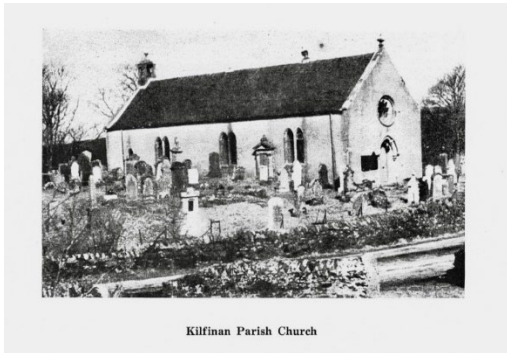


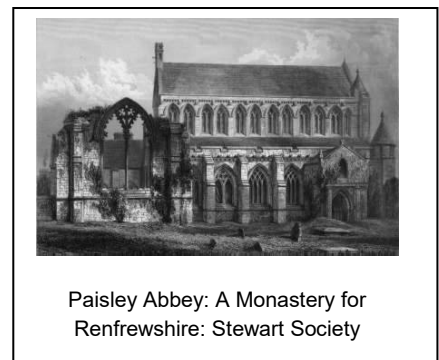
The Church in Kilfinan Parish



Kilfinan Parish Church

The introduction of Christianity to the [Parish of Kilfinan](#) is credited to Finan or Fynan, a holy man who may have founded the church at Kilfinan. Finan's mission was probably influenced by [St Columba](#) who settled on Iona in 563 but it is uncertain whether the two men were contemporaries.

No recorded evidence exists for the early life of Kilfinan Church but it is likely to have been shaped by the [Viking Period](#) [9th to 13th century] and reforms, begun by [Queen Margaret of Scotland](#) [1045-1093], to bring the Celtic Church into line with Roman practices. By the 13th century, it is known to have been in the hands of the fledgling Clan Lamont who granted it, and associated land, to the monks at Paisley Abbey, as confirmed in a Charter dated 1231-1246.ⁱ



Paisley Abbey: A Monastery for Renfrewshire: Stewart Society

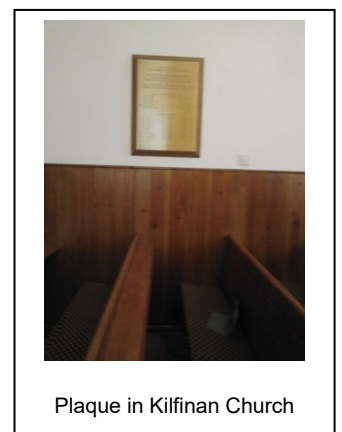
Despite their agreement, there is evidence that controversy remained over patronageⁱⁱ. The status quo remained, however, until what was known as the [Reformation Parliament of 1560](#) abolished the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Kilfinan became an independent Church in the newly formed Church of Scotland and in 1563 the Kirklands were returned to Lamont ownership.



John Knox: Reformer Scottish Reformation paintingandframe.com

The Church of Scotland, or Kirk, was established as the official Church in Scotland in 1567. Congregations within defined parishes were administered by Kirk Sessions presided over by a Minister. Parishes were organized into Presbyteries and several adjacent Presbyteries into Synods. Ultimate authority resided with the General Assembly. Synods were abolished in 1993 but all other Church Courts remain.

A list of pre and post Reformation incumbents, from Nechten in 1235 to the present day, can be seen on a plaque within Kilfinan Church. The church building was largely reconstructed in 1759.



Plaque in Kilfinan Church

Scotland experienced profound artistic, cultural and scientific creativity during the [Scottish-Enlightenment](#) of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1832, in the wake of significant social and economic change, [Rev. Joseph Starkⁱⁱⁱ](#), was ordained as parish Minister, under Lamont patronage. Rev. Stark appears to have been a gifted and well educated man of strong character who dealt purposely with church discipline, which was apparently lax, and with social issues.

