Part 2

Our story in people and buildings

Social and Geographical Context

A new beginning

To take a point in history: Friday 8 November 1861.

Queen Victoria had reigned over Britain and her burgeoning empire for 24 years. Across the Atlantic, the American Civil War, begun earlier in the year, was building momentum.

In Edinburgh, Augustine Church on George IV Bridge, some five years in the creation, was at last opened. Present at the opening service was, amongst many other eminent citizens of the city, the publisher Adam Black, a former Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and currently it's MP. He was there not just as a city dignitary but as an influential member of Edinburgh's pre-eminent non-conformist church congregation.

The minister at this time, the Revd William Lindsay Alexander, was himself a noted Edinburgh citizen – a scholar, ecclesiastical innovator, and influential preacher of the day. Given his position and popularity, it is probably not without significance that instead of taking to the pulpit himself that day, the invited preacher was the Revd Thomas Guthrie, the eminent minister of nearby St John's Free Church (now St Columba's Free Church, Johnston Terrace) but known as a social reformer and founder of 'Ragged Schools' in the city.

Photo: Statue of Thomas Guthrie in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh

The inscription on the statue of Guthrie in Princes Street Gardens reads: 'A friend of the poor and of the oppressed.' Was his presence in Augustine's pulpit a reflection of how the members of the congregation, who appear to us now as largely middle-class, professional

men and their wives, wished to think of themselves? In this elaborately fronted building that would have dominated the local skyline, proclaiming self-confidence and influence, was there also a commitment to serving the needs of the poor and oppressed in Edinburgh? After all, the building sat cheek by jowl alongside one of the most deprived areas in all of Scotland – that lower part of the Royal Mile, which had long contributed to Edinburgh's unenviable reputation as foul-smelling, disease-ridden and horrendously over-crowded. Indeed, just over a fortnight after the opening of Augustine Church, an event would take place round the corner on the Royal Mile that not only epitomised the problems facing the city but which proved a significant catalyst for change all around the congregation's new home.

A catastrophic event

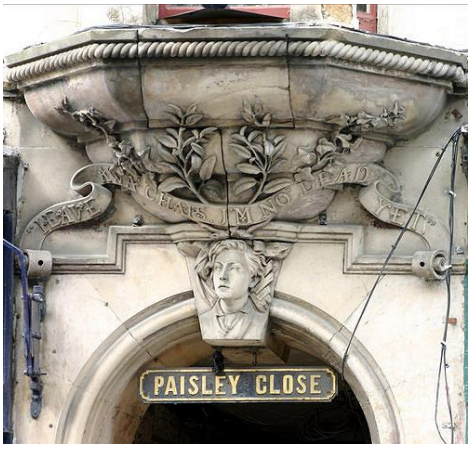


Photo: Paisley Close, The Royal Mile

On 24 November, 1861, the 250 year-old tenement apartments at 99 and 103 High Street, on the Royal Mile, collapsed. 35 of the occupants were killed but as the debris was being cleared away, a young lad was heard to shout out from within the collapsed building, "Heave awa' lads, I'm no deid yet!" The memorial inscription above Paisley Close, which was built in place of the collapsed houses, recalls the boy's words.

The tragedy, which highlighted the overcrowding prevalent at the time, resulted in the appointment of Edinburgh's first Medical Officer of Health.

Geography and geology: the effects of water

Edinburgh's 'Old Town' had grown up on the spine that stretched down from the massive volcanic plug, now crowned by Edinburgh Castle, towards the Canongate and the royal residence of Holyrood. Housing had been confined to this narrow ridge of land, constrained

by water-logged land, small burns, the 'Cowgate Loch' (drained at the end of the 15th century) and, famously, the Nor' Loch, now Princes Street Gardens.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the water of this area would prove a gift to the rapid growth of breweries in the area. Merchant Street, adjacent to Augustine United Church, was home to W & J Raeburn from at least 1863 until about 1897 when the brewery was bought by the trustees of the nearby Heriot College for the purpose of extending their property on Chambers Street. Just behind it were the premises of Campbell, Hope and King's Argyle Brewery, an area now owned by the University of Edinburgh and accessible from Chambers Street. However, the artesian wells that provided a continual flow of brewing water have created problems in the years since. The erection of the new Edinburgh Sheriff Court building (opened 1994) was complicated by the need to plug the water sources, and AUC itself has struggled with damp over the years. David Wright, a former AUC treasurer, observed that the situation was not helped when the tram rails and cobbles were lifted from George IV Bridge c.1956 and "the damp course was ruined".

Photo: George IV Bridge, 1910, with tram running; Augustine Church visible in the distance

Geography and geology: the effects of overcrowding

By the mid 1700s, though the Canongate area of the Royal Mile (outside the Edinburgh's original city boundaries) "was still, in many respects, [the city's] dignified and elegant social centre", maintaining health and cleanliness in the Old Town had always been difficult. Still remembered for the practice of throwing human waste out of windows as many as 12 storeys high with the cry of "gardy-loo!", Edinburgh had a reputation for being the filthiest city in Europe. "I smell you in the dark!" declared Dr Johnson on returning to Auld Reekie one evening after slopping out time. However, the smell was simply one symptom of an environment in which plagues had been feared, and where cholera, typhus, whooping

cough and other diseases still ran rife. In 1832 alone, while the 'Augustine' congregation was still gathering in nearby Argyle Square, cholera killed 600 people in Edinburgh during the first eight months of that year.

Some attempts were made to clear space but those who could 'wanted out'. From 1767 onwards, they moved to the New Town and, with the opening of South Bridge (1788) and George IV Bridge (1832), to the south of the city. Here, housing was being established in the countryside of Newington, and the South Loch had finally been drained to create the Meadows parkland. (AUC's connection-by-name with this latter initiative comes from the congregation of Hope Park and Buccleuch Congregational Church, who met on Hope Park Terrace, named for Thomas Hope, a pioneer of the nearby Meadows reclamation scheme.)

The result of this exodus from the Old Town by the professional classes was that those who remained were the less well-off, living in decaying buildings, built ever higher towards the disappearing sky, such as those that collapsed in November 1861. Social inequality was more glaringly obvious than ever before. Previously, the wealthy and deprived had lived side by side; now, the poor were left behind.

Responding to deprivation: the city council

The medical officer of health appointed by Edinburgh Council in the wake of the tenement collapse in November 1861 was Henry Littlejohn, a respected university lecturer and police surgeon. He was also a kirk elder at Lauriston Place United Presbyterian Church. His seminal *Report of the Sanitary Conditions of Edinburgh, 1865* addressed the social and structural problems that had accumulated over centuries.

