

The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) was founded in 1709. The first school in Braemar was started under their auspices in 1710 or shortly thereafter. The schoolmasters glebe, and presumably the school itself, were in Castleton (close to Kindrochet Castle) in the spot now occupied by Victoria Hall of Castleton¹, which was built in 1887. “Their plan in those days was to carry on a school for some time in one locality, affording the means of rudimentary instruction to children and young adults there, then shift both teacher and school to another locality. Braemar, Monaltrie and Clachinturn seem to have been taken in succession, the schoolmaster being Mr. John Young. ... a spinning school for training, especially in the spinning of lint, was set agoing in Castleton about 1755 ... by Lady Sinclair, wife of Mr. Farquharson of Invercauld. ... A qualified spinning mistress was engaged, but at first it was difficult to get the young women to attend, and so the laird of Invercauld had to speak to his tenants, and in a manner compel those who had two or three daughters to send one of them to the spinning school.”²

WILLIAM McQUEEN, SCHOOLMASTER

William McQueen was born in Ardelach, Nairnshire, on January 30, 1791. His father was a “teacher and catechist”³ so William grew up in a household where education was valued. I have found little information about his early schooling, but it is likely that he attended the Aberdeen Grammar School to prepare for entrance to King's College, Aberdeen. He graduated from King's College in March 1818⁴ and in 1819 was appointed schoolmaster of the Braemar SSPCK school.⁵

With a secure job, William married Henrietta Leslie (Lesly) of Ardelach on September 1, 1820. The SSPCK minutes for the meeting of March 1, 1821 notes a number of appointments for the teaching of domestic skills to girls, and among those appointed was Mrs McQueen of Castleton (supported by a pledge of £4 by Mrs Farquharson of Invercauld).

The McQueens had eight children between 1821 and 1833:

Jane, born October 22, 1821

Ann, born February 4, 1823

John, born September 25, 1824

Alexander, born July 16, 1826

Henrietta, born February 24, 1828

Mary and Christian (twin girls), born February 15, 1831

Richard Rose, born September 30, 1833

The Braemar school was inspected several times by the SSPCK during William McQueen's tenure as Schoolmaster. One inspection was made during 1824, but the inspection report makes no mention of specific schools or their masters. Another inspection was made during 1927 but there is no mention of either Braemar or William McQueen in the inspection report. An inspection was scheduled for 1829 but the Muckle Spate interrupted this trip and the inspector returned to Edinburgh without visiting Braemar. All we know of the Braemar school under William McQueen is taken from the report of a visit made April 28, 1830.

“This is one of the most efficient and useful schools on the establishment of the

1 Coutts, pg 103

2 Coutts, pg 132

3 William McQueen statutory Death register, 1861

4 Anderson, pg 276

5 Cowper, entry for “McQueen, William”

Society. William McQueen has been teacher here for eleven years. He is a very judicious, sensible man. He is in the midst of a numerous body of Catholics. It is the station of one of the Catholic Priests. Our Teacher has uniformly conducted himself with great prudence and propriety, and from the uniform standing and correctness of his conduct has commanded the esteem of the people and even of the Catholics, many of whom send their children to his school. Every attempt was made by threats, flattery and otherwise to induce the teacher to allow the Catholic Catechism to be taught in the school to the Catholic children. These however he has persistently declined and notwithstanding his refusal, his school is well attended by Catholic children. He does not insist on these learning the Assembly catechism but he requires them to read the bible and to learn passages of it by heart. Some of them did this with great accuracy, and answered questions on bible history very readily.

The number of children attending this school in winter is about 100. There were upwards of 40 pupils to day although it was fair day in the village, and they had no idea of my being there till after I was in school.

With the general appearance of the scholars and their progress and proficiency I had every reason to be satisfied.

The accommodations here are in every respect excellent. The school room is large, well lighted and sufficiently furnished. The glebe consists of an acre and a half of excellent land all enclosed. Besides cows grass summer and winter, there is also a very good garden enclosed – barn & byre both good, and feed is provided regularly. The dwelling house is very commodious, consisting of three rooms and kitchen besides attics.

There are five bursaries to this school. One set of these was a mortification many years ago by one of the Invercauld family, called the Farquharson bursary, which is for three children of the name of Farquharson, for each of whom the teacher has ten guineas annually for bed, board, washing & education. The nomination to this bursary is in the Invercauld family. The other two bursaries are from a sum mortified by a Mr. Farquharson and his wife whose name was McDonald. It is called the Farquharson and McDonald bursary, and is intended for a boy and a girl of any of these names, and for each of whom the sum of £10 is allowed the teacher annually. This last mortification has only just come into operation within these few years. The former has existed for many years. These bursaries are all now filled and the teacher has thus five boarders at an annual sum of £51. 10. It was to accommodate these boarders that so large a dwelling house was provided.

Although this is a district where Gaelic used to be much spoken, and where Gaelic is the only language understood by many of the old people, yet there is not a young person that does not speak and understand the English as well as the Gaelic. There is a regular Sabbath Evening school. Well attended.

The school on the second patent [domestic skills] here is succeeding remarkably well under the charge of Mrs McQueen. It is extremely useful in the district, and is well

supported.”⁶

Henrietta Leslie McQueen died January 25, 1836 and was buried in the Braemar churchyard. Apparently her eldest daughter Jane took over her teaching responsibilities, for Jane is listed as Schoolmistress in the 1841 census. There were no formal education requirements for women teaching domestic skills at that time.

