



Bishop Geddes, 'a fisher of men?'

Rhyme and religious reason

Fr Michael Briody of St Michael's in Moodiesburn examines the meeting and letters between Bishop John Geddes of Edinburgh and the young poet he attempted to guide, Robert Burns, who was born 250 years ago this year and became a national hero.

In late January 1780, a leaflet was circulated around Edinburgh, encouraging people to gather on Wednesday evening, February 2, in a street called Leith Wynd. The purpose, the leaflet said, was 'to pull down that pillar of Popery lately erected there'. This referred to the chapel-house built by Bishop George Hay, to whom we Scots Catholics owe a great deal as the architect of the revival of Catholicism in Scotland in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Bishop Hay was in London at the time negotiating with the government over Catholics gaining some relief from the laws that inhibited their freedom. Rumours of these improvements for Catholics had instigated the leaflet and the riot that ensued. Two priests were in the house when the mob arrived. They just managed to escape by clambering over the neighbouring rooftops. The house was ransacked and burnt to the ground. The authorities did nothing to prevent it, despite everyone knowing it was going to happen, and vague promises having been made beforehand that there would be nothing to worry about. Bishop Hay did not lack courage, but at this juncture he retreated to Preshome, near Buckie, a Catholic stronghold in the North-East of Scotland, and asked his recently-ordained coadjutor, Bishop John Geddes to take up residence in Edinburgh. You can imagine Bishop Hay's surprise when he soon started getting reports from Edinburgh that his assistant was attending dinner parties held by the great and the good, making it well-known that he was a Catholic Bishop. Bishop Hay repeatedly wrote to persuade him to lead a more discreet life, but to no avail. He really feared that there would be some terrible retribution at some point. Bishop Geddes, however, had a very distinct plan in mind. As well as caring for the Catholics of Edinburgh, and walking to Glasgow every six weeks or so to care for the sixty Catholics there, he was intent on influencing the opinion-formers of late 18th century Scotland. His diary mentions frequent visits to

Lord Monboddo, a Court of Session judge, who had the practice of hosting dinner parties to which he invited any person of interest who happened to be in Edinburgh at any given time. On March 26 1787, Bishop Geddes wrote to a priest in Rome: "There is an excellent poet started up in Ayrshire, where he has been a Ploughman; he has made many excellent Poems in old Scotch, which are now in the Press for the third time. I shall send them to you. His name is Burns. He is only twenty-eight years old; he is in town just now, and I supped with him once at Lord Monboddo's, where I conversed a good deal with him, and think him a man of uncommon genius; and he has, as yet, time, if he lives, to cultivate it."

The Bard.

Yes, Bishop Geddes met Robbie Burns. Clearly the bishop was impressed with his ability as a poet. It is not recorded what he thought of his morals. We do know what Burns thought of the bishop. In a letter of the 4th 1787, writing to a Mrs Dunlop, he states that the finest 'Cleric character I ever saw was a Roman Catholic.' He was 'a Popish Bishop, Geddes'. We know that the bishop bought a copy of Burns' poetry and Burns himself took it off him and returned it some time later with several extra poems in his own hand written in the fly-leaves at the front and back of the book. Known as the 'Geddes Burns', it is now, unfortunately, in a library in California. We know from the surviving letters that they must have corresponded several times. A very interesting letter of Feb 3 1789, written by Burns from Ellisland, near Dumfries, begins.

"Venerable Father (an unusually respectful address for those times), as I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here, at last, stationary in the serious business of life; and have now not only the...leisure, but the...inclination, to attend to those great and important questions, what I am, where I am, and for what I am destined."



