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# THE HOLY CORNER: A STUDY IN THE EARLY HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF EDINBURGH TOWNSCAPE

YVONNE HILLYARD

*It would seem as if the prosperous and populous suburb of Morningside had had a church visitation on the competitive principle and the result from any point of view is not one to be regretted. The most conclusive proof of the vitality of any religious body is that it is able to march pari passu with the material growth by which it is surrounded. Morningside, as has been said, has been well attended to in this respect.<sup>1</sup>*

SUCH WAS A DESCRIPTION of 'The Holy Corner' in 1883. This article examines how each of the four churches at Holy Corner came to be built, and how they fit into their context, both geographical and historical. They vary in quality, but the group they form is unique. Consideration of these buildings is worth while both for this reason and also because in describing each one in detail there emerge various general points about church architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The 'suburb of Morningside' mentioned above can be identified as the areas of Merchiston and Greenhill (fig. 1). All four churches were built on land originally belonging to these two estates, the Greenhill estate on the east of Morningside Road and the Merchiston estate on the west.<sup>2</sup> In 1814 Sir William Forbes had bought the Greenhill estate.<sup>3</sup> Some time before 1852 a number of plots had been feued off from the estate for houses along what is now known as Greenhill Gardens.<sup>4</sup> In 1729 the Merchiston estate, originally belonging to the Napiers of Merchiston Castle, had come into the hands of the Governors of George Watson's Hospital.<sup>5</sup> Most of the estate area was well to the south west of that under discussion, and stretched as



Fig. 1. The Holy Corner as shown in Bartholomew's *Post Office Directory Plan of Edinburgh and Leith, 1868-69*. At this stage only two churches had been built, the original Free and United Presbyterian Churches. (*Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.*)

far as Meggetland and Gorgie Mills.<sup>6</sup> However, there was also an L-shaped portion of land owned by the Governors which was bounded by Morningside Road on the east, Merchiston Avenue on the west,

Granville Terrace on the north, and Albert Terrace on the south. It was for this area that the Merchant Company asked their architect David Rhind to prepare a feuing plan for houses in 1844,<sup>7</sup> and to a large extent the arrangement of villas followed this plan. The necessity for new churches to accommodate this population became increasingly apparent during the third quarter of the century.<sup>8</sup>

## MORNINGSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

The earliest of the four churches now standing at The Holy Corner is Morningside Baptist Church, on the south west (fig. 2). This church, acquired by the Baptists in 1894, had previously housed the Morningside Free congregation, and was built in approximately 1872. It replaced an earlier, smaller



Fig. 2. Morningside Baptist Church (formerly Free Church), photographed from the north east. (RCAHMS.)



church on the same site, built in 1844, following the foundation of the Morningside Free congregation in 1843.<sup>9</sup>

The first Free church, whose appearance is not recorded, is yet worth remembering because of its close associations with Dr Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Disruption in 1843 which led to the foundation of the Free Church of Scotland. Chalmers lived at No. 1 Churchhill between the spring of 1843 and his death in 1847, and was the moving spirit behind the establishment of the Morningside Free congregation, the earliest in conception, if not actually in terms of the building, in all Scotland. Chalmers' scheme for raising money for the stipends of those ministers no longer associated with the Establishment was first put into operation in Morningside Parish, and that was at the end of 1842, six months before the Disruption.<sup>10</sup> The building was designed by the architect James Newlands,<sup>11</sup> who practised in Edinburgh for a decade in the 1830s and 1840s and resided in Gilmore Place during this time.<sup>12</sup> This church was demolished to make way for the larger building we see today.<sup>13</sup>

Negotiations for the new church opened in January 1871. The right to build on an additional piece of land 'fronting the church' (i.e. the old Free Church) was obtained by consent of the City Road Trust and the Governors of George Watson's Hospital.<sup>14</sup> A limited competition was held in 1872, and eight architects were invited to submit plans. Those asked to compete were some of the most prominent architects of the 1870s, and included the Edinburgh architects Messrs MacGibbon and Ross and the great church-building Glaswegian John Honeyman.<sup>15</sup> Six sets of plans were submitted, and were displayed for public viewing at the old Morningside Free School.<sup>16</sup> The commission went to MacGibbon and Ross. Of all those who submitted plans, they were perhaps the least experienced in church-building; the reason for their being chosen

may well have been that they were already known to the congregation.<sup>17</sup>

The church, Early English in style, consists of a simple rectangular nave with gable end toward the street and a massive heavily buttressed tower and broach spire at the south-east corner. This tower and spire dominate the design, as is underlined by the tower being on the street-line while the gable wall is set back. The building was handled in a simple but scholarly way; for example, contemporary criticism noted the entasis of the spire, 'frequently found in the works of the Middle Ages'.<sup>18</sup>

The church was opened on 2 April 1874. At the opening ceremony 'there was a large attendance notwithstanding the boisterous state of the weather'.<sup>19</sup> Exactly twenty years later the building was put up for sale: it was then bought on the instigation of the Rev. J. Cumming, the minister of the Baptist Church at Portobello, and a Baptist congregation was rapidly installed.<sup>20</sup>

Today the church is flanked by shops with houses above. The block which turns the corner into Colinton Road is of three storeys and attic with raised centre and ends terminated with mansard roofs. It curves round the corner, enclosing the rear part of the church. To the south a plain four-storeyed block rises up to Churchhill. However, before the new Free Church was erected schemes had been drawn up by the Merchant Company architect David Rhind for blocks of buildings on either side of the church site.<sup>21</sup> They were considerably more ambitious than those eventually built, and it is an interesting point that these schemes were known to David MacGibbon. The design for the new Free Church by MacGibbon and his partner Thomas Ross must be seen in the context of these schemes.

The original drawings of 1862 by David Rhind for the corner block show a thirty-eight bay block with an extraordinarily varied outline.<sup>22</sup> The Colinton Road elevation was symmetrical with three-storeyed

pavilions terminating in mansard roofs at either end and with linking sections of two storeys and a central feature basically consisting of three storeys with attic in the centre but a further garret level within the space created by the two mansards. Round the corner into Boroughmuirhead (now Morningside Road) the block was terminated on its south-east corner by another mansarded pavilion of three storeys. The mansards were all to be finished with wrought-iron cresting. A stone balustrade was to run along the facade of the mansards at eaves' level. On the corner, shops were intended at ground-floor level.