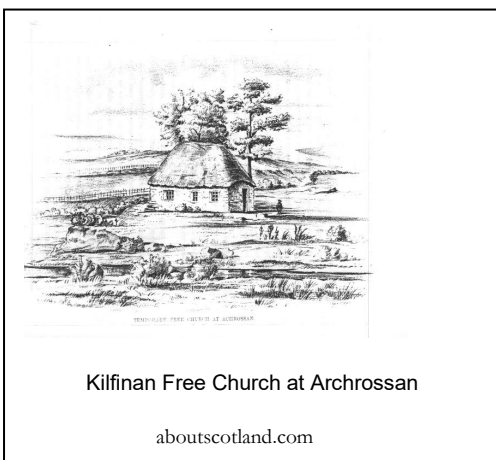


At the time of Rev. Stark’s induction, most of the population walked to church. Over half lived north of Kilfinan Church but, by 1839, sufficient funds had been gathered to build a missionary supported church at Kilbride to the south. Worship subsequently became more accessible to parishioners in the Ardlamont peninsula, at a time which also coincided with the introduction of gunpowder manufacture at [Millhouse Gunpowder Mill](#).



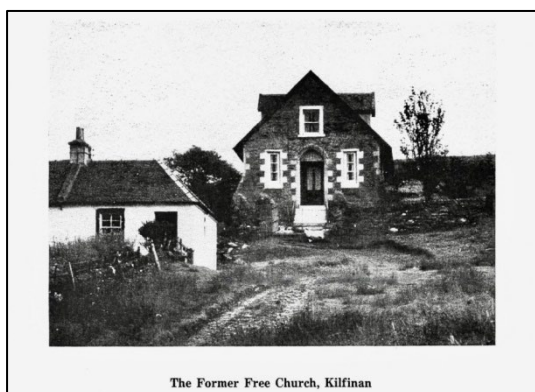
Kilbride Church. Courtesy of Winifred Nicolson

Tensions, however, erupted within the Church of Scotland in 1843 over the use of patronage. At what became known as the [Great Disruption](#), Rev. Joseph Stark, almost half his elders and a large number of the congregation, left the Church of Scotland to support the right of congregations to appoint their own Minister.

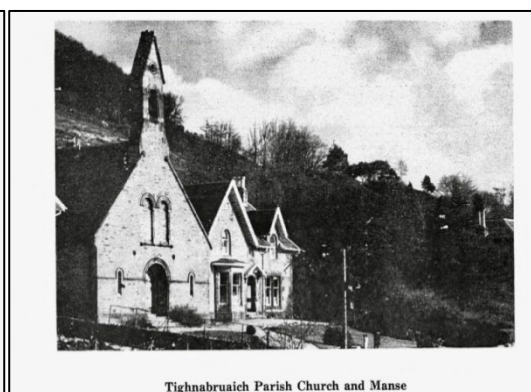


The dissenting church became known as the [Free Church of Scotland](#). The only accommodation then available to Rev Stark was at Acharossan, a mile south west of Kilfinan. There, he established Kilfinan Free Church, conducting worship in an old shieling or, in the event of insufficient space, out of doors. Similarly, parishioners who had left Kilbride initially met outside or in a room at the Inn at Millhouse. Milhouse Free Church was built at what is now Kirkokerry, on the Portavadie road, in 1849.

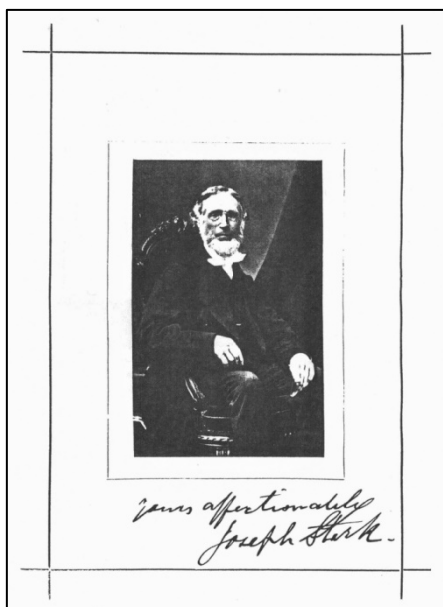
Joseph Stark was obliged to leave Acharossan in 1853 and moved to Tighnabruaich which was on the cusp of developing as a residential and holiday centre. There, he had a wooden shed built for worship at the side of the village burn and commissioned and purchased Craigandairach as his residence. Joseph's brother, Alexander, joined him in 1856, taking charge at Tighnabruaich while he continued to minister at Millhouse and Kilfinan, covering the distance by foot. He built Kilfinan Free Church in 1860, on a site secured from Otter Estate, and oversaw the construction of Tighnabruaich Free Church and Manse on the shore road at Tighnabruaich in 1864.



