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## THE COATS FAMILY AND PAISLEY BAPTISTS<sup>1</sup>

### I

Victorian architectural competitions were minefields. They made, marred or exploded the reputations of assessors, competitors and premiated alike. They were always fraught and sometimes rigged. Their great virtue was the publicity which they provided for the profession and its patrons. There was not a building type without its competitions. Consequently there were some famous chapel competitions: for Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, for example, or Henry Allon's Union Chapel, Islington, or St James's Congregational Church, Newcastle, or the Thomas Coats Memorial Baptist Church, Paisley.<sup>2</sup>

Although it was nine years before the result of the Paisley 'Baptist Chapel Competition' could truly catch at the breath of all who surveyed it, the competition itself hit the pages of *The Builder* and *The British Architect* in 1885.<sup>3</sup> The proposed church was to be a working memorial to Thomas Coats, the Paisley sewing-thread manufacturer, who had died in 1883. This explained the cost at which competitors were to set their sights (£20,000); it explained the style, which was to be Gothic with tower and spire; and it explained the size, since it was to seat some 800 people. It also explained the shape. Because those people were believed to be connoisseurs of music as well as preaching, the choir and organ must be as carefully placed as the pulpit. Because they were Baptists there must be the appropriate arrangements for believer's baptism by immersion and that meant not just a baptistery but convenient retiring and dressing rooms for those who were to be baptized. There must be rooms for minister and deacons and there must be halls to hold the social genius of these Baptists. There there was the site. That was potentially commanding and certainly demanding, since it was hillside and not hill top. Here was such an opportunity as might make or crown a career.

Nine architects were invited to compete: one from Edinburgh, three from London and five from Glasgow.<sup>4</sup> The assessor was Glasgow's James Sellars.<sup>5</sup> *The British Architect* gave his report on six of the designs, those by the Londoners J. P. Seddon,<sup>6</sup> Arthur Billing and Charles Bell,<sup>7</sup> by the Glaswegians J. Burnet & Son<sup>8</sup> and John Hutchinson,<sup>9</sup> and by Edinburgh's Hippolyte Blanc. Of these, Seddon was best known: a Goth to be reckoned with, though Dissenting Gothic was hardly his forte. Of the Scots, Burnet & Son had the soundest base and the most distinguished future.

The prestige of the competition was not in doubt. The Coats family was politically, economically and philanthropically influential and it was about to become powerful. Given the vigour of Glasgow's architectural profession, there was spice in the battle between Glasgow, Edinburgh and London. There was also a challenge in the commission's Baptistness. For cost, its only rival, apart from the Metropolitan Tabernacle, was James Cubitt's recent Church of the Redeemer, Hagley Road, Birmingham, completed in 1882;<sup>10</sup> and as a symbol it had no rival for here was to be a Baptist cathedral, commemorating a Christian family which had made its way by Baptist principles in a town whose economy might warm to their expression but in a country which was ungrateful ground. As a British statement,

this was to be a notable church; as a Scottish statement it was to be extraordinary. No wonder the assessor trod delicately as Agag, and even so found it very hard not to see the planned memorial as Presbyterian.

The competitors rose to the drama of the moment. Their drawings were of 'the highest artistic excellence'. Their seating ranged from the 800 of Burnet and Blanc to Bell's 971; the furthest their hearers could sit from their pulpits ranged from the 80 feet of Hutchison and Blanc to Bell's 110 feet; the height of their spires rose from Blanc's 183 feet to the 250 feet of Billing and Burnet. As for the cost, Blanc estimated £19,000 for either of his plans A and C; his plan B, like those of his rivals, was put at £20,000. Sellars judged they would all cost more than the architects' estimates.<sup>11</sup>

It was Hippolyte Blanc, the Edinburgh man, who carried Paisley. There can be little doubt that he was the most suitable choice. For a start, he landscaped his design, setting it back in its hillside on a series of terraces. Next he provided variants, A, B and C. Each had nave, aisles (passages only), transepts and chancel, but B had a shorter, wider nave which brought the congregation closer to the preacher, and C made a prime feature of the crossing of nave and transepts, which turned the space into an octagon with a circular rhythm of pews. Sellars opted for B ('better for a Presbyterian church', he persisted). B worked well acoustically; its necessary rooms were convenient and had lavatories; its baptistery was given the central position under the chancel arch, with the pulpit to westwards. Sellars paused only at the elevations, for B had twin towers with spires at its south end ('quite unworthy of the other parts of the design'), while A's tower bestrode the church's great crossing, its stone-ribbed crown striking a superbly memorial note. If B had Sellar's suffrage internally, A won hands down externally: 'The drawings show that the author is familiar with the best examples of Gothic art in our own country . . . The central tower, surmounted by the open lantern, forms a fitting and graceful crown to a beautiful edifice'.

## II

Despite his name and origin, Hippolyte Jean Blanc (1844-1917) was Scottish born and bred.<sup>12</sup> He was the essence of the Edinburgh architectural establishment, Tory in politics and antiquarian by inclination. His publications reflected this: papers on 'Medieval Abbeys: their place as Schools of Art', or 'Scottish Ecclesiastical Architecture in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century', brought up-to-date by his passion for photography. There was nothing arcane in his practice. Restorations were outweighed by his institutional and municipal work, with public halls, public baths and public libraries, culminating in the colony for 1000 patients at West Bangour for the Edinburgh and District Lunacy Board. When it came to churches, Blanc worked across the denominational board. The Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the United Presbyterians, the Episcopalians and the Evangelical Union all employed him. In Paisley he had already designed St James's Church (1880) for a Presbyterian Coats, and he was soon to reconstruct Ferguslie Park for Thomas Coats's son, Sir Thomas Glen Coats. He was, in short, the ideal choice for fully-fashioned paternalism.

