An overview of the history of Bristo Baptist Church (1765 – 2015)

By David Polland (delivered to the Scottish Baptist Historical Society)

It is now so long ago when this church was founded that it is difficult to relate, with any sense of meaning at all, back to that time. Perhaps to help put this in context: in 1765, the Marquess of Rockingham was Prime Minister and George III was on the Throne. Since then the country has been further served by 67 Prime Ministers and there have been another eight Kings and Queens on the Throne!

It is therefore impossible to condense 250 years of this church's history into a few pages or an hour's talk, so what is spoken of today is only a brief look into some significant aspects of church life over those years. It is also my intention to focus more on the early years, while still delivering a broad overview of the history of what, back in 1765, was the Original Scotch Baptist Church, known today as Bristo Baptist Church.

To all outward appearance, the Edinburgh of the early 1700s was still mediaeval. By the middle of that century, however, the city was on

the rise. The failure of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46 had brought renewed peace and prosperity, and the cultural movement known as the Age of Enlightenment, characterised in Scotland by the chief values of improvement, virtue, and practical benefit for the individual and society as a whole, was making its influence felt in every sphere of city life. Additionally at this time, the outdated city fabric of the Old Town clearly no longer suited the professional and merchant classes who lived there. In 1766 the competition to design Edinburgh's New Town was won by Scottish architect, James Craig, and planning and building commenced soon afterwards.

Edinburgh, thus, was on the cusp of entering a period of significant progress and momentous change. And it was into this environment that Robert Carmichael, a printer from Glasgow and incoming pastor of an Independent, though not Baptist, church, set foot.

The story of Robert Carmichael's life is the record of a man casting off the fetters of tradition and entering slowly, but with growing confidence, into freedom and light. It reveals a candid mind receptive

of the truth, and anxious in all things to obey the words of Jesus Christ.

Prior to this time Carmichael had ministered in Coupar Angus, but had left the church when his views on the relationship between church and state changed. He had been influenced by John Glas, who had opposed the National Church on a number of grounds and who, after severing from them, formed a number of dissident churches.

Carmichael in leaving his ministerial employment, and now, in all probability, devoid of his livelihood, made his way to Glasgow, where he was elected one of the elders of the Glasite Church in that city. Though he did not remain long, he there formed a friendship that was to bear remarkable fruit in the near future and which influenced greatly his life thereafter. For amongst the members of that Glasite church was Archibald M‘Lean, a conscientious, earnest, and active minded man not yet thirty years of age.

McLean too had left the National Church on similar grounds and had allied himself with the Glasite church in Glasgow. But in 1763 both

he and Robert Carmichael left the Glasites because of what they considered to be an injustice in the case of church discipline

It was while in this state of separation from other Christians that a momentous conversation took place between the two friends: “What think you of the subject of baptism?” Carmichael asked of M‘Lean. It was a novel question that started new trains of thought; sending the companions on a fresh inquiry into the teaching of the Scriptures.

Having both, in a sense, already experienced a loosening from the bonds of tradition through departing the National Church, the friends promised one other an interchange of views on baptism after they had independently studied the subject; and thus started a process which was to lead eventually to the formation of the Baptist church which we meet in today.

Not that Robert Carmichael, on moving to Edinburgh in 1764, was considering starting a Baptist Church. He had arrived in this city at the invitation of an Independent congregation, who invited him to become its pastor, while, at the same time, continued his employment

as a printer. He also continued corresponding with his friend Archibald McLean on the subject of baptism. And it was not long before McLean wrote to set forth his conclusions; he had become convinced that baptism was an ordinance reserved for believers and that the method to be used was immersion.

Carmichael, while admitting the force of much of McLean's arguments in favour of baptism by immersion, was not wholly won over to these views until a year later. But now having reached the conclusion that immersion of believers was the correct mode of baptism, he, along with seven others, left the Independent church, because of these views on baptism and other doctrinal differences.

The question now arose for this small group, where could they receive baptism? They were not aware that there was a single Baptist in Scotland beside themselves; they were explorers in a new field and suffered all the disadvantages of lack of assistance, and guidance, and sympathy. Had Robert Carmichael but known it, he might have 'found near him in Edinburgh a Baptist of fifteen years' standing - Sir William Sinclair, the founder of a Baptist church in 1750 on his estate

of Keiss, a small village in Caithness in the north of Scotland. Debts left by his father and the building of the new house of Keiss, however, had brought Sir William into reduced circumstances, and having virtually parted with his estates, he came to end his days in obscurity in Edinburgh, not having any contact with Carmichael or any other Baptists in that city.

It was to England then that Robert Carmichael looked, writing to Dr Gill of London and expressing the wish that he would come to Edinburgh to baptise the group. Dr Gill was unable to comply with this request and, in the end, Robert Carmichael went by invitation to London to preach and to be baptised there. He preached to Dr Gill's congregation on the morning of Sunday, 6th October, and was baptised on Wednesday, 9th Qctober. Dr Gill preached from 1 John v. 3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments," and after his sermon he baptised Carmichael. There was a large congregation present, numbering over 600, many of whom were Independent or Baptist ministers. Robert Carmichael wrote at this

time, “I have had occasion of being in company with a great number of Baptist ministers, who all showed me great kindness and respect.”