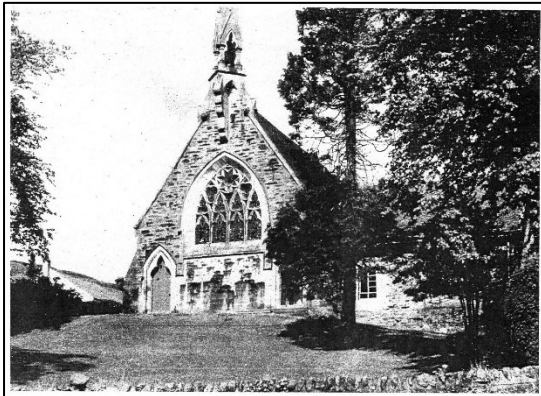
The Former Free Church, Kilfinan



Tighnabruaich Parish Church and Manse



Joseph Stark retired in July 1872, amid a send-off that reportedly included a large gathering at Craigenower, Tighnabruaich, the display of bunting on yachts and flagstuffs in the Kyles and a series of gun salutes! He died in Glasgow in 1877, the year after two Free Church Ministerial posts were agreed for Kilfinan Parish; one at Tighnabruaich and one to serve Kilfinan and Millhouse. The Manse for the latter was built at Auchenlochan.

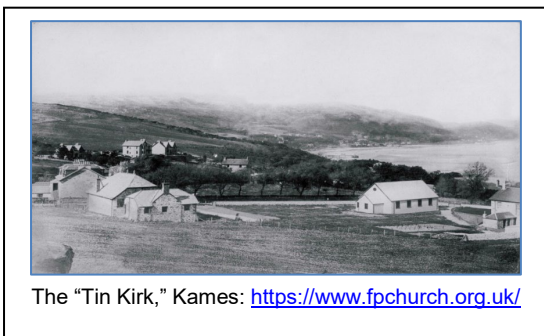


The Former High Church, Tighnabruaich

Meantime, in 1862, under the superintendence of Kilfinan Kirk Session, the Church of Scotland also made inroads into Tighnabruaich and district by building “a Chapel for the Poltalloch District,” on the site that is now the Medical Centre and probably, adjacent to it, “the Poltalloch Madras Mission School.” At around this time, too, a Missionary Hall was built at Kames Corner. In 1882, the Chapel was dis-joined from the Parish of Kilfinan to become Tighnabruaich West Parish

Church: the High Kirk. The Manse, on the Royal Brae, is the house now known as Ashburn. What began as a mission school – where older pupils apparently helped teach younger students - is now Tighnabruaich Primary School.

All was not to remain uncontroversial, however, and in the course of the 1890s further doctrinal division within the Free Church of Scotland proved to have a considerable impact locally. In 1894, Kilfinan Free Church of Scotland closed amid a storm of discord – including “lock outs” and disrupted meetings -over matters of conviction and principle. In what was described by the Free Church Presbytery in Dunoon as a “huge secession”, many worshippers from Kilfinan and Millhouse^{iv} left the Free Church to become part of the [Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland](#). By summer 1894, they succeeded in building a church, the first in Scotland, at Kames Corner. Rev. Alexander Macrae, forefather of the Macraes Ardlamont, was ordained as Minister in November 1894. The building – which could accommodate up to 300 worshippers - became known as the “Tin Kirk” because, until re-