In 1863 the corner feus were advertised by the Governors, and in February were bought as a speculation by John Farmer, a baker.<sup>23</sup> Farmer had the plans altered by the architect Robert Paterson (a storey was added, and the position of the mansards, as well as their shape, was altered), and then proceeded to build the block we see today.<sup>24</sup> In March 1863 MacGibbon wrote to the Governors offering to take the feu of the other section, and plans were drawn up for a terrace to marry in with Paterson's scheme. Later the same year he requested permission to build the terrace to his own design.<sup>25</sup> This he finally did, but not before a lengthy argument had been fought out between Farmer and MacGibbon and the Governors over MacGibbon's deviations from the original Rhind drawings.<sup>26</sup> Therefore it is clear that MacGibbon knew the Rhind schemes.

MacGibbon's part of Merchiston Terrace, as it was to be named, situated to the west of Farmer's part, was 'in the course of erection' in June 1864 and completed by 1866.<sup>27</sup> The feu charter was drawn up on 2 December 1868.<sup>28</sup> MacGibbon departed from the French style and designed a block three storeys in height, which, in contrast to Rhind's original design, is irregular and asymmetrical and in a vaguely Scottish Baronial manner. The block is set back from the pavement and from the line of the terrace designed by Rhind and Paterson. Shops have been

eliminated, and small gardens inserted at the front. The houses are enhanced by weatherboarded gables, pepper-pot turrets and a canted bay at the west end. A small pointed window at the east end of the block gives it an almost ecclesiastical touch.<sup>29</sup>

David Rhind also drew up designs for blocks of houses to the south of the Free Church site in 1863.<sup>30</sup> The stretch from Abbotsford Park at Churchhill running north along Morningside Road was to be called Marmion Terrace. Like Rhind's Merchiston Terrace, it was to have an interesting roof-line varying from four storeys in the centre to two storeys with attic in the low link blocks, though it was to be considerably plainer than the Merchiston Terrace block. It was finally built by 1871,<sup>31</sup> though only the centre pavilion of the south half was built to Rhind's design and even then in a simpler fashion than originally intended. The plans show that Marmion Terrace was to have had touches of Renaissance detail, for example pedimented dormers and rusticated quoins. These touches were retained, but in a reduced and altered form. The other block designed by Rhind in 1863 was Waverley Terrace, filling the gap between Marmion Terrace and the Free Church. Waverley Terrace was completed by 1879,<sup>32</sup> but to an entirely different design. Rhind had intended a block with projecting ends similar to Marmion Terrace but shorter: what was built was a straight, solid four-storey block of twenty-three bays.

Various points emerge from the foregoing section. We noted that the spire of the Free Church was certainly the dominant feature of the building. It seems likely that this design was influenced by the fact that Marmion Terrace was in the course of being erected and that there already existed designs for the other block, which MacGibbon knew well. With the limited money available for the Free Church commission,<sup>33</sup> perhaps his knowledge of these designs led him to devote most attention to the spire. In this way the church would not be dwarfed by the

encroaching buildings.

A second point to note is that MacGibbon's design for the western part of Merchiston Terrace with its combination of Scottish Baronial and ecclesiastical details blends much better with the appearance of the church than does the French corner block designed by Rhind and amended by Paterson. An awareness of the possibility of relating these two stylistically perhaps contributed to the designing of such a tall spire. The result was the view from the west that one sees today – the baronial terrace with the spire behind.

However, other factors should be taken into consideration when examining MacGibbon's choice of style. It had been found that the French style block did 'not pay as a speculation'.<sup>34</sup> It seems probable that the Scottish Baronial style was cheaper to build. Also, by keeping the block consistently of three storeys and not varying the roof-line, as Rhind had intended, more apartments could presumably be accommodated in the block. Economic factors, then, may have had a part to play.

It may well have been MacGibbon's speculative venture at Merchiston Terrace that brought him to the attention of the Deacons' Court of the Morningside Free Church and persuaded them to choose his design. Also, his contact with the Governors of George Watson's Hospital during the altercation with Farmer almost certainly led to his being appointed as architect to the Governors on 2 April 1867 when David Rhind had fallen out of favour.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE ERIC LIDDELL CENTRE, FORMERLY NORTH MORNINGSIDE CHURCH

As the present Baptist Church is the second building on its site so the present Congregational Church diametrically opposite, on the north-east corner of Morningside and Chamberlain Roads, occupies the

site of an earlier church (see fig. 1). In 1862 local adherents of the United Presbyterian (UP) Church established themselves as a congregation and erected a church by subscription. It opened in January 1863.<sup>36</sup> It was a plain Gothic building, with a shallow porch giving access from Morningside Road, and in 1881 was described as 'a superficial structure of non-descript character'.<sup>37</sup> It soon failed to meet the needs of the United Presbyterian Church.

In the summer of 1879 the congregation acquired a new site. They bought two villas on the south side of Chamberlain Road, demolished them, and compensated the adjacent owners for loss of amenity.<sup>38</sup> The acquisition of the new site on the south-east of Holy Corner was a lengthy process; several other sites, including one in Merchiston Castle Park, were considered but rejected on grounds of expense. Two schemes for the new church were submitted to the Managers at a meeting in July 1879. It was decided that the church was to be 'Norman',<sup>39</sup> a decision resting on the 'desire ... that the design of the new church should not have the appearance of being in competition with those of the Episcopal or Free Churches at its doors'.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the style of the building did not, as one might have expected, depend on its suitability to the character of the denomination that the building was to house; nor indeed on its suitability to the surroundings. After all, the United Presbyterians were distinguished by their alleged non-sectarianism and egalitarianism; certainly there is no link between this and the use of a neo-Romanesque style.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary sources describe the church as 'Norman style as it was practised in Scotland during the twelfth century',<sup>42</sup> and the result is a large heavy structure with a chunky north-western tower (fig. 3). Two elaborate doorways, one on the main axis of the church on Chamberlain Road and the other on Morningside Road, lead into the narthex. Above the Chamberlain Road doorway there is an interlocking