Given that germs were an unknown concept, Littlejohn's task involved identifying the external factors that contributed to ill health in the city, and to do that required re-mapping Edinburgh in terms of topography, drainage arrangements, social composition and economic activities. It was a huge task. Even drawing up a list of Edinburgh's streets was difficult because no single list existed. Poorer areas didn't even have postal addresses.

Population increase was a key focus for the enquiry. The population of the Edinburgh's

centre and its suburbs had risen from 69,000 in 1801 to 161,000 in 1851, and included a significant influx of people from the Highlands and Ireland. Alongside recommendations to improve hygiene, one clear conclusion to be drawn from Littlejohn's pioneering work was that sanitary conditions and consequent ill health were worst in areas of gross over-crowding. These areas required 'de- crowding'. It was a conclusion that would be borne out over the next two decades during the Old Town clearances. Death rates fall by as much as 43 per cent in the Central Tron district, and across the whole of Edinburgh by 20 per cent.

The report's publication was seized upon by the publisher and politician William Chambers in the run-up to the council elections in November 1865. In his first speech as Lord Provost "he noted that little had changed in Edinburgh since James IV had perished at Flodden" and advocated "opening up the Old Town by cross and diagonal streets through more dense and confined masses". The result was an Act passed by Parliament: the 1867 'Chambers' Improvement Act for Edinburgh, which led to radical urban clearances. Another result would be the re-naming of the street outside the museum as 'Chambers Street'.

Responding to deprivation: the Church

Since the Scottish reformation, responsibility for 'the poor' had fallen largely to church parishes. However, 'economic changes had made [the system] ineffective, while the secessions, and above all the Disruption, had weakened the claim for the ability of the established Church to be responsible for the whole parish'. The Poor Law (Scotland) Act of 1845 set up Parochial Boards and Inspectors of the Poor and, in principle, allowed the State to take over from the Kirk and centralise poor relief.

In practice, poverty was an increasing concern of the Church, though motivations for Christian engagement were mixed. There were those, like Dr George Bell, who appears to have been at least as anxious about the fate of immortal souls as about present health and wellbeing. Even Augustine's own biographer Abijah Murray, speaking the language of his day, refers to "the mass of ignorant and godless humanity" living at the door of North College Street. Then there were radical Presbyterian ministers like the Revd Dr James Begg who collaborated with other radical ministers to alleviate poor housing conditions. Religious leadership, they believed, could lead to economic, social and educational benefits for the

people.

Sectarian prejudices were also a factor. A large number of Irish immigrants had settled in the Old Town. For many, the Irish were synonymous with Roman Catholicism, and stereotypes focusing on their 'antagonistic habits and ideals' gained ground as their numbers swelled in Scotland, particularly following the 1845-52 potato famine. Views of Irish/Catholic 'inherent fecklessness' became blurred with opinions about their faith and a general perception of poverty being bound up with immorality.

Buildings

North College Street Chapel (later, Argyle Square Chapel)

The congregation's first home was in North College Street, next to the still unfinished University College (now the University of Edinburgh's 'Old College'). North College Street was an awkwardly shaped road running under what is now the north east corner of the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street. The site was bought, and the building paid for, by the church's first minister, the Revd John Aikman, and it was built by a member of his congregation, Charles Black, whose family was to play a significant part in the history of the church and of the city. Charles Black's son, Adam, recounting the history of the chapel at the congregation's last meeting there, comments:

> Many remarks have been made upon the coarse and homely appearance of the building, but so earnest were Mr. Aikman and his advisers, the Messrs. Haldanes, (sic) at that time for bringing under the sound of the gospel as great multitudes as possible, that no money was spent on what might have been superfluities. I have heard my father, who was the builder of the chapel, say that he pled for something more ornamental, but in vain.

The builder's instructions were "that not one penny was to be spent on ornamentation of any kind". It was opened for worship on the 'Lord's Day the 30th May', 1802. Aikman's successor, Dr Lindsay Alexander, described it as a "dark, dingy, comfortless place". Despite this, Aikman's "simple truthful preaching" attracted a wide range of church attendees.

Elizabeth McLaren wrote in 1911:

> The chapel was off the main thoroughfare, its exterior was uninviting, but, in spite of all hindrances, gradually the congregation grew in size and in importance. It became known that in this out-of-the-way place Sunday after Sunday a tall scholarly-looking young man preached, whose thoughts, founded on Bible truths, took a wide range, and whose whole bearing while he spoke commanded attention. People of all sorts

> and conditions came —plain, earnest men and women, literally disciples, for they wished to be taught, men of leisure, young advocates who reached the Bench in after days, and theological students belonging to every branch of the Christian Church.

Clearly, the 'undenominational' aspirations of the Haldane brothers lived on in North College Street; and the combination of scholarly, articulate Gospel proclamation, and the ethos of intelligent independence was attractive to well-educated and influential men and women. The chapel's founding congregations was made up of members of the Tabernacle. (A map drawn up in 1805 refers to the "Tabernacle Meeting House. Back of College." See p.15) Reporting on the opening service, the *Missionary Magazine* of June 1802 observed: "The service was extremely interesting. It presented a scene not frequently witnessed - a church separating in love in the hope of the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom."

By 1838, the chapel had become shabby, overcrowded and in need of repair. A new building was required and the congregation hoped to sell the existing one to their neighbours. The university, however, didn't have the money and the congregation had to stay put. Thorough repairs and redecoration were undertaken and the church acquired a new, more upmarket name: Argyle Square Chapel.

At the same time, the congregation was wrestling with the terms of a Trust Deed drawn up by John Aikman in 1812, placing restrictions on the future use of the building or money acquired from the selling of the property. These restrictions included the stipulation that three services should be held each Sunday and that the church must be "always (as at present) congregational and paedo-baptist [allowing only the baptism of babies and infants, not of adults]".

The fact that the Deed was drawn up in the same year as the formation of the Congregational Union of Scotland, which would have brought together a broader grouping of theological opinions, suggests that Aikman wished to ensure the continuation of church life and belief as he had established it in North College Street. This was not an uncommon procedure among non-conformist 'independent' congregations of the time. They tended to

identify strongly with non-conformists of other denominational traditions (Congregational, Baptist, Methodist…) and wished to work alongside then; but also wanted to be clear about theological distinctions. The emphasis on paedo-baptism in Aikman's deed, for example, stands in notable contrast to the evolving beliefs of his mentors the Haldanes, who had embraced *credo*-baptism (i.e. of adults).

After his death, some members wished to adhere strictly to Aikman's instructions; others desired greater freedom to reflect an evolving congregation and changing times. Amongst the latter group was Adam Black, who believed that Aikman's Deed was "an unscriptural interference with the liberty of the church". He argued that Aikman "never would have thrust his opinion upon the church", and regarded clauses of the Deed "as simple recommendations".

