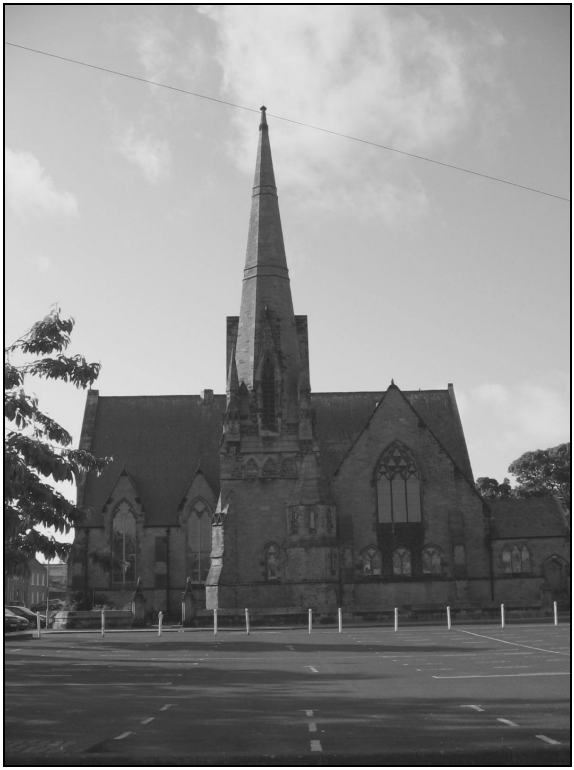
ST ANDREW'S WALLACE GREEN AND LOWICK CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, BERWICK-UPON-TWEED



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Foreword

One hundred and fifty years ago, on 19 June 1859, the first service was held in the newly built Wallace Green Church, and ever since that day not only has the building stood as a visible reminder to the population of Berwick-upon-Tweed that there is much more to life than the material, but people have gathered in it to worship God and be strengthened by Him, so that they might serve Him better both in the Church and the community.

As the history of the ensuing years makes clear, society has changed beyond recognition and the congregation itself has gone through many changes - the most recent ones being its becoming pan of the Church of Scotland in 1971 and its union with St. Andrew's and Lowick in 1987. However, whilst it is necessary to know our history and understand how we have reached the position that we are in at the present, rather than glory in that past we need to use it as a challenge to action in the future. The basic spiritual need of men and women to have their sin forgiven has not changed over the last one hundred and fifty years and people need to hear the message of God's love in Christ as much now as they did in 1859. The way in which we communicate that message will, and must, change but the message hasn't, and mustn't, and it is the Christian's duty to pass it on, for as someone has said, "God doesn't command sinners to go to church, but He does command the church to go to sinners."

On this happy occasion we thank God for those who were responsible for giving us the beautiful building that we have, and also for those whose have maintained it over the years so that we can gather together to worship God. Let's make sure that we honour their love of God and commitment to His cause by continuing and developing their work. And may God be the one who receives all the glory as men and women are brought to faith in Christ.

Paul M. Sewell.

CHAPTER 1: Built in a Year

The church is the house of God, it is sacred, and it is brought to life by its ministers, Kirk session, elders and congregation all working together to succeed.

When any church reaches its 150th birthday it is a cause for celebration and St Andrewôs Wallace Green is now honouring this notable landmark.

19 June 1859 was a day of great significance to Berwick-upon-Tweed and, in particular, to the United Presbyterian Church. This year, Wallace Green Church celebrates 150 years of devoted service to God, and to the local community.

The foundations, laid down a year before the opening ceremony, were solid and from them arose a building which has an honoured part in the history of the town. At a time when many churches have closed, others have merged and attendances have dropped, it is still going strong ï a testimony to the builders, to its ministers, its officers and to generations of members.

Many factors have contributed to the success of Wallace Green Church. It has had outstanding ministers whose work and influence has spread far beyond the boundaries of Berwick. The loyalty and support of its congregation has been crucial for no church could have been so successful without them. The determination to work together and to embrace change has also been important and the church has earned the deep respect of the people of Berwick and men and women far and wide. There have been times of trouble, and of controversy, but the will to succeed has never been in doubt.

At the opening service, to which attendance was by ticket, Wallace Green Church was described as ôan important addition to the public edifices of this town.ô It differed materially from ôthe plain and unattractive structures which were occupied by other dissenting congregations here.ô

Apart from the Town Hall, the church is the most conspicuous of all on the skyline of historic Berwick.

The estimated accommodation for the original building was 750 in the nave and 250 in the galleries but the additional of a third gallery increased that and, in its heyday, it had congregations numbering over 800.

The spire is 127 feet high, the interior well lit with numerous windows and the circular stained glass feature behind the pulpit is superb. The building consists of a nave and a transept, the former 83.5 feet long and 41.5 feet broad while the length of each arm in the transept is 16 feet and its breadth 32 feet. Toe roof rises 40 feet from the floor.

Wallace Green Church was designed by Messrs Hay of Liverpool and the cost was over £4000, most of it raised through the efforts of the members themselves. It cost a further £700 to buy the site and negotiations over that were fairly protracted.

The contractor was Mr Matthew Reed of Newcastle and it is remarkable that it took only 12 months from the laying of the foundation stone by Dr John Cairns of 2 June 1858 to the opening on 19 June1859. The stained glass was the work of Ballantynes of Jedburgh.

Dr. J. Cairns
1845-1876

The excitement had been building for weeks as the magnificent building neared completion and the opening services, conducted by Dr King from Glasgow and Dr Cairns, saw capacity congregations.

Dr Cairns was one of the great figures in the Presbyterian Church with a world-wide reputation as a scholar, and the people were proud to have someone of his calibre as their minister.

They were confident his inspiring leadership would guarantee its successful development and they were not to be disappointed.

It was Dr Cairns who dedicated the new building to God then he preached an eloquent sermon, listened to with rapt attention. He believed that removal to a new sanctuary would quicken the congregation to enlarged effort for much remained to be done.

The Mayor of Berwick, Thomas Bogue revealed that initially he did not favour the proposal to have a new building and they had just cleared off the debt for their former chapel. However, by the year 1854, the Trustees had unanimously agreed to purchase the old vicarage. Insuperable difficulties thwarted this scheme.

No agreement could be reached either on whether to rebuild their chapel in Golden Square or on a field adjoining Ravensdowne.

The solution arrived on 4 June 1857 when Mr Robert Douglas offered them a site in Wallace Green. The deal was concluded, the foundation stone laid and the new church was on its way.

The congregation had been formed 88 years earlier between 30 and 40 years after the secession in Scotland. An old granary in Bankhill was to be the first home but a move to Golden Square quickly followed.

The first minister was the Rev. Alex Dickson and he was succeeded by the Rev. John Blackhall who served for 31 years. He was followed by Dr John Balmer who stayed for 30 years and then came the great Dr Cairns. His official biography filled 800 pages and it was clear that his strength and vision led to the new church in Wallace Green creating an immediate impact on the religious life of the district.

The centenary book posed, and answered, the question of Dr Cairnsô greatness.

ôIt lay, unquestionably in his unquenchable Christian faith. There was in him what his biographer calls ña liquid inconcussumò something unshaken which kept him calm and serene above all the storms of doubt called forth by the advance of scienceôthe book records. From this flowed his zest for life, his abounding compassion, his complete disregard for self, his profound humility.ô

In 1876 his wonderful service in Berwick ended when he was made Professor Theology in the United Presbyterian Hall in Edinburgh.

Such was his love of Berwick that he not only returned to preach in Wallace Green but also addressed open-air meetings from the steps of the Town Hall.

On one occasion it seemed that the whole population of Berwick had turned out to see him. The carriageway, pavements, doorways and windows were packed with people as far as Golden Square. All traffic was stopped.

