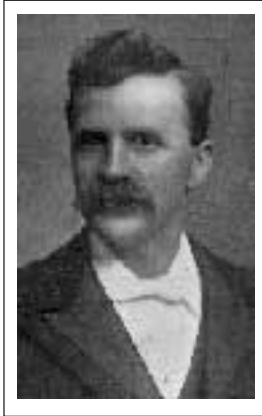


Vision to Build

Rev Alex Paterson

Alex Paterson was born in Glasgow in 1860, and his earliest years were spent in the Evangelical Union in Bridgeton. As a diligent reader of the Bible he stumbled upon the word 'baptism', which led to him seeking admission to the Baptist church where he set his heart upon



Alex. Paterson

answering the 'call' to prepare for the work of the ministry. He received his education at Glasgow University and the Baptist Union College, where he sat under the teaching of Dr Coats and Dr Flett and "took the foremost place in his classes". Mr Paterson was called to the pastorate in Falkirk Baptist in June 1889 which he accepted, and began his ministry here in September 1889 at the age of 29. His subsequent ministry of nearly 33 years is the longest in the history of the church.

When Alex Paterson arrived in Falkirk, the congregation worshipped in the iron building in Melville Street. Considering their accommodation to be uncomfortable, badly constructed, and having a murky atmosphere, his ambition, along with others, was to build a new church. In 1893 the church secretary, Robert Wilson, proposed that money should be raised for a permanent church building. His father, James Wilson, offered to pay half the cost of the new building if the congregation raised the other half. Mr Paterson urged the congregation to accept Mr Wilson's generous offer, and to give cheerfully and bountifully.

Vision to Build


Opening of New Building

A site for the new church and hall was secured at the corner of Orchard Street and Weir Street. By various means, the church raised the amount required, and the new church and hall were opened on Saturday 9th October, 1897. The building is built of red stone from Locharbriggs Quarry near Dumfries, and the architecture is Gothic which was enjoying a revival at the end of the nineteenth century. Inside the church was bright and cheerful, well lighted, and artistically painted and decorated, and the seats were comfortably cushioned. There

FALKIRK • BAPTIST • CHURCH.

Programme of Services
IN CONNECTION WITH
OPENING OF NEW CHURCH AND HALL,
on
SATURDAY, 9th October, 1897, at 3.30 p.m.
SUNDAY, 10th October, at 11.15, 2, and 6.30.
MONDAY, 11th October, at 7.30.

The Minister and Deacons of the Church heartily invite yourself and Friends to the Opening Services



MIN. & DEACONS.
FALKIRK.

Opening of the Church 1897

was a choir platform, and above this a pulpit platform fitted with a baptismal font (the present open baptistry was added later). At the opening service, Rev Alex Paterson referred to the beauty that surrounded them, and pointed to God's hand in it all. To those present, he said he hoped it 'might be a place for the praise and the glory of His name

Vision to Build

to whomsoever might come within its walls'. It was a day of remembrance for the church, and the principal item in the programme that day was the unveiling of the memorial windows.

The three-light window above the pulpit was unveiled by James Wilson of Bantaskin, to the memory of his wife and his daughter-in-law.



Pulpit Window

The inscription reads :

“Erected to the memory of Mrs James and Mrs Robert Wilson by James Wilson. Bantaskin. 1897.” The centre light shows Christ the Good Shepherd, holding a shepherd’s staff in His right hand, and a young lamb in His left hand. At the top of the window is the *corona victrix*, the ‘Crown of Victory’ or ‘Crown of Life’ which awaits each Christian in heaven. The window to the left of this light is a portrayal of St John the Evangelist, with a book in his left hand and a feather quill for writing in his right hand. The window to the right is a portrayal of St Peter, holding the keys of heaven in his right hand, and the ‘book of names’ in his left.

Agnus Dei

The side window is the Towers Memorial Window, and was unveiled by Alexander Towers to the memory of his father and mother who had both greatly helped the Baptist cause in its earlier days. The subject of the window is taken from Numbers chapter 21, and shows Moses holding a pole with a bronze snake on it. The Falkirk Herald reporter

Vision to Build

present at the opening service commented for his readers that one could almost hear Moses uttering the words 'Look and live!'. The inscription on the window reads : "In remembrance of James Towers who died 10th Sept 1890 aged 73. Also Margaret McKirdy his wife who died 16th July 1892 aged 76. Erected by their son Alexander Towers". The small window above was donated by the artists, Blythswood Stained Glass Company, and shows a lamb holding a flag with a cross, with the words 'Agnus Dei' written underneath. The lamb represents Christ Jesus, and 'Agnus Dei' was the name applied to Jesus by John the Baptist and is translated 'O Lamb of God'.