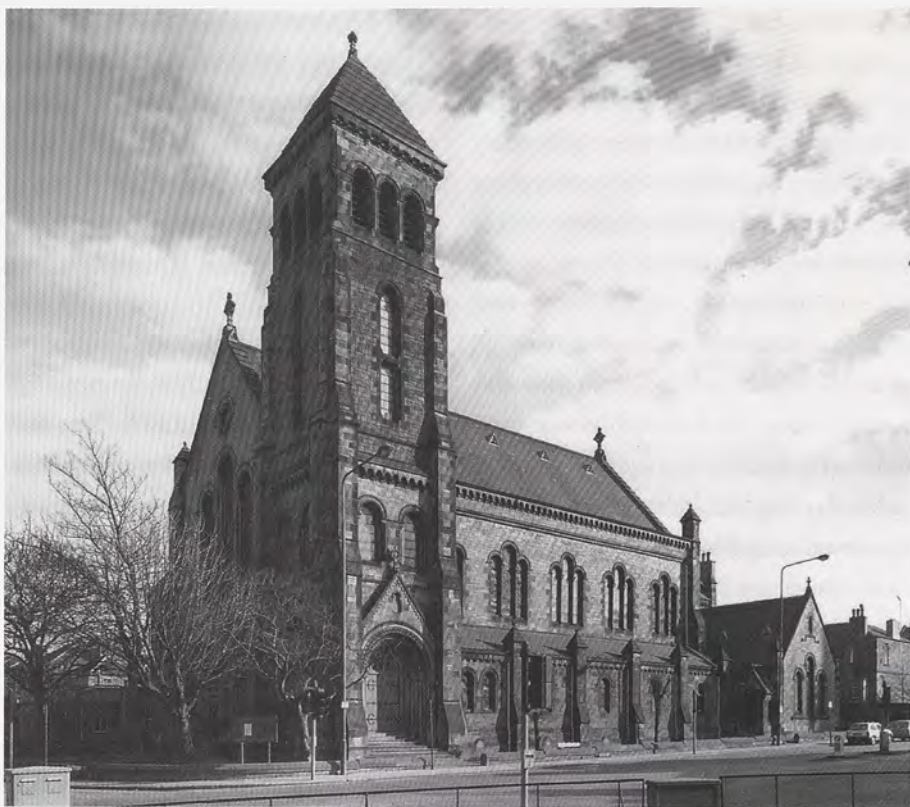


Fig. 3. The Eric Liddell Centre (formerly North Morningside United Presbyterian Church), photographed from the north west. (RCAHMS.)

blind-arched arcade, and above that a large three-light window (the arcade's position and design were no doubt derived from obvious precedents such as the arcade above the south door of St Cuthbert's Church, Dalmeny). Externally, the church is rectangular with a small transept-like projection toward the west, which in fact contains subsidiary offices. Inside, it is rectangular and divided into nave and aisles; the aisles are merely narrow passages. The four-square quality of the exterior is emphasised internally by the symmetry; the pulpit is centrally placed forming 'part of a reredos-like design',<sup>43</sup> and the organ gallery behind balances the gallery at the opposite end.

The external appearance of the church, built in grey Craighleith stone, is grim. Indeed, contemporary

opinion was harsh in its criticism of the building, both of the exterior and of the interior. It was considered to be too large and was even described as the 'UP Cathedral'.<sup>44</sup> Internal details proved unacceptable. The hammer-beam roof was said not to be a 'suitable covering over a somewhat massively treated Norman arcade and clerestory'.<sup>45</sup> And the architect was criticised for declining to 'introduce grotesques which formed a characteristic of the buildings of the period'.<sup>46</sup> The style as a whole was attacked – 'for a Presbyterian Church, the Norman is rather too heavy and intractable a style for satisfactory adaptation'.<sup>47</sup>

How do we account for this criticism? Was it because the architect, David Robertson (1834–1925),<sup>48</sup> was unhappy designing in the Norman style? Certainly he did not use this style for other

large commissions. There are two other Edinburgh church designs which he considered worthy of exhibition at the Royal Scottish Academy: the John Ker Memorial Church in Polwarth Gardens exhibited in 1894, and the Gorgie Road United Presbyterian Church (later the Cairns Memorial Church) exhibited in 1897. Both are Gothic in style. The Ker Memorial Church, completed in November 1893,<sup>49</sup> is a large gaunt building with sparse detail and a tall thin spire. It is not a particularly successful design, but the difficulties of the site may perhaps excuse it. The church had to be slotted in beside the large gable of the existing hall of rather insipid design,<sup>50</sup> and had to contend with the encroachment of tenements to west and east.<sup>51</sup> With the Gorgie Road Church, completed in 1901,<sup>52</sup> Robertson was again building the church on to an existing hall, but had the advantages of having designed the hall himself and of the church's corner site.<sup>53</sup> The design is somewhat more successful. The church is smaller and squatter than either the Morningside Church or the Ker Memorial Church; it was to hold 820 sitters as opposed to 1000 in the other two.<sup>54</sup> The low broad effect is emphasized by the stocky tower with short red-tiled spire at the corner. Perhaps, then, Robertson was more successful with the Gothic style.

Could there be other reasons for the criticism aimed at his Morningside Church? The Norman style appears but rarely between 1860 and 1890. Earlier, a simplified round-arched style was used occasionally (for example, David Bryce at St Ninian's Episcopal Church, Alyth, 1857, or David Cousin at Cambuslang Old Church, 1841), often in cases where economy was important. After 1890, the scholarly McGregor Chalmers erected a number of sturdy Romanesque churches, possibly influenced by the Glasgow Ecclesiological Society of which he had been a member from the start in 1895. The rare appearance of this style in the intervening years suggests that it was generally unpopular, as does the lack

of response by contemporary reviewers to the few examples built.<sup>55</sup>

## CHRIST CHURCH, MORNINGSIDE

Early in 1875, the small Boroughmuirhead community of Episcopalians decided to proceed with the building of a church to the north west of Holy Corner,<sup>56</sup> and a competition for the design was organised.<sup>57</sup> The dedication was to be Christ Church. The hall below the nave of the new church, which is on a sloping site, was begun in May 1875.<sup>58</sup> The nave of the church was in a reasonably complete state a year later. The first service was held on 4 June 1876.<sup>59</sup> The chancel, tower and spire were then begun, the cost being borne by Miss Falconer of Falcon Hall, and were 'in progress' by December 1876. They were opened in June 1878.<sup>60</sup>

Like most Episcopal churches of the nineteenth century, the church was correctly orientated, and on this site that meant that the chancel was on the street side. The present arrangement of the church appears to be unusual, with the tower at the north-east corner and the entrance at its base (fig. 4). However, had the original design been completed, it would not have seemed so strange – it was intended also to provide a western entrance. The congregation still hoped to complete the design as late as 1908, but shortage of funds apparently prevented them.<sup>61</sup> This arrangement would undoubtedly never have been satisfactory. Members of the congregation would have had to walk from the street down the side of the church and enter at what would have seemed very much the back.