No visitor to Coats Memorial can escape that paternalism and no thinking visitor will find it easy to reconcile it either with the congregational polity of the Baptists for whom it was built or with the radical understanding of Christian initiation which made them *Baptists* in the first place. Is it, then, a rich family's toy, to be enjoyed and then set aside? 'I can remember as a small boy', recalled Thomas Coats's grandson in a reminiscence which shed incidental light on James Sellars's perplexity as to plans A and B and on Blanc's handling of the consequent diplomacies, 'seeing side by side two models of churches prepared by Mr Blanc, the interior of each illuminated by electric light . . . The one had twin towers recalling the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. The other, with its crown tower, reminding one of St Giles' Edinburgh, was the one chosen.'<sup>13</sup>

One of Thomas Coats's cousins made no bones about the high-minded high-handedness of his kinsfolk, so ready to be at one with Notre Dame or St Giles:

We shall be translated to a building every stone, every curve, every pillar and arch of which have been conceived and constructed with the idea of affecting, as far as art can, the hearts and souls of man Godward. I believe this building is acknowledged to be the finest example of medieval ecclesiastical Gothic architecture which has been erected in this country since the Reformation, and it is perfectly equipped and adapted for its purpose. All this magnificent transformation has been accomplished without the slightest effort on the part of the Church. By the fairy wand of filial piety swaying and directing the resources of labour and art, the change has been effected, without our lifting our little finger or contributing one farthing towards its production. The founders could do no more. They have done their part. The dress of the Bride is there; the apparel is gorgeous. Everything which can materially signify purity and love and high endeavour and holy aspiration will be waiting and ready. Is the bride going to shew herself worthy?<sup>14</sup>

Man must propose if he is to be true to his nature, but God disposes nonetheless; therein lies the motor of church life. Paisley man, however, had posed some cruelly sharp questions for one group of God's people. Manipulation by words, whether Godward or not, was already their occupational hazard as Baptists. Now they were to be manipulated by stone. Their options for future action were to be sumptuously constrained by bounds no longer of their own making. A dead man's family had set the agenda for their future worship and church life. Could that possibly be a recipe for Baptist life? The competing architects, none of them Baptists, had wrestled with the bones of the problem and their solutions spoke first to the emotions. That was natural and safe. Their Gothic idioms, their towers and spires, were sure reference points, even for Scottish Baptists, but they served no practical, working use, however satisfactory their aesthetic, memorial appeal.

Yet even at the level of the emotions this memorial to paternalism is a markedly rational creation. It is without doubt a cathedral, a Baptist St Giles, 220 feet from the tip of its crown to the High Street pavement, grandly appropriating France and Germany as well as medieval Scotland, commanding the hillside into which in fact it nestles, holding Paisley in its view, keeping Paisley Abbey in its place and

upstaging every other Paisley church. It is breathtaking in its completeness and its quality. Its tiled lavatories were like reception halls. In its vestibule are fonts, but since this is a late-Victorian Baptist church they are neither fonts nor stoups for holy water but fountains for drinking water to slake thirsts caused by gas lighting. That combination of richness with convenience is echoed in the traceries screens which separate the transept aisles from the ambulatory, for these screens are glazed in the clearest crystal, essay in merciful deception for the eye and draught exclusion for the neck. The pews are of oak, the first ten of them exported from Scandinavia since only there could wood of the right length be obtained. They have kneeling boards for any worshippers who might dislike the Nonconformist crouch and when they are unbolted from the floor they can be moved for easy cleaning. Nothing jars. The pulpit of marble from Languedoc and alabaster from Staffordshire, dating from 1910, like Blanc's lectern of 1904 is of cathedral richness. So too, though few cathedrals were built with such things in mind, are the umbrella stands, the radiator cases and the gasoliers - these last turned now into electroliers and electrolabra. So is the door furniture, the hinges and the handles and the massive studs. There are niches in the stonework so that when the main doors are opened wide they fit flush against the walls, studs, hinges, handles and all. And there is the colour: the oak barrel vault of the nave in contrast with the pulpit's gold and blue-greys; the chancel ceiling alive with angelic musicians; the vestibule mosaics; all of it richly dimmed now. Only in the windows is there no colour, for there is no painted glass since only clarity should celebrate so grand a space.

The church's admirers praised its harmony and form. Purists might be disturbed by its decorative eclecticism and some, mindful that even churches sprang to life when touched by the contemporary Glasgow style, might regret a Gothic which is too scholarly to be free; save that later Victorian Free Gothic slips very easily into modishness unless released by genius. All, however, must applaud the fruitful tension between the cathedral Goth and the Arts and Craftsman in this architectural proof text of the liberty for which intelligent patronage can find room.

With that patronage we are back to the fact that the 'name of Coats is inseparably linked with the Memorial Church'.<sup>15</sup> The opening service, in May 1894, was almost a memorial service (admission by ticket, with Paisley's MP and Provost in attendance) for Thomas Coats, now eleven years dead.<sup>16</sup> His widow had opened the east transept door with a golden key and then she and her family were escorted by the architect to their seats in the west transept. That service was conducted by Richard Glover of Bristol, the weightiest of English provincial Baptists, but the afternoon service was taken by Oliver Flett, the new building's minister, whose wife was Thomas Coats's first cousin once removed, and the evening service was taken by her brother, Jervis Holms Coats, who ministered at Govan.<sup>17</sup> The opening service was choral, with a robed choir, sixty strong, thus putting key parts of the architect's brief to immediate test.