An eye-witness, Mr W B Dickinson recalled: ôHe began his address quietly but gradually raised his voice. When he got warmed up and the words rolled out from him, his great body swayed backwards and forwards and keeping time with his movement he shot out first one great arm and then the other. This action went on all the time he spoke. This peculiar, unstudied action was a habit he always dropped into in the pulpit. It became a feature of his preaching and was his only gesture.ô

Dr Cairns died in 1902 and it is reported that life in Edinburgh came to a standstill. Shops closed, traffic halted and thousands paid their respects.

To this day the contribution that Dr Cairns made to Berwick and to Wallace Green Church in particular, remains undimmed. He was, indeed, a colossus.

With his departure in 1876 the congregation faced up to finding a successor. For the next two years, it was claimed, there ôs a sense of groping, a feeling of bewilderment and clear lack of a strong, directing hand at the helm.ô

Names were suggested, many approaches considered, but they ended in failure. Even candidates with no qualifications were canvassed.

There had also been a major change when Wallace Green, which had belonged to the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, joined the Presbyterian Church of England which had just become a unified body.

In the ten years before his departure, Dr Cairns had tried in vain to secure the union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterian Church in Scotland. History records that he felt Wallace Green might be happier in a now unified body in England.

Although the decision to switch to England had potential implications, Dr Cairns secured the full backing of his session.

The congregation was just settling into the situation when the vacancy committee received a letter. It came in February 1878 from the Rev. John Smith. ôI have considered your request prayerfully and I think I can see my way to accept your kind invitationô he wrote. The long search was over.

CHAPTER 2: A Vivid Imagery

Dr.J.Smith
1878-1885

Mr Smith, said to possess ôa remarkable gift of languageôalso had ôa vivid imagery which made his sermons glow with life.ô

He was welcomed by the congregation with open arms. With the excitement of a new church now well behind them, the congregation needed a steady hand at the tiller and John Smith provided it. Under his leadership, membership of the church rose to a record 835 and communion services normally attracted 600.

Mr Smith worked hard, showing the enthusiasm for which the church had already become renowned. Invariably, word of his ability started to spread and offers began to come in to him. He rejected a church in London but in 1885 he accepted a call to a major church in Broughton Edinburgh, and after seven years he moved on. His had been a successful ministry but for the second time in its brief history, Wallace Green had to start the search for a successor. It was to be a year before the Rev. Ainslie Walton from Sunderland accepted.

Rev.A.Walton
1886-1892

Mr Walton also had a distinguished academic record from Edinburgh University, and he had gained experience in both city and rural parishes.

A tribute to him in the centenary book referred to ôthe beauty of his prayers and his impressive preachingôand he continued to draw large congregations. He also had his finger on the pulse, and was never afraid to speak up strongly for the downtrodden and oppressed.

From its formation, Wallace Green has been blessed by many fine elders, none of them more distinguished than Dr Philip Maclagan, a dearly loved medical practitioner in the town. It was during Mr Waltonôs ministry that he resigned and, despite pleading from his colleagues, he insisted that is was a decision he would not change.

The Doctor continued to attend church regularly but he sat with the congregation. It was the drink problem which caused his departure. The church, as a whole, had been concerned for some time about the amount of drunkenness and Berwick had its problems too. The Trustees of Wallace Green tried to exercise control over the members by warning them of the evils of drink and particularly cheap alcohol. They were warned of their obligations and threatened with suspension.

Sunday opening ï in which some licensees indulged ï was particularly strongly opposed and the trustees asked the general secretaries of both English and Scottish churches in London and Edinburgh for a ruling.

They were told that there was no specific church law for dealing with this but the session told the trustees they had no right to interfere in any disciplinary action.

It was this ongoing row which led to the Doctorôs resignation. It was regarded as a body blow and some felt it could even damage the church.

Mr Waltonôs ministry also brought a change from the afternoon service and an evening service and this also aroused considerable opposition and led to a plebiscite of the church members.

From that time, the Lordôs Prayer was said at every service and the collection was taken during the service itself. Around the same time, the congregation was asked for its thoughts on the acquisition of a pipe organ.

After six years at Berwick, Mr Walton announced that he was considering a call from St James United Presbyterian Church in Paisley and in January 1892 he preached his final sermon. With a typical gesture, he declined a parting gift of £30 and asked that it be distributed to the poor of the congregation. Tribute was paid to his ôexceptional powersôand to the way in which he spoke to the children.

Within a month, the vacancy committee was sifting through a list of 26 candidates but their final choice was not among them.

Rev.J.Witherow
1892-1898

The man who was appointed was the Rev. James M Witherow; he remained for six years. He was inducted on 3 November 1892 and the praise was not led by a harmonium, as in the past, but by a new three-manual pipe organ which cost £800.

The congregation had strongly supported the move and its introduction enhanced the fast growing reputation of the church.

Mr Witherow was only 25, and he had no previous pastoral experience, but from the very start he silenced the doubters by proving himself, in the words of the centenary book as ôa preacher of power and charm with an endearing Irish accent.ô

There was little doubt that Mr Witherow was a man of great ability, but when he first preached at Wallace Green he was just out of theological training in Ireland. First impressions had been favourable and he was invited back on two successive Sundays.

When the call went out to him, he received overwhelming support. Having inherited a considerable library from his father, he was well read and quickly settled down in Berwick where attendances were good. He introduced childrenôs addresses and that was welcomed by the Kirk session that had started to exercise concern about a decline in the numbers of young people going to church. The minister also set up a Young Menôs Guild which was also well supported. His work in Berwick brought him to the attention of other, larger churches and he left in 1898 carrying the good wishes of everyone.

Within a month, Wallace Green through they had found a successor but, to their disappointment, Mr small fro Leith turned down a unanimous call. However, in his letter, he paid a handsome tribute to Wallace Green. ôYour Church enshrines within itself hallowed memories and lively spiritual influences which give it an almost unique attractiveness for meôhe said.

Rev.J.Irvine
1899-1908

It was to be another eight months before the Rev. John A Irvine was inducted and it was he who led the church into the 20th century.

He came from Princeôs Road Church in Liverpool and rapidly showed all the qualities required to press ahead with the work of the church which, while only 40 years old, was already held in great esteem.

Mr Irvine was described as a ôquiet, scholarly man of great charm and deep spiritualityô and was always striving for greater efficiency. He brought renewed vigour to the Bible class and set up a flourishing literary society and while he was in Wallace Green new stained glass windows were installed.

His daughter Lyn wrote of him as ôthe amateur meteorologist, the meticulous diarist, the stickler for punctuality and exactitude.ôHis nine year ministry was marked by a happy relationship with elders, session and congregation and progress was maintained.

In 1908 he left to take up the charge of the South United Free Church in Aberdeen, which then had a membership of over 1000.

ôIf our parting must come, surely there is no better time for it than when our mutual affection is at full strengthôhe said on his departure. ôBetter by far it is to leave when all oneôs memories are happy and all is high summer time rather than when some regretful elements may be in the situation and there may be signs of autumn coming on.ô

CfHAPTER 3: A Golden Jubilee

Rev.G.M.Fairweather 1908-1914

Mr Irvine left in April 1908. This time the vacancy committee drew up a list of 60 candidates. That was whittled down to one after a deputation had gone to hear the Rev. George M Fairweather of Wemyss Bay. A unanimous call was sent to him and he was inducted in November. He had been at Wallace Green Church for just six months when he was given responsibility for organising the 50th birthday celebrations.

He handled it well, even reintroducing the old custom of holding a salmon kettle with the Mayor, Town Council, clergy, magistrates and other invited guests attending at South bells fishery with the Tweed salmon served in the time honoured style after being cooked in the kettle. Numerous toasts were proposed.

There was good reason to celebrate the golden jubilee for Wallace Green, a progressive church served by fine ministers, devoted elders and trustees had led to it building a great reputation.