Moses Window

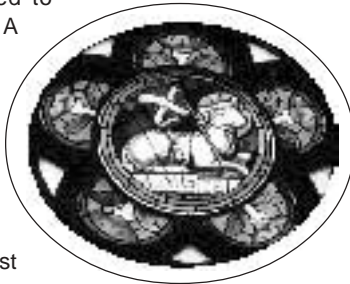


James Towers

James Towers was a senior deacon, and his death in 1890 was an immense loss to the church. He was well known in Falkirk as an industrialist. In 1857 in Grahamston he began the manufacture of firebricks to supply the needs of the local iron foundries, and in 1876 his son Alexander joined him and the company J & A Towers was set up. When Alexander Towers died in 1908 his son James took over the business. J & A Towers was successful in the first half of the twentieth century, but the closure of local iron foundries from the 1950s onwards finally led to the closure of Towers brickworks in 1971. The 230 ft chimney which dominated the Grahams Road skyline came down shortly afterwards, and now the local street Towers

Vision to Build

Court is one of the few remaining clues to their presence there. It appears that the Towers family connection with the Baptist church ceased in 1905 when Alexander Towers resigned as treasurer of the church, however the window to the memory of the Towers family is there to remind us of the Christian witness and Baptist support of an important Falkirk family. The silver plates used today at communion date from around the time of the opening of the church, and one plate bears an inscription to the memory of James Towers. The inscription reads : “Presented to Falkirk Baptist Church by Mrs A McIlwraith in memory of her father James Towers. November 7th 1897”. The communion cup too was presented at the time of the opening of the new building, and has the inscription : “Presented to the Falkirk Baptist Church by Mr & Mrs A. A. Skeene. Larbert. 10th Oct 1897”. Mr Skeene was a deacon in the church.



“Agnus Dei”

The architect of the new building was Mr George Deas Page, of whom only a few details are known. Mr Deas Page was interested in church buildings, and designed St James UF church and the YMCA Institute in Newmarket Street (now the Christian Centre), as well as the Baptist church. He was a quiet and retiring man, and an elder in Bainsford UF church for many years.

At the turn of the century, income, church membership and attendance at the church were all growing steadily. 250 people attended the morning service, and 150 the afternoon service. Mr Paterson’s standing in the town was favourable, and his salary was increased by £20 to £200 per annum, which was about four times the then

“O
Lamb
of
God”

Vision to Build

average salary. It was a time when the church produced a newsletter, the *Monthly Messenger*, and distributed around 1000 copies to homes in the town; when black cloth would be draped over the pulpit on a notable death in the church; and services would be held on the death or coronation of the King or Queen. The choir would render some anthems before church business meetings; and

Deacons Court 1906



Back Row: William Adamson, Hugh Lyon, James Wilson, J Telfer, Andrew Balfour Gray, Hugh Ross, Hugh Wylie, A Snedden.

Front Row: Harry Donaldson, Alex Skene, Robert Wilson, Rev Alex Paterson, William Donaldson, James Clarkson, William Forrester.

deacons in the church, when referred to by name, would be addressed by the title 'Deacon'. Huge numbers of children attended church organisations set up especially for them, such as the Christian Endeavour which was formed in the church in 1895.

Open Membership

The church operated an 'open' style of membership, the way it is today, where people could join the church without the prerequisite of baptism. The earliest Church Constitution available is in the Church Minutes from 1884, point 4 of which reads, "That while this church follows the primitive mode of Baptism, and recommends it

Vision to Build

to all applicants, yet it shall receive into its membership all who give a distinct avowal of Faith in Christ as their Saviour". The pastor and deacons had declined to discuss altering the style of membership to 'closed' (where baptism is necessary before church membership) when asked to by a church member in 1893, and again in 1896. This 'open' style of membership was still practised at the turn of the century, for on the back page of the Annual Reports for 1902, Distinctive Principle point 5 declared : "We are an open membership church, and receive into our fellowship all who have been spiritually born again". Similarly, when the Constitution was revised in 1925 the wording read, "..... as the Church follows the primitive mode of Baptism by immersion, it *recommends* that this mode of Baptism be followed by all applicants for membership". The issue was raised again in 1993, although the proposal to change was not passed at the church business meeting. The present Church Constitution reads, "Baptism should normally be administered by immersion and only to believers. The church *strongly recommends* that this mode be followed by all applicants for membership".