Robbie Burns

Conversion

The good bishop was clearly not wasting his time at the dinner parties. Was he hoping to convert Burns or others to Catholicism? That was perhaps too much to hope for at that time, but he was certainly trying to influence them to think about their souls and the true purpose of this life, and hoping at the same time to give a good picture of Catholicism. And he succeeded. Ten years after the Edinburgh mob burned down Bishop Hay's chapel-house, Bishop Geddes had Edinburgh society eating out of his hand. Allowing God's Holy Spirit to work through his character and personality, he had changed the mood and attitude towards Catholicism, so that the legislation giving Catholics some freedoms which had sparked the riots of 1780, was passed in 1793 (This was known as the Catholic Relief Act – The Catholic Emancipation Act was to follow in 1829)). Bishop Geddes was a 'fisher of men' as Our Lord Bishop John Geddes called St Peter and St Andrew. The lone angler standing by a river, patiently for hours, using all sorts of tricks, including letting out the line now and again, in order eventually to reel in the fish. That was what Bishop Geddes was doing, spending time with people he wanted to influence and get them to think about the important questions in life, and it is clear that he got them to think about the important questions in life, and it is clear also that he got Robert Burns to do that.

A Celebratory Mass, Tuesday 2nd June 2009



A Mass of celebration and thanksgiving was held at Scalán on Tuesday 2nd June 2009 to mark the purchase of Sandy Matheson's house by the association and the lease of the agricultural buildings and surrounding grounds from the Crown.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien and Bishop Moran were the principal concelebrants and the President of the Scalán Association, Canon Halloran gave the homily. Bishop Peter welcomed everyone, mentioning in particular the Lord Lieutenant of Banffshire, Claire Russell, the Crown Estate's national representative Alan Laidlaw and Scottish representative Andy Wells.

Around 100 people attended the Mass, a tent erected over part of the old chapel for the celebrants and the congregation seated in the courtyard. It didn't rain, it was occasionally quite warm and the swallows around Scalán, with the oyster catchers, lapwings and curlews also seemed to be celebrating the day.

Bishop Peter reminded us that we were fast approaching the 300th anniversary of the 'birth' of Scalán and Canon Halloran, in his discourse, pointed out that although Scalán was initially chosen as a place to hide from the Crown, its history was one of loyalty to the Crown as could be seen in the tireless work of Bishops Hay and Geddes to that Canon Brian Halloran, Cardinal Keith O'Brien and Bishop Peter Moran. This Mass and gathering was a celebration of the union of the Church and Crown which we were all pledged to support and encourage. Canon Halloran asked the Lord Lieutenant to convey the Scalán Association's good wishes to Her Majesty the Queen and to pledge our loyalty to her. Cardinal O'Brien also spoke on the same theme of 'love and loyalty'.



The Mass was concelebrated by the Cardinal, Bishop Peter, Mgr. R. McDonald, Mgr. J. McIntyre, Mgr. T. Wynne, Fr. J. Bath, Fr. M. Briody, Fr. G. Livingstone, Fr. A. Mann, and Fr. J. Thomson. Fr. C. Stewart, in the congregation, led the music.

After Mass we were invited by the Crown Estate to a reception in the Brae's Hall. This was followed by the A.G.M.

By Ann Dean

Presidents Report 2009

Our annual Pilgrimage Mass was held as usual on the first Sunday of July 2008. Almost 200 were present. The Concelebrants were Mgr. Robert McDonald, Mgr. John McIntyre, Mgr. Joseph Toal, Canon Donald Mackay, Fr. Michael Briody, Fr. Jerry Livingston, Fr. Jim Morrow, Fr. Gilmore McDermott, Fr. Eddie McGhee, and Fr. Jim

Thomson, and Canon Brian Halloran. They were assisted by the Rev. Deacon McQuade. Canon Donald MacKay preached the sermon.

Visitors to Scalán included the staff and students of Scotus seminary who came to the college on Saturday 8th May.

We have been donated a chalice in memory of Hugh and Stella McDermott and family.

We extend our congratulations to Mgr. Joe Toal, former secretary of the Scalán Association who was consecrated Bishop of Argyll and the Islands.

The big development this year has been the conclusion of the purchase of the cottage adjacent to the old college that was previously the home of Sandy Matheson. The price was £35000. We have been exempt from paying V.A.T. for the time being, but it will be charged if we ever take a rental for the cottage.