There remained the problem of maintenance. Three weeks earlier the church members had agreed to conditions proposed by the Coats family. The church's polity - its conditions of membership and communion and the ordering of its worship and meeting - was unaffected. It was what the church did in the new memorial that

exercised the Coatses, for the 'church buildings and property remain in the hands of the Family'.<sup>18</sup> They paid for its upkeep, they appointed and paid the caretakers, they met the expenses of organist and choir, and they had the right to use the new building on weekdays for 'organ recitals and other musical services of a religious character'. That, of course, referred to the naved church; the halls beneath were to be for social meetings or Bible classes, but not for mission or Sunday School work - those were firmly restricted to the church's former premises.

Their mission accomplished, it might seem that the commemorating family went the inevitable way of all prosperous flesh. A baronetcy came to one of Thomas Coats's sons and a barony (taking its name from its new holder's ballroomed-baronial place in Aberdeenshire) to another.<sup>19</sup> A grand-daughter married an English duke.<sup>20</sup> A third son combined the family disease of yachting with art collecting. His collection of Dutch old masters and the Hague and Barbizon schools was one of the most important to be amassed by that turn-of-the-century phenomenon, the art-collecting Scottish industrialist. It rivalled those of his friend, Sir William Burrell, and of his kinsman-by-marriage, T. G. Arthur.<sup>21</sup>

In that respect, Thomas's line, the Coatses of Ferguslie, were no doubt simply following the stylish ways of his brother's line, the Coatses of Auchendrane. The family's first title, a knighthood, had come in 1869 to Thomas's elder brother, Peter Coats, who had ceased to be a Baptist in 1843. The Scotch baronial of Sir Peter's Auchendrane provided the precedent for his nephew's Glen Tanar and to his unbounded civic philanthropies his descendants added yachting and hard-line fishing, Roman Catholicism and Toryism, marriage to the débutante of the season in 1922 and horticultural journalism and game shooting in later years.<sup>22</sup>

### III

What was the context for such variably consecrated paternalism?<sup>23</sup> The immediate contexts were Paisley and weaving. Paisley is nine miles from the centre of Glasgow, which might suggest that Paisley stands to Glasgow as Rotherham does to Sheffield or Ashton to Manchester. It does, since like them Paisley stands in its own right. It had been a weaving centre since the late seventeenth century and it became famous for its shawls in the early nineteenth. That trade, successfully stolen from Norwich, collapsed irreversibly after mid-century, killed by fashion. The shawl industry flourished and fell with the handloom. For a while cotton spinning and power-loom weaving replaced it, but from the 1870s it was cotton thread which reigned. The town was not wholly dependent on cotton thread. It also produced cigarettes, Robertson's marmalade, and Brown & Polson's starch. It provided, therefore, the infrastructure of a professional as well as a managerial and entrepreneurial class, and its handloom weaving traditions had formed an artisanate noted for its political and intellectual independence.

There was thus also the infrastructure for a distinctive culture reflected in its public buildings - its town hall, hospital, library, its observatory, even its drill hall - and especially its churches. Locals spoke affectionately of their 'Holy City', with its nine or ten churches off one street alone.<sup>24</sup> In fact, that spoke as much of the nicety of their sectarianism as it did of their piety, but several of these churches

were at least architecturally important. Paisley Abbey, is of Scottish significance; Thomas Coats Memorial Baptist Church, is of British significance. so far we have considered it as fine architecture, indeed, as its architect's masterpiece, and as a social document: as the product of a professional man's skills in meeting certain immediate needs and as the reflection of a particular kind of industrial largesse. That largesse, however, was inseparable from the particular complex of factors which made Paisley distinctive.

The Coats family, many-branched and far-flung, had grown with their church and their town, locked into its economy at every level. Coatses were among its mental artmen. They belonged to its professional and ministerial intelligentsia, as well as to its shopocracy. That was the strength which sustained their progress through its plutocracy. In the fifty years after 1883 the average estate of eleven millionaire Coatses was £2,270,000.<sup>25</sup> The reason was sewing cotton. The firm of J. & P. Coats, established in 1824, dominated not just its town but its world market. By the 1890s it had reached a peak, employing 6,000 hands and generating dividends which reached 45% in 1899. It was one of Britain's top three manufacturing firms. It was also the most financially successful combine in the world.<sup>26</sup> And the Coatses, who may or may not have been Paisley's leading family,<sup>27</sup> were certainly the most successful.

Their founder was Thomas Coats's father, James Coats (1774-1857). He moved through each stage of Paisley's textile trades before settling on the sewing thread which made his son's fortune. James was a Paisley handloom weaver's son and an English stocking weaver's grandson, who himself became a handloom weaver in his teens. That was the golden age of Paisley's handloom weaving when a man 'could earn as much money during the first half of the day as enabled him to play during the last half', and could afford to dress in the best broadcloth with 'Knee'd breeches, silk stockings and highly polished shoes decorated with silver buckles'. Such memories were not entirely fanciful, for one of James's sons recalled how, 'long years afterwards', those knee'd breeches 'did frequent duty in our juvenile Theatricals'.<sup>28</sup> James began to diversify. His wife employed on her own account several local women as embroiderers or 'tambourers'. When his health failed, he too turned to the manufacture of tamboured goods, in his case sewed muslins. By 1808 he had done sufficiently well to move to a suburban villa. This was the first major step in what his son, Andrew, later celebrated in the title of his reminiscences, *From the Cottage to the Castle*.<sup>29</sup>