A number of members of Falkirk Baptist, including Deacon William Forrester, left the church in 1904 to join with other Baptists who lived in the Larbert area to form a Baptist Church there. Thirty two people were baptised in the first year, and Pastor William Wyse was settled two years later. And a Baptist church in Grangemouth was formed in 1894 with help from Falkirk Baptist, in particular Rev Alex Paterson who chaired meetings of those interested in forming a church in the town and who preached at the opening service on Sunday 1st April 1894. The church in Grangemouth was formally constituted in 1895 and things went well initially. The church minutes record that Mr J Allan from Falkirk Baptist was appointed by Mr Paterson as

Vision to Build



Thomas Collins



James Wilson

the leader of the Grangemouth church from 1900 until 1905, as Grangemouth Baptist was under the supervision of Falkirk Baptist at the time. Despite a rising population in the area, by 1910 the membership had declined to such a level that the work in Grangemouth was wound up.

Although Mr Allan's ministry appears to have been more of a layman's role, two men who were sent out from Falkirk Baptist into full-time Christian Ministry were Thomas Collins and James Dewar. Thomas Collins ministered at Hutchestontown, South Glasgow, from 1895 until 1912. James Dewar spent two years at Eday, Orkney, from 1887. He was pastor at Old Cumnock Baptist from 1889 until 1896, and retired from Peebles Baptist in 1920 after twenty years ministry there.

The death of James Wilson in 1904 was a considerable blow to the church. He was a businessman who had spent much of his career in Trinidad in the West Indies. He was married there, in the Baptist church in Port of Spain. In 1879 he purchased Bantaskin estate in Falkirk, and came to live in Falkirk the following year. Being a staunch supporter of the Baptist cause, his arrival marked a new era in the history of the church. Although active in politics, James Wilson was known best for his deep interest in philanthropic and religious work, and used his resources and influence to help improve the lot of the people of Falkirk. In his obituary, the Falkirk Herald reported "It was in large measure due to his continued interest and liberality that Falkirk Baptist church is in such a prosperous condition".

Vision to Build

Enlargement

Such was the growth in numbers attending the church, and in the number of organisations linked to the church, that at the church business meeting held on 8th February 1905 the members and adherents voted to enlarge the church buildings by adding two transepts and build two new halls. The family of the late James Wilson of Bantaskin made a generous offer of half of the cost of £2300 required. Later that year, in September, two halls were opened along with a new vestry, ladies and gents rooms, and a deacons room (which was the former vestry, but now forms part of the present church kitchen). The halls were opened by Mrs Robert Wilson of Bantaskin. George Deas Page, the architect, presented Mrs Wilson with a gold key to open the halls. On one side of the key handle was the inscription : "Falkirk Baptist Church. New halls opened by Mrs Robert Wilson of Bantaskin. 22nd Sept 1905". On the reverse side was a sketch of the new halls.



Open Baptistry

On Saturday 17th March 1906, six months after the opening of the halls and rooms, the church sanctuary was reopened after the addition of two transepts. Alex Paterson had considered that the size of the church 'did not represent their responsibility in relation to the town', and therefore accommodation was required for an extra 150 worshippers. The architect, George Deas Page, successfully integrated the transepts into the sanctuary so well that it is difficult to spot that they are, in fact, later additions. The extended platform now contained a new pulpit and an open baptistry (made of Sicilian marble). The Towers Memorial

Vision to Build

10

“Come
unto
Me, all
ye that
labour
and are
heavy
laden,
and I will
give you
rest”

“I Will Build My Church”



Orchard Street Window

(Moses) window was moved into the north transept, and the south transept replaced the original church hall. Alex Paterson told the congregation gathered that day how when he came to Falkirk he had wanted, with God's help, to consolidate and build up the Baptist witness there. It was with feelings of great joy and gladness that they witnessed the scene that now faced them, especially when recalling how the church had moved from hall to hall in its earlier years. Part of the proceedings that day was the unveiling of the 'Wilson Memorial Window' by Robert Wilson to the memory of his father, James Wilson. The window, which faces onto Orchard Street, has as its subject the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 11 : "Come unto Me,

Vision to Build

all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”, and shows Christ healing the sick. The inscription reads : “In memory of James Wilson of Bantaskin who died 25th May 1904. Erected by his family. 1905”.