Leaving Argyle Square

In 1854, an offer was made that Black, for one, couldn't refuse. Inspired in part by the 1851 Great Exhibition, the Government wished to build a new museum in Edinburgh ('The Industrial Museum of Scotland') and expressed its wish to buy the chapel site and adjacent property (including the Merchant Maiden Hospital next door). Black jumped at the offer, consulted those trustees who happened to be in town, and struck a sale price of £2,000. In fact, the move out of Argyle Square didn't take place until over a year later. Nor did Black get everything his own way. It was decided that, in order to adhere to the letter as well as the spirit of Aikman's Trust Deed, the money from the sale of the chapel should not be used to fund the new building. This would allow a second, newly appointed board of trustees a free hand to make decisions about the construction and management of the new church.

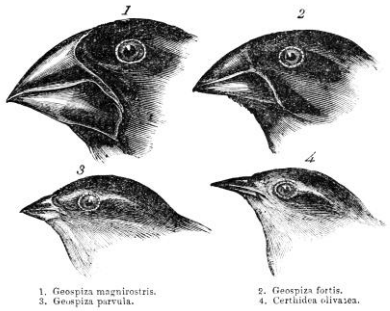
For the six year period following the sale of Argyle Square chapel in November 1855 until the opening of the new building in 1861, the congregation rented space, at an annual cost of £130, in the Synod Hall of the United Presbyterian Church at number 5, Queen Street – nowadays the home of *The Jam House*, Jools Holland's Edinburgh jazz club, and formerly the BBC's Edinburgh hub.

Moving to George IV Bridge

Mary Brockington, a former member of Augustine, observes that "the belief that an elaborate building is a silent but potent witness to the glory of God is no longer fashionable, as the cost of maintenance can be seen as diverting resources of time, effort and money away from with the world's poorest people."[29]

But for Dr Alexander, the congregation's minister, not only would the belief in witnessing to God through stone and mortar still have had some validity; but an impressive building may also have conveyed a number of other messages, about:

- the centrality of Christian belief in Victorian society (despite the questions being raised by discoveries in the fields of geology and biology – Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published while Augustine was being built)
- self confidence, even the success, of 'independent' churches in Presbyterian Scotland, not least those following in the tradition of the Haldane brothers
- the progressive approach advocated by Alexander, and supported by many of his congregation, towards worship (music in particular)
- the church's appeal to the city's wealthier, intellectual elite – many of whom would regularly pass by this impressive church on the bridge as they travelled to their homes in the open, attractive spaces to the south of The Meadows.



Finches from the Galapagos islands, and drawn by John Gould. These birds were among the flora and fauna observed by Charles Darwin and which helped him form his theory of evolution. His *On the Origin of Species* was published as Augustine on George IV Bridge was being built, and constituted a challenge to much accepted religious thinking of the time.

If indeed there was any element of pride amongst those involved in planning the George IV building, then the proverbial fall that follows was only just averted.

The congregation invited tenders for "a church capable of seating not less than 1000 persons with vestry and & other necessary accommodation". The successful architectural firm for the new building was Messrs Hay of Liverpool. Though it's possible that Dr. Alexander's own life-long connection with that city might have had some bearing in the choice, the Hay family originated in Scotland and in fact their output was largely confined to Scotland and the North of England. They were responsible throughout the 1850s for designing predominantly Free Churches all over Scotland, including Free Buccleuch (now Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church), which the firm had recently completed nearby on West Causewayside. These buildings were built in a modest, conventional Gothic style. Augustine was a distinctive departure from those more standard designs and this appealed to the church trustees. The design was, as Mary Brockington puts it, "exciting – exotic even, and it could be made to give the church due prominence in the developing Edinburgh townscape". (Another departure from more modest designs was St Vincent's, a bijou Episcopal Church in Stockbridge.)

Augustine reached high to the heavens and descended below the bridge down to a massive basement alongside the old thoroughfare of Merchant Street beside the Cowgate. John Hay's modernistic design assumed that a series of cast iron columns, connecting with massive internal cross walls in the lower floors, would take the weight of the hammer-beam roof – allowing the four-storey walls to be built without any external buttresses on what was a narrow site. This proved to be a misjudgement. When the slater piled several tons of slates on the roof in order to facilitate his work, the walls began to bulge. Disaster was averted with modifications tying the walls to the columns.

Photo: George IV Bridge crossing the Cowgate.
Photo taken by William Donaldson Clerk c.1860
(National Galleries of Scotland)

People and buildings

Mary Brockington observes that “it is still a mystery why the architects should have produced such an unsound initial plan”. Apart from the restricted footprint available for the foundations, Mary Brockington suggests two further motivations for the ambitious design. In part John Hay seems to have responded to the aspirations of an innovative, independent congregation with no denominational hierarchy to kowtow to; they were in a position to be surprisingly radical.

At the same time, the project also offered an opportunity for Hay to explore his interest in classical, European models of architecture. The upper part of the tower and spire bears some resemblance to the Giralda tower of Seville Cathedral, where the twelfth-century square tower, originally a minaret for what was then a mosque, was surmounted in the sixteenth century by an octagonal spire with three diminishing stages to serve the now Christian cathedral as a bell tower.

Photo: Giralda Tower, Seville Cathedral

Photo: Augustine United Church, Edinburgh

People and buildings

The appearance of the new church has been described by one authority as “best Liverpudlian free style, boldly mixing Romanesque, Renaissance and late Classical motifs…” and with a “frivolous pagoda spire”.

The building was most famously likened to a tiered and elaborately decorated “bridescake” by Dr. Alexander’s friend, Professor John Stuart Blackie. Such a comparison by a well-known and flamboyant doyen of Edinburgh society may well have been made in jest – but Lindsay Alexander still felt obliged to defend the building against Blackie’s criticism at a celebration soiree held in the congregation’s temporary home, the Queen Street Hall. And despite his protestations, the name stuck, being echoed in a guide to Edinburgh’s architecture published in the 1980s.

The man responsible for over-seeing what became a highly complex and protracted building project was James Tait Black, Clerk to the group of trustees appointed to the new building. James was the second son of Adam Black and grandson of Charles, who had built the North College Street chapel. It becomes clear from his many courteous letters that the task was a considerable burden to him. Like countless project managers since, he was continually required to chase up contractors and fret over rising costs and unpaid bills. At one point, financial disaster was only averted when the *Aikman* Trustees agreed that the interest on the proceeds of the chapel sale, though not the capital sum, could be diverted to the new building fund.

On Friday 8 November 1861, Augustine Church (referred to colloquially as ‘Dr Alexander’s church’) on George IV Bridge was opened: four years after Dr. Alexander had laid the foundation stone and at three times the original projected cost. A simple, practical rectangular interior complemented the striking exterior, with good sightlines and a gallery on three sides. The raised pulpit looked down upon dark wood pews laid out with two side aisles only.