It was a condition of the sale that we take a lease on the surrounding buildings and the surrounding area. The buildings include the old mill, an outhouse that was once a byre (which also has a mill attached to it) and a derelict cottage. The area of ground leased is 2.034 acres and includes the Bishop's Well. The lease is for fifteen years, dating from the 1st April 2008, at the rate of £100 per annum. Even if the lease had not been a condition of sale, it would have been necessary to fence the area as cows had caused considerable damage by knocking down our memorial trees, damaging the mill lade and churning up the ground in front of the college on the space in which we have our annual Scalán Mass. This area is now fenced, the Crown supplying the fencing material and the fencing erected by Mr. Gordon McGillivray's work force. The improvement is already apparent. The Crown has repaired the gable and slates of the mill house, has secured the once dangerous access to the mill wheel and has promised to repair the mill lade bridge. It is agreed in the lease that our share of the road maintenance from Eskemullach will be fulfilled by carrying out repair works with the hardcore and other materials provided by the landlord.

To mark the purchase and lease, the Crown suggested that we have a celebration, and we were very pleased that the Cardinal agreed to be the principal concelebrant at today's Mass and that the local bishop, Bishop Peter Moran, was also with us and we express our thanks to them and to all who came to today's Mass.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their hard work, in particular the editing team of the Scalán News, Mrs. Sylvia Toovey, Miss Ann Dean and Mrs. Elizabeth Beaton; Mr. and Mrs. Toovey and Mr and Mrs. McEwan for hospitality at committee meetings, Mr. and Mrs. Toovey for keeping a watchful eye on the building and for the regular emptying of the donation box, the Crown for catering for this occasion and the committee for all the meetings, sometime in inclement weather.

Email from South Africa

ALL SAINTS, BRACKENFELL, & ST KEVIN'S, NORTHPIKE.

Bed and Breakfast in Tomintoul in 1960 was a memorable experience. I was 19 years old and on my first visit to the UK from South Africa. Scotland in my mind, at that time, was a place of dreams: of Boswell & Johnson's Hebrides, of Walter Scott's Waverley Novels, of plaintive bagpipes, dubious haggis, lochs and castles, highland flings & caber-tossings...a typical colonial vision of reality north of Gretna Green!

My sister and I, in a hired Mini, ended up in Tomintoul one long summer evening. Our hostess packed us a picnic supper, suggested a "wee walk" just above the town and, when we got there, we sat, for the very first and thrilling time, in real Scottish heather, munching sensible sandwiches, stunning shortbread, tired-looking apples, and drinking from an ancient (14th century?) Thermos Flask. I photographed the bleakly bare and lovely hills surrounding "the highest village in the highlands", little thinking that in the 21st century I'd be back, and on my way through the town to the annual Scalán Mass. Since then "Scalán News" has been sent to my parish near Cape Town.

There are, in some ways, parallels to the experience of Catholicism in Scotland and in South Africa, in terms of banning and proscription. When the first Dutch settlers arrived in 1652 Catholicism was outlawed at the Cape. This was understandable, as Catholics had persecuted Protestants in France and the Low Countries after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the Governor did not want to import European troubles to the tip of Africa. Although records show that there were Catholics at the Cape, resident priests were forbidden, and itinerant priests barred from saying Mass.

So it was only in 1818 that the first bishop was sent, an English Benedictine monk, Dom Bede Slater, from what later became Ampleforth. From there the Church slowly grew, and now Catholics are about 7 or 8% of about 47 million South Africans. In 2009 I've downsized from Parishes of five & of four Mass Centres to one of only two Churches. About 40 people come to the Saturday evening Mass, and some 130 or so to each of the Sunday Masses. We are racially mixed, thank God, speaking mostly English and Afrikaans.

The South African Catholic Bishops Conference decided to implement the changes in the Mass as from Advent last year. They were mildly ticked off by Rome for doing this, but here we have adjusted to "And with your spirit", "through my fault, through my fault" (breast-beating), "it is right and just", "not worthy that you should enter under my roof" etc,etc. Many clergy and laity have vociferously protested both about the changes and about the way they were introduced. You, in the UK, will have to draw a very deep breath when the English-language missal is finally published and the changes made to your current Liturgy!

But to conclude, I lift up, in my mind, my eyes to the hills of Tomintoul, to the hills of Scalán, and I think of the priests and seminarians and loyal highland Catholics who in the Penal days risked wind and weather and man's inhumanity to man, and kept the ancient faith, and spread it in a way that has made possible our profession of faith today.