Mr Fairweather was renowned for his powers of oratory, and on his first anniversary the session sent him a letter of appreciation congratulating him on his ócclear and winsome presentation of the Gospel.ô

The centenary book described ñhis voice was that of an accomplished actor; his use of modulation, of pause, of tempo was masterly. And these were gifts that he devoted heart and soul to the service of his Master.ô

In 1911, a serious health breakdown forced him to be off work for a year and the church ran into debt. When Mr Fairweather returned, the whole congregation rallied round and the debt was quickly cleared.

He left in 1914 for Broughton Place Church in Edinburgh; the second minister from Wallace Green to have gone there.

CHAPTER 4: Facing up to War

Rev.J.Macaskill
1916-1919

By the time the Rev. John Macaskill was appointed from the United Free Church, the Great War had broken out and great restrictions were placed on the church and on its congregations. Very quickly, the number of young men leaving for service in France began to increase. Several were never to return. Conscious of the conditions under which the men were serving, Mr Macaskill asked for, and was given, permission to go to France as a chaplain to the Forces.

The strain on this young man was immense but he hurled himself into his work with great courage. Tragically, he died in 1919, the first, and so far only, minister of Wallace Green to die in office.

Yet his time in Berwick created a real impact and it was while he was in the town that he met and fell in love with Miss Jane Caverhill, daughter of a well known local business man. They were married and later she was to become the first lady elder at Wallace Green.

Although Mr Macaskillôs stay was all too brief, and interspersed with two terms of duty in France, he had made his mark. After his death, a book of his unpublished papers was printed in Berwick containing a 40 page biography by one of his friends, Rev. John Macconochie from Dundee. He recalled how Mr Macaskillôs second request to be allowed to go to France was viewed with some concern by the session of Wallace Green but despite the doubts about his strength, permission was granted. While in France, and at a time when there were immense casualties, he was hospitalised but he returned to his church in Berwick and tackled his work with renewed vigour.

Prompted by a petition from some of the younger churchgoers urging changes to the evening service, he launched a ónew age serviceôthat brought an immediate attendance improvement.

It was clear that his health was failing but he never slackened off and worked tirelessly among the returning soldiers and sailors, organising a social gathering for them.

The congregation could see a change in their minister but, just two days before suffering an internal haemorrhage from which he died suddenly, he had conducted two services in Wallace Green.

The session wrote a moving memorial minute. ôHumble and meek, patient and long-suffering, gentle and sympathetic, daily in his work and conversation he adorned the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was indeed a saintly and Christ-like characterô it read.

Mr Macconachie acknowledged the ministerôs great devotion to his wife and to his congregation.

The church had come through five years of strain, stress and sorrow but, as peacetime returned; the session again faced the task of finding a new minister.

Rev.W.Jardine
1920-1924

They did have one in mind, but their ideas were to change when the Rev. William Jardine, a chaplain to the Forces and a former minister in Coldstream, conducted a service which ôelectrifiedô the Wallace Green congregation. Within a month Mr Jardine received, and accepted a unanimous call, and in January 1920 was inducted to his new charge.

Having been with the Forces, it was hardly surprising that he was quickly regarded as ôa manôs manô It was felt that he had a lively personality and his sermons were thought provoking. His childrenôs addresses were popular and the attendance started to grow steadily again.

He introduced individual Communion cups, gifted by Mr Alexander Darling and Mr Thomas Darling, and he introduced other changes designed to keep the church right up to date. He reduced the number of services on Communion day from three to two and he gave a memorable sermon at the special service on 19 June 1921 at which Dr William B MacKay unveiled a memorial to the 36 members of the congregation who had made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War. It was a fitting tribute but it could never convey the pain, the grief and the suffering which the family of Wallace Green had borne.

Mr Jardine spent four years in Berwick before moving to the much larger Belhaven Church in Glasgow in 1924. His tenure was the second shortest but his influence had been considerable. He retained a great affection both for the church and the town. His ashes were interred at Berwick Cemetery in 1939.

Rev.A.Shaw
1924-1933

His successor was the Rev. Archibald Shaw who had been minister at Petty, in Inverness-shire, at Fort William and then at Leven. He was to stay for nine happy years and it was recorded that he had deep concern for everything connected with the spiritual welfare of the church. That was his constant care.

Wallace Green, by that time, had earned praise for its ability to select ministers who could preach powerful sermons and Mr Shaw, whose approach to worship was said to be reverential, was a man of similar calibre.

In 1929 he introduced a new Church Hymnary, but that was a controversial move because many of the members retained a fondness for the old Church Praise. In 1932, following a £4000 gift to the church by Miss Joan Ross and Mr Luke Ross, the organ and console were moved to their present positions and, for the organist that was a great decision. In its original place behind the pulpit, the organist could see neither the minister nor the choir.

A Highlander, Mr Shaw had adapted well to the life in the Lowlands but when, in 1932, he received a call to the Highland parish of Alvie, he felt me must accept it.

Rev.R.Marshall Smart 1933-1945

In 1933, the Rev. R Marshall Smart arrived at Wallace Green from Glasgow and he came to a town which, like the rest of the country, was fighting its way out of a depression. Mr Marshall Smart with his wife and family worked very hard to steer Wallace Green through this tricky time, but not long after his arrival it became clear that there was a danger of another war breaking out.

While the politicians talked and talked, the ominous signs were clear and the church knew it had a major role to play if hostilities did break out.

By September 1939 the storm clouds had gathered and on 3 September Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war with Germany. It was a Sunday morning, and all over the North East of England and Scottish Borders morning services were under way. Half an hour in the sirens sounded for the first time, warning of possible air attack. Mercifully it was to prove a false alarm but for the next six years Britain was involved in a world war.

Around Wallace Green there was great activity. The Regimental Depot of the King's Own Scottish Borderers was filled to capacity. A few yards from the church itself, more troops were billeted in huts on the Parade. A huge Infantry Training Centre was built on the Magdalene Fields.

For Mr Marshall Smart, the volume of work increased, and he worked tirelessly to hold the church and its congregation together. He showed that he had the ability to cope and to preach the Christian message to a church which was well aware of the difficult times ahead.

Kind and conscientious, he ended all his visits with a prayer and his ability to give comfort to families at times of grief and sorrow was an outstanding feature of his work

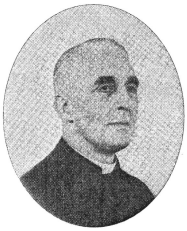
It was during this time that the part played by the minister's wife began to increase considerably and it was clear that in the post-war world this would continue to develop. Mrs Marshall Smart was the first of many Wallace Green wives to carve out a place of affection among the worshippers.

The centenary book pays tribute to Mrs Marshall Smart. Surely, no more gracious and winning personality ever graced the manse of Wallace Green Churchôit is recalled. Her calm, unruffled serenity, her welcoming smile, her gentleness and sympathy endeared her to all.ô

For the ministers the role was also changing. Involvement in public life was beginning to show and Mr Marshall Smart became President of the Berwick St Andrew's Club.

But in 1945, with victory assured and the war at an end, the minister revealed that he had accepted a call to Laurieston Church in Falkirk. His 12 year stint had been a great success. He left with warm wishes for the future.

CHAPTER 5: A Time of Change



Rev.W.Z.Gibb
1945-1956

In his place came the Rev. William Zachariah Gibb and his wife Jean, and on their capable shoulders lay the responsibility for taking Wallace Green forward into a peacetime age. Instantly recognisable by his silver hair Mr Gibb, who had come to Berwick with a high reputation, showed the qualities of leadership which were needed.

Like their immediate predecessors, Mr and Mrs Gibb took an active part in the life of the community as well as driving forward the work of Wallace Green Church.

As a young man in the south of the country and particularly in Edgware, from where he came to Wallace Green, Mr Gibb had shown what ability he possessed and he had done much to develop a young church.