The task had taken its toll on Black’s work and family life. Earlier in the year his first wife, Charlotte, had died of tuberculosis, leaving him with a family of three young girls and a new-born son to care for. At the same time, he had been deputising for his father in the family

publishing firm of A&C Black. When Dr Alexander announced, just a fortnight after the opening, that the church had been offered an organ, which would require alterations to the back of the gallery, one may imagine Black's sense of foreboding. This new development had never been part of the plans, though the rear gallery had been consistently referred to as the 'organ gallery' and it was known that Lindsay Alexander longed for an instrument to be installed.

James Tait Black (1826 – 1911)

James Tait Black was the second son of Adam Black, founder of the publishing firm A&C Black. James worked in the firm as an active partner and, according to his obituary in the *Ayrshire Post*, had significant responsibility for the publication of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He appears to have been artistic and a bibliophile as well as having an industrious bent and a businesslike approach to his work. His contribution to the cultural life of Edinburgh was recognised when he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1884. He died in November 1911, aged 85.

The long-drawn-out construction of Augustine Church, combined with the loss of his wife in February 1861, did put a considerable additional strain on Black's life and, in October 1862, he resigned as deacon (but not as treasurer). On this occasion, he was persuaded by the minister to suspend his resignation. However, shortly after his youngest daughter Lucy died aged seven from scarlet fever, he again gave notice of his intention to resign, this time as both deacon and treasurer. From September 1866, his break from Augustine was final and, whether because he was now living in London and the Lake District or for other more personal reasons, he appears to have withdrawn from church life altogether.

1968 redevelopment: the beginnings of shared accommodation

And that was how the building remained, unchanged in its fundamentals for just over a century.

The most significant alteration to the layout of the church sanctuary during that period came in 1929 the organ was replaced with a new instrument built by A.E. Ingham. The new instrument was situated centrally at the front of the church. At the same time, the pulpit was replaced and choir stalls positioned in front of the pulpit. (Prior to this, the choir had sat in the rear gallery alongside the organ.)

In 1968, significant and long overdue structural changes to the building were implemented. Chief among them was the construction of an internal staircase from ground level to the lower halls – at last replacing the steps down from the metal walkway that still runs down the south side of the building and in which, over the years, countless ladies' high heels had become stuck!

At the same time, the congregation had been encouraged by the General Secretary of the Scottish Churches Council, the Revd Andrew Wyllie, to consider providing a home for the Scottish Churches Council. The Council and Christian Aid were both welcomed as tenants, necessitating the requisition of space under the galleries for new office space. Controversially, the new partition walls were painted red while, at the same time, the pews were repainted gun-metal grey. Toilet facilities were installed at ground level, and a reception area created in the centre of the entrance hall. To facilitate this latter alteration, the church was now entered through its side doors, while the central doors were replaced with plate glass windows looking out on to George IV Bridge.

The layout of the sanctuary space changed in other ways, too. For the first time, the church gained a central aisle, replacing the side aisles (now lost to the new office spaces; as was the tradition, at funerals, of bringing the coffin in down one aisle and exiting up the other). The organ was moved again, this time from its central position to the north side of the church; choir stalls were removed; and a new vestry was created at the south side of the building.

At ground level, the sanctuary now had seating for around 200 people, with the gallery available for special occasions; a contrast to the estimated 1,000 seats available when the building was opened. Membership had declined considerably – but, at the same time, the congregation was opening itself up to new ways of connecting with partner organisations and the wider community, and had a strong sense of not wishing to be a 'one day a week' church.

1993-4 redevelopment: extending flexibility

With the union of Augustine and Dalkeith Road congregations in 1992, proceeds from the sale of the Dalkeith Road Church of Christ building, together with other funds, were invested in further repairs to the roof and another substantial redevelopment of the Augustine interior. The changes, into something far closer to its present-day arrangement, reflected new priorities and changing styles of worship. The high pulpit was removed, for example (preaching styles were rather different from the early days of John Aikman and Lindsay Alexander), and the pews were also taken out, together with the old gas heating pipes that had run underneath them. The spaces underneath the side galleries were opened up once again and chairs replaced the pews, allowing the re-widened space to be more flexible.

At the same time, the ageing organ was also replaced by a new electronic instrument constructed by the Bradford Organ Company but rather cleverly fitted into the old console. It was moved now to its current location on the south side of the building. Another feature also given a new home was the pair of memorial stained glass windows given in honour of the Revd Lindsay Alexander and his wife. The leading on the windows required replacement and it was decided to situate the restored windows at ground level in specially constructed light boxes.

At the front of the building, a central entrance was re-established and, inside, a glass wall fitted, allowing visibility from the church entrance right through into the sanctuary.

2002 restoration programme

In 1970, Augustine-Bristo had been designated a Category B listed building by Historic Scotland. However, the upper parts of the exterior had deteriorated over the years and it was a continual struggle to keep the building wind and water-tight. Pigeons in the tower created sufficient quantities of dung to cause concern:

> An intrepid team collected the dung bags and brought them down the turnpike stair, but were rewarded by having especially good vegetables in the next year.

In 1982, following the fall of some small stones from the tower, breaking roof slates below, the top tier of the spire was taken down and the hole covered over with a loose paving slab. However, by removing the internal finial rod that had culminated in the weather vane, what remained of the tower became increasingly unstable, threatening the safety of the whole building.

So, in 2002, following twenty years of temporary fixes and much deliberation over costs, the congregation embarked upon a major restoration and repair programme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund together with Historic Scotland and other grant makers with an interest in church architecture. Taking advantage of the opportunity, access within the building was considerably improved by the installation of a lift to the lower floors. Meanwhile, architects Tod and Taylor were able to reconstruct details of the original design and the spire was rebuilt, bringing the 'bridescake' back to something like its former glory.

This final phase of the programme almost came unstuck when, in July 2004, thieves scaled the scaffolding around the tower and stole specially commissioned carved stones worth £15,000. However, as the Augustine newsletter of August/September 2005 reported: 'The project has been about much more than stones and scaffolding; it has brought us closer to the Edinburgh public…; [and] it has taught us to value our heritage – not just the building but the people who erected it and cared for it, as a base for worship and community service for over a century and a half.

Lindsay Alexander

Hailed by Augustine member and historian Abijah Murray as "by far the most distinguished minister of this church" and described by the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as "perhaps the best-known non-Presbyterian minister in Scotland" at that time, William Lindsay Alexander came to Edinburgh with some considerable reluctance. "The idea of my coming to be a minister in Edinburgh seemed to me to be simply absurd. I never entertained it, consequently I declined the invitation at once…"

Life before Augustine

Alexander was in fact an Edinburgh boy – or, strictly speaking, a Leith boy. He was born the eldest son of a wine merchant, William, in Leith on 24 August 1808. He attended Leith High School and a boarding school in East Linton, and entered Edinburgh University at the age of fourteen, where he "distinguished himself in all his classes".