Contemporary sources describe the church as being 'French Gothic of the 13th century'.<sup>62</sup> Both in the plan and in the details French influence can be found. In terms of plan, the most obvious facet of French influence is the use of an ambulatory which is



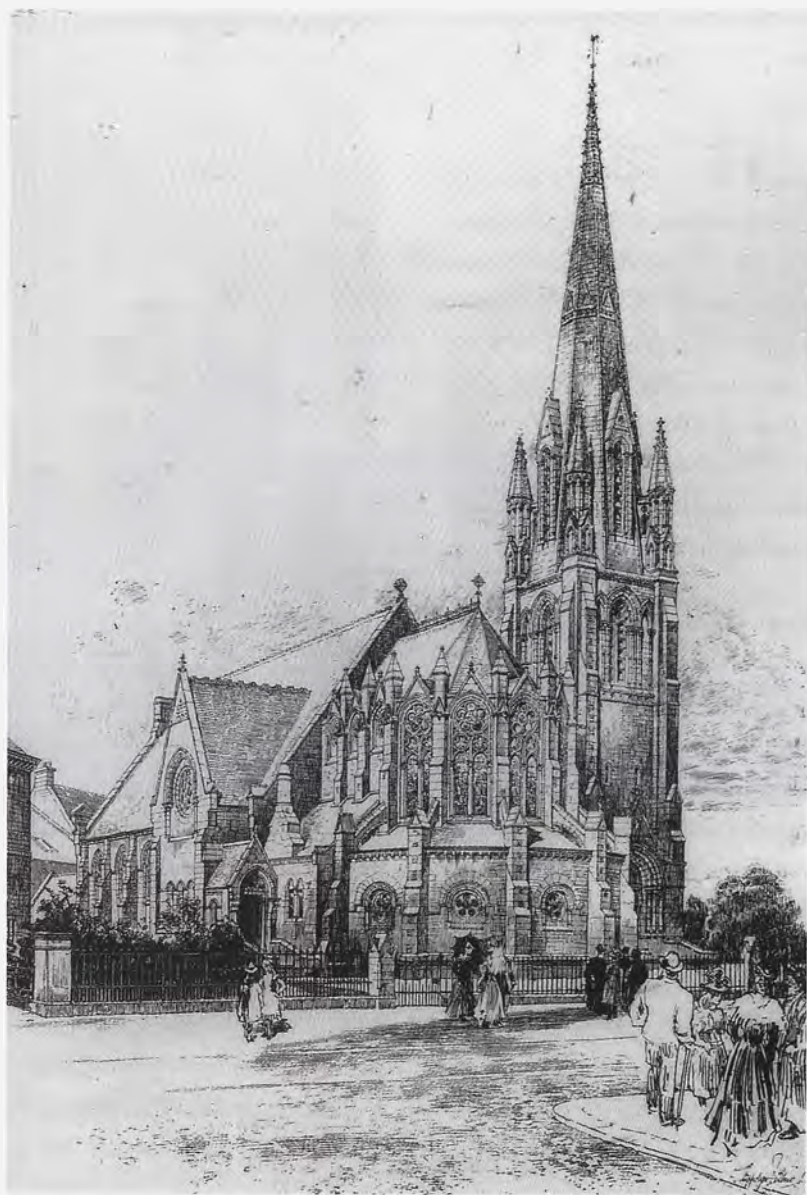


Fig. 4. Christ Church, Morningside, from the south east, in a drawing by Hippolyte Blanc published in *Academy Architecture* for 1913. (RCAHMS.)

treated elaborately on the exterior. Chancel and ambulatory are divided into bays by buttresses, the thrust from the chancel being carried over the roof of the ambulatory on miniature flying buttresses. The ambulatory allowed the clergy 'to pass to and from the vestry', which was situated on the opposite side of the chancel from the tower, that is at the south east. In terms of detail, the gablets and pinnacles crowning

the chancel are French in character, as is the treatment of the cusped cinquefoil tracery which descends below the level of the springers.

Why did the architect choose the French Gothic style? Two possible reasons may be considered: the first is because the architect had strong connections with, and an obvious interest in, France, and the second – possibly more important – is because the style was

fashionable in Scotland.

The architect whose design for the church had won the competition was Hippolyte Blanc.<sup>63</sup> The son of an Irish woman, Sarah Bauress, and a Frenchman, Victor Blanc, who seems to have come to Edinburgh in 1841 as an 'importer of ladies' French boots and shoes', Hippolyte was born in 1844. After George Heriot's School, of which he was dux in 1859, he worked as an apprentice in David Rhind's office, and studied at the Science and Art Department School, being the National Medallist for 1866. Then he entered HM Office of Works as an assistant, and by 1877 'had reached the responsible position of chief assistant'. 'From time to time' Blanc travelled on the Continent, and later sources tell us that he 'made a prolonged study of Gothic architecture with special attention to the French Gothic'.<sup>64</sup> It seems probable, especially as he was of French descent, that during or just after his student days he travelled to France, like a number of his contemporaries.<sup>65</sup> And if he did visit France in the 1860s, then the impact of French architecture and particularly that of thirteenth-century Gothic, which Blanc himself considered 'the purest and the most graceful of any of the periods',<sup>66</sup> would be fresh in his mind when he tackled his first major commissions.

French influence can be detected in other designs by Blanc at this period. Christ Church is his earliest recorded ecclesiastical commission as an independent architect.<sup>67</sup> The competition design was submitted early in 1875. A matter of months later he won another competition for a church design, Mayfield Free Church (now Mayfield Church of Scotland),<sup>68</sup> which was described by contemporary sources as 'early Gothic of French type'.<sup>69</sup> There are numerous stylistic similarities between Christ Church and Mayfield Church, despite the differences in size and plan. Firstly, the towers are very similar; both are tall and elaborate and of the same proportions. Both are of three stages, the treatment of the belfry openings

at the topmost stage being remarkably similar. The openings are tall and pointed with traceried heads, and have several rows of columns in the jambs. Both have octagonal spires with tall vents surrounded by gablets on four faces. On each corner of the towers the buttresses terminate in pinnacles with 'relieved shafts clustered around them'.<sup>70</sup> Secondly, internal details also bear comparison. The piers and the responds in Christ Church between chancel and ambulatory, with their clustered shafts, are found in a simplified form in Mayfield in the arcade separating the transepts from the nave. The similarities between these two churches are remarkable considering that they were designed for two entirely different denominations. This shows clearly that appropriateness of style to denomination was unimportant. The inclinations of the architect were again the decisive factor in his use of a style, and in the case of Mayfield, 'the committee [of Deacons] shewed broad-mindedness by giving the young architect a free hand'.<sup>71</sup> Blanc's inclinations, as The Holy Corner suggests, were towards the French Gothic style.