In Berwick his skill was to enable his church to meet the change which was coming. Older members of the congregation will remember how, at the evening service he would come down from the pulpit and lead the members in a lively question and answer session.

It was during his stay that the church halls, so valuable in this mid-20th century world, were re-roofed redesigned and redecorated. For the congregation to have raised £5000 for this was remarkable for it was still a time of austerity, and many items had been rationed until 1952 and 1953.

Rev. H. Osmar

1957-1965

It was also Mr Gibb who conducted the service, in 1948, when a second memorial was unveiled in memory of those who had fallen in World War 11. It was a great gesture that the unveiling was carried out by Mr Marshall Smart, making a welcome return to his former church.

In late 1955 Mr Gibb received, and accepted, a call to Heswell in Cheshire. He left behind a church which was showing all the signs of an encouraging future.

The fallowing year the Rev. Harold Osmar took over and he quickly showed that he had the determination, and the dedication, to carry the Wallace Green work through to its next level.

It was Mr Osmar, with a strong committee, who organised the memorable centenary celebrations in 1959 at which the church looked back with enormous pride on what had been accomplished.

During this time, Wallace Green operated benevolent funds set up by legacies and donations. Among them were the Dorcas Society, the Sisters' Fund, Session Benevolent Fund, Christian Benevolent Fund and the Dr Cairns Scholarship Fund.

In a foreword to mark the 100 years, Mr Osmar wrote:- ôHow different are these days of 1959 from those of 1859 yet the task of the Christian community now worshipping within the hallowed walls of Wallace Green Church is the same; to worship God, and to win souls for him. Berwickô he added ôneeded the witness of Wallace Green Church and God needed it.ô

If the first 100 years had brought change, problems and tricky situations, it was to be dwarfed by the speed at which almost every facet of life altered in the next 50.

When Mr Osmar arrived for his induction on 7 March 1957 it was at a period when the church, nationally, began to face up to the problem of declining attendance. That worrying trend was to continue into the 21st century.

Wallace Green remained strong, financially sound and above all, loyal. Its hall began to be used more and more for social functions, not all of them associated with the church although the income from lets was a benefit.

Like Mr Gibb, Mr Osmar was to minister to his charge through a period of rapid development in the town and district. Hundreds of new houses were being built, in Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal and church members were often moving out of the town centre and into the new private and local authority estates. In an age when the car was still a luxury to many people, it meant that travelling to and from church on a Sunday was not always easy.

The advance of television and the growth of radio services, both of which featured Sunday services, were also having an effect. In North Northumberland, as in most areas of the country, the drop in attendance became noticeable.

Closure, for some congregations became a possibility and that was very different from the days of Dr Cairns who regarded it as unthinkable.

Wallace Green was well alive to the problem and Mr Osmar was not slow to point the direction in which things were going. It was up to everyone to do something about it.

The closure of the small rural church at Ancroft North Moor - a Presbyterian Church - brought home to many the gravity of the situation

In the year that Mr Osmar arrived, the church expressed its thanks to Mr William Leithead who had retired as Superintendent of the Sunday school, a duty he had filled with great success.

From the early 1960s it became increasingly obvious that work would be required on the church building and also the hall, a short distance away in Wallace Green. A special committee was set up and their deliberations eventually led to the formation of a Fabric Committee, responsible not only for raising and spending money on the buildings, but also giving guidance on the already established fund raising activities.

Funds were being boosted by the sale of work and garden parties and also by special events like concerts and fashion shows.

A possible reconstruction of the hall began to appear on the agenda but there was also a need, quickly fulfilled, to provide an up to date heating system for the manse in Mellingtom Terrace.

The hall was attracting more and more support. It was the home of the successful church badminton teams but it also catered for a number of outside organisations, and both Session and Trustees began to express their concern ^ ówhe behaviour of certain people.ôThere were allegations that drink was being brought into the building and after investigation at least one regular let ceased.

For 16 years Mr Norman Connell had been Church Treasurer and when he retired, Mr Osmar thanked him for his work.

There was one let, however, that the officials wanted to see continue and that was the annual use of it by the Berwick Post Office staff who used it as their depot for handling Christmas parcels. There was regret when it was confirmed that the GPO intended to give up the lease and hope was expressed that it would be a temporary situation. The postmen never returned.

By 1964 worries about the condition of the church and the hall increased. The church roof was re-slated but both minister and Session vowed that in future there must be no more ópatching upôas had happened during the 1950s when, of course, austere conditions prevailed.

From now on, it was agreed, if a job needed to be done it would be carried out in a way which would ensure that it lasted. An estimate for £5000 was received for part demolition and rebuilding at the front of the hall and re-flooring was also a necessity. Although it was felt this was necessary work, it was confirmed that funds were not readily available . Many members felt strongly that Wallace Green would be failing in its duty if it did not go ahead

There was considerable debate and no action was taken initially but it was agreed that a Hall Development Committee should be formed. Mr Osmar himself gave a blunt warning that increasing expenditure on the church itself would also have to be faced. Towards the end of his tenure, Mr Osmar revealed that Berwick Presbytery had come forward with a recommendation that the congregations of Wallace Green and the much smaller St Aidan's Church, a few hundred yards away in Church Street, should be united.

There was no surprise at this suggestion. It was very much a sign of the times because attendance decline nationally was still accelerating and closures and mergers were becoming a regular event.

The minister and his Trustees promised that they would assist in any way possible to bring about a union and in 1965 both the Trustees and then the full congregation unanimously agreed with union.

But while Wallace Green put out the welcome mat, the reaction from St Aidan's was different. They wanted to continue and so no action was taken. Eventually, St Aidan's did close. Today it is the St Aidan's Trust Hall, with part of the site having been developed as a Peace Church by Mrs Joy Mitchell.

In 1966 Mr Osmar announced that he was moving on. He, too, had been a hard working, popular and far sighted minister.

CHAPTER 6: Back to Scotland

Rev. B. Barkham

1966-1974

His successor was the Rev. Basil Barkham and he was to be the man in the pulpit when momentous decisions were taken. Like so many of his predecessors Mr Barkham came to Wallace Green with a high reputation and he was to become involved in community life in a way that no previous incumbent had by becoming a member of the Town Council, a role in which he excelled.

However, Mr Barkham will always be remembered for the part he played in taking the church back to its Scottish roots. That was to take place on 27 June 1971 when it became a member of the Church of Scotland and of the Presbytery of Duns.

A minister with 15 years of experience behind him, he was, with his wife, proving to be a fine preacher and a leader.

He was not long into his tenure when he and his colleagues were asked to consider õThe present strategic input of the Presbyterian Church in Berwick.ôThe discussion was regarded as a matter which demanded urgent attention and the debate was lively. But before the congregation took any decision on a return to Scotland, the Session had to tackle an unexpected problem, when the lightning conductor at the top of the spire was damaged by a lightning strike. The whole of the south-facing side had to be clad in scaffolding while the tricky repair work was carried out.

Fortunately, a firm of specialist steeplejacks was already working locally and they were engaged to do the work. Subsequently, more visitors to the spire were carried out and, unusually, one of those who informed the church of a problem was a visitor, well versed in the care of ancient buildings. He had used his binoculars to confirm his initial belief that there was damage.

The state of the roof was also causing problems once more and it was agreed that the entire amount of money raised from the 1969 Anniversary Appeal should be devoted to the repairs. There was worry too over the state of the hall and it had been damaged internally. The outcome was a request that a youth club, who used it as their base, should be asked to discontinue.

Repair work was essential but by then the church was becoming more and more involved in its future.

The subject had actually surfaced first while Mr Osmar was at Berwick, but the serious talking began towards the end of 1968.