James Coats remained in that villa for the rest of his life but it was he who ensured the next industrial step, whether by chance or providence.<sup>30</sup> It seems that two Paisley friends and fellow manufacturers, James Coats and James Whyte, were in London independently of each other. Though each bought his wife the latest fashion fabric, a Canton crape shawl, neither gave it to her for each had determined to discover for himself the secret of making Canton crape. Neither succeeded but when, by chance, they shared their common failure and pooled their efforts they succeeded in producing a good substitute. Thus they introduced Canton crape to Britain, their partnership prospering under successive permutations as Coats and Whyte, then as Coats, Grieve & Company, finally as Grieve, Macgregor & Coats.

Part of the Canton crape process involved the twisting of silk yarns, for which the machinery was the same as that used in making threads. Paisley already had a thread works, Ross & Duncan of George Street, but it needed capital. So James Coats provided the capital, became a sleeping partner in Ross & Duncan and thus ensured that his yarns were twisted. When recession hit silk yarns and it became vital to seek new outlets for thread, he built his own factory at Ferguslie, equipped with a twelve-horsepower steam engine. That was in 1826. Sixty years later the firm generated 12,000 horsepower and its Ferguslie plant covered fourteen acres.<sup>31</sup>

J. & P. Coats was born, although the firm took that style only when James retired and his sons James (1803-45) and Peter (1808-90) took over. In fact, four of James's sons played a crucial part in the expansion of his business, since James and Peter were joined by Thomas (1809-83) and Andrew (1814-1900). James the younger began as a shawl manufacturer; Peter, after a dose of 'Glasgow College, with the view of qualifying for the church',<sup>32</sup> turned to a Glasgow East India Merchant's counting house; Thomas began as an engineer and machinist; Andrew began as a lawyer. Their combined talents made J. & P. Coats unshakable in very shaky times. James's judgement as senior partner, Peter's accounting and marketing flair, and Thomas's technical skills provided the basis for what Andrew turned to brilliant transatlantic advantage.

After ten years of legal practice in Scotland, Andrew emigrated. From 1839 to 1860 he lived in the United States, working indefatigably in the firm's interests, playing the Scottish networks of Philadelphia, New York, Boston and New England for all they were worth, battling 'in that country of magnificent distances' for the soul of its retailers since only they could persuade its wholesalers that Coats was the firm to use. Eventually agencies were secured. The first links, cemented several times by marriage in later generations, were made with the New York houses of Auchincloss and Frelinghuysen, while Quaker friendships via a Philadelphian cousin of John Bright's led to a mercantile partnership with Joseph W. Bates, 'in whom I at once recognized my table companion in a Cunard steamer, during a recent passage from Liverpool to Boston'.<sup>33</sup> The firm of Bates & Coats, importers of dress goods from Yorkshire, expanded from Philadelphia to New York, where it provided the future basis for the already large Auchincloss fortunes. By 1860, thanks to Bates & Coats and Andrew's various agencies and contacts, Coats's thread led the American market. It weathered the Civil War. It weathered tariffs of forty or fifty per cent. Its six-cord thread was admirably placed to cash in on the sewing machine revolution, and when the tariffs became prohibitive the firm built its own factories in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. For a while three-quarters of its trade was American, but by the late 1880s that American trade was equalled by the firm's home and foreign trades. Coats's thread had the world sewn up. Its principals' villas, their cottages long since sold, had become castles.

The architect of the next stage of expansion was Archibald Coats (1840-1912), Peter's son, salmon fisher with some of the best beats on the Tay, and 'Napoleon of the thread trade'.<sup>34</sup> Archibald consolidated the firm's large-scale organization through the cartel and the trust. It was Archibald who incorporated the firm in 1890 as a limited company with capital of £3,750,000, and who amalgamated the firm



five years later with four of its chief competitors.<sup>35</sup> Capital, efficiency, contacts throughout the world and a statesmanlike ability to deflect attention from their virtual monopoly, meant by the 1890s that any localized memorial, such, for example, as Paisley's new Baptist church, must witness to a global reality. To that extent, Thomas Coats's Memorial Baptist Church is an international statement.

It is nonetheless primarily a witness to local possibility. Rich men do not spring from a vacuum and they seldom leap straight to their castles from a cottage. This building, to be marvelled at as a monument to one rich man by his family, must also be judged by its aptness for purpose. For this memorial takes shape as the house for the gathered Christian fellowship which formed that rich man's view. The Coatses knew their Paisley but Paisley knew all about its Coatses. Though some were millionaires, others cured ham. The fortunes of some were made by thread, those of others hung by a thread. Some put on airs; some were nicknamed the 'Petticoats'. Though some were Baptist ministers and some were medical men, others - it was said - found their vocation and perhaps their fall in fast women and slow horses. But all were related to enough families who were nothing at all beyond being Paisley stalwarts for these Napoleons of industrial combination to be containable and manageable. This millionaire's memorial is a subtler and more complex matter than the foisting of a rich man's largesse or his family's sentiment (or conscience) onto a passive people. This astounding statement in red sandstone is the more astounding for relating so naturally to its community.