Three years later, in 1825, he moved to St Andrews University, drawn by the reputation of Dr. Thomas Chalmers, who from 1823 had held the chair of moral philosophy and political economy. Chalmers had made a name for himself pioneering an experiment in urban ministry in the new parish of St John's, which he created in a working-class district of Glasgow. He had pursued a parish ministry "untrammelled by existing regulations regarding the care of the poor", promising to eliminate gradually the need for any legal poor relief in

the parish, taking all St John's paupers off the rolls of the Town Hospital and saving the city ratepayers over £300 per annum. He would go on to be the leading voice in the far-reaching ecclesiastical Disruption of 1843, and Alexander would express solidarity with his old mentor.

In 1826, at the age of 18, Alexander became a member of Leith Congregational Church despite his parents being members of the Baptist Church – and while still studying at St Andrews he began conducting services in nearby villages. On 24 April 1827, still aged 18, he made his first appearance in a pulpit.

Following a short spell at Glasgow Theological Academy, Alexander was offered the post of classical and mathematical tutor in the Blackburn Academy, where he taught for four years and preached in the surrounding area – though without any obvious intention of entering the ordained ministry. Clearly he was a 'renaissance man' and considered, at different times, pursuing his interests in the law, Greek, literature and medicine. It wasn't until a visit to Liverpool, where he was persuaded to stay on as a regular preacher at the Newington Independent Church, that he began to feel gradually "that this was my proper work into which I had been drawn". Effectively, he was the minister of the Newington congregation from 1832 to 34, following which he went to Germany for further theological study.

(An equally significant, though slightly later, outcome of his sojourn in Liverpool was his marriage, on 24 August 1837, to Mary, the daughter of James Marsden of Liverpool. Together they had 13 children.)

John Aikman had died in 1834 and, on his return from Germany, Alexander was invited to preach in Aikman's North College Street chapel but "had no idea I was to be invited there". Instead, he planned to take up an invitation from a congregation in London and dismissed a proposal to become co-pastor with Aikman's successor, Mr Cleghorn. A visit to London by a member of North College Street, Mr A. Geike – armed with letters from influential members of the congregation, including the formidable Adam Black (at that time Treasurer to the City of Edinburgh) and Mr Cleghorn himself – proved persuasive. As he recalled on the occasion of his 40th year ministering in Edinburgh:

> Well, I thought things looked serious then, and though I was very unwilling to come, I felt that I was in some measure shut up to do so. I had a feeling that I was only coming to make a fool of myself, and would very soon have to retire again. I never entered upon any undertaking with more fear and trembling than I entered upon the engagement as pastor and preacher to this congregation. So it was that by the leadings of Providence, and from no wish or seeking of mine, I was brought into the relation which I have so long and happily sustained with this church.

The "best-known non-Presbyterian minister in Scotland"

Alexander's "ability as a preacher was at once recognised, and gradually he attracted a large and distinguished congregation. Students, scholars, professors, literary men, of all creeds and denominations, flocked to hear him. As a preacher he was second to none in a city which was noted for its great preachers".

Back in Blackburn, Alexander had begun to develop the art of preaching without notes, a style that, when combined with his intellectual qualities, proved attractive to like-minded thinkers. Mary Brockington writes that "his powerful, scholarly preaching attracted huge congregations, including some of the most prominent and influential of Edinburgh's citizens, men of vision and radical principles, moderate and inclusive in their views, but passionate in that moderation." Among those influential citizens were Adam Black, the publisher and politician; Sir James Marwick, the Orcadian historian and lawyer; Sir George Harvey, a figure and landscape painter; Professor John Stuart Blackie; and Sir James Donaldson. Less visible to modern eyes, but of real significance in the lives of those living around them, were the women of Augustine.

Adam Black

Adam Black founded a publishing company that still exists in the form of an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing plc. He had built up a bookselling business and was joined in it by his nephew Charles – the 'C' of A&C Black. After Charles' death, and as Adam became more involved in Edinburgh's political life, much of the running of the company was taken on by his sons, including Augustine stalwart James Tait Black.

A&C Black not only published the 7th, 8th and 9th editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; in 1851, it also purchased the stock and copyright of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels.

As city treasurer, Adam Black rescued Edinburgh from impending bankruptcy and placed it finances on a secure footing, and as Lord Provost (1843-48) he went on to establish a reputation for honesty in the Edinburgh administration. Between 1856 and 1865, he was the Liberal MP for Edinburgh.

Black died in 1874 and is buried in Warriston Cemetery close to another significant Edinburgh citizen, James Young Simpson. Three years later, a bronze statue of Black was erected in East Princes Street Gardens.

Though it was Black who was Augustine's influential elder statesman, there were others who matched his civic prominence and energy. Elizabeth McLaren writes:

> During Dr. Alexander's long ministry of more than forty years a very large number of men representative of the city attended his ministry… At the historical election of 1847, when Macaulay was defeated, the proposer, or seconder of each of the three candidates, 'Whig', 'Tory', 'Advanced Liberal', was a deacon in Dr. Alexander's church.

Was this a preacher who reflected their Christian beliefs, or their position on the relationship between the Church and State, or did he simply offered a stimulating environment for intellectual debate – or was it a combination of all three? Abijah Murray, a member of Augustine during Dr Alexander's time as minister, offers a detailed account of Alexander's qualities as a preacher:

> His appearance in the pulpit was very striking. Tall and erect, massive of build,

> stately and dignified, a more impressive figure was never seen in a pulpit. The lameness which was noticeable when he walked was unobserved when he was preaching. His strong face, bright eyes, mobile mouth, and firm chin, all added to the impression of solidity and power suggested by his whole appearance. He had a clear and sonorous voice, and his reading of Scripture was marked by fine modulation and expressiveness. His literary style was pure, lucid and refined, and his oratory was stately and restrained.

His sermons depended for their effect on intellectual force and scholarly fullness rather than on flights of oratory or appeals to the feelings. His aim in preaching was first to make his hearers comprehend fully and minutely the precise meaning of the passage he had selected, and thereafter to impress on them the Christian truth or doctrine that it contained.

Murray adds that "Dr Alexander was somewhat nervous, and any sudden noise startled and disturbed him. This nervousness was due to an incident that occurred when he was preaching a funeral sermon in a Lancashire village. An instrumental band was present, and when the preacher read the words 'For the trumpet shall sound' a trumpeter blew a blast at his side, giving him a shock from which he never entirely recovered."