Following his baptism, Robert Carmichael felt competent to administer this ordinance to the friends associated with him. On his return to Edinburgh in November 1765, Carmichael himself baptised first two, then an additional five, members of his previous congregation who had come to share his views on baptism. It is worth recalling their names: Dr Robert Walker, a noted surgeon, and his wife, Charlotte, who was the daughter of Sir John Jardine of Applegaith; Joseph Strachan, Elizabeth Brown, Margaret Harley, Joseph Wainwright and J Harlow. These seven, with Robert Carmichael as pastor, constituted the first Baptist Church in Edinburgh in November 1765.

Indeed, the earliest written record of what is now Bristo Baptist Church is a manuscript extract from the Scots Magazine for November 1765. This is unsigned so we do not know which of the church's founders made the note nor who ensured its survival. The extract reads as follows:

" on Monday November 25 an antipaedobaptist [*that is, Robert Carmichael*] administered the ordinance of Baptism to two adults in the water of Leith, hard by Canonmills, near Edinburgh in the following manner: the two persons being first stripped were cloathed with long black gowns and then went into the water along with their Minister who after repeating some words in their ordinary form took them by the nape of the neck plunged them down over head and ears and keept them for a little time wholly under the water "

A few weeks after he had baptised these seven, his friend Archibald McLean travelled from Glasgow to be baptised in turn. What was not apparent just yet was McLean's commitment to this infant church, though within a few years he was elected co-pastor with Robert Carmichael and went on to become a pioneer and leader of the Baptist work in Scotland.

It is helpful now for us to retrace our steps and recall the personal history of Mr Archibald M‘Lean, who, if not the first pastor of the Church here, had reached Baptist conclusions before Robert Carmichael.

The religious upbringing of Archibald M‘Lean was in connection with the National Church, to which his parents belonged, and it was under the preaching of Mr John M‘Laurin of the Ramshorn Church, Glasgow, that the gospel message laid hold of him. By the age of 15 he was a member of the “fellowship prayer meeting”, in which he took his part, and he grew in esteem and in experience.

In 1759 Archibald Mclean married Isabella, the youngest daughter of Mr William Moore, a merchant in Glasgow. He obtained a small property upon the marriage, sufficient to enable him to commence business on his own account, which he did the year following, as a bookseller and printer in Glasgow. His close friend, William Jones, who in 1817 published his memoir of McLean’s life and ministry, stated, however, that ‘he [McLean] was not very well calculated for the management of a shop, nor for conducting his business which

requires an expertise in ‘the tricks of tradesmen’, many of which appeared to him irreconcilable with the integrity and simplicity of the Christian character’.

With regard to his church connection, Archibald McLean’s days of adhering to the National Church were numbered. Mr John Glas’ book, The Testimony of the King of Martyrs, fell into his hands and convinced him that there was no New Testament warrant for national establishments of religion. McLean accordingly left the National Church in 1762 and joined a small Glasite Church, the only one in Glasgow, which had been formed in 1760.

As we have seen, it was in this Glasite Church that Archibald M‘Lean first came into touch with Robert Carmichael, and these two friends were destined to be closely associated throughout the rest of their lives. Their fellowship with this Glasite Church, however, was of short duration and now the two friends stood alone, strong in their convictions yet without fellowship, and severed not only from the National Church but now from the only other church that offered them a spiritual home.

It was then that the memorable conversation took place between them on the question of baptism, occurring as Robert Carmichael was leaving for Edinburgh, but Carmichael's question had fallen on fruitful soil. It was characteristic of Archibald M 'Lean that he could not rest under an unfinished question. He promised to take the subject into consideration and in July 1764 drew up a long letter which, in his words, 'laid before his friend [Robert Carmichael] the whole subject as clearly and plainly as ever he could have done in any subsequent period of his life'. This he had done, not through persuasion by any other Baptist, but through a careful reading of the whole of the New Testament. The result was that Archibald McLean became a decided Baptist on principle and the means of later leading many hundreds of others into similar views of the subject.

Not that, as we have noted, Robert Carmichael was immediately won over by his friend's arguments but within the year he became fully convinced of McLean's views on the subject, and, subsequently, was baptised and founded this Baptist Church.

Following McLean's own baptism by Robert Carmichael, he remained in Glasgow for 18 months. His association with the Edinburgh Church was infrequent, though he did visit it from time to time, despite his wife's unsympathetic views at first. Indeed, his wife was not in agreement at all with the step he had taken and declared that she could not have been more sorry if he had become a Roman Catholic! Her views on baptism changed, however, and she became a staunch Baptist herself and remained so till her death.

In June 1767, now completely dissatisfied with business in Glasgow, McLean sailed for London, in search of better prospects. The voyage was particularly stormy, and fraught with danger and difficulties, and he and his fellow passengers narrowly escaped a watery grave. On finally reaching London, McLean wrote to his wife, 'I have it, however, to remark to the goodness of God, that I preserved a calmness and serenity of mind even in the view of death, and the thought of leaving you and the children constituted my chief reluctance; for it certainly affected me much with what concern you would receive the intelligence of my death. However, I commended

you and them to the merciful protection, and bountiful providence of our gracious God and compassionate Father'.