#### IV

In its religious guise that community was Baptist, originally Scotch Baptist.<sup>36</sup> That meant less that it reflected relatively recent developments in Scottish church life than that it had grown as Paisley was growing and that its temper drew on the distinctive Paisley temper. The dividing line between independence and dissidence is a fine one and Paisley's Baptists both benefited from and contributed to that line's fineness. They began as a secession from a secession:

formed by seven members of the Abbey Close Independents - known as Dale's Kirk, from their having been established by Mr David Dale, father-in-law of Mr Robert Owen, of Socialist notoriety; whose son, the Hon. Robert Dale Owen, is author of 'Footfalls on the Boundary of another world'.<sup>37</sup>

That account, itself taken from a history of Paisley's most distinctive religionists, encapsulates something of the Paisley temper. The Baptist septet separated from Dale's Kirk in 1795; by December 1798 they had moved from their own premises in Abbey Close to larger ones purpose-built in Storie Street, where they remained until 1894.<sup>38</sup> The new cause's polity, like its worship and its buildings, emerged pragmatically. It was Baptist, closed alike in membership and communion. It had elders (from 1798 to 1866), reflecting its Scotch Baptist beginnings, but no *pastor* before 1851. From 1839 to 1863 it tolerated a friction-fraught system of dual management: a committee ran its secular affairs (and appointed the church's secretary and treasurer), while spiritual matters were left to the elders and deacons. After 1863 the deacons managed the lot, subject always to the approval of church

meeting, which of course had appointed them. None of this prevented secession and in 1842 and 1866 new, flourishing and enduring Baptist causes began in George Street and Victoria Place respectively. In each case the secession brought Storie Street's membership down from well over a hundred to the eighties. In each case there were clashes of doctrine and personality and in each case it was the conservatives who seceded - older-fashioned Calvinists in 1842, Spurgeonists in 1866. The second secession led to the departure of the church's last elder. The Scotch Baptist model had in most respects given way to an 'English' model, and the way was paved for a consistent if always pragmatic liberalizing. An organ was discussed in 1866 and in use by 1868. Open communion was discussed in 1868 and practised from 1869.<sup>39</sup> Open membership was regularly discussed from 1875 but not secured for many more years despite the personal preferences of successive ministers. And the membership grew: the 118 of 1843 became the 171 of 1879 and the 320 of 1894. So did the paraphernalia of mutual improvement, mission work and children's work. In all outward respects Paisley's Storie Street Baptists conformed to the successful urban mid-to-late-Victorian run. With their worship, indeed, the run became a gallop, much of it in an English direction.

The church's tradition had been that, while only elders might occupy the pulpit, any male member might speak from his pew or the precentor's desk, a moment signified by the elder's formula: 'There is now an opportunity for a word of exhortation'.<sup>40</sup> In past years, apparently, that had turned Storie Street's worship into an arena for debate, but the principle nonetheless survived the moderating effect of asking exhorting brethren to intimate their intention to an elder on the preceding Sunday. The real changes came rather with the emergence of a stated and salaried ministry, confirmed by the long and cumulatively powerful pastorates of the Orcadian Oliver Flett and the English Walter Mursell (both Coats' connections) between 1861 and 1921.<sup>41</sup>

As has been noted, that came (and the precentor went) in 1869. A psalmody class conducted by a music teacher began in October 1872; an anthem became part of the choir's duties from January 1873; the first paid choirmaster came in 1884, the first paid organist in January 1887;<sup>42</sup> and by 1889, with the new church in view, there were thoughts of a choir of boys alone (in the event boys formed a third of the choir), while the new and fully professional organist-choirmaster compiled a Hymnbook and Psalter for the new choir's use, with a supplement of anthems, with free copies for the pews in Staff and Tonic sol-fa notation. His choir, fifty strong, was divided for antiphonal singing and was robed in white surplices with mortarboards.<sup>43</sup> This was an extraordinary feature for Baptist churches anywhere, let alone Scotland. Robed choirs were all very well in the years just before the Great War for large and theologically suspect London Congregational churches,<sup>44</sup> but in the 1890s their rarity was equalled only by that of women deacons and women preachers. In one other choral respect Paisley Baptists ran ahead of themselves: they were used to the prose chanting of psalms as well as the metrical version; among British Dissenters, and outside London Congregationalists of a certain kind, that was largely restricted to Scottish Episcopalians.

Nonetheless, Storie Street's buildings conduced more to debate than to song. In

each of the church's buildings, whether Abbey Close, Storie Street or Coats Memorial, public worship was in an upper room. In Storie Street that upper room was income-generatingly above a shop and a day school, as well as the caretaker's house. It was of course amenable to enlargement and improvement. Thus it was gas lit from 1831 and central heating replaced stoves from 1839, when a move to rebuild was sidestepped into enlargement, with more to come in 1859 and 1863. Then in January 1885 the minister intimated to a church meeting the wish of Thomas Coats's widow and family to commemorate him by a building in which the Storie Street folk might worship. Nine years later that happened and Storie Street was given over to the Sunday school until that too was eventually provided with purpose-built premises. The decision to build was taken in 1903 and the schools were opened in December 1910. Although they were far from the Renaissance grandeur of Seddon's scheme and were far cheaper than Coats Memorial, they were still by no means cheap.<sup>45</sup>