Mr Barkham announced to the congregation that there was a proposal to amalgamate the Presbyterian Church of England ï of which Wallace Green was a member ï with the Congregational Church of England and Wales. The step was being recommended because of growing financial problems. The two churches proposed a basis for union, but by then the trustees of Wallace Green announced that they were not in favour.

In 1968, for the first time, both the trustees and the session discussed the possibility of reuniting with the Church of Scotland. Soon afterwards a petition was sent to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland seeking permission to join.

It was a contentious subject but minister and officials took it step by step and kept the congregation fully informed. By 1969 they had given their support to the move and the same year a commission, appointed by the Presbyterian Church of England met the congregation and office bearers and the Moderator undertook a special visit to Wallace Green. He stressed that no decision would be taken until such time as a possible union had been ratified.

But at Wallace Green the pace of the situation had speeded up and there had been a significant development when the Church of Scotland made it clear that Wallace Green would be welcomed.

The die was cast early in 1974 when the General Administration Committee of the Church of Scotland reported acceptance of the request. On May 18th, the General Assembly confirmed this.

For any church it was a major decision to take but Wallace Green earned great credit for the responsible way in which they had gone about the issue.

It had taken years to achieve a final resolution, and not everyone within the congregation was in favour, but there was a large majority.

Through it all Mr Barkham had displayed great patience and tenacity and for him the year 1971 must have been truly memorable.

Not only was he building a growing reputation as a town Councillor but he was also President of the Berwick Rotary Club. How he found time to attend, and play a part in so many meetings was a tribute to his stamina ï and to his versatility.

For almost a decade a return to Scotland had been a recurring theme at meetings, but the links with the county just across the Border went back a long way.

Before the laying of the Wallace Green foundation stone in 1858, the worshippers who were first to use the granary in Bankhill, and then the chapel in Golden Square had sought, and obtained, permission from the Secession Church in Edinburgh. By 1847 the congregation was part of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland and it remained as such for 29 years before the long association with England began.

The switch back followed the creation of the United Reform Church. Some Berwick congregations opted to join but for Wallace Green it brought a major change.

There was already a Church of Scotland in Berwick ï St Andrewôs on Greenside Avenue - which was established in 1879. The small church looking on to the Elizabethan walls served the community well but in size and stature it bore no comparison to the splendid Wallace Green.

The decision to move into Duns Presbytery also brought to an end Berwickôs long links with the local Presbytery. The Wallace Green contribution to its work was considerable; its ministers had served it with distinction. They frequently took the lead in major topics and gave guidance.

The historic decision to join the Church of Scotland having been taken, it was formalised on 27 June 1971 with a special service in Wallace Green at which Mr Barkham was admitted as minister and the formulae for him and for his elders were duly signed.

Not surprisingly, the church was full for the service conducted by the Rev. W Howard Purdie of Coldingham Church, who was Moderator of the Duns Presbytery. The sermon was preached by the Rev. John Peat, minister of Ayton with Burnmouth.

The right had of fellowship was offered and the change was implemented. For Mr Barkham, his session, his elders and his congregation, a new chapter had opened.

Mr Barkham continued to lead the church forward but in his role as a councillor he was also making a considerable impression. Unafraid to air his views, he became an efficient and occasionally outspoken member of the local authority. Had he stayed, it is possible that he would eventually have been elevated to the Aldermanic Bench.

For Wallace Green the pace never slackened as they entered the Church of Scotland. Blessed throughout its long history by some wonderful people dedicated to service the church and Christ, there was a special tribute to Mr Ivor T Smith when he retired after 32 years service as a trustee.

Member of a family who had set up a well known firm of solicitors, he was a former sheriff. He had been a tremendous servant and never more so than during the protracted discussions leading up to the switch. His wise counsel and his legal advice had been invaluable and he assured his colleagues that he would always be available if his expertise was needed.

The fabric of the church continued to cause concern but a decision was taken to renovate the hall, and a great improvement resulted.

In the church it was agreed to the installation of a loudspeaker system while the Berwick Boys Brigade Company became attached to the church for the first time. It was a youth movement whose roots were linked to the church.

The congregation, who had shown great loyalty during the momentous early 1970s, continued to provide backing in numerous ways and in 1973 Mr Barkham was able to report on ‘an extremely good spirit within the church organisations.ô

Yet just a year later he disclosed that, for the first time, they had failed to meet all their financial obligations and attendances had started to drop. It was symptomatic of what was happening throughout the length and breadth of the land.

In 1974 the minister accepted a call to Whithorn. He had led Wallace Green in a confident and devoted manner through a period of dramatic change and could look back with pride on what he had achieved, not just within the church but the entire community.

CHAPTER 7: The ‘Health Improves’

Rev.G W Monteith
1975-1985

The vacancy committee met and quickly came up with a successor, the Rev. Graham Monteith who was inducted in 1975. Although he suffered from a physical disability, he was to prove a very good minister and created a favourable impression from the start. A young man, he had a splendid academic record and in the pulpit he was able to give lively and thought-provoking sermons, which underlined his ability as a thinker.

Despite the difficulties he faced, Mr Monteith was to set a fine example on the way in which the challenge of disability could be tackled and throughout his life has continually championed the cause of those with disabilities.

Many church buildings were in poor condition but Wallace Green weathered the storm.

Early in 1985 Mr Monteith accepted a call to a parish in the South Isles of Orkney. It offered him a complete change of environment and many of his new parishioners could only be reached by boat; but he was a man who faced challenges every day and succeeded. Moving north was not going to halt his dedicated work for the Church of Scotland.

The news was received with great regret and despite the long distance involved, and the need to use both road and ship, a delegation from Wallace Green was there to see him inducted to his new charge.

Rev. J. Blaikie

1986-1997

Waiting to greet the party as they came ashore were Mr Monteith and his mother. The service was held on 15th May 1985 and the church to which he had moved was still lit by oil lamps and described as "quaint"

Once more the vacancy committee assembled and set about finding a successor. Their judgement was proved to be sound again and the man they selected was another Scot, the Rev. James Blaikie.

The Orkneys connection was to be strengthened because Mr Blaikie and his wife Sadie had served there and had many happy memories. He had also worked in the textile industry in the Scottish Borers and Hawick with the renowned firm of Pringle of Scotland, so had knowledge of the "shop floor", as well as spending some time working in the United States of America.

He had studied for the ministry, graduating from Edinburgh, and was building up a good reputation. He was also an accomplished musician and singer.

CHAPTER 8: A Union goes through

Quickly into their stride, Mr and Mrs Blaikie showed that they would continue to serve the church and its members, as well as the wider community.

Within 18 months of his arrival, he was assured of a substantial increase in membership when the congregation of Wallace Green united with two others ï St Andrew's Church of Scotland and Lowick. It was to make Wallace Green even more influential in the religious life of the area.

The first stages of a possible union had been talked about from the early days of Mr Blaikie's tenure. St Andrew's had no minister at the

time and the feeling was strong that union was the only answer. St Andrewôs had already merged with the church across the river in Tweedmouth and its link with Lowick was already established. The proposed union made sense.

As they had done on previous occasions over the years, the session and trustees of Wallace Green showed a willingness to cooperate from the outset. Their attitude helped considerably to make the journey to fruition so smooth.

The service of union was held in Wallace Green on Sunday 29 April 1987 and it marked another historic step forward.

The church was packed and the sermon was preached by the Very Rev. W Roy Sanderson. Also taking part were Mr Blaikie, the Rev. Ian Penman, who was the Moderator of the Presbytery of Duns and the Presbytery Clerk, the Rev. Peter Graham.

It was to be a merger both successful and fruitful. St Andrewôs and Lowick brought with them tradition and a record of faithful service.

St Andrewôs was in fact almost half a century older than Wallace Green. The first Scottish Presbyterian Church was built on Hide Hill in 1719 followed by another which opened in 1724 on what was then the High Street, now Marygate.