He went on to find work in London in the printing business though within six months he was offered the position of overseer of the extensive printing concern of Messrs Donaldson and Co. in Edinburgh and, to the great joy of his friends in Edinburgh, settled in that city.

Robert Carmichael, at this point, was the sole pastor of the Baptist church in Edinburgh but his health was never very strong and one Sunday morning illness unexpectantly prevented his attendance. The church, now in a dilemma of what to do, asked Archibald M'Lean, who was present that day, to give them a word of exhortation. He consented and addressed them from the words of 1 Corinthians 3:11: "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. In the evening Mr Carmichael was restored and back in his usual place, but the church asked that Mr M'Lean might have the opportunity of expanding upon his sermon which had given them much satisfaction. This was agreed, and Mr M 'Lean preached again.

Clearly he found agreement with the members, for shortly afterwards, in June 1768, he was chosen to the pastoral office as Mr Carmichael's colleague, and soon the membership of the church began to increase steadily.

It was perhaps inevitable that much publicity followed the formation of this new church, particularly one that placed such emphasis on the ordinance of baptism by immersion. Controversial articles appeared in newspapers, and the subject of baptism was discussed until, as it was reported at the time, 'every ranting noisy tippling-house and every drunken taproom have been filled with the controversy of baptism'.

Not all the interest, however, was hostile. The publicity created sincere sympathy to the doctrine, and in 1769 a church was formed in Dundee, followed a year later by churches in Glasgow and Montrose. In other Scottish towns, Galashiels, Kirkcaldy, Paisley, Largo, Aberdeen, Perth and Newburgh, groups met and members came to Edinburgh to be baptised and to be associated with the Mother Church. It has been said that the growth of churches in these towns and cities was encouraged by their association with the Edinburgh

‘Mother Church’, though others felt this stunted growth. Nevertheless the Edinburgh Church continued to exercise authority over these churches until they were set in order with elders.

The Dundee church had earlier petitioned Robert Carmichael to go there as its pastor, and, despite initial reluctance, he finally agreed to go in May 1769, but returned to Edinburgh not long afterwards, disappointed and with his health impaired, where he died in March 1774.

In Robert Carmichael we see manifested the evidence of an honest and gracious mind, eager to learn the will of Christ and to obey Him. He was a man of considerable gifts, and of fervent and genuine piety. Under his leadership, the little band of believers with him confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, and proclaimed their conviction that it was His will that this baptism in water in His name should be undertaken by every true believer. They severed themselves from every denomination around them and became a peculiar people maintaining a distinctive principle.

This distinctive principle was their form of church government; they had a congregational form of church government with no formally trained ministry. Leadership was in the hands of lay pastors or elders. At least two, occasionally three, were required, who kept their secular employment as well as exercising spiritual oversight over the church in preaching and teaching, for which they were unpaid. They were known as ‘Scotch’ Baptists. Indeed, the Edinburgh church was the birthplace of the Scotch Baptist movement and was first known as ‘the Original Baptist Church’ or ‘the Scotch Baptist Church’.

Because of this distinctive unpaid, plural pastorate form of church government, those following the Edinburgh pattern became known as "Scotch Baptist" churches, to distinguish them from later foundations, such as Charlotte Baptist Chapel, based on the "English" model of a single full-time pastor. Such terms of ‘Scotch’ and ‘English’, however, do not reflect each church's country of origin.

Following Robert Carmichael’s departure for Dundee, Dr Robert Walker, an Edinburgh surgeon, and one of the founding members of

the Edinburgh church, had been elected co-pastor with Archibald McLean.

Archibald McLean was responsible for setting other Scotch Baptist churches in order throughout Scotland and beyond. He was the chief pastor, writer and mentor of the Scotch Baptist movement. The Edinburgh fellowship was regarded as the Mother church, and gave advice and spiritual guidance in matters of dispute. Indeed before some of those churches were set in order, converts were baptised in Edinburgh and became members of the church there. Particular problems were caused by the need for an Elder to preside at Communion. For smaller fellowships this meant that they could not observe the Lord's Supper until an Elder from another church could visit them, and this later caused divisions.

From its inception, the Edinburgh church ordered itself on the New Testament model described in Acts 2:42 "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer". Breaking of Bread at Communion took place every Lord's Day and only church members could participate. An Elder had to be

present to administer communion. Public prayers and exhortations of the brethren were observed in meetings and offerings for poorer brethren were taken. They also copied certain New Testament practices like foot washing, the love feast and the kiss of charity. More significantly, they taught that each church must possess a plurality of ‘unlearned’ Elders; these elders functioning as a team of co-pastors.

The Scotch Baptist churches were subject to strict discipline. Elders investigated cases of wrongdoing and followed the carefully laid down procedures set by McLean.

On more than one occasion, however, in these early decades, divisions unfortunately depleted the membership. The interpretation of the pastoral office, particularly in dispensing Communion, was one such issue which vexed them; but it was the administering of church discipline which had more far-reaching effects, leading to McLean’s co-pastor, Dr Walker, and others, separating from the congregation in 1774. Dr Walker was the only man of means in the church at that time and paid for the rent of the Magdalene Chapel where the church met.