Fashionable Gothic Architecture

The Falkirk Baptist Church building is unusual, although not unique, within the Baptist denomination, in that it has a sloping floor, stained-glass windows, an open baptistry, cherubs and gargoyles, transepts, and is of Gothic architectural style. By the late nineteenth century, the Baptists in Scotland desired to be known as a respectable denomination equal in stature to the Church of Scotland and a building with fashionable Gothic architecture more closely matched the ambitions of the congregation than the ‘tin kirk’ of Melville Street. Rev Alex Young, President of the Baptist Union, commented that ‘it would be difficult to find anywhere a better equipped church for carrying on religious and social work than that of Falkirk Baptist Church’. Over £1200 was raised to help pay off the debt remaining by holding a public bazaar in Falkirk Town Hall in October 1906. The debt on the buildings was finally paid off around 1911.



Cherub



Gargoyle

Centenary

As with all churches, Falkirk Baptist had its ups and downs. 1907 was such a year. A disagreement over a financial matter led to the resignation of five deacons in April, which was reported on in the Falkirk Herald. In October, however, the church celebrated its Centenary, with special congregational meetings held over three days from Sunday 6th October. Alex Paterson described the history of the church as ‘a hundred years of

“100
Years”

“A
hundred
years
of
sunshine,
mingled
with
soul-
testing
storms”

“I Will Build My Church”

Vision to Build



sunshine, mingled with soul-testing storms'. Four buildings had been constructed at various points in the church's history, and almost all of the halls in the town had at one point been used as a place of worship. When the various small congregations finally did unite in 1881, in many ways the modern era of the church began.

With regard to the Centenary in 1907, it is worth noting that the date the church was founded hasn't always been agreed upon over the years. Looking at Scottish Baptist Year Books dated towards the end of the nineteenth century, the years of 1867 or 1869 are suggested. However the Baptist Church in Falkirk certainly existed before then. As already noted, James Love's history written in 1906 suggested the close of 1807, or the beginning of 1808, as the year the church was founded. It seems that the church anniversary has always been held towards the end of the year, as Scottish Baptist Magazines as far back as the 1870s show and which is current practice today. Perhaps the timing of the anniversary prompted the church to select the close of 1807 as the date the church was founded when deciding upon 1907 as the Centenary year. However, The History of the Baptists in Scotland (Yuille, 1926) states that Falkirk Baptist Church was founded in 1808. Baptist scholars have suggested that this date may be a misprint, although it is more likely to reflect the fact the Haldanes, to whom the church owes to a large extent its origins, adopted Baptist views in 1808.



Vision to Build

Therefore when church anniversary celebrations were reinstated under Rev Matthew Cook's ministry in the 1940s, the year the church was founded was taken to be 1808 (from Yuille's history) and this later resulted in the 150th anniversary being held in 1958. Another suggested date is 1809, for in 1993 the minutes record that the church celebrated its 184th anniversary. As James Love wrote in 1906, "Any history of the early years of Falkirk Baptist Church must necessarily be a thing of 'shreds and patches', as the only records existing are of the most meagre kind". Unless further historical information comes to light, the bi-Centenary should be celebrated in 2007 since the Centenary was celebrated in 1907.

Robert Wilson, James Wilson's son, died in October 1908. His last public appearance was when he visited the church in March 1906, at the occasion of the reopening of the building, when he unveiled the memorial window to his father. Like his father, he too was a philanthropist, and a man of whom Alex Paterson made the comment, 'he made all things in life yield spiritual results'. The following article appeared in the Falkirk Herald shortly after his death. "By the death of Mr Wilson, the Falkirk Baptist Church has lost one who was a veritable tower of strength. He was an esteemed deacon of the church for nearly twenty years, and filled the offices of secretary and treasurer. By his wise counsel he did much to extend and consolidate the work of the congregation". Some years later, when all debts on the church buildings had been paid off, Alex Paterson commented that the only debt the church now owed was the debt of love. He was, of course, referring to men like James and Robert Wilson, and others. The Wilson family did not only provide financial resources to the Baptist cause in Falkirk, they brought spiritual insight, wisdom and vision to the church, and the stained-glass windows to their memory remind us



Robert Wilson

Vision to Build

today of their work, liberality, and influence which makes their name inseparable from the history of the church.