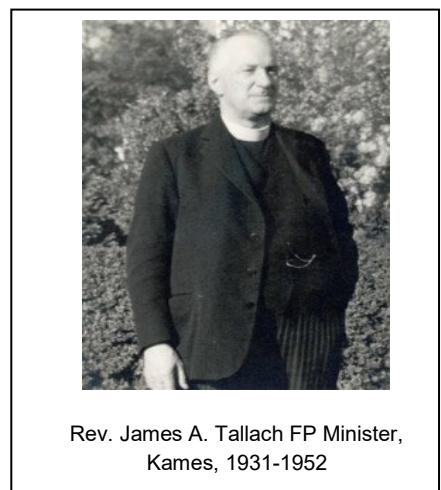


The “Tin Kirk,” Kames: <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/>

built in 1940, it had a corrugated iron roof.

Meanwhile, those members from Kilfinan and Millhouse who

wished to remain in the Free Church of Scotland also proposed and built a new church, situated in Kames, a few hundred yards from the Free Presbyterian (FP) Church. The building, which opened in 1898 and now serves as Kyles Church, was designed and constructed by Thomas Harvey, maternal grandfather of the late Jackie Cooke, Electrician, Tighnabruaich.



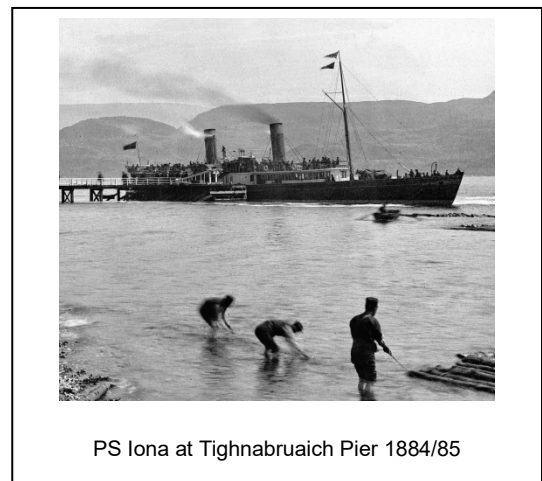
Rev. James A. Tallach FP Minister, Kames, 1931-1952



Rev. Duncan MacNeill and his wife. Rev. MacNeill was inducted to Kilfinan/Millhouse Free Church amid the upheaval of 1894 and then the first Minister in the Free Church at Kames.

In the course of the nineteenth century, therefore, Kilfinan parish went from having one Church of Scotland to having overseen the introduction of two further Presbyterian denominations and seven new church buildings, serving a population which, although shifting from Loch Fyne to the Clyde, had changed little in number.

In the long history of the parish, however, such growth and diversity was relatively short-lived. Reunification and reversal began in 1900 when Scotland's Free Church and [United Presbyterian Church](#) came together to form the [United Free Church of Scotland](#). The congregations of the Free Church at Kames and Tighnabruaich elected to become United Free Churches, the former initially retaining the title of Kilfinan. The Free Church buildings at Millhouse and Kilfinan were sold in 1920 to become residential properties. Of perhaps greater significance, the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland reunited in 1929, following the British Government's recognition of the latter's spiritual independence, its role as a national church and the discontinuation of patronage.



PS Iona at Tighnabruaich Pier 1884/85

With Kames and Tighnabruaich now supporting three Churches of Scotland, Tighnabruaich's "East" and "West" churches decided to unite in 1931 as the Parish of Tighnabruaich. Services continued to be held in both buildings in the summer but otherwise worship was conducted in each venue on alternate Sundays until 1942 when the High Kirk closed, initially for the war period and was used for storage. It did not reopen and was bought as a hall for the use of Tighnabruaich School in 1949.



[Duncan] Kerr 'Barney' Crawford and Anne Nicolson receiving a shinty escort leaving Kilbride Church following their marriage in November, 1966 with bridesmaids May, Maureen and Linda Nicolson.