## V

The *tone* of this changing polity and worship and building can be detected, artfully no doubt but affectionately, in two generations of reminiscence. Paisley's Baptists were born in secession from a congregation of Independents. Another Paisley Independent congregation also issued in a Baptist secession in 1797. These seceders reconstituted themselves in 1798 and continued in Pen Close (hence the Pen Folk) until 1819. Although their awkward Calvinism separated them from everybody and they remained quite distinct from the Storie Street Baptists, secessions from the Pen Folk enlivened Storie Street with some dominant characters. John Taylor, weaver and Pen Folk elder from 1799 to 1805, was Storie Street's elder from 1819 to 1842, his family intermarrying with the growing Storie Street network.<sup>46</sup> The Pen Folk too were practised exhorters and it was held that Storie Street's debating atmosphere owed much to seceders from Pen Close. Their memorialist, writing after the death of their last survivor and sensibly skirting their doctrinal quirks to get to their strength of character, seized on three Pen facets. The first, from a manuscript sermon of 1817, began in terms that most Congregationalists would have echoed in 1917:

The text is, 'Where two or three is gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'. This is the charter of Christian brotherhood and equality. When the Lord spoke those memorable words, he gave to every band, however small, of his followers, who might at any future time gather to worship him, their inalienable law. He did not place their right in the keeping of any Presbytery or Synod; nor did he give any control or supervision into the hands of Bishop or priest whatever. The charter is Divine, and gives its duties and privileges to each gathering of worshippers without the intervention of council . . .<sup>47</sup>

The second is the memorialist's own gloss of 1871:

Democratic government is the only one that is in harmony with a gospel

brotherhood, because it alone recognizes the divine declarations in their simplicity, 'All ye are brethren', and 'One is your Master, even Christ'. Presbytery in any form ignores that brotherhood, because it involves a self-perpetuating order of men to whom the laity is, to some extent, subservient; whilst Episcopal and Papal rule exclude the brotherhood altogether, and make the Church to consist of its officials, - reminding me of the regiments we formed in our boyhood which were wholly composed of corporals, captains, and colonels. Democracy, however, is obnoxious to the great ecclesiastical trades-unions of Christendom, whose chief use in our day resembles that of custom-houses, whose officers levy a tariff on the products of the earth bound heavenward, prohibit *unsound* articles, and consign them to destruction.<sup>48</sup>

The third facet concerns those whose gender precluded them from public exhortation, though in no other sense from serious discussion: 'The wives of the Pen . . . those quiet, sensible, queen-like mothers, who, in the very maturity of repose, sat during the intervals of worship in the cozy nook of the meeting-house'.<sup>49</sup> The point about them was this:

the children of each family were enjoined to call every matron in the connection 'Aunty'. I had half-a-dozen Aunty Jeans, and as many Aunty Maries and Aunty Margarets . . . Those who have not experienced the benefits arising from the use of this name, cannot know the humanising power it had over our young hearts . . . More than fifty years have passed, and yet, when I meet the descendants of the Aunties of the Pen Kirk, I feel the old kindly affections welling up strong within me, and I would gladly do them service . . .<sup>50</sup>

That humanizing element is too often omitted from analyses of sectarianism. Transposed from Pen Close to Storie Street it makes sense of building and society alike.

As Pen Close was recalled in 1871 'By One Who Knew Them', so Storie Street was recreated fifty years later in G. H. Coats's *Rambling Recollections*.<sup>51</sup> In his mind's eye, the east end of its upper room was dominated by 'a big gaucy pulpit . . . a big four-barrelled affair, with room . . . for four elders at a time - panels up at the back, with hat pegs and a bookboard and cushion in front for the Bible and hymnbook'.<sup>52</sup> Storie Street's topography was complicated. The big pulpit reared above a smaller one with a well-cushioned seat for the precentor. To its right was the hymn-tune rack (Stroudwater, Caroline, St Marnock's, Marksworth, St George's Edinburgh) and to its front again was a red plush upholstered desk, flanked by brass holders for the tune's name which the precentor would hold aloft as appropriate. There too were the music book, the tuning fork and the spittoon, 'indispensable for the clearing of the precentor's throat'.<sup>53</sup> Thus the landscape extended from the gaucy pulpit, the plush-upholstered desk in turn fronted by the railed-in table seat for deacons and non-officiating elders, to the table in the centre. This in fact was the baptistery's portable top, edged by sloping book boards. The room had a central passage between pews whose sittings, ten a side, were free. For baptism the table

top was removed and candidates for baptism followed the presiding elder up temporary steps, over the edge and into water 'cold to freezing point in winter'.<sup>54</sup>

The room worked or, rather, was made to work, a fact confirmed by the Storie Kirk Love Feast (or 'Coffee Kirk') held between Sunday services in the downstairs meeting room.<sup>55</sup> What began for church members was extended to church children and what began with kail broth and mild ale was gentled to Johnstone's essence, biscuits, cheese, bread and mustard. 'We sat on the forms, with our coffee jugs on the sloping school desks, and sometimes they slid off.'<sup>56</sup> Coffee Kirk's liturgy was grace, food, fellowship and then news of members. It was the cement of community, and Coats Memorial, with its upper-room cathedral and its banqueting hall beneath, was designed to perpetuate it. But somehow that did not happen: 'There is little hope of these practices being revived . . . under the conditions as they at present exist in the magnificent buildings called the Thomas Coats Memorial Church!'<sup>57</sup> Yet for some the heart of the matter was transformed rather than obliterated. One minister recalled for the jubilee of those magnificent buildings his own formation in them: the choir on the opening day, in which he sang; the first baptism, with him baptized; the building 'that spoke of the eternal things all about us'; the naturalness of what was 'stately, dignified and moving. It made Christian worship unique, and proved that the influence of the church service could be the greatest moral and spiritual instrument in the world.'<sup>58</sup> That testimony suggests that these memorial buildings *worked as buildings for Baptists*, that they grew from Storie Street rather than that they sucked in Storie Street. Which brings us to the Baptistness of Paisley's many-septed Coatses. *[to be continued]*