Despite a temporary union, the split became permanent after further theological and governmental differences, and this led to the diminished company of believers meeting in the home of Archibald McLean.

Though re-united for a short time, a further unhappy dispute arose in the church in 1777, which led to the permanent departure of Dr Walker. Around this time, however, Mclean published his ‘A Defence of Believers Baptism’, through which a number of people were convinced of its truth and joined the Edinburgh Church, most notably William Braidwood, previously a pastor of an Independent church, and Henry David Inglis, Deputy Clerk of Edinburgh Bill Chamber, who later found a special ministry preaching to the villages around Edinburgh and in 1794 qualified as an Advocate, bein particularly drawn to a ministry to prisoners under sentence of death. Both Braidwood and Inglis were elected co-pastors with Archibald McLean, an association which lasted 20 years.

There were no such divisions in the 1780s, but several useful members were lost, such as Andrew Swanston, Charles Stuart, who

was the previous minister of the Cramond Parish, near Edinburgh, and George Grieve. All were theologically-trained men. It is remarkable that the church, with both its propensity to be dogmatic and its insistence on unanimity, survived at all. It is a tribute to McLean, Braidwood and Henry. D. Inglis, a great triumvirate, that the Edinburgh church was put on such a firm footing. The church now had three outstanding leaders and the cause flourished. It was said, 'they walked in the fear of the Lord, enjoyed much of the consolations of the Holy Spirit, and were both edified and multiplied'. In 1785 McLean estimated the membership of the church at 380.

Incidentally our church may have played some part in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society. The guest speaker at our Bicentenary celebrations in 1965 was Dr Ernest Payne, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and a former president of the Baptist Historical Society. In his address Dr Payne stated:

> "Dr Charles Stewart joined [your church] in 1778 and soon afterwards got to know a group of ministers in Northampton. He sent parcels of books

to them, including the works of Johnathan Edwards,
and it was through reading these works that
eventually led these ministers to take steps which led
to the formation of the B.M.S."

It was soon clear, however, that the strain of Archibald Mclean's church activities, combined with his employment as overseer of Donaldson's Printing works, was proving detrimental to his health. In 1785 the church leadership proposed that he leave his secular employment and devote himself entirely to church matters, receiving a stipend of 60 guineas a year to do so. This was highly unusual, of course, for a Scotch Baptist Church, where the co-pastors all gave freely of their time and talents in the cause of the church, yet such was the calibre of this Baptist pioneer that such a step was taken, allowing him to devote more time to his pastoral, literary, theological and missionary labours. McLean travelled throughout Scotland and England on church matters and became an acknowledged authority on Baptist theology.

Largely because of McLean's influence and writings, Scotch Baptist Churches were formed in England, particularly in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and Welsh speaking ones in North Wales. David Lloyd George, prime minister from 1916 to 1922, was brought up by his uncle, who led the Scotch Baptist church in Criccieth.

McLean's ministerial duties at home, and in fledgling Baptist causes under supervision of the Mother Church, were attended to with utmost diligence. His wife was generous, open-hearted and given to hospitality, and they entertained and provided lodging for poorer members. His income was small but he chose not to be burdensome to the flock under his charge.

In 1787 the congregation moved to the first place of worship designed and built for a Baptist church in Scotland, a building erected in Richmond Court. As the Edinburgh church grew, it worshipped in a number of buildings in this area. In 1802 it purchased St Cecelia's Hall in Niddry Street. Later, in order to accommodate the growing congregation, a larger building was erected in the Pleasance, which was opened in 1811.

In 1793 the College of Rhode Island, in America, thought proper to confer on Archibald McLean an honorary degree in consequence of his writings; but he declined taking any notice of it; and the only effect it had upon him was to lead him to pity the childishness of those who transmitted it.

In his later years, Archibald McLean, now widowed, lived with his one surviving child, a daughter who was herself now a widow, and raising four sons. His stipend remained at the low level of 100 guineas, though his commitment to his duties, his masterly preaching style and his extensive writings and correspondences, did not wane.

Archibald Mclean died on December 21, 1812, at the age of 79, one year after the Baptist church had moved to a new building in the Pleasance. Called to the work of the ministry in 1768, he laboured for almost 45 years; the first 17 of which he supported himself and his family by means of demanding secular employment. He was a prolific writer throughout his life. Derek Murray describes him as ‘the most considerable writer among the Scotch Baptists’. His works influenced and led to the formation of Scotch Baptist churches in various parts of

the British Isles. He debated theological issues at length, wrote extensive commentaries, most notably on Hebrews, had a number of influential works published, travelled extensively throughout Britain, supported with great zeal the newly formed BMS, confronted readily what he perceived as heresies and doctrinal errors, and served the Edinburgh church faithfully in pastoral and preaching duties. Yet, even all this is undoubtedly still to understate the huge influence this man had as a pioneer of Scottish Baptists. He was a towering figure of his time and whose godly legacy we remember today with gratitude.

On news of his death, co-pastor William Braidwood wrote the following to the Baptist churches connected with the Edinburgh Baptist Church:

> But surely I may be permitted to bewail the loss of a servant of Christ, whose talents were so remarkably distinguished, and employed for many years in the service of his Master with unremitting constancy and perseverance, and whose conduct uniformly and adorned his profession.