Dr Alexander, scholar

Certainly Alexander more than held his own in Edinburgh's elite circles. A member of many of Edinburgh's learned Societies, he was the recipient of honorary doctorates from St Andrews (1846) and Edinburgh (1884). He published extensively in the fields of theology, Church history, and biography – including the two-volume *A System of Biblical Theology* (pub. posth. 1888). He also wrote articles for the eighth edition of Adam Black's *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. A noted writer on the Old Testament (e.g. *The Connection And Harmony Of The Old And New Testaments*, 1841), in 1870 he was invited to join the cross-denominational committee preparing a revised version of the King James Old Testament. This latter work took up a large proportion of Alexander's time during the final years of his life, as evidenced in the pulpit, from where "he frequently, and for a time systematically, imparted to the congregation many of the results of the critical study of the Old Testament". On several occasions, Alexander was invited to take up academic appointments, including as

Principal of New College, then being established in London – a post to which he gave strong consideration but declined following persuasion from his congregation. He told them: "I wish you to understand that in declining the invitation to New College I am sacrificing the ambition of a lifetime."

Lord Henry Cockburn, is known to have put forward Alexander's name for the chair of Greek at London University; and Alexander himself pursued, unsuccessfully, the post of Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University. Cockburn noted in his Journal on 21 December 1845:

> I heard [---] that a congregation, neither Catholic nor Episcopalian, but worshipping according to the forms of the Church of Scotland, had given £200 for an organ, to be set up and used in an Edinburgh meeting-house. The people who have sense and spirit to do this are a congregation of Independents who assemble near the College, and are presided over by Mr. Alexander, an able, excellent, and eloquent man – no inconsiderable fact in the progress of Scotland.

In 1854, however, Dr Alexander did succeed Dr Wardlaw as Professor of Theology at the Theological Academy in Glasgow, subsequently relocated in Edinburgh and known as Theological Hall. Finally, in 1877, and after 43 years of ministry at Augustine, Alexander resigned his ministerial charge and took up the newly-created post of Principal at Theological Hall, where he continued to work until his retirement in 1882.

Alexander's views

What do we know of Alexander's theological views? Perhaps the most telling evidence comes from his response to the 'great Voluntary Controversy', which culminated in the Disruption of 1843, a seismic political as well as religious event in 19th century Scottish life. Alexander demonstrated solidarity with the dissenters within the Church of Scotland and with his former teacher, Thomas Chalmers, by joining in the decisive procession from St Andrew's Church on George Street, where the Church of Scotland Assembly was in session, to the hall at Canonmills, where the 'Free Church' held its first meeting. In doing so, Alexander was siding with the Presbyterian Evangelicals and with those who wished to

assert the independence of the Church from interference by government and landowners (who used patronage to 'intrude' ministers into parishes within their control).

In this there may be seen echoes of the Haldane brothers whose evangelicalism led to accusations of "subversive intent towards the establishment" and who also severed their ties with the Church of Scotland. Abijah Murray indicates that Alexander and his congregation were as one on this matter:

> The sympathy of this church and its pastor with the Free Church did not end with this demonstration, for when the New North Congregation was driven out of its place of worship in Brighton Street, this church offered the use of their chapel in North College Street to the dispossessed congregation, and for six months the two congregations worshipped at different hours in the same building. In memory of this brotherly action the New North Free Church presented to this church two beautiful silver communion cups that are still in use here.

But if Alexander was 'evangelical' (in its original sense of being a committed proclaimer of the Christian Good News), he was also 'progressive' in his thinking about worship, as his success in procuring an organ for the new George IV Bridge building demonstrates, and to which the elaborate design of the building itself seems to stand testimony.

"Augustine": the name

Mr. Sloan, Augustine's church officer, was proud to tell that "'Ae Sabbath, when I took in the Doctor's lunch, we were haein' a crack, and he telt me that they couldna hit on a richt name for the new kirk. I said, "Doctor, there's a man ye spoke o' in your sermon the day, and ye often quote him, and ye aye approve o' him, Augustine. Would *His* name dae?" The Doctor lookit at me, and then he lifted up his haund, and when he brocht it doon a' the dishes dirled, and says he, 'Mr. Sloan, Augustine it will be.' And Augustine it is."

["'One Sabbath, when I took in the Doctor's lunch, we were having a chat, and he told me that they couldn't hit on a right name for the new church. I said, "Doctor, there's a man you spoke of in your sermon today, and you often quote him, and you always approve of him, Augustine. Would *his* name do?" The Doctor looked at me, and then he lifted his hand, and when he brought it down all the dishes rattled, and he said, 'Mr. Sloan, Augustine it will be.' And Augustine it is."]

The meeting places of Congregationalists were usually known by the street in which they were situated. However, following the move to George IV Bridge the members decided to name their new building differently. The minutes for the church meeting highlight Dr. Alexander's proposal and reasons for it being named after Augustine, Bishop of Hippo:

1. Augustine's singular eminence as a theologian;
2. His important services to the cause of God, not only in his own day but in subsequent times, as it was to his writings chiefly that the theologians of the middle ages were indebted for their views of divine truth and the Church for what life was sustained in it; nor is it to be doubted that to him instrumentally we are indebted for the theology of the Reformation, and to a great extent for the Reformation itself;
3. The fact that on several points of theology in which we differ from other Calvinists, we differ by agreeing with Augustine rather than Calvin;
4. The pastor's personal obligation to Augustine's writing, by which his own religious thinking was much influenced, and from which his public teaching derived much of

its character & substance.

Moreover, the designation, 'Church' as a name for the new place of worship was considered "the most appropriate word for designating it, according to the principle by which a building received the same name or designation as its occupants." Members objected to 'Chapel' because it was "identified with certain peculiarities of Romanism, it being used to designate the places in which worship was offered to the saints & the virgin Mary."

Saint Augustine

Augustine lived from 354 to 430 AD. A Christian theologian, he was one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. He was born in present day Algeria and was made Bishop of Hippo Regius (nowadays Annaba in Algeria) in 396.

His writings include *The Confessions*, sometimes described as the first Western autobiography, and *The City of God*. He was called upon to write against many of the heresies of this period. In so doing, he defined the shape of orthodox Christian doctrine, explaining and defining many of the doctrines that became central to Christian belief (e.g. of God, free will, and evil).

Detail from one of two paintings by Russian artist Maria Rud hanging in the gallery of the church. This one portrays Augustine of Hippo (RHS rear gallery as viewed from front of sanctuary). The larger painting is of St Columba. Maria was part of DOM, an artists' collective hosted at Augustine for the Fringe Festival in 1997. The collective had set up an exhibition including Maria's paintings, her partner's stone sculptures and even a programme of classical music – including a quartet from St Petersburg. The painting of Augustine was donated in lieu of the rental payment. St Columba was gifted later.

