

The Story of Morningside Parish Church.

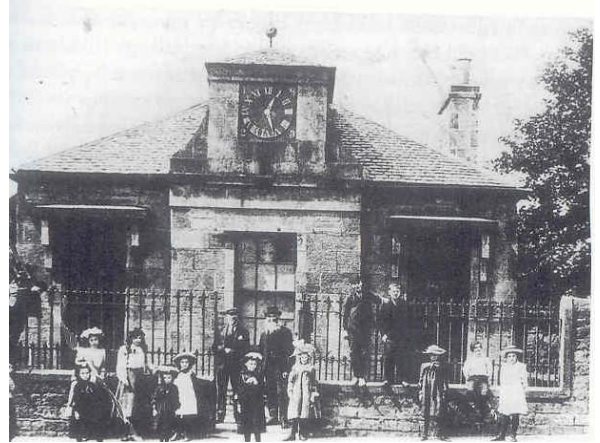
As part of the Family Service held on 26th March 2006, a brief résumé of the history of Morningside Parish Church was presented. This is a slightly amended version of the text used on that occasion.

The theme was chosen on account of the day being Mothering Sunday. That date became established in the 16th century as a holiday for domestic servants and apprentices, who were often very young, to go home to visit their families. Mid-Lent Sunday was also traditionally the time for people to go to worship in their “Mother church”. In the Protestant tradition, the term mother church is used to describe the church “established originally as the first mission of a particular region”¹.

In 1800, Morningside was a village on the road in to Edinburgh from the south. It consisted of little more than a row of thatched cottages, with bigger houses around on the large estates, and the farms of Canaan, Egypt, Braid, Comiston and Plewlands beyond.

A two-room school was opened in 1823, and as The Old Schoolhouse it can still be seen at 140 Morningside Road. Children came to this school from as far away as Swanston, some on foot, some on farm carts, some on horseback, and the horses were tied up in the little lane beside it - still called Cuddy Lane.

At that time, the village of Morningside lay within the Church of Scotland parish of St Cuthbert's, the church below the castle. For many years, a minister would come out from St Cuthbert's of an evening to take a service for the people of Morningside in the wee village school².



The Old Schoolhouse (by permission of Charles Smith² ©).

In 1837 it was declared high time that Morningside had a church of its own, and the parish was created by act of the General Assembly of May 1838. A building fund was raised by subscription, and the original Morningside Parish Church opened on July 29th 1838, at the end of Newbattle Terrace. The preacher at that very first service was a famous minister, Dr Thomas Chalmers. He was a leader of the evangelical side in the Church of Scotland, and when in 1843 the Disruption, or split in the Church, occurred, he was elected Moderator of the First Assembly of the new Free Church of Scotland. A copy of the well known painting by DO Hill commemorating that event hangs in the Session Room in the Braid Centre today.



One third of ministers and members left the established Church of Scotland to go to the Free Church in 1843. A Morningside Free Church was set up, but it did not get a building of its own till much later. The first few services were held in Dr Chalmers' large villa, with 300 people packed into all the rooms. The sermon was preached from the landing. Soon they were using a tent at Abbotsford Park in place of a church, when one day a naughty boy cut the ropes and the canvas fell down around a congregation of 400²! In later years (1874-1894) they used the small church near the corner of Colinton Road, subsequently sold to the Baptists. The architect's plan for Morningside High Church,

as the final building at Churchhill was called, includes a tower that was never built.

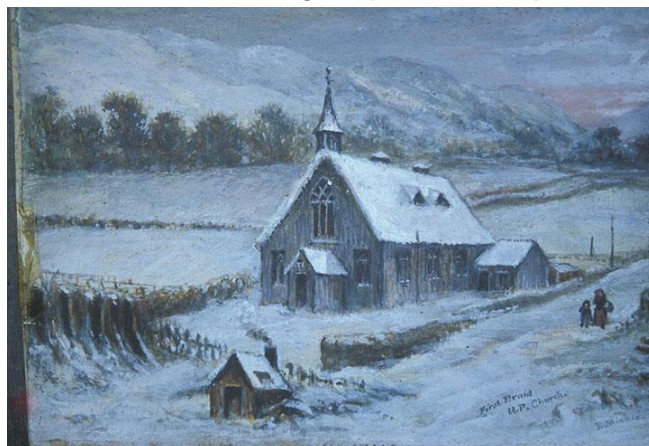
Interior of Morningside High Church, (by permission of Edinburgh City Libraries, ©).

