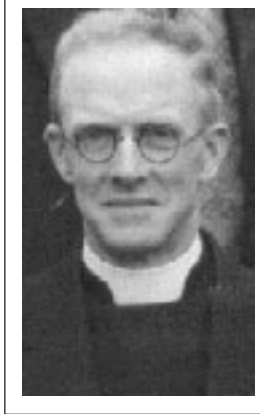


The War Years & Afterwards

Rev Matthew Cook

On 13th April 1941, six months after Rev William Paterson left for Paisley, Rev Matthew Cook was inducted to the pastorate of Falkirk Baptist Church. Again, the church didn't have a long vacancy. Perhaps one reason for this was because the church didn't desire



Matthew Cook

lengthy military occupation of the empty manse, as extensive damage had occurred. The church had thought it necessary at the time to remove some valuable pieces of furniture until a minister was settled. This time the church went for a more experienced man. Matthew Cook had been in the ministry for 34 years and Falkirk Baptist was his fifth and final pastorate.

Matthew Cook was born at Law in Lanarkshire in 1883. He was brought up in the Free Church there, but also had connections with Carluke Baptist Church. At the age of sixteen he was accepted for private tuition by Rev Professor A P Baker MA BD of Law. It was at this time, around the turn of the century, he started preaching at mission hall meetings. In 1905 he went to study for the ministry at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, and in November 1907 he was called to his first pastorate at Shettleston Baptist Church in Glasgow. He was assisted there by James Shorten from County Cork in Ireland. In 1910 Matthew Cook married Mr Shorten's daughter Susannah. Things had not gone too well during the ministry prior to Mr Cook,

The War Years & Afterwards

and Shettleston Baptist turned out to be a difficult pastorate for him as a young, inexperienced minister.

Keiss

In February 1913 he was called to the Baptist Church in Keiss, where he stayed until just before the end of the First World War. His pastoral ministry covered a large area, extending as far north as John O' Groats, and covered the outstations at Lyth, Freswick, Stroma and Auckingill. Up to 200 people could be present at the church in Keiss, a huge number compared with today's attendances, and the regular attendance was about 120 if the weather was favourable. Weather was a major factor in determining attendances there. Once, during prolonged heavy storms, only two people turned up at the church. Mr Cook would have liked to have visited the outlying districts more. Cycling was his only mode of transport, but the distances and exposure to the elements made this infeasible. The War was beginning to make an impact even by the end of 1914. Fishermen were prohibited from fishing, due to German submarine activity, causing hardship and the church finances suffered as a result. In November 1916, after the death of another young man from the congregation as a result of the War, Mr Cook reported to the Baptist Home Mission, "The cutting off of so many young promising lives is too terrible to contemplate. What a comfort it is to know that through death they have passed into a fuller life beyond".

In August 1918 he became the minister of Buckie Baptist Church. At his induction service he was referred to as a man with 'grace, grit and gumption'! Two years later he reported, "I am feeling more at home in Buckie than I used to,

The War Years & Afterwards

and am conscious of a growing attachment between myself and the people". He was minister there for less than four years before moving south again, in January 1922, to become the first minister of Perth West Baptist Church. Perth West Baptist Church was formed in 1920 as an extension of Perth Baptist Church. The following year the congregation purchased a building, and the chairman at the opening service was Rev Alex Paterson of Falkirk Baptist, who was in his Presidential year. Matthew Cook was the first pastor and also the longest serving one. It meant that he had the distinction of being the minister of the oldest (Keiss) and youngest (Perth West) Baptist churches in Scotland. He celebrated 25 years in the ministry in 1932, and brought to a close a ministry in Perth lasting 19 years when he was called to Falkirk Baptist in April 1941. Under his leadership, Perth West Baptist Church became a strong, evangelical force in the community. Although it was said he liked to get his own way, Matthew Cook exercised a vigorous and fruitful ministry there, preaching intelligently and with great conviction. Perth had two Baptist churches until November 1947 when the two churches rejoined.

