as to use have been made and the building has changed hands more than once. The building itself is now beyond repair and the latest plan is to build student flats on the site. The brick spire will remain.

line along the Denburn valley just below the West church and there were serious fears that this work might undermine the whole structure. In fact, these fears proved groundless and over a hundred years later both railway and church still exist. However, the three congregations entered into negotiations with the railway company and eventually it was decided to sell them the entire triple church at a price of £12,000 and to abandon it as a place of worship.

Very soon it was realised that this action had been rather precipitate and that the likelihood of the building - or any part of it - being undermined and collapsing was actually very remote. Accordingly, the East and South congregations soon repurchased their respective churches at a cost of £3,000 each. This meant a profit of £1,000 to each congregation as a result of this bizarre transaction. Now that the East and South congregations were again in occupation of the churches they had so recently left, it seemed that the way would be open for the West to do likewise.

A majority of this congregation decided, however, that a new church should be built and the eventual outcome of this was the construction of what is now the Langstane Kirk ⁸ in Union Street. A sizable minority of the West congregation wished to return to their old building and this caused considerable discussion and negotiations in the Free Presbytery. The railway company wished a price of £3,800 for the West building and the East and South congregations each contributed the £1,000 surplus they had made on the sale and repurchase of their respective properties towards the repurchase of the old church, leaving the minority to subscribe only the sum of £1,800.

Eventually, the building was reopened on 20 January 1867 as a preaching station under the name of the Free High church. In the

⁸ Known for many years as the West Church of St Andrew, latterly the Langstane Kirk after a union with St Nicholas (Union Grove). The Langstane congregation was subsequently dissolved and the building is now a public house.

same year this (ostensibly) new charge was raised to full status and so, once again, there were three separate congregations worshipping under the shadow of the brick spire. This was not to last for very long.

The South congregation vacated their church towards the end of the nineteenth century (1892) in favour of a new and larger building in nearby Rosemount Viaduct to the design of Alexander Marshall Mackenzie and it is this building that will house the new united congregation of St Mark's. The East congregation then purchased the former South building and converted it as described above.

The High church continued in operation for a good many years and united with the congregation of St Columba's (Dee Street) when the latter were disposed of their building in 1907 in favour of the continuing Free Church. With the progress of time and the shift in population, the High congregation was transported to Hilton just before the last War. Their building was actually bought by East and Belmont church at this time which meant that this congregation now owned the whole complex. As an act of Christian kindness, this congregation sold the former High church to a homeless Congregational church in 1947 for the same price as they had bought it.

This act of kindness has cost dear in the long term as the subsequent decay of this building has not helped the fabric of East and Belmont. Various ideas were put forward for its use by bodies and individuals who were anxious to see the old High church preserved. At one stage it was hoped that it might be taken over by the local authority and converted into a museum but this scheme fell through.⁹

⁹ The empty building was allowed to fall into serious decay.

It seems rather sad that the wider church could not have made use of it as a conference or youth centre. The building is in the heart of Aberdeen (it enters from Schoolhill) and can function as a unit quite separately from East and Belmont. It certainly seems regrettable that a speculator was eventually allowed to buy it at a very low sum. It is not, however, the purpose of this article to try to be wise in retrospect which would be less than helpful. It must be said that the wider church is not a society for the preservation of old buildings no matter how interesting or historical they may be.¹⁰

With the continuance of union and readjustment, the next twenty years will certainly see the demise of many excellent churches, some perhaps of considerable architectural merit. This is a hard fact that must be faced. Yet however quaint it may seem to us now to build three churches in one, Simpson's triple church has served a useful purpose and has been a worthy landmark in Aberdeen not only in a physical but also in a spiritual sense. In the course of some one hundred and thirty years, the brick spire has seen many changes in the churches beneath it. During that time the prayers of the faithful have ascended, the Good News of the Gospel has been proclaimed and it is on such criteria alone that the whole matter must be finally judged. Those who, like the writer, mourn the final passing of the triple church from the Christian life of Aberdeen can take considerable consolation from the fact that the real landmark of any place of worship is not physical but spiritual; and so, in a real sense, they can remember the Scriptural injunction "Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set." (Proverbs 22: 28)

The writer wishes to record his thanks to Rev Walter J Gordon and to Mr J Duncan Morrison for their patience and help in collating much of the material in this article.