The other, more important, underlying reason for Blanc's use of the French style is that it was fashionable. The older generation of English architects had been turning to 'the sterner French types such as Chartres and Laon' in the late 1850s and 1860s.<sup>72</sup> Likewise in Scotland the French style was popular, as is easily seen from a number of significant churches erected in the French Gothic style in the late 1860s, 1870s, and early 1880s.<sup>73</sup> Its popularity was at least partly due to the fact that it approached 'more nearly to the best period of Scottish Gothic', thereby satisfying the need, which undoubtedly was felt, to build in a national style.<sup>74</sup> Both Christ Church and Mayfield were approved of by the critics, which suggests their readiness to accept the French style.<sup>75</sup> And Blanc continued to design in the French Gothic style into the 1880s, which again indicates that the style was well received.<sup>76</sup>



Blanc's Christ Church design is perhaps based partly on Sainte-Chapelle in Paris,<sup>77</sup> as suggested by the following similarities. Firstly, the polygonal apse of Christ Church with its tall two-light lancets terminated externally in gablets, each one flanked by pinnacled buttresses, is similar to the east end of Sainte-Chapelle. The external walls of the Paris building are splayed at the level of the lower church, and this feature, I believe, has been translated by Blanc as an ambulatory; the windows of the lower church thus equate with the circular windows in Blanc's ambulatory. Secondly, in the interior the blind arcade at the east end of Sainte-Chapelle is remarkably similar in effect, though not of course in detail, to the arcade between chancel and ambulatory in Christ Church. Thirdly, as in Sainte-Chapelle, the nave is divided into five bays. Fourthly, the plan of Christ Church is unusual in its combination of aisleless nave with transepts and chancel. This can perhaps be explained if one sees the design as being a re-interpretation of the Sainte-Chapelle theme but modified to suit Episcopal needs in the chancel area (the combination of aisleless nave and chancel with ambulatory is of course historically a nonsense). Finally, had Christ Church been completed, there would have been a 'spacious west porch'.<sup>78</sup> This would obviously have been tall, possibly of two storeys with an entrance to the hall below the church entrance. This would then have increased the resemblance to Sainte-Chapelle.

It should also be noted that of Blanc's contemporaries, James Sellars used the same source for his design for Hillhead Church; in 1876 it was described as being 'designed upon the model of Ste Chapelle, Paris'.<sup>79</sup> Did Blanc know Sellars' design for Hillhead Church, and was he inspired by it? Or was he independently using Sainte-Chapelle? There are various details in Christ Church and Hillhead Church which are similar but unlike Sainte-Chapelle: for example, in the interior of both churches we find shafts sup-

porting the roof ridges set upon rather unsatisfactory cone-shaped elbow corbels in the nave. And yet the chronology is against Blanc being influenced by Sellars. Blanc's design for Christ Church had been prepared by 13 February 1875, the day of opening of the exhibition at the Royal Scottish Academy.<sup>80</sup> The competition for Hillhead Church took place no earlier than the middle of 1874,<sup>81</sup> and by November 1875 the building had reached an advanced stage, but had not been completed.<sup>82</sup> Blanc could have done no more than see the design for Hillhead Church. That is not impossible,<sup>83</sup> but it also seems quite likely that he made independent use of Sainte-Chapelle.

MORNINGSIDE UNITED CHURCH,  
FORMERLY MORNINGSIDE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Of the four churches under discussion, the Congregational Church on the north east of Holy Corner (fig. 5), was the last to be built; it was opened on 5 October 1929.<sup>84</sup> In 1887 the congregation had begun to hire the former United Presbyterian building for their services, and in 1890 they had bought it.<sup>85</sup> By the early 1920s the old building was in need of repair.<sup>86</sup> The decision to build a new hall and subsidiary rooms, to be followed by a new church, was taken in late 1922.<sup>87</sup> Negotiations dragged on, but by May 1924 James McLachlan had been appointed architect and his plans for hall and rooms adopted.<sup>88</sup> The hall was begun in the summer of 1925, by which time plans for the church were being prepared.<sup>89</sup>

In February 1927 the building committee decided on some changes in the proposed new church.<sup>90</sup> These resulted in a new set of plans being prepared by McLachlan.<sup>91</sup> More accommodation was deemed necessary, and extra buildings were to be added on to the east end of the church; the east window disappeared, and the tower was moved to its present position from just east of the easternmost gable of the





Fig. 5. Morningside United Church (formerly Congregational Church), photographed from the south west. (RCAHMS.)

south 'transept'. A number of other very interesting changes were also made between the first and second sets of plans; these changes bear no relationship to the required extra accommodation. Stylistic details were altered, giving the building a completely different flavour. The tall windows, originally to be pointed on facade and side elevations, were changed to become round-headed. The first set of drawings show these tall pointed windows filled at their heads with simple tracery. Likewise, the arches of the open porches of the front of the building were originally to be pointed. The openings at the top of the tower were originally rectangular and glazed with quatrefoils at the top, two on each side of the tower. They were changed to open arches as they now appear.