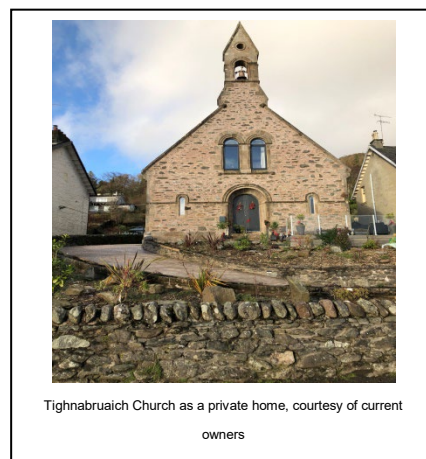
By the 1950s, Kilfinan and Kilbride had effectively become small rural churches. Their long-standing linkage was dissolved in December 1956, following the demission of Rev. Glover, the last Church of Scotland Minister to live at Kilfinan. In early 1957, Kilbride and Kames united to form Kames and Kilbride Parish Church while Kilfinan and Tighnabruaich became a linked charge. The manse at Kilfinan was sold in 1960.

Two decades later, the process of further rationalization began with the retirement in 1978 of Rev. J Johnston from Kames and Kilbride and Rev. E Shaw from Tighnabruaich and Kilfinan. A Basis of Union was agreed, linking Kames and Kilbride, Tighnabruaich and Kilfinan, with Tighnabruaich Manse chosen as the Minister's residence. Tighnabruaich and Kames Churches both held Sunday morning worship while Kilfinan and Kilbride met on alternate Sunday afternoons over four week periods. Four years later, on 14 July 1983, Tighnabruaich Church united with Kames and Kilbride to form Kyles Parish Church linked with Kilfinan. Kames Manse, at Auchenlochan, was sold in 1982.

The following decade proved to be a turbulent period for the newly formed Kyles Parish Church. Services were initially held at Kames and Tighnabruaich on alternate months while worshippers at Kilfinan and Kilbride continued to meet as hitherto. In 1985, Presbytery arbitration led to the decision that Kames should be the sole place of worship for the joint congregation. Tighnabruaich and Kilbride Churches were closed and weekly worship was restored at Kilfinan.

At the beginning of 1987, however, Tighnabruaich Church re-opened following an appeal to Dunoon Presbytery. Sunday worship was re-instated at both Tighnabruaich and Kames until, in 1992, Tighnabruaich Church and Hall were deemed unsafe and had to be closed. A later Fabric Survey confirmed that Kames Church was the better structure and the closure

of Tighnabruaich Church became permanent. Disposal of the building was agreed in 1994 while plans to sell Kilbride Church were agreed in 2004. Elsewhere, the FP Church was reduced to a preaching station in 1994 and closed in 1997. It was subsequently purchased as a private home.



The process of readjustment and reappraisal began again in 2003 in anticipation of the retiral of Rev. David Kellas. On this occasion, there was little dissent and in March 2004, Argyll Presbytery ratified the linkage of the united parish of Kilmodan and Colintrave with Kyles Parish Church linked with Kilfinan, creating [West Cowal Churches](#). A decision was also made to sell the existing manses in favour of a newly built, more sustainable property in Kames: West Cowal Manse.

Rev. David Mitchell was appointed in 2006 as the Minister of the newly linked West Cowal Churches and continues to serve the parish. In anticipation of his retiral in late 2023, however, and in accordance with [Presbytery Planning \[2019\] throughout the Church of Scotland](#) the linked charges of West Cowal agreed to become a united charge from 1 January 2023. Only the building at Colintrave is scheduled to close and weekly services of worship remain available throughout the parish.

In the past 200 years, fluctuations in the local population have significantly impacted on the number and use of church buildings (Figure 1).

