

Heritage Trails, Sir Andrew Duncan, 1884-1952

George Duncan, Mrs R A M McCreadie, and the Misses Mure

The Story

Regarded locally as "without doubt the greatest Irvine man of his generation" ('Irvine Herald'), Andrew Rae Duncan (1884-1952), born at 8 Waterside, was a son of George Duncan, the missionary at the Bethel Mission - this building is now the theatre of the Harbour Arts Centre. George Duncan (1840-1908), born in Wishaw, married Jessie Rae in Dumfriesshire and lived in Annan before coming to Irvine in about 1884.

The plot of ground where the Arts Centre stands was bought, as recorded in the title deeds, by Mrs Rachel Anne Mure McCreadie, the widow of Patrick McCreadie of Perceton, and her daughters the Misses Mure (Mary Rachel & Helen Jane). The Mission Hall was built in 1888. When Mrs McCreadie died in 1892, her third passed to her daughters. When Mary died in 1912, Helen J Mure became sole owner. In 1914 it was known as the Shore Mission Hall and ownership passed to the Trustees (of whom Miss Mure was one) of the Perceton Mission Trust. In 1946 it was sold to the 1st Ayrshire Boy Scouts for £800, then in 1954 to David Allan (Knitwear) Ltd of London for £600, and in 1965 to the Royal Burgh of Irvine for £3,058 16/- so that the newly-formed Harbour Arts Group could establish the Arts Centre. The Misses Mure of Perceton also supported both Fullarton and Irvine Free Churches - the latter was renamed the Mure U F Church in 1900. [Their father, Patrick B Mure Macreadie, a landed proprietor and JP, laid a tramway in 1854 from his Perceton coal pits past Newmoor down to Townhead (Strawhorn p.141).]

The 1891 census records George Duncan as the Missionary living in the cottage beside the Mission Hall. In the 1901 census, he is living at 22 Bridgegate as a "shoe merchant", possibly to make ends meet with a family of eight children. At his death in 1908, he is again recorded as 'missionary'.

Andrew Duncan was educated at Loudoun Street School and Irvine Royal Academy, and graduated M.A. from Glasgow University in 1903. Going into law, he gained an LL.B. from Glasgow University, and an LL.D. from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. Going into business, he became Secretary, then Vice-President (1920-1927) of the Shipbuilding Federation, war-time Coal Controller (1919-1920), was knighted in 1921, and became President of the British Iron and Steel Federation. He served as Chairman, Central Electricity Board, 1927-1935, and as a Director of the Bank of England. In 1925 and 1932, he was Chairman of Royal Commissions to inquire into the Coal Industry in Nova Scotia. In 1926 he was appointed, by the Mackenzie King Canadian government, Chairman of a Royal Commission to inquire into the grievances of the Eastern Maritime Provinces of Canada. In that year he attended Irvine Burns Club Centenary Dinner and in 1927 was the Club President. He was Chairman of the Sea-Fish Commission for the United Kingdom, 1933-35, and belonged to the Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus of Italy; other roles included High Sheriff, County of London, 1939-40, and one of H.M. Lieutenants for the City of London. He was co-opted into Churchill's wartime government as President of the Board of Trade and Minister of Supply, serving twice in both offices. In 1948 he received the freedom of his native town, and attended the prizegiving at Irvine Royal Academy. (Sources: Strawhorn p.208, Irvine Burns Club s.v. Andrew Duncan, and Durham Mining Museum Who's Who.)