Lowick continued to play an important role until 1957 when the Rev. James P Reid demitted the charge. A year later the Rev. Donald Mackay was inducted to the linked charge of Lowick and Tweedmouth.

There has continued to be a presence in the North Northumberland village until the present day, with the minister from Wallace Green conducting weekly services there.

For Mr and Mrs Blaikie, the union meant a considerable amount of extra work. More visits, more meetings; but the developing the enlarged congregation was an exciting time.

For the minister, an additional role arrived when he was invited to be the chaplain of the Royal British Legion. The last minister of St Andrewôs, the Rev. Gordon Johnston, had fulfilled this job and there

was a closeness and warmth about the relationship between the Legion in Berwick and the Church of Scotland.

There was a long link with the St Andrewôs Club of Berwick and Mr Blaikie became its President. There was also an annual church service, as there head been for many years, on the nearest Sunday to St Andrewôs Day. This service continued for much of Mr Blaikieôs stay in Berwick but in the 1990s, the number of club members attending continued to dwindle and the service was stopped. It was only revived again in 2007.

Like many of his predecessors, Mr Blaikie also became a Rotarian.

Under his guidance he was able to see the church continue to prosper and play an ever more important part in the spiritual life of the town.

It was also during the 1980s and 1990s that the Berwick Male Voice Choir began to make more and more use of Wallace Green Church for its concerts in the spring and again before Christmas. With its high ceiling, the church provided excellent acoustics. The friendship between the church and the choir continues to this day.

The church also began to be used for flower festivals allowing Mrs Jessie Dodds and her team from the Berwick Floral Art Club to display their expertise in inspiring surroundings.

This period was also notable for two significant reasons. For years the state of the hall had been causing problems and negotiations opened for a possible sale. It was eventually acquired by Berwick Borough Council and became the meeting place for their committee meetings as well as providing additional office space.

Towards the end of Mr Blaikieôs tenure, it was also agreed to provide a new manse and the old building, overlooking the Berwick Walls, Tweedmouth Docks and the River Tweed, was sold. A new house was purchased at the north end of the town but it was to be Mr Blaikieôs successor who was the first minister to move in there.

The 1990s also heralded the beginning of an unusual link when Wallace Green Church became officially associated with the local football team, Berwick Rangers.

The football club chairman had discussed with officers of the church the possibility of setting up a link and agreement was quickly reached. For years the name of Wallace Green Church was added to the official board of welcome at Shielfield Park. The chairman had felt that the guidance of the church could be useful to players, directors, officials and spectators.

From a playing point of view, the relationship was a great success. The club won promotion for the second time in their history and played a memorable 0-0 draw with Scottish giants Rangers, at Shielfield. The sell-out game was played live before the ITV cameras and a handsome cheque came Berwickõs way.

Mr Blaikie found time to praise his congregation for all their hard work and loyalty during what had been a very busy time. Throughout its history, the church had been indebted to men and women who displayed great loyalty to it.

A man who could make inspiring words flow from the pulpit, Mr Blaikie and his wife earned the respect of the community.

In 1995 a highly respected and enthusiastic member of the church died. Mrs Olive Chalmers had joined in 1968 and as a tribute to her the family gifted a stained glass panel for the vestibule; it was designed by her daughter Christine.

After 12 years in Berwick, Mr Blaikie retired to Peterhead where he and his wife still live. Although he had spent a considerable part of his working life in the Borders and North Northumberland, he had a great affection for the north of Scotland and that helped to sway his decision.

The vacancy committee met again and the search began for a new minister. The final choice was one which undoubtedly raised a few eyebrows.

A call was sent to the Rev. Alison Meikle, a young woman married to Hugh and with a son Euan. She became the first woman to take charge of the church at Wallace Green and it was her task to lead it into the 21st century.

CHAPTER 9: A Woman's Touch

Rev. Alison Meikle
1999-2002

Women had been taking a more and more active role within the Church of Scotland for some time. At first the subject had provoked fierce debate and many people strongly opposed the ordination women ministers but the world was continuing to change.

The country had seen Margaret Thatcher become its first woman Prime Minister while churches north and south of the Border had persuaded their congregations that they possessed the skill, dedication, spiritual leadership and determination to succeed both in and out of the pulpit.

As a young mother, Alison Meikle was completely in touch with modern thinking and was warmly welcomed to Berwick. It was hardly a surprise, Wallace Green always went for personalities who had strength of character to match their ability.

Duns Presbytery already had a woman minister in the Parish Church at Foulden and Alison was soon to be followed by a woman minister in the Berwick Methodist Church just along the road in Walkergate. It quickly became clear that Wallace Green had made a very good choice.

From the outset, the congregation enjoyed Alison Meikle's way of doing things. She brought the woman's touch and she was certainly a good preacher and hard worker, conscientious in her duties. Her sermons were perceptive and well put together, and she enjoyed the work involved.

Supported by her husband Hugh, she realised the need to try and raise attendances, something which was a perennial problem, even though Wallace Green suffered far less than most.

She aimed at bringing young families into church and made families feel wanted. Her addresses to the boys and girls became very popular with the Sunday Club, which owe so much to the organising skills of

Marianne Jerdan and prospered. A youth forum which had been set up also proved popular.

As minister, she did much to strengthen the relationship between the church and young people. Already the Air Training Corps was using the church for its annual carol service.

She also established links with the Berwick Youth Project in Golden Square. With John Bell as its leader, it had been set up a few years earlier to provide accommodation for young people beginning to enter into an independent life. The church members held them and a team of ladies and men volunteered to cook meals and encourage them by talking to them. The scheme was a great success. So too was a scheme for young people which provided flats converted from an old granary. Wallace Green assisted them in this venture.

In 2001 Wallace Green hosted what was to be held up as an example of what could be done to bring church members together. They staged a Family Meal.

The minister had already declared:

ó Although there has not been a resurgence back to church yet, I live in hope and so does the session, the board and the treasurer.

ó If we, as a congregation, are to grow in the Holy Spirit, we need to be focussed in our purpose, our vision. We need to be strong in our prayer and witness and we need to work together rather than individuallyô

The church organised a questionnaire which was to be sent out to every member, asking them what they could do for the church and what they wanted it to do for them. The result was encouraging and the Family Day was progressed as one of the ideas to follow up the efforts being made.

There were doubters who believed that providing a meal for up to 400 people ï men, women and children ï could not be organised. Some officers shared that view but they quickly gathered enthusiasm after an administration committee, headed by Sheena Burgon, was set up. The entire church roll was brought up to date and a team, led by Robert Whitten, took on the task of organising the function.

ôA day to be rememberedô was the verdict on the event held on a Sunday afternoon at the Swan Centre in Tweedmouth.

It was not a money-raising event rather it was a ôgetting to know youô occasion, with the church members talking to the many guests who had turned up, creating a big impression.

An upturn in the numbers attending church was the immediate outcome. The occasion had been enjoyed by everyone. A lovely meal had been provided and the fellowship was excellent. It was a wonderful example of a church working together, as previous ministers had urged, tom emphasise what it meant to the life of the community. The problem of persuading more people to attend church had been met head on.

Alison Meikle also launched an innovating and popular idea which has been continued and expanded by her successor. A service for the bereaved, the lonely and those who find it difficult to cope in the run-up to Christmas has earned many plaudits for St Andrewôs Wallace Green. Thos who have attended ï and they are numerous ï have found the service to be moving, uplifting and comforting. They have derived great benefit from it.

Development continued but in the summer of 2002, Alison Meikle revealed that she was the sole nominee for a vacancy at St Nicholas Church in Lanark. It was an area she knew well, where she had family and friends, and she accepted.