Perhaps it is fitting to read out the reply received from the Aberdeen church:

> Your's brethren, is no ordinary loss; you are deprived of the labours of an eminent servant of God, whose life was devoted to the support and propagation of the truth. His labours in public, and conversation in private, showed with what diligence and perseverance he had studied the Word of God; while his exemplary deportment in ruling, proved how well qualified he was to take care of the church of God. The consistency of his conduct through the whole course of a long and laborious life, at once justified and adorned his profession, and constrained even those who were 'otherwise minded' to admit that his example was in the highest degree worthy of imitation. His usefulness, however, was not conferred to you alone. Endowed by the Great Head of the Church with talents of no ordinary

> description, he was singularly qualified to instruct his fellow men far beyond the sphere of his ministry in a particular church. His valuable publications are lasting monuments to his indefatigable researches into the Sacred Writings, and of the warm interest he took in the furtherance of the Gospel. By these he has taught many the 'truth as it is in Jesus'.

Mr William Peddie, a co-pastor of McLean and Braidwood, and who himself served the Edinburgh church 'with a zeal and devotedness not surpassed by any of his predecessors', gave the following eulogy for Archibald McLean on 27 Dec, 1812:

> By the Great Head of the church he was endowed with singular talents – talents which rarely fall to the lot of man. These he cultivated with care, and diligently employed for the great ends for which they had been conferred – the glory of God in the advancement of His cause in the world, and the edification of the flock of which he was an overseer.

His abilities as a writer are extensively known, though dead, he will continue to speak to future ages. As a preacher his talents were of the first order. He possessed an eloquence peculiar to himself – an eloquence that spoke to the heart. His conception of his subject was clear and distinct. In the delivery of his discourses his ideas were clothed in plain and simple language; he, as it were, held up his subject to view, and the attentive hearer was never at a loss to discover his meaning. In the spirit of the beloved disciple he had no greater joy than to see his brethren walking in the truth, he kept back nothing that was profitable to us, nor did he shun to declare unto us the whole counsel of God. His heart was in his work; it was his pleasure and delight. He spoke as one who felt the power of the truths which he taught and who lived upon them. He was indeed a living preacher, exemplifying in his own conduct what he inculcated upon us, and as an example to the

> believers in word, in conversation, in doctrine, in faith, in spirit, in purity. In doctrine he showed incorruptness, gravity and godly sincerity. He loved with a pure heat fervently. He discharged his office without partiality. To him the rich offender and the poor transgressor stood on equal terms; and if there was any leaning, it was leaning to the side of mercy. Nothing roused his feelings so much as any thing like poverty opposed by riches, and weakness oppressed by power.

Such a man, it was acknowledged, was not easy to replace.

The Baptist church remained at the Pleasance for just over 20 years. There were seven deacons and three pastors at this date, namely William Pattison, John Horsburgh and Henry D Dickie.

A record of church services at this time is contained in "Reminiscences of the Old Baptist Church, Pleasance" by James

Williamson, a manuscript dated 1891 but in it describing his experiences in the church as a small child in the 1820s.

(*We have this manuscript available today and you might wish to peruse it later.*)

With the growth of evangelicalism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was increasing concern about national morality, and that correct standards of behaviour should be upheld. Some of the decisions, however, seem strange to us today. An example comes from our Scotch Baptist Church where, James Williamson records details of a sermon preached by Robert Anderson in November 1824, immediately after The Great Fire of Edinburgh, which was one of the most destructive fires in the history of Edinburgh. It started on Monday, November 15, 1824, and lasted for five days, with two major phases. Anderson's sermon was from Amos 3:6

> Shall a trumpet be blown in the city and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?

This was the earliest text Williamson, then aged eight, distinctly remembered. He further recalls:

> The calamity was alluded to in all the pulpits in Edinburgh, some of the Ministers boldly asserting (and was very generally accepted) that it was a judgement upon the City on account of the "Musical Festival" which had taken place a short time before, at which were performed Handel's Messiah, Haydn's Creation and some other Oratorios. I have been informed on good authority that a prominent Edinburgh Organ Builder & Music Seller was separated from the Church for attending the Oratorio of "the Creation", the

> ostensible offence being his refusal to acknowledge his sin.

Similarly, Robert Murray McCheyne, a leading evangelical minister in the Church of Scotland, had warned his congregation, St. Peter's, Dundee, against attending performances of oratorios because it meant

> taking passages out of the Word of God, and setting them to music, and they are sung by profane persons.

In 1832 the membership stood at over 300. The church, at this time, was described as being 'largely poor and working class in composition'. The year 1834, however, marked a turning point for the church. Sixty years earlier a division had occurred over the observance of the Lord's Supper, and particularly that the elements could only be dispensed in the presence of a presiding Elder. Although some valued members had been lost to the church back then, peace was restored. Archibald Mclean would not accept that the Lord's Supper could be observed without Elders present, and

significant divisions were to occur on this issue in 1810 (shortly before his death) and now, more markedly, in 1834.