The census of 1841 shows 14 people in the household headed by William McQueen, Schoolmaster. They include his daughter Jane, Schoolmistress, 6 other McQueen children (all except Alexander), 5 Farquharson children ages 11-16, and one McDonald child age 10. Undoubtedly 5 of the boarders were provided for by the school bursaries.

The Statistical Account for Crathie and Braemar compiled in 1842 (published in 1845) reports: “The number of schools in this parish is nine, and at all of these about 250 boys and girls attend during the winter season, of which number nearly 40 come from the adjacent parts of the parish of Tullich and Glenmuick. ... Five of the schools above mentioned are on the first and second patents of the SSPCK, that is two for boys on the first, and three for girls on the second patent.”⁷ The report goes on to say that 2 of the schools are supported by the General Assembly, and two by the Roman Catholics for three months during winter. Thus it appears that the Braemar schools under Mr. McQueen might indeed have been responsible for around 100 students in 1842.

THE DISRUPTION

In 1843 the Scottish church was split in two over the issue of patronage. A large percentage of the Presbyterian congregation left the established church to found the Free Kirk. In 2010 Sheila Sedgwick, a local historian, wrote “In Braemar the Rev. Farquhar MacRae and two of the three elders and 80 of the 180 communicants left. ... They worshiped in the Fife Arms [Hotel] and in a converted stable”⁸ However, a contemporary writer, Angus McIntosh of Glen Clunie, wrote in a letter dated 5th May 1843: “the only thing spoken of here is the ministers. Mr Mcrae has left the Kirk on Sabbath (yesterday) he preached in the Fyfe Arms to 170 hearers – while Mr Anderson preached in the Kirk to 100 sitters == mourn for your native vale – divisions and strife are within it. Mr Mcqueen & John Atken has left. Angus is prescenter. All in the fife interest has gone to Lows Barn.”⁹ Note that Braemar is divided by the north-flowing Clunie River which empties into the Dee. The section of Braemar east of the Clunie is called Castleton and is owned by the Laird of Invercauld; the section to the west of the Clunie is called Auchendryne and is the property of the Earl of Fife. Invercauld was hostile to the Free Kirk but Fife was a supporter. The Braemar church and SSPCK school (and the minister's glebe) were all in Castleton. The Fife Arms Hotel is in Auchendryne. William McQueen and John Atken were Elders of the established church, which made their departure noteworthy to the letter-writer. Lows Barn is presumably the “converted stable” mentioned by Sedgwick.

On July 8, 1843, Angus McIntosh wrote in another letter: “I give a brief sketch of the families who have followed Mr McRae. Indeed with a few exceptions the whole of the fyfe interest have left the Kirk – on the banks by the Clunie the Auchalater family has fled in a body. Mr McQueen and family has also left. John Aitken and family, John Barron and family, Mrs Poset and family ...

6 SSPCK *Inspection Reports, 1926-1833*

7 *The New Statistical Account of Scotland, Volume 12*, pg 653

8 Sedgwick, *Living Stones*, pg 255

9 McLeod, pg 39

William Gruer and family ... the Session books is taken from McQueen his successor not appointed.”¹⁰ It was common for the schoolmaster of a church-supported school to act as the Church Session Clerk, and this confirms that William McQueen had been the Session Clerk in Braemar.

The records of the Braemar Free Kirk begin: “In the wooden church Auchandryne, 24 December 1843, the Kirk Session of the Free Church at Braemar being met and constituted, there were present Rev Farquhar McRae Moderator, Major James Gruer and William McQueen Elders.”¹¹ This indicated that McQueen was one of the Elders of the Braemar Free Kirk from its inception. This, of course, represented a conflict with his position as Schoolmaster of the SSPCK-supported school. The record of SSPCK Schoolmasters shows his tenure as ending in 1845,¹² although he may have left this position a year earlier. In any case, the SSPCK made a formal announcement on 5th November 1846 that “all teachers, Missionaries, or catechists who have left the Established Church, ceased to be connected with the Society from first May last.”

“The Earl of Fife gave permission for a wooden building [to be constructed to house the church] adjoining the Cluny Road. It was built in a few days and opened in late 1843. In 1845 it was replaced by a stone building opened on 6th July 1845. A personal communication from Angus Howatt states: “The Free Church opened a school of their own with [William McQueen] as teacher and gave him the wooden building for school and schoolhouse when it was replaced by the stone building.” “In 1870 a new church was built. The 1845 building was taken down, stone by stone and re-erected at Aberarder as a preaching station and a school.”¹³ Although he was no longer alive in 1870, it seems likely that William McQueen would have approved of this re-purposing.

The 1851 census shows William McQueen living in Auchindrine, still listed as a Schoolmaster. Figure 10 is a recent (2010) photo of his house. His daughter Henrietta is living with him as housekeeper, and a 3-year-old grandson, William McKenzie, is also recorded in the census. The grandson is listed as having been born in Kirkmichael, Banffshire and is the first child of Ann McQueen and John McKenzie (my ggrandmother and ggrandfather). I suspect William McQueen was actively engaged in teaching at a Free Church school in Braemar, but I have found no details. He died January 10, 1861 from “ossification of arteries of brain” with “paralysis of right side”.¹⁴ He was buried with his wife, and daughter Christian, in the Braemar (Presbyterian) churchyard.

10 McLeod. Pg 41

11 Braemar Free Kirk, *Session Minutes*, pg 1

12 Cowper, entry for “McQueen, William”

13 Sedgwick, *Living Stones*, pg 255

14 William McQueen statutory Death register, 1861

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