Music

"Despite his generally non-extremist views, many of Lindsay Alexander's ideas were viewed with alarm…", as demonstrated by the installation of an organ in 1863.

Alexander had already published a book of hymns in 1849, subsequently known as *The Augustine Hymn Book*, and his congregation enjoyed a reputation for strong singing in worship. In Scotland at the time, it was not considered proper for congregations to stand to sing. Even to sing psalms, as Alexander's congregation did, was considered advanced, and forming a choir was considered a dangerous innovation. However, Alexander was convinced that music was a valuable aid to worship. As the ageing precentor (a solo music leader) at Argyle Square gradually failed, a few young bloods were allowed to stand beside him until a regular choir emerged. The congregation took to standing up to sing, and eventually Augustine became known as "the best sung congregation" in Edinburgh.

> With the opening of the new building in 1861 *The Scotsman* carried a leaked report that the minister was to be presented with a preaching gown and bands, that passages of scripture were to be chanted by the congregation, and that an organ had been ordered. An indignant and hostile rebuttal from an anonymous church member was printed the following day, and it was not until two years later that Augustine became one of the earliest churches in Edinburgh (other than Episcopalian or Roman Catholic, where they were more usual) to install an organ.

It is hard for us now to understand the strength of feeling aroused by the suggestion that the new church building should contain an organ. Certainly it fits with descriptions of musical developments within the congregation – the formation of a large choir, the chanting of psalms and passages of Scripture within worship, and the involvement of the whole congregation in singing. However, the radical nature of Alexander's innovations in a Scotland dominated by Presbyterianism becomes clear when set alongside the strength of opposition experienced by the progressive Dr. Robert Lee in Greyfriars Kirk, a few hundred yards away.

Robert Lee's driving enthusiasm for freedom of worship and the revival of a less puritanical style of worship led to the introduction of the first post-reformation stained glass windows; the use of a service book; and encouraging his congregation to kneel for prayers and to stand for singing – as at Augustine. In 1860 Lee introduced a harmonium to accompany the singing, followed five years later by the first organ to be installed and kept in any Presbyterian church in Scotland.

For these and other perceived innovations, Lee was pursued on successive occasions by the Church courts (including, in 1859, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland), where he was accused of unlawful innovations in worship.

Perhaps this ecclesiastical landscape explains why, when the Augustine organ was inaugurated on 3 October 1863, Lindsay Alexander observed that it had taken him twenty years of advocacy to reach this point. (It is also interesting to note that Saint Augustine himself had a complex relationship with the power of music. In *The Confessions*, he writes: "I realise that when they are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervour and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if there they were not sung. But I ought not to let my mind to be paralysed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray.")

The new organ, built by the Edinburgh firm D. & T. Hamilton, was the gift of Mr William McMurray, a papermaker and London newspaper proprietor, and was installed in the rear gallery of the church. *The Scotsman* described it as "a magnificent instrument, both as regards quality of tone and volume of sound". Also gathered for the occasion was an augmented choir of sixty:

> … the whole performance gave in no equivocal manner the promise that Augustine Church, which has already no mean reputation for the refined taste and excellent execution that mark its devotional music, will in future yield to none in the city for impressiveness of effect, and excellence in its psalmody.

An organ built for Greyfriars, also by D. and T. Hamilton, was inaugurated by Adam

Hamilton, the maker's brother, with slightly less pomp on Saturday 22 April 1865; Augustine's organist, Mr Davidson, played it for them during worship the following day.

During the following years, a good deal of attention is given in church minutes and records to the role of organist, indicating the continuing importance of the organ and musical standards in the life of the AUC congregation. The church's musical reputation was widespread. When, in 1886, the organist and choirmaster retired, there were two applicants for the post, one from Crieff and one from as far away as Banbury in Oxfordshire.

During the period of the Revd Rees Griffiths' ministry (1927-34), a scheme was launched that included building a new organ by A.E. Ingham and placing it at the front of the church. In addition, the pulpit was to be replaced and choir stalls positioned in front of the pulpit (hitherto the choir had sat in the rear gallery alongside the organ). "With the installation of the new organ [in 1929] there were a number of criticisms of the organist, Mr. Keppie, who had held the post since 1926, and he was invited to resign. Mr. Tom Moir McCourt, A.R.C.O., was appointed at a salary of £80 per annum" and under his leadership, lasting until 1939, a music club was formed and musical life flourished.

Another sign of how far things had changed since Lindsay Alexander and Robert Lee received criticism for musical innovation was the appointment, in 1959, of Dr. Erik Routley as minister (1959-67). Erik Routley was a brilliant scholar and musician— a member of a committee responsible for the compilation of *Congregational Praise*, with particular responsibility for the music of that hymn book. He struck up an especially good relationship with Robert Lauder, appointed organist in 1962 – to the extent that at one evening service Dr. Routley played the organ while Mr. Lauder spoke about the hymns. This period also saw close co-operation established with Cranley School for girls in south Edinburgh, whose choir for a number of years gave special musical services at Christmas. In 1961, for example, they gave the first performance in Scotland of Benjamin Britten's *Missa Brevis*.

Erik Routley

The American hymnologist Austin C. Lovelace described Erik Routley (1917 – 82) as "undoubtedly one of the most brilliant hymnologists and theologians of this century". Nevertheless, the authors of *Duty and Delight: Routley Remembered* (1985: Hope Publishing Co.) observe that he was "primarily a pastor and preacher". He was remembered by one church member as "a dynamo of energy, an encourager of us all."

Routley combined his commitment to comforting the bereaved, sick and troubled with a far-reaching influence on the development of the late 20th century hymnody, not least through his editorship (1948 – 74) of the *Bulletin* of The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland. He was a prolific writer and is credited with, amongst other writings, 50 books and monographs, four hymnal companions, 600 published articles, and 110 hymn and other tunes. His writing was not solely about hymns and music. During his pastoral appointments at AUC (1959 – 67) and in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1967 – 74), a good deal of his output reflected the theological and social issues that were part and parcel of city church ministry.