It was now over 20 years since McLean's death, so perhaps we see a dilution of the effects of his teaching as younger leaders were advocating a more liberal approach to the matter of celebrating Communion without Elders.

The aforementioned James Williamson recalls events surrounding this 1834 division:

> At length [mother] came home in deep distress, sobbing and crying bitterly, and told us the church was rent in twain. This unhappy division divided families as well as the church. My youngest sister and myself, as might have been expected, remained with the advanced or liberal party, while my mother and eldest sister hived off with the sterling, true blue Orthodox party'.

The outcome was that the majority of members voted in agreement with the view that the Lord's Supper could be observed without Elders. This led to those who held the orthodox view – namely two of the three co-pastors, Messrs Pattison and Horsburgh, one deacon and one-third of the members – to withdraw from the church, a situation which caused much heartache and sorrow on those who remained.

James Williamson has recorded that 'it was a melancholy sight to see so many blanks in the pews the first Sabbath morning after the division. The only remaining pastor, Mr Dickie, was a man of very keen feelings, who on that memorable morning, seeing the vacant places, made three attempts, before succeeding, to rise and give out the first hymn.

Pastor Henry D Dickie, was to serve the church for 37 years, until his death in 1863.

Those who withdrew continued in existence for 40 years as an independent church, known as Minto House Church, until, in 1874, they dissolved themselves. Most members reunited with the original

church, although Archibald Shearer, one of the elders, joined the open membership church at Dublin Street, and eventually became a deacon.

The church building in the Pleasance was sold and a new building in Bristo Place was opened in November, 1835. They became known as Bristo Place Baptist Church, and remained there for 100 years, until their present premises here on Queensferry Road were opened.

The Hamilton Trust was established on a marriage settlement of Mr & Mrs John Hamilton in 1833 and became effective after the death of the survivor in 1852. Its purpose was 'for maintaining one or more missionaries to be nominated by the elders and deacons jointly with the church itself, to preach the Gospel in Scotland and to teach the observance of all the commandments of Christ'. Hamilton Trust missionaries did much work in smaller churches and Mission centres for the Baptist cause throughout Scotland. It is interesting to note that the present deacons of the church still administer this Trust today; a reminder to us of the sacrificial giving and far-sighted vision of those members of our church at a time far back in our history.

Between 1850 and 1905 Bristo Place had ten pastors in all, with overlapping periods of service because of the dual pastorate. Some of the most significant were from the Anderson family: Robert Anderson (1835-1850) and his two sons, (one also) Robert (1838-1868) and Charles (1868-1884). Their father had founded the large firm of R. Anderson and Company, iron merchants and importers, based in Leith, the port of Edinburgh, and trading mainly with the Baltic countries. With the death of Mrs. Grove Anderson in 1922, the Anderson family connection with Bristo Place, which had begun with the baptism of Robert, senior, in 1790, came to an end. Dr Lumsden (former Secretary of Bristo Baptist) has written a full appreciation of this family's contribution to Bristo Place church, in her paper 'A FAMILY'S SERVICE: The Andersons of Bristo Place Baptist Church', published in the Baptist Quarterly, 2006. Christopher Anderson, who founded in 1808 the church that became Charlotte Baptist Chapel, came from the same family and spent two years in McLean's church when a teenager.

The first full-time minister was William Grant (1870-1902). In the 1840s a deacon of Bristo Place, the solicitor John MacAndrew, paid for Grant's university education at the recently opened Free Church College (New College), where he was influenced by Thomas Chalmers. William Grant, supported Moody and Sankey in their evangelistic campaign of 1873-74. He served as pastor of Bristo Place until his death in 1902. A memorial to him is located on the wall of the Crush Hall next door. He was a man of 'large sympathies, attractive personality and earnest evangelism'. During his ministry, membership increased from two hundred to more than six hundred, the highest in the church's history, and it was noted at the time that many people who otherwise may have drifted away were fostered in the active fellowship of Bristo Place Church.

The gifts of laymen were utilised fully. This enabled Sunday services to be supplemented with two mission halls, a Christian Endeavour, a pastor's Bible class, a Band of Hope, a Dorcas Meeting, Monthly prayer meetings, Fellowship Associations, a Missionary Working Party and a Mutual Improvement Association. Bristo Place Church

also had a highly successful choir; a professional teacher of music being engaged to conduct practices. Such a full schedule of services once again reminds us of the commitment to the cause undertaken by church members of a previous era.

Indeed, it is impossible to tell the stories of every deserving member; a number of whom gave many decades of service to the church in formal and informal roles, who gave sacrificially of their time, energies and in some instances professional skills, and whose life revolved around the church they loved. Remembrances of their dedication and service are recorded in the Bristo history booklets, published in 1965 and 1985.

The second full-time pastor, Rev. W. B. Nicolson (1897-1919) had graduated Master of Arts at Edinburgh University in 1884, having in the previous year begun to study theology ‘in the hall of the Baptist Union of Scotland’. His ministry had been described as one of quiet, steady progress. In 1905 the church ceased its afternoon service - the pastors now hoping that the exhortation of the brethren would be continued at the midweek service. Additionally, in July 1919, the

church departed from the long established Strict communion service, thus opening up the partaking of the Lord's Supper to Christians of other denominations.