Others had left the Church of Scotland before the Disruption, and some of them joined up to form the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1847. As more people came to live in South Morningside, by 1880 it was felt they should build a church there too, and thanks to a generous donor they were able to buy an iron church – these came in kit form, the original portable flat-pack.

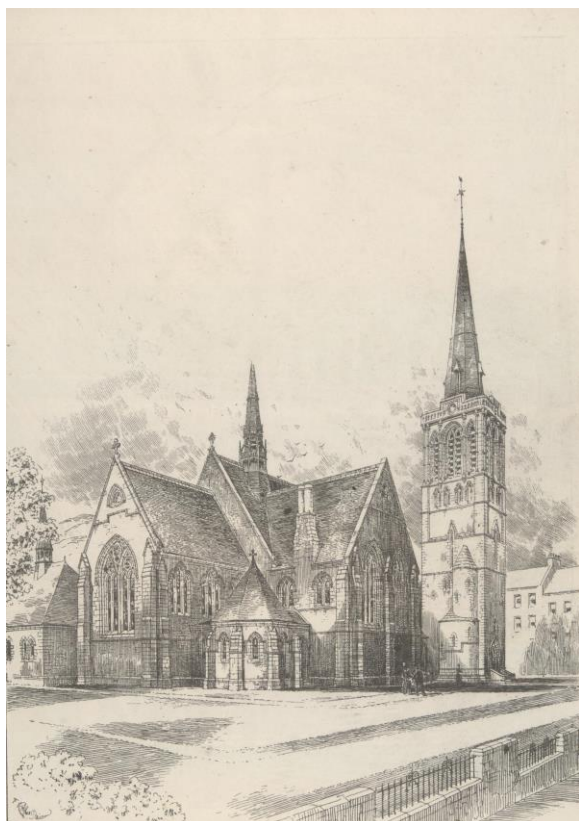
The Iron Kirk had a wooden frame, corrugated iron sides and roof, and was lined inside with pine boarding, often very well decorated. The painting is by E. Michie (see it and another in colour on the website), and it shows what that First Braid U.P. Church looked like in 1883 when set up in a field just where Braid Road meets Comiston Road. How little traffic there was around then!

Braid Iron Kirk 1883

(from colour slide courtesy Mr Bill Smith)



The Church of Scotland also put up an Iron Kirk, in 1885, at what is 2 Cluny Avenue. This was a Mission Station of the Morningside Parish Church and was named St Matthew's. The architect's plan for the permanent St Matthew's Parish Church, the building we use as our church today, included another tower that was never built. The foundation stone was laid in 1889, and the inaugural service was held on 4th May 1890. The hall was built in 1896; in 1901 the chancel was added and the Henry "Father" Willis organ installed.



Despite the difficulties that led to the Disruption, good had come in that many more people came to be active in worshipping God together and wanting to help others to do so too. The Free Church was no different, and it raised money to build South Morningside Free Church – the building we now know as the Cluny Centre. That congregation met at first in the church hall, the first ever building in Cluny Drive, in 1889. There is a cross in that tower on the South Morningside building that still shines out over Christmas and before Easter across Morningside.

By the close of the nineteenth century there were five Presbyterian churches between Church Hill and the new South Morningside Primary School, which opened in 1892. It had only become compulsory for everyone to go to school since 1872.

In *Morningside Memories*³ an elderly lady recalled going to that school:

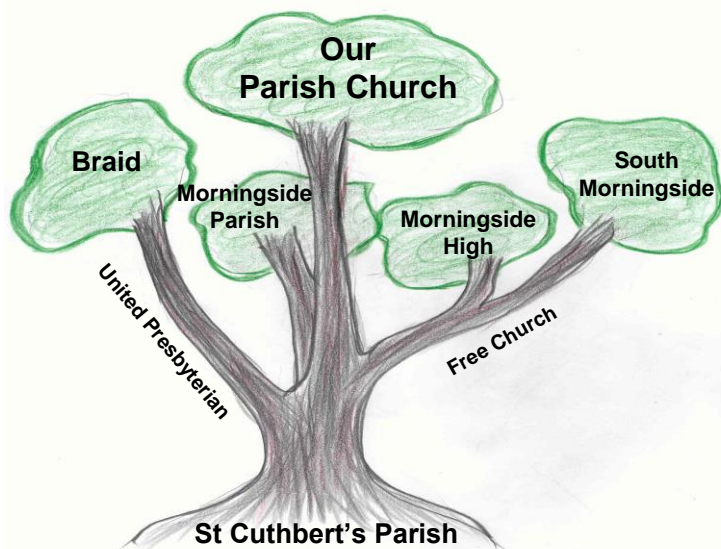
"When we went to the school first, there was no pencils and paper. We used slates. An' ye wrote on it wi' a slate pencil. And when you wanted to rub out, ye did (*demonstrated rubbing out with sleeve*) - if ye forgot yer rag, you used your sleeve."