War Time Restrictions

Falkirk Baptist Church was his final pastorate. He knew the difficulties of pastoral ministry during a time of war, having been at Keiss from 1913 until 1918. At Falkirk he worked hard during the War years, perhaps to the detriment of his health. His three sons, Ernest, Gerald and Eric, served with the Forces during the Second World War, and each returned home safely at the end of the war. At his induction to Falkirk Baptist he said that he intended his ministry to be evangelical, and this was borne out with a number of outreaches taking

The War Years & Afterwards

place. War time restrictions, however, affected the work of the church as well as the attendances. The military had the use of the halls as well as some of the rooms at that time. The Christian Endeavour in the church played their part by putting on a soiree for the soldiers billeted there, and the Women's Auxiliary sent parcels to the 'boys in the forces'. Restrictions meant that before the church could even get a spring-clean, a permit for soap and powder had to be applied for! Mr Cook described his first year at Falkirk as 'strenuous but happy'.

Fabric Fund

The church financial situation continued to cause



Matthew Cook, Shettleston, 1910

concern, with extra expenses incurred such as insuring the church and stained-glass windows against war damage. The overdraft with the bank

The War Years & Afterwards

was increased to £100, and offering amounts for the previous Sunday were intimated to help keep the financial situation in focus. One measure taken was the formation of a Finance Committee, made up entirely of non-deacons, to look at the church finances. Mr Cook thought that, with patience, the church could pay its own way. He stated to the church that one reason for their financial position was the lack of keen spiritual interest, and it was up to every member to put it right. He considered that the halls must become a source of income, and after the war the halls were let out to a variety of organisations. Another helpful measure was the setting up of a Fabric Fund, run by Helen Kennedy and Grace McLeay, which raised monies through various means and kept the amount owed by the church to a minimum. But the income generated through these means still wasn't enough, and £500 had to be borrowed from the Baptist Union under a bond.

Gipsy Hawkins

Matthew Cook organised a number of outreaches, notably one held in 1943 with Gipsy John Hawkins, the celebrated evangelist. Mr Cook wrote the following article in the September 1943 Scottish Baptist Magazine : "An Evangelistic Campaign was conducted in the Baptist church, Falkirk, July 25 - August 15, by Gipsy John Hawkins. It had been planned to hold the campaign for a fortnight, but because of growing interest it was decided to continue for another week. The meetings at which the Gipsy told his life story were attended by fully 350 people. And all this in spite of the fact that it was holiday season, in addition to the large numbers engaged in Civil Defence, Cadet Training and canteen work. Gipsy Hawkins has travelled in many lands and has a rich experience of life on which he draws very largely in his preaching by

The War Years & Afterwards

way of illustration and this made his addresses so full of enthralling interest that, though he preached for double the usual time, nobody wearied but all came back for more. He preached with dignity, eloquence and power, and his plain and pointed messages and downright earnestness and passion for souls made a deep impression. A number of decisions were recorded, especially among the young people, and the hearts of God's people were warmed and revived.”.

On 8th May 1945, known as VE Day, the war ended in Europe. A service of thanksgiving was held in the church that evening. Later, a 'Welcome Home' was arranged for those returning home from serving with the Forces. Each one was given a Bible, with a total of 41 being handed out.

Women Deacons

At the quarterly church business meeting on 28th May 1946, a motion was passed for which the ministry of Rev Matthew Cook will be most remembered. At his request, the motion was that women were eligible to join the Deacons Court on the same status as men. One of his reasons was that women 'take their full share in carrying out the work of the church'. This was discussed at length, and various amendments and counter-motions were defeated. The motion was carried and Mr Cook initially wanted 8 men and 4 women to make up the Deacons Court, but as it turned out 2 women, Mrs Adam and Miss McLeay, were elected onto the Court.

Mr Cook didn't always keep well, and needed three months break from ministerial duties in 1950. He was a man who was very aware of his position in the church. The story is told of how the deacons decided to pay him a visit at the manse one time when he was unwell. Conscious of his position,

The War Years & Afterwards

he insisted on putting his ministerial collar on over his pyjamas before the deacons went up to see him!

Matthew Cook retired from the pastorate at Falkirk Baptist in October 1954, after 13 years ministry here and 47 years in the Baptist ministry. Mr Cook exercised an evangelical ministry. He was dignified, forthright and earnest in everything. He was strong in his views and stood for no nonsense, but although some remember him as 'belonging to the old school' he is remembered as a good pastor, a good Biblical teacher, and a good speaker. Mrs Cook is also remembered as a bit of an extrovert! Mr & Mrs Cook retained their membership of the church, and helped out during the time of vacancy which followed. Matthew Cook died suddenly on 19th October 1958 at the age of 75, while on his way to take the morning service at Redding and Westquarter Church of Scotland. The fact that he was going to church to preach and to lead worship when he died is a fitting commentary on his whole life.