In contrast to Grant's fervent support of evangelistic campaigns, Nicolson had had misgivings about the impact of the 1905 Welsh revival in Edinburgh, considering that it generated too much excitement. After a fruitful ministry, he resigned his pastorate in 1919 on his appointment as Secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland, but he was already in poor health and died in June 1920.

Around this time, serious consideration was given to the proposal from Marshall Street Baptist Church that the two churches should unite. The link with Marshall Street had been forged during Rev. Grant's pastorate and the two churches had united during August and September of each year. Careful and prayerful consideration was given to the proposal but it was not carried.

Of the remaining lay pastors, two may be mentioned. Alexander Cromar (1888-1907) had come to Edinburgh in 1842 to work with

J.B. Gallie and Company, iron merchants, becoming a partner in 1849. Cromar had been brought up in the Church of Scotland but in 1843 ‘came out’ and joined the Free Church. He later was convinced of believers’ baptism and, having been baptised, was received into membership of Bristo Place in May 1856. He was a generous benefactor, and gave liberally of both time and money. He was Sunday School superintendent for over 30 years, elected a Deacon in 1867, became the Treasurer in 1888, and at the age of 69, was made co-pastor. He was much loved and respected by the church. He died in 1907 aged 87. The full extent of his generosity was only disclosed after his death but he was remembered most as a saintly man whose heart was his Saviour’s and what he had, he gladly gave to Him. It is perhaps interesting to note that the Cromar Trust still operates today, with sums of money from it administered by the current deacons.

Alexander Cromar promoted church interest in foreign missions and between the years of 1845 and 1907, twelve members of Bristo Place had offered themselves for missionary service in Brazil, China, Congo, India, West Africa and Ceylon.

The last lay pastor was Percival Waugh (1903-23) who had been born in Galway in 1854, educated in Dublin, and brought up as an Episcopalian. In 1872 he arrived in Edinburgh for employment with the Legacy Duty Office, reaching, in 1915, the senior position of Assistant Secretary to the Board of Inland Revenue and Registrar of Death Duties. It was said of him that government ministers "quailed before him".

Percival Waugh had become a Baptist by conviction. He joined the Bristo Place Church in the 1880s, serving as a deacon from 1886 and as clerk from 1890 until his election as co-pastor in 1903. For a short period of time he edited the 'Scottish Baptist Magazine' and travelled throughout the islands in the interests on Home Mission. When he retired from the pastoral office in 1923, he was not replaced, so ending the system of lay co-pastors, which had been an unbroken tradition of the first Scotch Baptist church since its foundation in 1765, thus making the first Scotch Baptist church to be the last remaining Baptist church in Scotland to hold fast to this particular

order. By adopting a single trained pastorate, Bristo Place entered the mainstream of Scottish Baptist life.

In recognition of this change from a dual, lay pastorate form of church government, the designation ‘Scotch’ was discontinued from the church’s title in 1927. The name of the church was now simply Bristo Place Baptist Church. Waugh’s last public duty, in October 1933, was to lay the Memorial Stone of the new building here on Queensferry Road. He died in April 1934. The Communion Table behind me, was gifted by his family after his death – a fitting memorial to a ‘faithful and trusted leader of Bristo Place church’.

So, until the appointment in 1870 of William Grant who, from the outset, was a full-time pastor, our leaders were all laymen who carried on their own business or professional employment while serving the church. Is it more than coincidence, Dr Lumsden asks, that William Grant's ministry, which lasted until his death in 1902, was the most fruitful in Bristo's history? Membership, as we have seen, increased from 200 to over 600. The first ordained minister was Rev.W.B.

Nicolson, and the final dual pastorate ended with the retiral of Percival Waugh in 1923.

In the final two years of Percival Waugh's pastorship, Rev. Cecil Edgar Shipley, formerly of Sheffield, was inducted as pastor. He remained at Bristo Place for the next seven years. He was instrumental in fostering an ecumenical spirit amongst local churches and was greatly interested in Baptist History. Both he and Percival Waugh contributed largely to the narrative of the 'History of the Baptists in Scotland', which was published in 1925.

The Chapel Building Fund Committee, which was established in 1898 with the object of acquiring a site for building new and enlarged premises to accommodate the greatly increased congregation, was reformed some 30 years later and the search energetically renewed for a suitable site on which to construct a new church building. Sites at Clerk Street, Nicolson Square and Lauriston were looked at, but each proved unsuitable. In 1932, the present site here on Buckingham Terrace was purchased for £1,000 and the dream of over 30 years was becoming reality.

The assets in the Fund were close to meeting the estimated costs of £16,500 for building the new church and halls. Plans were prepared and passed, and on the 25th October, 1933 the memorial stone of this building was laid. Percival Waugh assisted in this ceremony, an act which proved to be his final public duty before his death in 1934 at the age of 80.

The Opening and Dedicatory Service of the present building took place on Wednesday, 20th February, 1935. The great and the good of Scottish Baptist church life officiated: George Yuille, John MacBeath, James Scott, Peter Fleming, along with the then Bristo minister, James Hair. Dr Glover of Cambridge University, who was a former President of the BUGB, preached on the opening Sunday.