## NOTES

- 1 This paper has a complex prehistory. Earlier and shorter versions have appeared in C. Binfield, 'Towards an Appreciation of Baptist Architecture', K. W. Clements ed., *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 1983, pp.126-7; 'Thomas Coats Memorial Church, Paisley', *Proceedings of the Summer Meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute in Glasgow in 1986*, 1986, pp.28-30; 'Coffee Kirk Sundays', *Landscape*, October 1988, pp.26-9; and 'A Working Memorial? The Encasing of Paisley's Baptists', W. M. Jacob and N. Yates eds., *Crown and Mitre: Religion and Society in Northern Europe since the Reformation*, Woodbridge 1993, pp.185-202. This is a more comprehensive version of the latter essay and I am grateful to Boydell and Brewer Ltd for permission to reprint. I must also express my indebtedness to Mr Ian Gow, Mrs Phyllis Hastings, Mrs E. MacGregor and Mr George Thallon for their help at key stages.
- 2 See R. H. Harper, *Victorian Architectural Competitions: An Index to British and Irish Architectural Competitions in The Builder 1843-1900*, 1983; C. Binfield, 'The Building of a Town Centre Church: St James's Congregational Church, Newcastle Upon Tyne', *Northern History*, xviii, 1982, pp.155-82; C. Binfield, 'A Chapel and its Architect: James Cubitt and Union Chapel, Islington, 1874-1889', Diana Wood ed., *Studies in Church History*, 28: *The Church and the Arts*, Oxford 1992, pp.417-47.
- 3 *The Builder*, xlix, 1885, pp.4, 49, 86, 113, 186-9; *The British Architect* 24 July 1885, pp.43-4, from which the following account of the competition is drawn.
- 4 Harper, *op.cit.*, p.133.
- 5 For Sellars (1843-88), see R. Dixon and S. Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, 1978, p.266; Elizabeth Williamson, Anne Riches and Malcolm Higga, *The Buildings of Scotland: Glasgow*, 1990, wherein his Glasgow work can be charted.
- 6 For John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906) see Dixon and Muthesius, *op.cit.*, p.266. Gray, *op.cit.*,

- p.362 (sub C. F. A. Voysey').
- 7 For Charles Bell (1846-1899), see Harper, *op.cit.*, p.187; *Congregational Year Book*, 1885, p.251.
  - 8 For John Burnet (1814-1901) and Sir John James Burnet (1857-1938) see A. S. Gray, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary*, 1985, pp.128-131; see also *DNB*.
  - 9 By 1885 Hutchison's office included the young Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Gray, *op.cit.*, p.249 (sub 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh').
  - 10 It cost £17,340. See C. Binfield, 'Towards an Appreciation of Baptist Architecture', *op.cit.*, p.125; T. W. Hutton, *The Chronicles of Our Church*, Birmingham 1902, pp.73-96.
  - 11 For fuller details of all the designs, see Clyde Binfield, 'A Working Memorial? The Encasing of Paisley's Baptists', in N. Yates and W. Jacob, eds., *Crown and Mitre*, Boydell & Brewer, 1994, pp.189-208.
  - 12 For Hippolyte Jean Blanc (1844-1917) see *The Builder*, 30 March 1917, p.206; *RIBA Journal* 24, 3rd ser., April 1917, p.147; J. B. Crossland, *Victorian Edinburgh*, Letchworth 1966, pp.66, 90.
  - 13 *The Thomas Coats Memorial Church, Paisley, Jubilee Book 1944*, Paisley 1945, p.10.
  - 14 G[eorge] H[olms] C[oots], *An Ideal Baptist Church: A Lecture Delivered in the Baptist Church, Storie Street, Paisley, 2nd April 1894*, Paisley 1894, pp.4-5.
  - 15 *Jubilee Book*, *op.cit.*, p.18.
  - 16 D. D. Hair, *The Thomas Coats Memorial Church: Notes Historical and Descriptive*, Paisley 1930, pp.14-15.
  - 17 For Richard Glover (1837-1919), who had ministered in Glasgow 1861-69, minister of Tyndale Chapel, Bristol, 1869-1911, President of the Baptist Union 1884, see *Who Was Who, 1916-1928*, p.413; for Oliver Flett (d.1894), minister at Paisley from 1860, see *Jubilee Book*, *passim* esp. pp.10, 49, 72, 78-9; G. H. Coats, *Rambling Recollections*, Paisley 1920, pp.78-80; for Jervis Holms Coats (1844-1921), see *Jubilee*, *passim*; *Rambling Recollections*, pp.56-62; *Who Was Who 1916-1928*, pp.208-9.
  - 18 *Jubilee*, p.69.
  - 19 For Sir Thomas Glen-Coats Bt., MP (1846-1922), see M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, II, 1886-1918, Hassocks 1978, p.138; his brother, George Coats (1849-1918), was created 1st Baron Glentanar in 1916.
  - 20 Lillian Coats (d.1946), second daughter of the 1st Baron Glentanar, married the 5th Duke of Wellington (succeeded 1934, d.1941) in 1909.
  - 21 William Allan Coats (1853-1926); see R. Marks, *Burrell: A Portrait of a Collector*, Glasgow 1983, pp.60, 72, 79.
  - 22 For Major Archibald Coats (1916-1989), 'a legendary figure in the shooting world', see *Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1989; for Mrs Dudley Coats (Audrey James), see P. Ziegler, *Mounbatten: The Official Biography*, 1985, pp.50-60; for Peter D. Coats (1910-90), horticultural journalist, see *The Independent*, 11 August 1990; for Sir Stuart Auchincloss Coats Bt, MP (1868-1959), Private Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape to four Popes, see M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, III, 1919-1945, Brighton 1974, p.69.
  - 23 See G. Worsley, 'An Identity Maintained: Conservation in Paisley, Renfrewshire', *Country Life*, 12 September 1985, pp.708-12.
  - 24 Personal information.
  - 25 D. Farnie, 'The Structure of the British Cotton Industry, 1846-1914', Akio Okochi and Shin-ichi Yonekawa eds., *The Textile Industry and its Business Climate. Proceedings of the Fuji Conference on Business History*, Tokyo 1982, p.80. I am indebted to Dr David Jeremy for this reference.
  - 26 *ibid.*, pp.77-80.
  - 27 Their rivals were the Clarks of Anchor Mills, whose best known descendants are Kenneth Clark (Lord Clark 'of Civilisation'), the art historian, and Alan Clark, the Conservative politician, military historian and diarist.
  - 28 A. Coats, *From the Cottage to the Castle*, priv. 1893, pp.6-7.
  - 29 *ibid.*, pp.12-14.
  - 30 *ibid.*, Pt II, pp.1-3.
  - 31 *ibid.*, Pt I, pp.14-15; II, pp.3-7.
  - 32 *ibid.*, Pt I, pp.46-7.
  - 33 *ibid.*, Pt II, p.50. This section is based on Pt II, pp.14-96.
  - 34 Farnie, *op.cit.*, p.79; G. H. Coats, *Rambling Recollections*, p.178.
  - 35 Farnie, *op.cit.*, p.74.