Architect's drawing for St Matthew's Church.
(by permission of Edinburgh City Libraries ©).

At the turn of the nineteenth century a congregation of eleven from Braid (UP) Church set up a Mission station at Greenbank, then right at the edge of the city, and still our southern neighbour. Greenbank Parish Church celebrated its centenary in 2000.

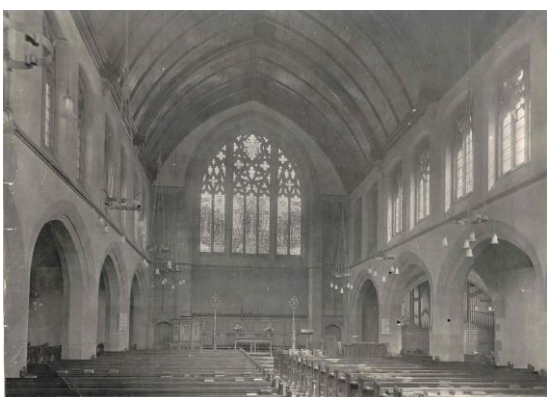
Families do try to make up their quarrels, and gradually our Scottish Presbyterian churches did so. First of all the United Presbyterians joined with most of the Free Church, to make the United Free Church of Scotland in 1900. Finally in 1929 the Church of Scotland was re-united with that United Free Church. The chair belonging to Thomas Chalmers used at a meeting to celebrate that occasion, is kept in the vestry here now.

Dr Thomas Chalmers' chair,
(From colour slide courtesy of Mr Bill Smith)



Our church's family tree is quite complicated. We have the original Morningside Parish Church, opened in 1838 as the mother church of this region. Then in 1843 there is the Disruption and the Free Church splits off, settles later in Morningside High (opened in 1894), and a new Free Church is built in South Morningside (1889). Braid is opened by the United Presbyterians, first in the Iron Kirk of 1883, and St Matthew's (the permanent building that took the name of Cluny between 1974 and 2003) was opened in 1890. In 1960 Morningside High joined with Morningside Parish Church, and the vacated High Church was bought by Edinburgh City Council. It was converted into the Church Hill Theatre, opened in 1965.

In 1974, South Morningside joined with St Matthew's. The St Matthew's building became Cluny Parish Church, and the South Morningside building was converted into halls and small rooms for a variety of uses – the Cluny Centre as we know it now.



Interior of South Morningside as a Church
(Photograph courtesy of Mr Geoff Bulmer)



Interior of converted upper hall in Cluny Centre,
(colour photograph courtesy of Mr Forbes Bowman)



In 1990, Morningside joined with the Braid Church to become Morningside Braid, using the Braid Church building. The first Morningside Parish Church building was acquired by Napier University and converted for lectures.

Interior of original Morningside Parish Church (1990), (from a colour photograph, courtesy of Miss Jean Bowie).

Finally on April 13th 2003 when Morningside Braid united with Cluny, the name Morningside Parish Church came into use again. Dr Derek Browning is Minister.

Morningside Parish has a special relationship to St Cuthbert's Parish Church. The stained glass window commemorating St Cuthbert, designed especially for the union of our churches into the new Morningside Parish Church in 2003, was the gift of the Friends of Morningside Parish Church.



The St Cuthbert window (From colour photograph, courtesy of Mr Forbes Bowman)

At the service on Mothering Sunday we had in place a new pulpit fall, with St Cuthbert's cross embroidered on it, most generously donated anonymously since the union. We also had on the lectern an old pulpit fall, showing Noah's Ark and the rainbow of God's promise, from our Mother Church, the first Morningside Parish Church.

References

1. *Wikipedia.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_church
2. *Smith Charles.* 1978. *Historic South Edinburgh.* Vol 1.
3. *Morningside Heritage Association et al.* 1986. *Morningside Memories.*

Much more information can be found in the various publications on Historic South Edinburgh by Charles Smith, and Morningside Memories volumes 1 and 2, published by the Morningside Heritage Association.

There are also booklets that were published to commemorate anniversaries of the various churches.

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