She had been very popular and one member described her as ôour angel and our guardian.ôThe minister herself admitted freely that she was moving on with very mixed feelings. In her final message to the congregation she wrote:

ôYou, the members of St Andrewôs Wallace Green and Lowick are the light of Berwick. The community looks to you as a growing and caring church to carry out tasks in the town. That is something to be proud of. We are called to be as Christ to others, caring and loving to all.ô

She left for Lanark, where she is still the minister, but it was to be another 12 months before a successor was appointed, and there were apologies for the fact that there had been a delay in setting the wheels in motion.

CHAPTER 10: 150 - Not Out

Having seen attendance numbers increase, the officers felt it was vital to have someone in charge until they could appoint a permanent successor, and the Rev Bob Higham was made Interim Minister in 2002. The Rev Andrew Morrice became the Interim Moderator and together they steered Wallace Green through what could have been a very tricky period.

Bob and his wife Diana lived locally and were already well known in the area. The Kirk session was happy to make use of their talents, and during this time a great deal of work was undertaken, behind the scenes, by Mrs Maureen Kirkaldy who was the session clerk.

Mr Higham had been a tanner in a leather factory in Lancashire and then became editor of the trade magazine for the industry. He trained for the ministry, was ordained in the Church of Scotland and had been parish minister of Greenlaw in Berwickshire. He and his wife had then spent four years on the beautiful but windswept Isle of Tiree, which is just off the west coast of Scotland.

A fine preacher and a noted singer ï he often appeared as a soloist at concerts ï he brought with him an additional pulpit personality; the camel puppet Humphrey, which he used regularly.

Humphrey may have been a childrenôs favourite but he was equally popular with the adults and with Diana Higham, also showing a wide range of talents and becoming a popular speaker, they carried the congregation along with them.

He encouraged a series of Scottish nights and these have now developed into proper Burns Nights, following all traditional procedures.

A social committee, let by Jessie Dodds, had been going for some time and their contribution to Wallace Green was outstanding. In five years they raised £10,000 through various efforts. The money was invaluable to enable the continued refurbishment of the church.

It was towards the end of his time as Interim Minster that Mr Higham, and his friend the Rev. Clive Harper, former Anglican Rector of Bilton, Rugby, embarked on the first stage of a walk the length of the country from Dunnet Head in Scotland to Lizard Point, the most southerly point in mainland England. This venture was organised to raise funds for the India Ministries Fellowship with which Mr Higham had been closely associated for nearly 25 years.

The walk was completed in spring 2009; carried out in stages, it has raised a very large sum of money and brought them into touch with churchgoers of all denominations.

Rev. P. Sewell

2003-

Throughout the first half of 2003, the vacancy committee carried out their deliberations and by midsummer, they were able to confirm that the Rev. Paul M Sewell from Stirling North Parish Church was to be their new minister. Mr Sewell and his wife Val had already built up a high reputation and Wallace Green was delighted to welcome them.

He was inducted at a very well-attended service on 25 October 2003. Afterwards he described the service as ówone of the most moving and personal that I have every participated in, and it was a fitting start to a new ministry.ô

From the moment he arrived, he and Mrs Sewell, have shown that an ideal choice had been made. They have been able to maintain the momentum and, as they become involved in the celebrations leading to the 150th anniversary, they lead a church which has achieved so much.

A fine preacher, whose sermons are very well researched, Mr Sewell is also noted for the sincerity of his prayers.

He too has demonstrated that rare skill to relate with young people and the Sunday Club continues to flourish.

Mr Sewell was to plan his own part in creating a moment of history with Wallace Green Church when he held a St George's Day service to mark the anniversary of the patron saint of England.

It came about when Mr Andrew Dewar, a leading personality in Wallace Green Church life but also then chairman of North Northumberland Scouts Association, asked if it would be possible to use St Andrew's for the service and parade which followed. Mr Sewell and his church officials readily agreed.

The service was to prove memorable for the Scouts, Cubs and Beavers who attended and Mr Sewell preached a sermon which was listened to with rapt attention. Association officials afterwards expressed their admiration for the warmth of welcome extended to the by all at Wallace green.

Mr Sewell became chaplain to the Air Training Corps and has encouraged the Cadets to use the church where their annual carol service is growing steadily in importance every year.

He has been delighted to welcome back the members of the St Andrew's Club for their annual service, now held on a Sunday evening in late November.

For several years the British Legion had wanted to make use of Wallace Green Church, with whom they had firmly-established links. Ministers from Wallace Green as well as St Andrew's Church before them, had been chaplains and had taken part in the service at the Cenotaph in Castlegate.

There was a growing body of opinion that the church should host the Remembrance Day event, always well supported and deeply moving.

Discussions between the clergy, the borough council and the Royal British legion had been ongoing for some time and a compromise was reached. Every other year the service would be held at Wallace Green alternating with Berwick Parish Church.

The move has worked well and Mr Sewell has officiated on three occasions.

Another feature which he inherited is the service held on the first Sunday of every month for the old people and staff in the care home at Tweed View. This is much appreciated and has brought further praise for the church.

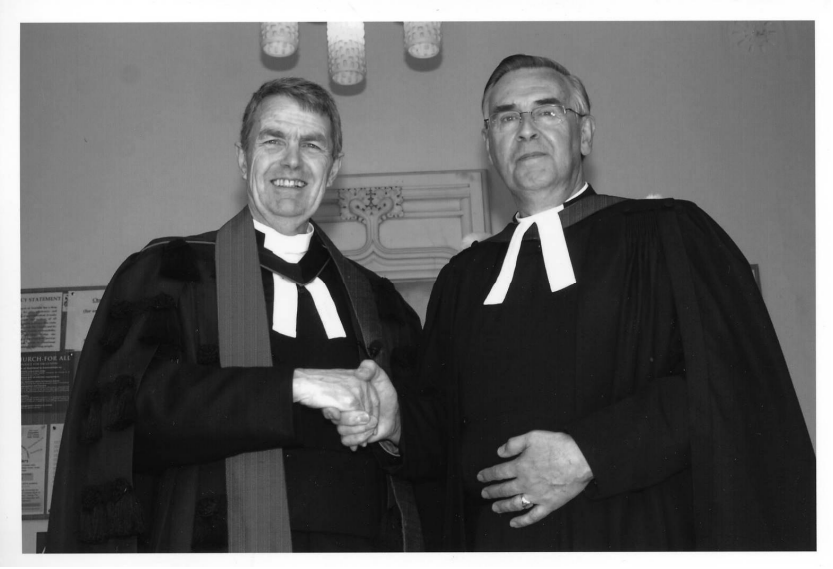
CHAPTER 11: What a Party!

In 2009 the congregation celebrated the 150th anniversary of the opening of the current building on 19 June 1859. There was a special service on Sunday 21 June 2009 where the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland gave the address

The event was reported in local newspapers.

The Berwick Advertiser: 24 June 2009

"The church can still achieve wonderful things, according to the Rt. Rev. Bill Hewitt, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland when, on Sunday, he preached the sermon at the 150th birthday of St Andrew's Wallace Green Church in Berwick.



It was a great occasion, with a packed congregation. The morning service was attended by the Mayor, Councillor Flora Simpson and the civic party, Sir Alan Beith MP and his wife Diana and representatives from other churches in the town.

The service was conducted by the minister, Rev Paul Sewell, who extended a warm welcome and thanked Jessie Dodds and the organisers for the exhibition which had been held during the previous three days. The lesson was read by Rev Ainslie Walton whose grandfather - also Rev Ainslie Walton - was minister of Wallace Green from 1886 to 1891.

On display was the silver trowel which had been presented by the congregation to Dr John Cairns, minister when the building was opened on June 19, 1859.

In his sermon, Mr Hewitt congratulated the church on reaching its 150th anniversary. Its history, however, went right back to the time of the Reformation and beyond.