I write this on Monday 1st June 2009, the day before the Thanksgiving Scalán Mass on Tuesday 2nd. I shall be thinking of you at midday in that place of grace and join you in spirit.

And you will save me a piece of Highland shortbread from the Chapelton Village Hall!

(Fr) Roger Hickley.

Cutting Peat at Scalán

Mgr. Sandy MacWilliams took notes from Scalán's Account Book, held at the Scottish Catholic Archives in Edinburgh. The Accounts tell us a little about cutting the peat—how much was paid to outside labour, when and for how long. From this, we can have a rough picture of 'peat winning' at Scalán. Although we know that the students were expected to do a certain amount of outdoor work, actually cutting of the peat was not one of their tasks, it being very hard physical work.

There were two peat cutting sessions in 1790, perhaps the whole job interrupted by a spell of wet weather before it was later completed; one session from 22nd May for three days and the other from the 5th June, also for three days. There were two 'tirrers' whose job was to shave off the surface layer of vegetation laying bare the peat. Seven 'casters' cut and cast the sodden slabs off the bank and set them up in layered patterns to drain partially dry; this ended the work of outside labour. The peats were then set up in mini stacks of five peats, to be turned and turned again, until really dry. This could take many weeks depending on the weather. Perhaps this was a task for the students to attend to.

Apart from the men's wages—tirrers 6d per hour, casters 5d per hour and rowers 4d per hour, they were supplied with certain perks; black sugar (liquorice), tobacco, snuff and the puzzling 'pins'. In another account, there is mention of 'pins for the altar' which made Mgr. MacWilliam wonder whether pins came from the French 'pain' meaning bread. In a peat cutting context, I wonder whether it meant food at the peat bank in the middle of the day, supplied by Scalán.

Ordinary work on the farm of Scalán must have stopped to allow all hands, carts and available horses to fetch home the dry peats. The stacking would have been done by the students, hard backbreaking work, supervised by

an experienced stack builder. Dry, well drained, sturdy stacks were essential.

Long after the Seminary, the farming and crafting community at Scalán continued to get their peats from the same peat banks near Clash o' Scalán. It was a communal activity—it had to be, with the tiring and casting done by the men folk, the setting up and drying by the women and children and the whole community in at the 'flittin' the peats home and the stacking.

As the community dwindled, Sandy Matheson still continued to cut peats for his own fire. As he grew older, his peats were cut for him but the rest he managed himself. He once showed me his two peat spades or 'tuskars'—the 'breist-spade' for cutting into the bank horizontally and the 'stamp-spade' for cutting down vertically into the bank. The 'breist-spade' was used where the layers of peat are in narrow horizontal bands

There is an account of the casting of the priest's peat at Glengairn in *Catholic Highlands of Scotland* by Odo Blundell, 1909, a real community affair ending with refreshments and a 'wee dance'. In more recent times, Isobel Grant in *Tales of the Braes of Glenlivet*, 1999, describes memories of her family working in the peat moss—the involvement of all of them.

Late each evening the fires at Scalán had to be 'smoor'd'—for they had to be still smouldering the next morning. I wonder if anyone at the college said the Gaelic prayer—

I smoor the fire this night
As the son of Mary would smoor it;
The compassing of God be on the fire,
The compassing of God on all the household.

By Ann Dean

John Thomson

Master 1767-Apr. 1770

John Thomson was appointed master in 1767 with the full support of Mr. Geddes who was living in Preshome in the Enzie.

Mr. Thomson was educated at the Scots College Rome and was a convert. He didn't start his religious education until he was 17 years old, older than the majority of the boys. He doesn't come over as having the nicest of natures. He was addicted to study, had unpolished manners, was easily embarrassed and quick to take offence. He was ordained in 1767 and taught briefly at The Scots College Douai before being appointed Master at Scalán in 1767.

John Thomson found the conditions at the college spartan and resolved to turn the establishment into a more luxurious place regardless of the cost. Unfortunately the funds available were not unlimited and he ran into arrears. Mr. Geddes put the excessive spending down to 'the inexperience of youth' and requested he hire no more tradesmen.