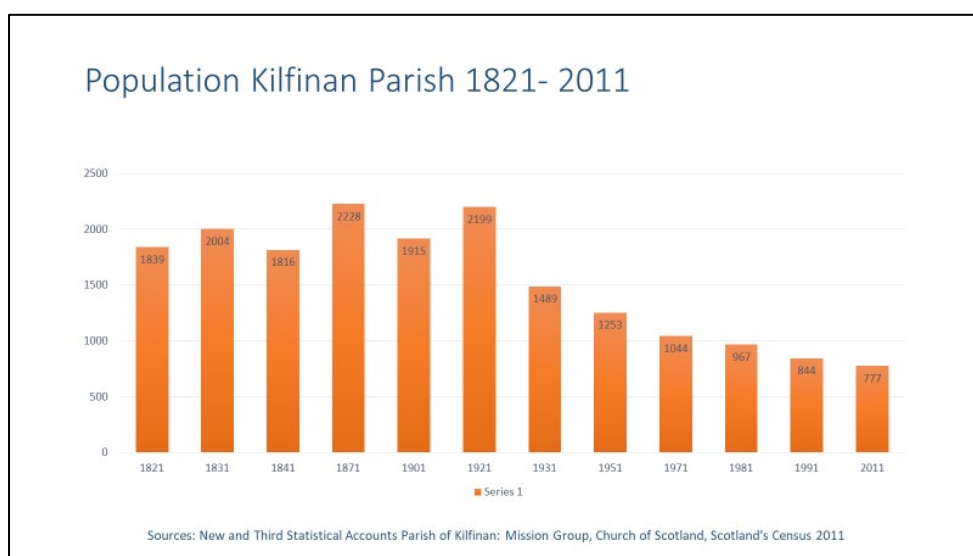


Figure 1: Population of Kilfinan Parish 1821 - 2011

Almost a millennium and a half after it was first established, however, the church at Kilfinan continues to serve the parish, as does the Church at Kyles. There have been many significant events over the centuries including:

- the place of Gaelic in Kilfinan Church post-Reformation;
- the part played in the trans-Atlantic slave trade by heritors and benefactors of the church within the parish;
- the eventual inclusion of women in roles of influence – Mrs. Irene Dickson appears to have been the first locally ordained female elder [Tighnabruaich 1979] and
- the establishment of the [Friends of Kilfinan Parish Church](#) during the Ministry of Rev. Dr. I Barclay [1988 – 1996].

All merit study in their own right as does the contribution to the parish of non-Presbyterian denominations. The Scottish Episcopal Church apparently held occasional services in the Royal Hotel from 1877 to 1893 and again at Kyles Parish Church from 1984 until 2011. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Argyll and the Isles also provided regular opportunities for Mass from 1982 to 1996, meeting initially at Tighnabruaich School, latterly at Kames Hall, but for the bulk of the period [1984-1994] at Tighnabruaich House.

Change will unquestionably continue into the future and undoubtedly include times of upheaval, as it has in the past, but the lesson from the history of the church in our community is surely one of constancy.



The West Cowal Churches, July 2023

Memories of Kilfinan Church by Duncan McIntyre

Following various changes, one Kilfinan minister, Rev. Herbert Marshall Gibson, a newly ordained minister kept the Sunday school going by changing it to a Monday after school. The school bus would stop at Drum, most of us would pile out and into Betty Paterson's kitchen, where we all had tea round the kitchen table. After a quick tea we all moved to the sitting room and the Minister and Jenny Paterson and maybe others led the Sunday school on Monday night. *Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God has done, Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*

Mr Gibson usually drove us home afterwards. Happy days. Rev. Marshall ran various Sunday school picnics, to Innellan and Lochgoilhead both being memorable. We travelled in Simpson's 14 seater minibus, which usually did the school run at the time. On the way to one of these we stopped at Strachur to see a 16ft Basking Shark which had been caught in fishing gear and was lying on the shore.



Kilfinan Sunday School 1963-6

More memories are available at
https://www.tddt.org.uk/files/ugd/1e8a87_a11dfbd39e03414fbb6ec66a9113b43b.pdf

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