What do these changes mean? The overall flavour, as well as some of the details, of the first design is distinctly Gothic, viz. the pointed arches, the traceried windows, the quatrefoils. However, the

church was described at its opening in 1929 as being 'in the Italian style with tall campanile and red roof'.<sup>92</sup> The changes between the two sets of drawings seem to have made the church more Italianate in appearance. The campanile is obviously Italian Romanesque in inspiration. Despite the simplification of the arched openings at the top, it bears close comparison with eleventh- and twelfth-century Italian bell towers. Other features Italianate in flavour, though not so obvious, are the porches symmetrically placed at the west end of the church. In their present arched form they recall elements of a Palladian villa,<sup>93</sup> though in the original drawing they were more reminiscent of lych-gates.<sup>94</sup>

Two explanations of these changes may be advanced. The design of the church can be compared with that of another Morningside church by a much better known architect – St Peter's Roman Catholic Church, Falcon Avenue, which Sir Robert Lorimer

was commissioned to design in 1905; its completion was delayed until the late 1920s.<sup>95</sup> Sufficient of the building would have been completed in the first stage of the operation to have enabled McLachlan to absorb the design, for the whole of the eastern end was in use by 1910.<sup>96</sup> It is interesting that Lorimer's drawings for the completion of the building are dated May 1927;<sup>97</sup> McLachlan's revised plans are dated June 1927.<sup>98</sup>

Is there a possibility that knowledge of these plans for the completion of St Peter's led McLachlan to give that building a closer inspection and caused him to change his design in some details? There are numerous similarities between the two completed churches. Lorimer's St Peter's is dominated by a campanile remarkably like McLachlan's, and the eastern gable too can be compared to McLachlan's. Inside, the combination of exposed brickwork and whitewashed plaster walls is similar. Tall narrow round-headed windows appear in both. Indeed, it has been remarked that in St Peter's Lorimer combines Italian and Gothic elements,<sup>99</sup> while elsewhere it has been described as 'of no particular style but vaguely suggestive of an early Christian basilica'.<sup>100</sup>

But even McLachlan's first design was at least partly Italian in inspiration. One hesitates to say that this was entirely due to Lorimer's use of it in the first stage of the building of St Peter's. Nor would it have

been entirely due to McLachlan's training, which, as far as we can tell, was reasonably traditional.<sup>101</sup> But a trip to Italy sometime before 1919 may have affected his choice of style.<sup>102</sup>

The overall townscape at The Holy Corner has not altered significantly since the completion of the Congregational Church, although inevitably some architectural details and the functions of the buildings have changed. The porch of the Baptist Church is now glazed, and additions have been made to the north and south sides.<sup>103</sup> Sadly Christ Church has lost a number of pinnacles.<sup>104</sup> In 1979 the congregation of North Morningside combined with that of the Congregational Church to become Morningside United Church, and in 1981 North Morningside Church, now vacant, was purchased by the Holy Corner Church Centre (itself formed two years before by the Holy Corner Churches) for use as a community centre. Subsequently renamed the Eric Liddell Centre, it is now undergoing large-scale internal redevelopment, detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>105</sup> The Holy Corner remains an outstanding example of church building effort of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Edinburgh.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

This article was originally written in 1980, and it has not always been possible to take into account more recent published work, though some references have been added. The present location of all plans here cited as belonging to the Merchant Company is uncertain, though some of the archive material was transferred to the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, in August 1993. My thanks are due to Miss Kitty Cruft and Mr Maurice Berrill for their advice and help.

- 1 *Edinburgh Evening Express*, 25 January 1883.
- 2 Ordnance Survey maps, 1852.
- 3 Minutes of the Town Council of Edinburgh, 30 November 1814, quoted in *History and Derivation of Edinburgh Street Names* (Edinburgh Corporation City Engineer's Department 1975), p. 46.
- 4 Ordnance Survey maps, 1852.
- 5 *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, 31 (1962), pp. 9–10. In 1729 the whole estate and lands of Merchiston were bought



- by the Governors of George Watson's Hospital. Subsequently, however, some of the estate was disposed of; for example, a small area was sold back to Francis Lord Napier in 1752.
- 6 Ordnance Plan of the Merchiston Estate, 1855 (Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 7 Layout for Feuing drawn up by David Rhind, Architect, 1844 (Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 8 *Builder*, 26 June 1875, p. 569, describes the expansion of Merchiston: 'Merchiston, a south-western suburb, laid out for villas is rapidly being taken up; some of these are evidently designed by architects; but the majority evidently emanate from the offices of the builders'.
  - 9 *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, edited by Rev. William Ewing, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1914), I, p. 6.
  - 10 Minutes of a Meeting of the Deacons' Court, 15 June 1847, Scottish Record Office (SRO), CH3/421/3. See also William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, 4 vols (Edinburgh 1849–52), IV, p. 329.
  - 11 *Scotsman*, 3 April 1874.
  - 12 *Post-Office Annual Directory* (later *Post-Office Edinburgh and Leith Directory*) for the years 1837–38 to 1846–47.
  - 13 In 1889 the Free congregation started discussing the possibility of a new church (Minutes of a Meeting of the Deacons' Court, 4 November 1889, SRO CH3/421/4). These discussions eventually led to the erection of their third church, the weighty baroque building which has now become the Churchhill Theatre. A consideration of this building is outwith the scope of this article, but it is important to note that Free congregations normally found their first hastily built churches of the 1840s inadequate after a number of years. More often than not, we find new, larger and more pretentious buildings being erected within a couple of decades. However, the Morningside congregation is unusual in having had three homes between the Disruption in 1843 and the Union with the United Presbyterians in 1900. It was the only church in Edinburgh to have this distinction. See *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, II, p. 6.
  - 14 The City Road Trust had exclusive right to use the piece of land in front of the church; see Book of Feu Charters of the Governors of George Watson's Hospital, May 1856. This right was given up in 1872 (Minute of a Meeting of the Deacons' Court, 14 March 1872, SRO CH3/421/3).
  - 15 Minutes of Meetings of the Deacons' Court, 14 and 18 March 1872, SRO CH3/421/3. The others invited to submit plans were: [J. W. and J?] Hay, [John] Starforth, [R. Rowand] Anderson, [R.] Thornton Shiells, [J. T.] Rothead, and [Robert] Paterson.
  - 16 Minute of a Meeting of the Deacons' Court, 24 April 1872, SRO CH3/421/3.
  - 17 David MacGibbon (1832–1902), educated at the High School, Edinburgh, and Edinburgh University, 'continued his professional studies in Edinburgh and London' (*Builder*, 8 March 1902). Thomas Ross (1839–1930) joined him as an assistant in 1862, and became his partner between 1872 and 1873 (*Scotsman*, 5 December 1930; *Post-Office Directory*, 1872–73). MacGibbon undertook a variety of commissions in the 1850s.
  - 18 *British Architect*, 17 April 1874, p. 251.
  - 19 *Scotsman*, 3 April 1874.
  - 20 *History of the Baptists in Scotland from Pre-Reformation Times*, edited by Rev. George Yuille (Glasgow 1927), pp. 131–132.
  - 21 'Feuing Plan of Merchiston and Abbotsford Parks and Merchiston Terrace, Boroughmuirhead, being Parts of the Estate of Merchiston Belonging to the Governors of George Watson Hospital by David Rhind Architect, 54 Great King Street, Edinburgh 1862' (Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 22 Elevations of the west part of Merchiston Terrace by David Rhind, dated 4 March 1863 (Merchant Company Plan Store, Stewarts–Melville College, Edinburgh).
  - 23 Minutes of a Meeting of the Governors of George Watson's Hospital, 12 February 1863 (Minute Book, 1856–64, Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 24 A different account is given by David Walker, 'The Architecture of MacGibbon and Ross', in *Studies in Scottish Antiquity*, edited by D. J. Breeze (Edinburgh 1984), pp. 391–449 (p. 402), who says that it was MacGibbon who finally re-designed and built Merchiston Terrace. Robert Paterson (1825–1889) served his apprenticeship as a joiner with the firm William Beattie & Sons 'in order to obtain a practical knowledge requisite for the profession of an architect' (*Scotsman*, 7 October 1889). He rose to become City Assessor in Edinburgh, following in his father's footsteps. As an independent architect, he executed numerous works, including the Cafe Royal (c. 1863) and the Windsor Hotel, Princes Street, now the Royal Overseas League (c. 1879). Farmer also erected a bakehouse at the south-east end. It is now occupied by a firm of painters and decorators.
  - 25 Elevation of the west part of Merchiston Terrace by David MacGibbon (Merchant Company Plan Store, Stewarts–Melville College, Edinburgh).
  - 26 Minute of a Meeting of the Governors of George Watson's Hospital, 22 February 1866 (Minute Book, 1864–1875, Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 27 *Post-Office Directory* for 1866–67.
  - 28 Book of Feu Charters of the Governors of George Watson's Hospital (Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh).
  - 29 This did not appear on the original drawings (note 22).
  - 30 See note 21.