Bishop Hay had just about completed his training of John Patterson when one of the Scalán boys, Robert Menzies, ran away and after a hazardous journey reached the safety of the Bishop's home in Edinburgh. He was desperate, exhausted and reckoned that Mr. Thomson did not want him at Scalán. Whatever the truth, after Mr. Patterson was ordained he was sent to Scalán to replace Mr. Thomson. This proved to be an excellent choice of master. It is on record that Mr. Thomson served the chapel at Auchriachan near Tomintoul 1770-1772. He died in Rome in 1793.

John Patterson

Student 1761 for 1 year returned 1764 Master 1770-1783

John Patterson was born at Coffurich (Cuffurach) in the Enzie. He entered Scalan as a student in 1761 but left for Würzburg a year later to join the Benedictine monastery. Ill health forced him to give up his dream of a monastic life and in 1764 he returned to Scalan to resume his studies. He was an able and willing student with a frank nature; a pleasure to teach. He travelled to Edinburgh in early 1770 to study under Bishop Hay and was ordained the same year. In August 1770 he returned to Scalan as master; a post he held for thirteen years.

He guided Scalan forward with a steady hand, building new kitchens in 1778 on the north wing where the ruined chapel now stands. Ten years later they were rebuilt on the south side, the site now occupied by Sandy Matheson's cottage. The college has always been a working farm and to increase its efficiency new stables and a byre were erected.

Owing mainly to the location, the college had to be as self-sufficient as possible. The farm provided corn, eggs and root vegetables but fish, meat, tallow for candles and some dairy products were purchased locally. Mr. Patterson was meticulous in his book keeping and managed to clear off Scalan's debts, and by 1773 he had twelve boys on the books, some of whom were boarded out in the township.

The winter of 1774 and two poor summers saw a change for the worse in the Highlands. Bad weather caused a lack of food; people started drifting south to find work and fill their stomachs. Many ended up in Edinburgh homeless, hungry and desperate. The Scalan area saw a slight decrease in population but the college and its students were not greatly affected owing to Mr. Patterson's efficiency. In 1783 he asked that no more students be sent to Scalan because of the difficulty of feeding them; by this time travelling to the coastal plains for meal as none was available locally. He and his students survived the famine but the toll on his health was to result in him dying of consumption in August 1883. Three bishops were at his bedside to witness the passing of a remarkable man. Scalan lost a leader who held the reins for thirteen years and inspired twenty four boys to study for the priesthood. These boys were ordained and served the mission in various locations. In 1776 John Patterson was ordained in 1770 and replaced Mr. Thomson who took over the Strathdon station. Mr. Patterson was an excellent master and Scalan became a happier place. Unfortunately the winters were horrendous from 1767 culminating in an even worse one in 1770-71. People started to leave the Highlands for a better life in the cities and in 1774 hundreds were tramping the Edinburgh streets seeking help. Some returned home but many stayed and by 1774 there were about 400 Highland Catholics living in Edinburgh alone. He opened a Catholic chapel for them and appointed Robert Menzies to take charge. I wonder if any of the congregation realised that this was the boy who ran away from Scalan seven years previously. He died in Edinburgh in 1791

Lachlan McIntosh

Student July-November 1770

Lachlan McIntosh was born in 1753 at Braemar which meant he was known as a Highlander. He entered Scalan in July 1770 where he spent about three months. During this period he was being assessed by Bishop Gordon for his suitability to be sent to the Scots College, Valladolid, as a student. He studied until 1778 when he left unordained.

Lachlan went to Corunna then made his way to Madeira and on arriving the illness he was fighting took over; he nearly died. On recovering his health he sailed to Lisbon, walked to the Spanish boarder and had sufficient money to take a carriage to Valladolid College where he was readmitted. He settled down and was ordained in 1782 returning to Glengairn Scotland as a missionary. He remained in this post for sixty three years and was best remembered for attending his far flung flock on horseback well into his nineties. This much loved priest died in

Glengairn in 1846.

Alexander Sawney Farquharson

Student 1771-1775 Master 1784-1787.