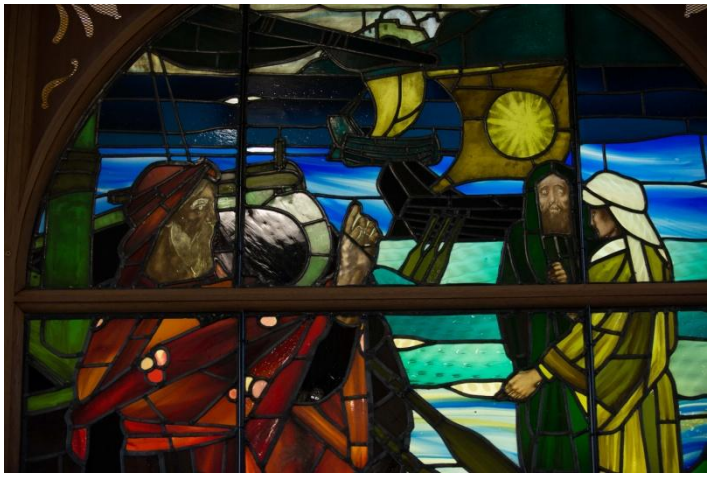
During the 1960s, while ministering at AUC, Routley became the 'catalyst and inspirer' for the Dunblane Consultations. These brought together a group of musicians and writers at Scottish Churches House in Dunblane to compose hymns that reflected contemporary issues and concerns. Ian Frazer writes that these hymns (gathered in the *Dunblane Praises* publications) were a response to the sense that too many new hymns repeated old stereotypes and that no-one was 'getting down to writing hymns for our time'. One of the group's concerns was to reflect 'life's rawness and crudity', taking serious account of violence in society, as in Erik's own hymn 'All who love and serve your city' – a response to the 1965 Watts riots in Los Angeles.

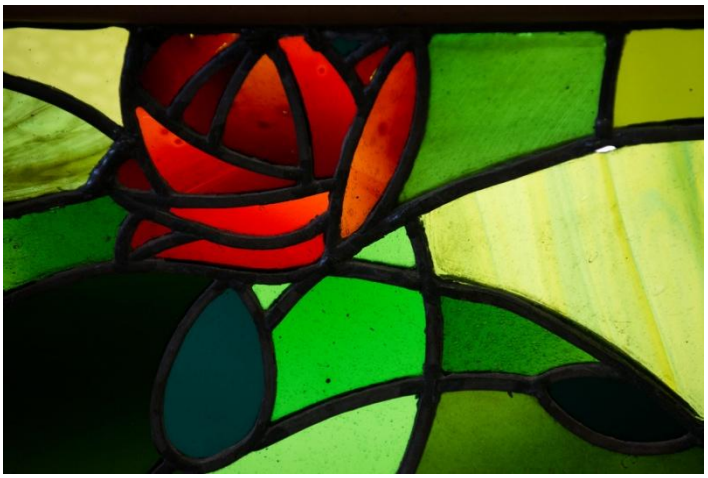
The British Weekly reported that the first consultation in October 1962 had met to 'take a radical look at Church music today', and the Dunblane gatherings are credited with stimulating the 'hymn explosion' witnessed in Britain in the 1970s and, in the following decade, in the United States.

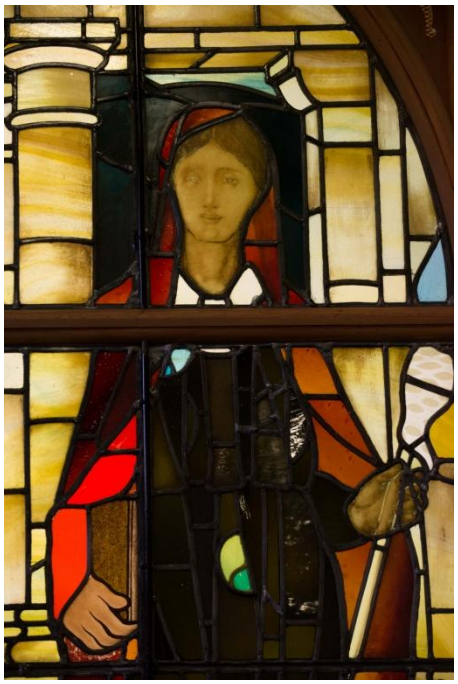
Erik Routley's hymn tune 'Augustine' was published in a number of hymn books, including *Rejoice and Sing*.

Stained Glass

At the end of 1903 Mr. [William Lindsay] Alexander of Pinkieburn, the eldest son of the late Dr. Lindsay Alexander, presented two stained glass windows to the church in memory of his father and mother (Mary). In 2002, they were established as being the work of the noted glass designer Robert Burns; probably installed by his great friend Stephen Adam. They depict Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20: 36-8), and the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31: 10-31. One notable feature of the windows is the use of moulded glass in order to depict the sea.







Images: details from Robert Burns's stained glass windows presented in memory of Lindsay and Mary Alexander.
Top left: St Paul taking leave of the Elders of Ephesus.
Right: the 'virtuous woman' of Proverbs.
Bottom left: detail from 'St Paul' window
(Photos by Simon Jones)

During alterations to the church in 1993-4, the opportunity was taken to move the two windows from their position above the south gallery (where they were invisible to anyone sitting on the right of the church) to the ground floor, at the front of the sanctuary. Here, in specially constructed light boxes, they could be displayed to better advantage.

Lindsay and Mary Alexander are also commemorated by a large window just to the right of the entrance into St Giles High Kirk. Information held by St Giles is that the window is by the firm of Ballantine and Son – and most likely designed by the son, Alexander.[108] It was placed there in 1886, 16 years before the Augustine windows. The donor is not recorded though Elizabeth McLaren (in 1911) states that again it was the Alexanders' eldest son. It also remains a mystery as to why someone who was not a member of the Church of Scotland would, unusually, be commemorated in its High Kirk.

The window itself is designed in a very different style to the Augustine pair and depicts scenes from the life of Moses-as-great-leader. Though we don't know if a complimentary comparison with Alexander was intended, some pleasure may be taken in the depiction of a bishop bowing low before the great independent leader of his people. In any event, the choice of theme is appropriate to commemorate a man known for his scholarship of the Old Testament. (The window is one of a pair; the other, dedicated to an Alexander Stewart, depicts scenes from the life of another Old Testament hero, Joseph.)

The 'other' Robert Burns

Robert Burns was a British artist who exhibited a diverse range of skills, from mural design and book illustration to the making of stained glass. (Before the First World War, his designs for biscuit tins proved popular!)

He was born in Edinburgh in 1869 and studied in both London and Paris and was a protégé of Sir Patrick Geddes. He worked in Edinburgh as a decorative artist and designer in the art nouveau style and was the first head of Drawing and Painting, 1908-1919, at the Edinburgh College Art. He was remembered as "influential and generous" in his encouragement of the students who included Anne Redpath, Adam Bruce Thomson and Alick Sturrock. However, he resigned from his post due to a disagreement over teaching methods.

One of his most well-known projects was for Crawford's Tea Rooms on Princes Street, Edinburgh; a further project, finally fulfilled later on in his career, was an illustrated volume of Scottish ballads. Though Burns became an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy (ARSA), he later resigned. He died in 1941.

Image: Panels from Crawford's Tearoom in Hanover Street, Edinburgh (Oil on board, 1923-37)

Photo: Robert Burns, taken about 1910, shows him with three of his students (Image: Aberdeen Art Gallery)