- 31 *Post-Office Directory* for 1870–71.
- 32 *Post-Office Directory* for 1878–79.
- 33 The total cost of the new church was £3868. 15. 3, as reported at a meeting of the Deacons' Court, 3 March 1875, SRO CH3/421/3.
- 34 See note 26. This minute also reports a letter of 18 March 1863 from Robert Paterson to David Rhind, saying 'I think it worthy of your consideration whether the style is not too expensive. I fear it will seriously operate against the feuing of the remainder of the Terrace.'
- 35 His appointment may also be due to the fact that his father, Charles MacGibbon, had held the position of Master of the Merchant Company, 1852–53.
- 36 Alexander Eddington, *North Morningside Church, Edinburgh: History of the Congregation, 1863–1930* (Edinburgh 1930), pp. 4–5.
- 37 *Builder*, 23 April 1881, p. 502. The church was designed by Robert Paterson; cf. Eddington, *North Morningside Church*, p. 25.
- 38 Minute of a Meeting of the Building Committee, 20 January 1880, SRO CH3/728/8.
- 39 Minute of a Meeting of the Managers, 4 July 1879, SRO CH3/728/8.
- 40 *Scotsman*, 13 October 1881.
- 41 See J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London 1960), p. 363; Andor Gomme and David Walker, *Architecture of Glasgow* (London 1968), p. 173.
- 42 *Building News*, 5 March 1880, p. 296.
- 43 *Architect*, 22 October 1881, p. 277.
- 44 *Edinburgh Evening Express*, 25 January 1883.
- 45 *Builder*, 26 March 1881, p. 369.
- 46 *Builder*, 23 April 1881, p. 503.
- 47 *Builder*, 26 March 1881, p. 369.
- 48 Robertson was educated at the Royal High School, Edinburgh, and then spent three years at the School of Design, after which he entered the Office of the City Architect, David Cousin.
- 49 *Scotsman*, 3 November 1893.
- 50 The hall was designed by Thomas Marwick in 1886 (Edinburgh Dean of Guild Plans, lodged 13 May 1886).
- 51 A watercolour perspective of the church by David Robertson (now in the Ker Memorial Church) shows no tenements to the east of the church, but in fact they are referred to in the *Post-Office Directory* for 1891–92.
- 52 Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900*, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1904), I, pp. 492–493.
- 53 Edinburgh Dean of Guild Plans, lodged 18 June 1896.
- 54 Small, *History of the United Presbyterian Church*, I, pp. 493–494.
- 55 Thus no comments on (for example) Blackfriars Parish Church, Glasgow, by Campbell Douglas (1878), or on St Ninian's Wynd Church, Glasgow, and Strathbungo Church, Glasgow, both by W. G. Rowan (1888–89, 1886). But Rowand Anderson's Catholic Apostolic Church, Edinburgh (1873–76), which was regarded as Norman, received considerable praise; see *Builder*, 5 October 1872, p. 778, and 26 June 1875, p. 569. Was this because it was less severely Romanesque?
- 56 See Harold Skelton, 'History of Christ Church, Morningside' (1955; typescript, Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Central Library), p. 6. The decision was taken at a meeting on 12 February 1875.
- 57 *Builder*, 1 January 1876, p. 7.
- 58 Skelton, 'Christ Church, Morningside', p. 6.
- 59 *Scotsman*, 5 June 1876.
- 60 Skelton, 'Christ Church, Morningside', p. 7; *Builder*, 30 December 1876, p. 1260.
- 61 Skelton, 'Christ Church, Morningside', p. 10. The congregation was still in debt for the purchase of two villas adjacent to the church.
- 62 *Scotsman*, 29 April 1876.
- 63 NMRS Architects file; *Post-Office Directory* for 1840–41; obituaries in *Builder*, 30 March 1917, p. 206, and 90th Annual Report of the Council of the Royal Scottish Academy; *Heriotes*, March 1917. It is appropriate to add here that Blanc was a founding member of the Old Edinburgh Club and served as Vice-President in 1914 and 1916.
- 64 *Mayfield United Free Church, 1875–1925* (Edinburgh 1925), p. 23.
- 65 For example John Burnet, John A. Campbell, R. D. Sandilands, John Keppie, and A. W. Paterson, all of whom attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. Others, like Rowand Anderson, simply toured France making copious drawings.
- 66 *About St. Matthew's Morningside* (Edinburgh 1908), p. 13.
- 67 But not his first commission. In 1873 he exhibited a 'Design for a suburban villa near Edinburgh' at the Royal Scottish Academy.
- 68 The competition is mentioned in the Minutes of Meetings from November 1875 to January 1876 of the Committee formed to negotiate the erection of the new Free Church at Mayfield, SRO CH3/1013/7.
- 69 *Scotsman*, 5 October 1878.
- 70 *Idem*.
- 71 *Mayfield United Free Church*, p. 23.
- 72 William Burges, *Ecclesiologist*, 23 (1862), p. 336, as quoted by Stefan Muthesius, *High Victorian Movement in Architecture 1850–70* (London and Boston 1972), p. 117.