Alexander Farquharson was born in 1758 at Minmore Glenlivet. A second cousin to John Farquharson, Alexander was one of only a few who spoke fluent Gallic. He was a student at the college for four years, entering the Scots College Rome in 1775. After his ordination in 1784 he returned to Scalan as master. He had received his training for the priesthood under John Patterson, an excellent master and a good role model. Unfortunately he did not have the ability of John Patterson.

On taking up the post he immediately had trouble with the Scalan farm tenants who wanted a larger share of the seminary's rental. He refused to meet their demands; they petitioned the Duke who reprimanded them. He went one step further; anymore trouble and the factor would remove them from the land.

The Duke was sympathetic to the master and offered to instruct the tenants to carry the slates to re-roof the buildings which the Duke wanted improved. The master had ambitious plans for the seminary. Due to a spark igniting the thatch (it was quickly put out) Bishop Hay made the decision to start slating immediately, also authorising interior improvements as well. Work started after Whitsunday 1786, but there wasn't sufficient money to cover the costs. The master wrote bills of promise to local tradesmen and by December he had overspent by £31. The harvest that year was very bad which greatly increased the price of meal and fodder. Bishop Hay considered him a bad manager and on visiting Scalan was appalled at the waste of money and the misappropriation of funds. The master left for Rome in 1794 to avoid conviction which could have resulted in the death penalty; a black day for Scalan.

Alexander Farquharson wandered round Europe and South America for a number of years unable to return to his Glenlivet home. He died in London in poverty age fifty three years.

Points of Interest

1. On the 29th September two large skeins of geese flew over Scalan. They had left their breeding grounds in the Arctic and were making for the east coast possibly Holy Island or Loch Leven, Kinross where they winter.

2.

The next day twenty seven swans passed by Scalan. They were in small groups or wedges. I guess their honking call was their way of communication as they searched for a break in the clouds to enable them to pass over the Ladder Hills. These were migrating Whooper swans from Iceland passing to their winter feeding grounds in eastern Scotland, northern England or Ireland; a very unusual site according to a local farmer.

3. Where have all the butterflies gone? Scalan has plenty of stinging nettles but no caterpillars to eat them. This is the second year there have been no small tortoiseshell butterflies hibernating upstairs in the rafters or in the buildings.
4. The Scalan tawny owl has returned to sit above the front door and digest his food.
5. An adult golden eagle and two youngsters were seen circling above the Slochd in September.
6. The toilets will be closed at the end of October for the winter.
7. Please come and join in the annual Mass held outside Scalan in the cradle of the hills. A piper can be heard as you approach the bridge over the Crombie. The Buckie Players lead the singing with help from the birds. There is plenty of car parking for those who do not wish to walk as pilgrims. Seats are provided. Hope to see you on the first Sunday in July at 4pm. Make a note in your diary.

Annual Mass at Scalan

The annual Mass took place as usual on the first Sunday in July. The priests present were Canon Halloran (President), assisted by Deacon Vincent McQuaid, Monsignors John McIntyre and Robert MacDonald, Fathers Frank Barnes SJ, James Thomson and Michael Briody.

We drew the congregation's attention to the absence of Fr. John Kelly, Parish Priest of St. James, Coatbridge, who had died on 20 May. He was a frequent attendee at the annual Scalan Mass. He had always brought ten or twelve parishioners and they were present this year as before. We extended our sympathies to them and assured them of our prayers. Nothing else of note except the weather was fine for the Mass. Rain earlier in the day encouraged the dreaded midges which had a field day. Much flapping of hands and rubbing of faces didn't discourage 'the wee beasties'.

Father Jim Thomson gave the homily, emphasising the lack of young men entering the priesthood. He pointed out that the older priests were nearing retirement and in so many parishes there was no one to replace them hence one priest was covering a number of chapels. Recruits are desperately needed; it is a worthwhile calling. A priest is a father to all no matter who or what you are.

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Scalan peat bank offering shelter to a grouse taken 20 years ago now completely overgrown 2009

You care for the earth, give it water,
you fill it with riches.

Your river in heaven brims over
to provide it with grain.

And thus you provide for the earth.

Psalm 64 verse 10