- 36 For some of the implications of this, see D. W. Bebbington, ed., *The Baptists in Scotland: A History*, Glasgow 1988, pp.19-24.
- 37 *Reminiscences of the 'Pen' Folk, By One Who Knew Them*, priv. Paisley 1871, pp.38-9.
- 38 *Jubilee op.cit.*, p.28. This section is based on pp.34-63.
- 39 *ibid.*, p.60.
- 40 *Rambling Recollections, op.cit.*, p.124.
- 41 Oliver Flett (d.1894) married Mary Coats (1840-1901), first cousin-once-removed of Thomas Coats of Ferguslie. Walter Mursell (1870-1949, minister 1898-1921) married Mrs Flett's niece, Elizabeth Fraser (d.1940).
- 42 *Jubilee, op.cit.*, pp.56, 61, 66-7.
- 43 *ibid.*, p.174.
- 44 R. J. Campbell's City Temple led the way, followed by E. J. Barson's Penge Congregational Church. The King's Weigh House, under W. E. Orchard, was not far behind.
- 45 *Jubilee, op.cit.*, pp.85-7. They cost £8,152.2.3. Their architect, T. Graham Abercrombie, also designed Paisley's Royal Alexandra Infirmary, another object of Coats' largesse.
- 46 *Jubilee, pp.32, 34, 36, 37.* His granddaughter, Georgiana Taylor (1853-1927), married Professor Joseph Wilson Coats (1846-99), brother of Mrs Flett and uncle of Mrs Mursell.
- 47 *Reminiscences of the 'Pen' Folk*, p.27.
- 48 *ibid.*, p.9.
- 49 *ibid.*, pp.9-11.
- 50 G. H. Coats, *Rambling Recollections*.
- 51 *ibid.*, p.119.
- 52 *ibid.*, p.121.
- 53 *ibid.*
- 54 *ibid.*, p.121.
- 55 *Pen Folk, op.cit.*, p.10.
- 56 *Rambling Recollections*, p.138.
- 57 *ibid.*, p.139.
- 58 *Jubilee, pp.131-2.*

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## MICROFILM OF THE ISAAC MANN COLLECTION NOW IN THE ANGUS LIBRARY

Thanks to a generous gift from the E. A. Payne Memorial Fund of the Baptist Historical Society, the Angus Library has been very pleased to acquire a microfilm of the Isaac Mann Collection of letters, now in the National Library of Wales, no.1207D. This is the collection calendared by F. G. Hastings, with annotations by W. T. Whitley, in the *Baptist Quarterly*, vols.VI and VII, 1932-35. It is a collection made by Isaac Mann (1785-1831) of about two hundred autograph letters of Baptist ministers and missionaries, written between 1711 and 1831.

The letters are arranged alphabetically by author in each of the two sections, ministers and missionaries, whereas Hastings' calendar was arranged chronologically. The Angus Library now has an alphabetical index in one sequence to the whole collection. The collection includes letters by such notable Baptist ministers as Benjamin Beddome, Abraham Booth, Andrew Fuller, John Gill, Robert Hall, Joseph Kinghorn, Samuel Pearce, John Rippon, Robert Robinson, John Ryland, John Saffery, Samuel Stennett, John, Joshua and Timothy Thomas, and Daniel Turner and by missionaries William Carey, Joshua Marshman, William Ward, Daniel Brunson, James Chater and Ignatius Fernandes. There are also letters in Bengali by Indian converts.

This microfilm goes very well in the Angus Library with the microfilm of the Rippon Collection from the British Library. Taken together these two collections richly enhance the manuscript sources available in the Angus Library for research into eighteenth and nineteenth-century Baptist history.

SUSAN MILLS