¹⁰ East and Belmont church eventually became a public house known as "The Triple Kirks" with a dance studio upstairs.
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View up the Denburn Valley from Union Bridge before the building of the railway in 1865, showing the triple kirks and the gardens at the back of Belmont Street.
Copyright: Aberdeen City Council.

Contributions to the Dictionary of Evangelical Biography ¹¹

ALEXANDER, WILLIAM LINDSAY (b. Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland. 24 Aug. 1808; d. Musselburgh. Midlothian, Scotland 20 Dec. 1884). Congregational divine. He was educated at the universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews and, although of Baptist extraction, he became a Congregationalist in 1826. In 1827 he studied at Glasgow Theological Academy under Ralph Wardlaw and Greville Ewing. After a period of classical tutoring at Blackburn Theological Academy, he commenced medical studies on 1831. In 1832 he became minister of Newington Independent Church, Liverpool moving to Edinburgh in 1834 to take up the charge of North College Street Congregational Church (which eventually became Augustine Congregational Church) where he remained until 1877. An eminent scholar, he served both as professor of theology and principal at the Edinburgh Congregational College; he was also a member of the Old Testament Revision Committee. In 1884, the year of his death, he was awarded the degree of LLD, having previously received the degree of DD from St Andrews University in 1846.

BANNERMAN, JAMES (b. Manse of Cargill, Perthshire, Scotland, 9 April 1807; d. Edinburgh, 27 March 1868). He was educated at Perth Academy and Edinburgh University, licensed by the Presbytery of Perth in 1830 and ordained and inducted to the charge of Ormiston in 1833; he adhered to the Free Church in 1843. In 1849 Bannerman was appointed professor of apologetics and pastoral theology at New College, Edinburgh. A very able and distinguished scholar in the Reformed tradition, his work "Inspiration. The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures" published in 1865, was written (in his own words) at a "time of transition in religious opinion". The volume helped to clarify some of the main issues and contemporary attitudes in the

¹¹ Copyright Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. The bibliographies and select writings are omitted, other wise the articles are reproduced as printed, although I have expanded some of the abbreviations.

debate over the inspiration of the Bible. While he remained an exponent of orthodox teaching until his dying day, Bannerman's support for plenary rather than verbal inspiration was undoubtedly of considerable significance in the longer term. He was awarded the degree of DD by Princeton College in 1850.

BROWN, JOHN [of Broughton Place] ¹² (b. Whitburn, Lothian, Scotland, 12 June 1784; d. Edinburgh, 13 Oct. 1858). Scottish Secession Divine. he was the grandson of the more famous John Brown of Haddington and a son of John Brown of Whitburn: although a less distinguished scholar than his famous grandfather, he was of a warmer nature and maintained connections with other Christian traditions. He studied at Edinburgh University 1797-1800 and received further theological education 1800-4 under the saintly George Lawson of Selkirk who had succeeded to John Brown of Haddington's ¹³ position as sole professor of the Associate Synod.

He was inducted to his first pastoral charge of Biggar Associate Church in 1806 and remained there for some 16 years. During his time at Biggar he built up a justifiable reputation as an expositor of scripture. At the time when much expository preaching was either very formal or purely devotional, Brown returned to true expository preaching, opening up the Bible in a consecutive, doctrinal and practical manner.

In 1822, he was called to minister to the United Presbyterian congregation worshipping in Rose Street, Edinburgh and in 1829 he moved to the pastorate of Broughton Place Church in the New Town of the same city. The handsome classical building which housed Brown and his congregation (and which still stands) ¹⁴ was popularly known in Edinburgh as "Dr John Brown's Chapel". It was at Broughton Place that Brown's ministry was most influential. A

¹² John Cairns (1860) *Memoir of John Brown*. See also my own article in *Whose Faith Follows* (2013)p. 26.