It was commented at the time, 'few congregations have been blessed with such good fortune'. The church and halls were built free of debt; a significant legacy indeed, and made possible by the generosity of the far-sighted members of the old Bristo Place church. The church was now known simply as Bristo Baptist Church.

It was recognised, however, that moving to the present location from the other side of the city, had reduced the membership of the church; perhaps not surprising since a number of the older members, or those in failing health, were unable to travel far.

It had therefore been quite a historic 30 years; with the discontinuing of the afternoon exhortation service, the ceasing of the plurality of Elders, the adoption of a single trained pastorate, the dropping of the word ‘Scotch’ from the church’s name and now inviting the President of the BUGB to preach on the opening Sunday of the new building! The original Scotch Baptist church of 1765 had travelled far!

After 10 years in pastorate, divided equally between the old and new buildings, Rev James Hair retired from active ministry in 1940. In addition to his work at Bristo, he was part-time lecturer at the Baptist College. He was also President of the BUS in 1930-31, an honour which previous pastors, William Grant and W.B. Nicolson, had held in earlier years.

When Callum Patterson was inducted to the pastorate in 1941 it is interesting to note that the question of a change in the name of the church first arose. It was thought that the inclusion of 'Bristo' was misleading. However, no alternative was adopted although the issue has been considered again from time to time.

Rev William Lunn Cassie succeeded Callum Patterson and took up the pastorate in 1950. He remained until his retirement in 1965. He was one of the Scottish representatives on the General Committee of the BMS and took an active role in the Council and Committee work of the BUS. His wife was National President of the WA in 1953.

The church continued to uphold its earlier tradition of missionary enterprise, with Misses Winifred Gow and Lena Pringle serving in the BMS in India and Congo respectively. In 1956 new traditions were formed when the first lady, a Miss Marjorie Pringle, was appointed to the diaconate of Bristo Baptist church. When the 200th anniversary was reached in 1965, a special weekend of meetings were held, and a bi-centenary history booklet published

The following year the Rev Peter Clark was inducted. He initiated house to house visitation to nearby housing communities, and following up with the mailing out of 1,000 Easter cards. Further outreach continued into the neighbourhood, particularly catering for the lonely.

Peter Clark left Bristo to take up the post of Assistant General Secretary of the National Bible Society of Scotland. His successor was the Rev William Porch arrived in February, 1976. As a former BMS missionary in Jamaica, church life in that period emphasised the work of the BMS which was very strongly supported by an active BMS group in the church as well as wider fellowship offerings. Rev Porch and his wife were both musical and the choir was strong in those days. Mrs Porch ran lots of groups especially the Women's Auxiliary. Rev Porch ran classes on Baptist history and for a while the church had the "Way Ahead" initiative, trying to work out God's purpose for themselves and where they were. Emphasis was placed upon fellowship and social activities, and the deepening of the

spiritual life of the church. Bill Porch left in February 1984 to take up a pastorate in Leicester.

After a period of vacancy the Rev Sandy Greig and his wife, Janette, arrived. Both were quiet, gentle and gracious people. Rev Greig was a godly, Spirit filled and prayerful man, with a keen interest in evangelism, and during his ministry the church celebrated a number of baptisms

Rev Dr Jim Purves arrived in 1994 and remained in pastorate for 17 years, before taking up the position of Mission and Ministry Advisor with the BUS. He was a learned and gifted preacher, and under his pastorate emphasis was placed on Bristo becoming ‘a Holy Family of Believers, a House of Prayer and with a Heart for Outreach’. The outworking of this led to increased emphasis on communal discernment, the encouragement of gifted lay preachers, an opening up to the Person and Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the development of a significant Internship programme and valued links with Bethlehem Baptist Church in Lom, Bulgaria, and the questioning of the use of

our buildings and possible relocation. All were particular features of his pastorate.

After a period of vacancy lasting almost two years. Rev Garry Ketchen, Associate Pastor at nearby Granton Baptist, and for a time Interim Moderator and then part-time Interim Pastor at Bristo, accepted the call to the ministry here in November last year. Under his leadership particular emphasis has been placed on abiding in Christ, prayer, strengthening the members, seeking the leading of the Spirit, linking with the community groups who use our premises, and reaching out into our neighbourhood and community. This latter aspect of the work has been reinforced with the recent appointment of Christopher Anderson as a Mission & Community Development Worker. Prior to this appointment, Rev David Purves, son of the previous pastor, served for a time at Bristo as an Assistant Pastor to Garry Ketchen, bringing back into focus, after the absence of almost a century, the dual pastorate role at Bristo Baptist.

In conclusion, I hope this overview of our church's history has shown that though the persisting pattern of church life through 250 years has

changed much in detail, yet in its essentials it has remained largely the same. As we remember our past, we are challenged to write our own chapter into the wider narrative of Bristo Baptist's story. We need not only the dedicated, sacrificial spirit of those who went before us, but also an open minded readiness to adapt or modify through the leading of God's Spirit. Let us then put out trust in God, Who changes not, and let us with a will to adventure renew our vows, embracing the pioneering spirit which is our legacy, as we prepare ourselves for the opening of our next quarter millennium.

Thankyou.