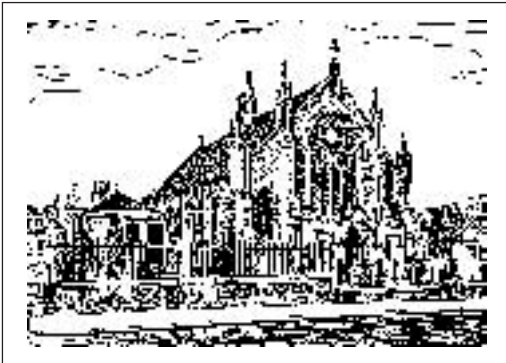
During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Baptist Union was encouraging local church associations, where churches could pool resources and initiate joint actions locally. The Baptist witness in Stirlingshire, and indeed all over Scotland, was steadily growing. Delegates from the Baptist churches at Falkirk, Stirling, Alloa and Alva had been meeting informally since 1893 to discuss Baptist matters, however it wasn't until 1909 that the Stirlingshire & Clackmannanshire Baptist Association (SCBA) was formed. The SCBA was formally constituted on Saturday 19th June 1909, with Rev George Yuille of Stirling Baptist church as its first President. The member churches were Stirling, Falkirk, Larbert, Denny, Bo'ness, Grangemouth, Alloa, Alva and Tillicoultry, with only Banton not going into membership. The first public meeting of the SCBA was on Saturday 2nd October 1909, and Rev Alex Paterson was one of the speakers. The aims of the Association were to encourage interest, support, prayer, and financial aid between the churches, as well as to further the principles and work of the Baptist denomination. Alex Paterson was keenly involved in the work of the SCBA, and was its third President with his Presidential year being session 1913/14. His tireless work was rewarded when he was appointed a delegate from the Association to attend the Baptist World Congress held in Philadelphia USA in June 1911. Presidents of the SCBA from Falkirk Baptist since Mr Paterson have been Hugh Ross (1925/26), Rev Fred Cawley (1932/33), Andrew Balfour Gray (1933/34), Rev William Paterson (1939/40), Rev Matthew Cook (1946/47), Rev John Lyons (1957/58), William Grant (1958/59), Bill Murray (1977/78), and Bill Black (1990/91). In addition, Rev Ian Reed was vice-President of the

Vision to Build

Association in session 1986/87. Despite a name change to the Central Baptist Association in 1983 the local churches have, from around the end of the Second World War, generally shown a declining interest in the activities of the Association.

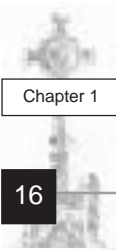
Seat Letting

The church had an outreach work to men staying in a Lodging House in Kerse Lane. The work there



Drawing of Church from 1902

was described as “difficult, and needed all the faith possible to continue in the face of so little that encourages”. Gospel services were held there at 4:30pm on Sunday afternoons over a number of years, and occasionally there would be some positive results to report. Mr Paterson was known for his encouragement of modern ideas in youth work. In 1914 he started the Young Worshipers League to “encourage among the children a feeling that their proper place on Sabbath mornings was at the church”. He regarded 1914 as being one of the most successful years during his ministry. The church had 173 members, and a total of 234 seats were let in the church. Seat-letting was a long-established way of raising income when a seat, or



Vision to Build



Mrs Paterson



"I Will Build My Church"

pew, could be let to an individual, or family, for a small weekly sum. Most families in the church had a pew which was regarded as theirs. Income from seat-letting is mentioned in the earliest available church minutes in 1884 until around 1940. The purpose of raising income in this way was to pay for repairs, feu duty, taxes and heating & lighting.

A congregational soiree was held on 23rd February 1915 to mark the semi-jubilee (25 years) of Mr Paterson's ministry in Falkirk. Rev George Yuille of Stirling Baptist presided, and congratulated Mr Paterson on the progress the church had made under his ministry, as well as his work in enlarging the work of the denomination in the district.