- 73 For example St Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral, Inverness (1869), by Alexander Ross; Dowanhill Church, Glasgow (1865), by Melvin & Leiper; and the former Gilmorehill Church, Glasgow (1876-78), by James Sellars. Also the competitive designs for St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, by Alexander Ross and by William Burges were French in character.
- 74 Alexander Ross, in the text accompanying his design for St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, when it was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in August 1872, wrote that 'a severe and comparatively early style of French Gothic has been selected, so as to avoid excessive detail and carving and as approaching more nearly to the best period of Scottish Gothic which in much of its massive, severe character is more nearly allied to the Early French than any other and many details may be found identical in both'.
- 75 See *Builder*, 1 January 1876, p. 7: 'The Episcopal Church at Merchiston promises fairly'. The design was exhibited as late as 1898 at the Royal Scottish Academy, and caught the attention of the *Scotsman* for 12 March 1898, which seems significant as individual designs are rarely mentioned in its reviews of Royal Scottish Academy exhibitions. For Mayfield Church see *Builder*, 30 December 1876, p. 1260: 'decidedly perky in character'.
- 76 Blanc used the French Gothic again for St James' United Presbyterian Church, Paisley (1880), which with minor alterations reproduces the Mayfield design. For the Thomas Coats Memorial Church, Paisley, he submitted designs in both Early French and Scots Gothic (1885).
- 77 Blanc obviously drew his inspiration from more sources than Sainte-Chapelle. The tower and spire are perhaps derived from the south-west tower of Chartres. The use of the ambulatory may have been inspired by Burges' competition design for St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh.
- 78 Skelton, 'Christ Church, Morningside', p. 10.
- 79 *Builder*, 4 March 1876, p. 209, where it was observed that certain features in the design had been introduced purely for aesthetic effect: 'Prominent in the centre of the apse stands the pulpit, with an unmistakable baldachino, which rises to a great height over it. There is a certain fitness in this arrangement, seeing that in the Presbyterian Church, the pulpit occupies the chief place, although it may be that in this instance the feature in question possesses no particular significance, but it is merely introduced for aesthetic effect.'
- 80 *Scotsman*, 12 February 1875.
- 81 Minute of a Meeting of the Managers, 24 November 1874, SRO CH2/993/2. By that date the architects were fixing the boundaries of the church.
- 82 Minutes of Meetings of the Managers, 1 and 9 November 1875, SRO CH2/993/2. The design of the flèche was discussed, and an estimate for pointing the church was accepted.
- 83 Blanc was obviously well known to, and respected by, his contemporaries in Edinburgh at an early stage in his career; he was appointed President of the Edinburgh Architectural Association when only twenty-seven. Later in his career he must have had some contact with his Glasgow contemporaries through his membership of the Glasgow Ecclesiological Society, but it is hard to say how much contact he had in the 1870s.
- 84 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 October 1929.
- 85 Roderick G. Davies and Alexander Pollok, *Morningside Congregational Church: The Story of Fifty Years, 1887-1937* (Edinburgh 1937), p. 18.
- 86 Minutes of the Monthly Church Meeting, 10 May 1922 (Minute Book No. 2, 1906-26, Morningside Congregational Church).
- 87 *Ibid.*, 1 November 1922.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 13 May 1924.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 13 May 1924 and 30 September 1925.
- 90 Minutes of the Business Meeting of 2 February 1927 (Minute Book No. 3, 1926-46, Morningside Congregational Church).
- 91 Edinburgh Dean of Guild Plans, first set lodged 6 May 1926, amended set lodged 24 June 1927.
- 92 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 October 1929.
- 93 For example, the pavilions of the Villa Godi.
- 94 Lych-gates were revived relatively frequently in the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, e.g. Butterfield's simple gate at Coalpitheath (1844-45) and the elaborate gate by J. D. Sedding at Ermington Church (1889).
- 95 It was begun in April 1906, and a celebration in honour of its completion was held on 6 January 1929; see *The Catholic Directory for the Clergy and Laity in Scotland*, 1930, p. 292.
- 96 See photographs in *Architectural Review*, 27 February 1910, p. 89.
- 97 Lorimer drawings for St Peter's Church dated August 1905, January 1906, and 17 and 19 May 1927 (Lorimer Collection, NMRS).
- 98 Edinburgh Dean of Guild Plans, lodged 24 June 1927.
- 99 Christopher Hussey, *The Work of Sir Robert Lorimer* (London 1931), p. 78.
- 100 Peter Anson, *Innes Review*, 5 (1954), p. 139.
- 101 He became a Licentiate of the RIBA in 1911 and a Fellow in 1925. He began practising at 24 Charlotte Square, moving to 4 Melville Crescent by 1922, and subsequently to 6 Melville Crescent. He appears to have worked both in Edinburgh and Glasgow. His practice does not seem to have been extensive; among his larger jobs were the Commercial Bank, Hyndland Road, Glasgow (1934), and additions to Belford House,

- Edinburgh (1922). See death certificate in HM Register House; Kalendars of the RIBA; Royal Scottish Academy exhibition catalogues.
- 102 He exhibited a drawing of 'a Palazzo (Ca' D'Oro) on the Grand Canal Venice' at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1919.
- 103 When fire damage was repaired, further alterations were made to the church by David Carr, Architects: Edinburgh Dean of Guild Plans, lodged 22 March 1974, 4 October 1974 and 15 May 1975.
- 104 J. Gifford, C. McWilliam and D. Walker, *Edinburgh* (The Buildings of Scotland, Harmondsworth 1984), p. 616.
- 105 Information kindly supplied by Patricia Richardson at the Eric Liddell Centre. The design for the conversion was the subject of an RIAS competition held in 1987, which was won by Nicholas Groves-Raines, Architects.