They could look at the past and idolise, and it was right to look back and celebrate. They had the option of rejecting the past, and for some it reminded them of failure but in rejection they lost their identity. Wallace Green was acknowledging its history and they were right to do so. It was not, however, the church of the past but of today.

"We now enjoy the freedom of religion, of thought and expression for which people were prepared to make sacrifices and to die," he said.

As a congregation they must have faith in the future, and be committed to the heritage of the past and prepared to take it forward. If God was with them, great things could be achieved, but he urged them to have an attitude of conquest and of commitment. They needed to be encouraged to put their hand into the hand of God and continue to move forward.

James Armstrong, senior elder, made a presentation on behalf of the congregation to Mr Sewell and his wife, Val, who had celebrated their ruby wedding last week. There was also a gift of Horncliffe honey for the Moderator and his wife, Molly. In turn, Mr Hewitt made a presentation to the Church of Wallace Green.

A lunch was served to the congregation with catering by Peter Allan and his staff, and the highlight was a superb iced cake, made by Robert Whitten, which was a model of the church itself.

In the evening, the celebration day ended with a 'Songs of Praise' in which favourite hymns nominated by the congregation, were sung.

Attending was Rev Alison Meikle, who was minister until 2002, and she was accompanied by her husband Hugh and son Euan. Also present was Rev Duncan Murray, Moderator of the Duns Presbytery. Both offered their congratulations.

Berwick Male Voice Choir, who have links with Wallace Green extending back for a quarter of a century, sang four songs.

So many suggestions for hymns had come forward that several will be included at morning service on Sunday.

For the congregation it had been a momentous day and now they face the challenge of progressing to their 200th anniversary.ô

CHAPTER 12: People and Activities of Note

THE popular ôKirk Newsôat Wallace Green Church changed from an ordinary to an extraordinary magazine at a stroke - or to be precise a large number of magical strokes from the pen of Syd Burgon.

He and his wife have been enthusiastic members, attending regularly and helping in many ways. Mrs Burgon is an elder. The introduction of a front page cartoon has made the Kirk News essential reading and it brings an instant smile to the faces of the readers. A cartoonist of outstanding international repute his work has featured prominently in comics, newspapers and magazines published all over this country.

As Swab, he had established his reputation for providing a supply of cartoons which earned national acclaim and his annual front page work for the ôBerwick Advertiserô at Christmas time was a great success.

For Syd to agree to contribute to ôKirk Newsôwas a master stroke and for more than 30 years he has provided a wonderful selection of clever, humorous and topical cartoons most of them relating to the Church.

ót started during the ministry of Graham Monteith and from the initial feedback it was obvious that people enjoyed it and I have kept going ever sinceô he said. It is his ability to conjure up up-to-date topics which has made Swab such a superb contributor.

óSomehow, I always seem to be able to find a situation which is interesting but it can take considerable thought to come up with the ideal themeôhe added.

Communication has always been vital in the life of a Church but the current publication differs in many ways from its pre-Swab appearance.

Successive Editors have found the right mix and there are contributions from the minister, church officers and members of the congregation and the standard is consistently high.

Under the present editor, Andrew Dewar, it has continued to be enjoyable and informative. Recent contributions from the Rev. Bob Higham and his wife Diana have been varied and educational, and there has been a superb series of pen pictures on the minister, his wife and church personalities from Bea Nicholson.

Fashion, recipes, reminiscences and poetry combined with articles from the minister help to make it a magazine looked forward to with anticipation.

Church organists

Longevity is a characteristic frequently associated with the church and there can be few finer examples than that of the post-war organists at Wallace Green.

Since 1947 there have been just two. Robert L Purdue was there until 1982 when he was succeeded by Tommy Gladston who is still there. Both lived in Shielfield Terrace. Both have played an important part in the Church, not only by playing the organ but also leading the choir and both have, and are, making contributions to the community as a whole.

To make the feat even more remarkable, Tommy Gladston first played the organ in Wallace Green when he was just 11 years old after his father had suggested that he should take up music lessons. ó suppose it was the sensible thing to doô he revealed. ôMusic has figured so prominently in my life ever since ó

Robert Purdue was invited to take up the post early in 1947 largely on the strength of excellent qualifications. He was a professional musician, having shown great aptitude at school and in his teenage years. He achieved ócathedral standardô which enabled him to give recitals on the great organ of St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh and at many other venues.

In Berwick he quickly proved himself and was a very competent organist. He did suffer from ill health and towards the end of his life he was unable to turn out for evening services if the weather was particularly cold and inclement. One of those who deputised for him was Tommy Gladston.

Robert Purdue was also a qualified music teacher, and he became Musical Director of Berwick Amateur Operatic Society. He also served as an organist at the Scremerston and Bankhill Churches before taking on responsibilities at Wallace Green. In 1982 he died after a career which had spanned 35 years.

The Rev. Graham Monteith offered the job to Tommy and he immediately accepted, launching a career in the Church which has extended over the last 26years.

He was only 14 when he was appointed organist of the church at Ladykirk in Berwickshire. Trained under Mr John Arthur, he was already very accomplished and was showing great promise. To play at Ladykirk he had to cycle seven miles there and back until he was old enough to drive. For that he received an annual salary of £15. He remained for four years and then after working at Low Fell he returned home and in 1954 was appointed organist of St Aidan's Church on Berwick. He remained until 1972 and it was during this time that he showed his growing skills as a musical director.

St Aidanôs had a very talented concert group and their annual productions which Tommy supervised on the musical side, played to packed houses.

A family man, he decided he would like to spend more time with his wife Kathleen, his two sons and a daughter. But music was in his blood and when the Wallace Green Church post came up he was the obvious choice.

ólooking back, I would not have missed it for the worldô he said. ôThrough the church and through music I have met so many wonderful people and I have a host of great memories.ô

Life at Wallace Green was busy, with two services on a Sunday as well as numerous social events around Christmas time. He was also the choirmaster and was a great help to the members at their Thursday meetings.

He still found time to take up other interests. For 30 years from its inception in 1963, he was the accompanist for Berwick Male Voice Choir and went with them on their regular visits to Sarpibbrg in Norway and to Haan in Germany. He also served for a short time as their conductor, and for 25 years he was the accompanist and musical director for the Spittal Variety Group.

He is also the accompanist for Berwick Salmon Club, the oldest of its kind in the world, and he is a former President. He is also a leading member of the Berwick Probus Club. For his work, Berwick Borough Council honoured him with a community award.

His wife Kathleen has also served Wallace Green tirelessly throughout her long association with it. From time to time she reads the weekly lessons, she makes the tea at the end of each service and she is heavily involved with the annual Bums supper and other events connected with Church life.

Christmas cards

An unusual service is provided by St Andrewôs Wallace Green Church every Christmas.

A team of volunteers become highly efficient postmen and women, delivering hundreds of cards handed in by members of the congregation and their friends. It has become a useful source of income.

For a modest fee - well below that of a second class stamp - the church undertakes three weeks of service to the community. The traditional stamp featuring the church building is used to frank the mail. The 2008 event was more successful than ever and the reliability speaks volumes for those who give up so much of their time during the festive season.

Cards are delivered in Berwick, Tweedmouth, Spittal, Scremerston, East Ord, Norham, Horncliffe, Lowick and across the Border in Foulden, Hutton and Paxton.

Perhaps it is not surprising that St Andrews/Wallace Green provided this unusual service. For many years after the Second World War its hall was used by Berwick Post Office as a parcels office. At that time the local Postmaster hired students and people from the unemployment register to deliver the parcels.

Clearly the impact was to linger on.

Objectives and Activities

The Church of Scotland is Trinitarian in doctrine. Reformed in tradition and Presbyterian in policy, it exists to glorify God and to work for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom throughout the world. As a national Church, it acknowledges a distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry. It co-operates with other Churches in various ecumenical bodies in Scotland and beyond.