¹³ See *Whose Faith Follows* (2013) p. 20.

¹⁴ Broughton Place Church was designed by Archibald Elliot. The congregation is now united with St Mary's Bellevue and the latter's church building is used. The former Broughton Place Church (where the writer was a Student Assistant 1968-9) was used for a time as a theatre and now serves as an auction room.

contemporary (Professor Masson) wrote of him: *At that time there was no more venerable man in Edinburgh. People turned in the street to observe his dignified figure as he passed and strangers who went to hear him were struck no less with the beauty of his appearance, the graceful fall of the silver locks around his fine head and sensitive face than by his Pauline earnestness.*¹⁵

In 1830 he was awarded the degree of DD by Jefferson College, Pennsylvania. In 1834 he was appointed as Scotland's first professor of exegetical theology in the United Associate Synod; by this time, the training for Secession ministry had altered and there were four professors, of whom Brown was one, who also held full time pastoral charges. Students came to study in the Synod Hall in Queen Street, Edinburgh¹⁶ over the summer months, working of the remainder of the year under the supervision of their home Presbyteries. Brown was able to use his expository gifts for the benefit of his students and, in later life, he was able to publish much of this material in commentary format; even today, some of his works are available in print.

Among his more influential works are *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ* and *Expository Discourses on I Peter*; among his commentaries are works on *Romans, Galatians, Hebrews* and *I Peter*. C H Spurgeon wrote of him:¹⁷ *We always think of Brown as a Puritan born out of due time. Everything he has left us is pure gold. He is both rich and clear, profound and perspicuous.* Equally, expounding scripture seems to have been Brown's greatest delight; writing of his work on Hebrews¹⁸ he said: *Happier hours than those which I have spent in composing these expository discourses I can scarcely expect to spend on this side of the grave.*

¹⁵ A R MacEwen, *Life and Letters of John Cairns* [London, 1895] p. 111. See also my own *Whose Faith Follow* (supra cit)

¹⁶ The Synod Hall later moved to a larger building in Castle Terrace. Older readers may remember it being used latterly as a cinema, specialising in horror movies!

¹⁷ *Commenting and Commentaries* [London, 1890]

¹⁸ Published in 1862 and reissued by the Banner of Truth Trust (1961) in their Geneva Commentary series.

In 1841, Brown became involved in a controversy of which he was never to be entirely free. The Reverend James Morison of Clerk's Lane, Kilmarnock and a former student of Brown's was indicted for heresy in that he held and preached a universal view of the Atonement. This was not denied by Morison but Brown, while not agreeing with everything that Morison said, spoke on his behalf and suggested that *...there ought to be room in the United Secession Church for men who held similar views to Mr Morison...* although he also stated that Morison was certainly in error *in certain respects*. As it happened, Morison effectively deposed himself and went on to form the Evangelical Union in 1843. As Morison attributed at least some of his views to Brown's teaching and since Brown was perceived as having taken Morison's side at the trial, he had laid himself open to the suspicion of the Hyper-Calvinists, led by Dr Andrew Marshall of Kirkintilloch. To them, Brown's views at least tended in the direction of Amyraldianism (sometimes known as Universal Calvinism) and they charged him before the synod of twelve counts of teaching unsound doctrine. In 1845 he was finally cleared of all such charges.

Interestingly, Brown and Marshall were allies in another matter - the movement which sought to disestablish the Church of Scotland and move towards what later came to be known as the "voluntary principle". Brown was so strongly against any church/state connection that he refused to pay the annuity tax levied on citizens of Edinburgh to pay the stipends of the ministers of the Burgh Churches. Rather than pay this tax, he allowed his goods to be poinded and sold by the civil authorities. He had a son, also named John, a medical doctor and the author of *Rab and his Friends*¹⁹ and other works.

BUCHANAN, ROBERT (b. St Ninian's, Stirling, Scotland 15 Aug. 1802; d. Rome 31 March 1875). Disruption worthy. After studies

¹⁹ 1859

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