Mr Paterson replied by saying that if they were to ask him why he had waited so long in that sphere of service, he could only say that the growth and development of their work there had been a thing of stages, and he had never been able to make an end of things.

Firstly, there was the new building. Then the money had to be raised to pay for it. Later, the church extended the sanctuary, and added the halls and rooms, and this too had to be paid for.

He added that he had had the joy of receiving almost 500 members into the fellowship, and had experienced 'days of heaven upon earth because of His soul-reviving power'. He was presented with a cheque for £50, and Mrs Paterson was presented with a gold bracelet from the ladies of the church.

First World War

Mr Paterson ministered during the difficult years of the First World War (1914 - 18). In 1917 he reported to the church that 64 young men had joined up from the church. One of the deacons, George

Vision to Build

Donaldson, was killed in Palestine in November 1917. Mr Paterson wrote the following article in the Scottish Baptist Magazine : "George Donaldson was one whose spiritual faithfulness was admired by all. He never forgot that his Lord always came first. He did a great deal of service for the church as Sunday School teacher, as tract distributor, as Lodging House worker, and as deacon. He proved himself a man who was whole-hearted in the Lord's work". It's not certain how many men from the church died in the First World War (or Great War, or European War, as the church minutes refer).

The Roll of Honour (twentieth list) printed in the Scottish Baptist Magazine in 1918 gives the name of nine men from Falkirk Baptist who died. Since this list includes men killed in late 1914, this number is probably the number of men in the church who were killed. In January 1919 discussions started on a suitable War Memorial for members and adherents who had served during the war.

Two bronze or brass plates were to be fitted, one bearing the names of those who had served and the other the names of those who had been killed. A committee was again set up in 1923 to talk over this issue, but it appears unlikely that the memorial plates were ever fitted.

Gourock Baptist Church

Alex Paterson's faithfulness as a minister earned him the Presidency of the Baptist Union of Scotland in session 1920-21. The subject of his Presidential Address was 'Denominational Union'. The following year, in May 1922, he resigned the pastorate of Falkirk Baptist after nearly 33 years ministry to become minister of Gourock Baptist Church. At the special church meeting where his resignation was read out, it was moved and seconded that 'a deputation be sent immediately

Vision to Build

to his house to ask him to reconsider his decision'. On their return the deputation intimated that Mr Paterson still wished to leave the church and his resignation was accepted with regret. He is remembered as a father-like figure to the church, like a shepherd with his flock, someone to whom the members of the church could talk to with ease. He is remembered as "Mr Paterson who built the church".



Gourock Baptist Church

At the age of 62 Mr Paterson left Falkirk for Gourock. His induction to Gourock Baptist took place in September 1922. The church accommodation in Gourock wasn't large enough for the congregation, so Alex Paterson proposed that a new church should be built at a cost of £3750. There would be accommodation for 300 worshippers, a vestry, a ladies room and a deacons room. He suggested that the church's sloping front garden should be the site for the new church, under which three small shops would be built. The rent from the shops helped towards the building and on-going costs of the church. 78 people were received into membership during his first two years at Gourock. He was asked back to Falkirk for special occasions, such as the 1926 bazaar held in the town hall. He retired from Gourock in October

Vision to Build

1934, after 12 years of ministry there and 45 years in the ministry. His ministry was given only to two congregations and he had the probably unique experience of building a new church for both his congregations, which are lasting memorials to the excellency of his ministry.

Rev Jim Murdoch, who is well known to the congregation in Falkirk Baptist, wrote the following



Falkirk Baptist Church today

article for the church magazine in 1997 : “I was most interested while with you this summer to read in *The Messenger* the name of the Rev Alexander Paterson in connection with the Centenary of your present building. He made quite a name for himself as a builder of churches for within two years of leaving Falkirk for Gourrock in 1922 he saw the need for the fellowship there to have an enlarged place of worship. I owe my conversion to Mr Paterson’s clear presentation of the Gospel as did many others both in Falkirk and Gourrock”.

Rev Alex Paterson died on 29th May 1935 at the age of 75. A memorial service was held in Falkirk Baptist where Rev Dr Fred Cawley described him as a strong and lovable friend. A senior member of the church has said of Mr Paterson, “there has been no-one like him since!”.

“The churches at Falkirk and Gourrock are lasting memorials to the excellency of his ministry”