

72 BERKELEY STREET

Our 40th anniversary celebrations have stimulated me to do some research on the history of the buildings on this and neighbouring sites, and I thought some of the results might be of interest to members and friends.

The north and south rows of buildings in Berkeley Street between Granville Street and Elderslie Street were originally known jointly as Berkley [with only two "e"s!] Terrace, of which the north side (No.1-19) was first occupied around 1860, and the south side (No.20-38) about a year later. The numbering on both sides actually started in Granville Street itself, and likewise ended in Elderslie Street, leaving only 15 numbers on each side of what eventually became part of Berkeley Street. The later street numbering is farther confused by the fact that some numbers are omitted, and one building has two numbers. Our own site represented No.13 of the Terrace, and was first occupied from 1860 until 1869 by James S. Napier (of Napier & M'Intyre, iron merchants of 33 Oswald Street) and his family. The Napiers had two sons, who were prize-winning scholars at Glasgow Academy. Initially, their neighbour at No.11/68 was the notorious "Dr." Edward W. Pritchard, hanged in 1865 for the murders of both his wife and his mother-in-law, and suspected also of having been previously responsible for the death on 5th May 1863 of his 25-year-old family servant, Elizabeth McGrain, in a fire which started in her attic bedroom at No.11/68, although there was insufficient evidence to charge him with that offence. As a matter of incidental interest, only the three central houses on each side (64-68 and 71-75) have these original attics, although on the south side the distinctive dormer windows don't form part of the façade, making their presence less obvious.

As an organist, I'm particularly interested in the occupant of our site from 1886 to 1894. He was James K. Strachan (1860-1933), born in Errol, Perthshire, and starting his musical career as a choirboy at St.Paul's Episcopal Church (the future Episcopal Cathedral) in Dundee, later becoming organist of St.Enoch's Free Church in that city. An indication of his outstanding ability was that he eventually became a pupil of the great French organist Alexandre Guilmant, who may have been a guest at 72 Berkeley Street during his visits to Glasgow in the 1890s. After moving to Glasgow, Strachan initially became organist and choirmaster of Kelvingrove U.P. Church (1880-1888), a magnificent French Gothic building standing on the gusset between Kelvingrove and Derby Streets, in front of the south gates of Kelvingrove Park. Sadly, the building was demolished in 1925 after being gutted by a fire (thought to have been caused by a spark from the conflagration which destroyed the first Kelvin Hall). The church was never rebuilt: remarkably, this prime site is still an open space. Strachan went on to be organist successively of Claremont U.P. Church (1889-1891), of the Free Church College (1892-1893), and latterly of Anderston Parish Church. He was also a regular recitalist in the St.Andrew's Halls between 1891 and 1927.

I was amazed to discover that between 1897 and 1899 Rev. Albert Lazenby of our St.Vincent Street Church lived at No.6/54 in the Terrace. I don't know if that property was actually the Manse (in the sense of belonging to the congregation), but this was a connection we had with Berkeley Street well before the 1980s.

Returning to the theme of Organists... In the 1920s and 1930s, long before the Glasgow Society of Organists was associated with Glasgow Unitarian Church, it was holding meetings in Berkeley Terrace. I used to imagine that these events would have taken place in the then Musicians' Club (No.29/73), but in fact they were held next door to that, in what was then a Masonic Lodge (No.30/75). In those days the Organists' Society used to hold an annual magazine night, when selected members would

contribute articles on subjects of interest to organists: this imaginary magazine was called "The Berkeleian", even long after the Society had ceased to use the premises in Berkeley Street. The Editor of the magazine had the scripts of most of these articles typed and bound in volumes which can still be consulted in the Society's Archives in the Mitchell Library.

Up till about the time of the First World War the properties in Berkeley Terrace were mostly used as domestic accommodation, but from the 1920s onwards the former houses were increasingly put to commercial and professional use. No.13/72 was no exception, and from 1924 to 1926 it was used by The Health Institute, an organisation of chiropractors. The health theme was continued between 1928 and 1943 by Miss Elizabeth Donnachie, a naturopath from Prestwick. She shared the building with various other individuals and organisations such as The Aerograph Co. Ltd., an engineering firm specialising in pumps and spraying machinery. From 1943 till 1953 the building was the home of the Glasgow branch of the Old Contemptible Association, an organisation of First World War veterans. The site seems to have been unoccupied from about 1954 until 1965.

Fire is a recurring theme in this story, and it was as a result of another fire that the original building at No.13/72 was demolished and replaced in the mid-1960s by our present premises; however, I've been unable to discover when the fire actually occurred. In this connection, The Scotsman reported on Wednesday 7th February 1962 that an undisclosed company wished to develop a site at 72 Berkeley Street for offices and showrooms. Presumably that was after the fire, but maybe not! Sadly, the architect of the rebuild obviously made no attempt to match the other buildings in the terrace, an approach which I hope would not be permitted nowadays. In fact The Scotsman of Wednesday 24th March 1965 reports that even the then Planning Committee, in response to complaints not only from its own officials, but also from the Glasgow Institute of Architects, had instructed the Town Clerk to write a letter of censure to the architect responsible, for infringing the approved plans, which had stipulated that this office development would be "married" into the houses on either side; as can be seen all too clearly, it did not harmonise at all, especially in the specified aspects of height, stonework, and style of architecture; there was also thought to be too much glasswork. Firm action was threatened to prevent any similar infringements in future. Subsequent correspondence in The Glasgow Herald expressed the understandable view that stronger action should have been taken at the time. This conflict of style is all the more regrettable in that it was quite unnecessary, since plenty of other properties in the terrace were already being used for similar purposes without any such drastic external alteration.

From 1965, John Haig & Co. Ltd., whisky distillers, appear to have been the sole occupants of the new building until the Glasgow Unitarians came along in 1983, by which time the place had long been known as Haig House. Users of the building may have noticed that we still retain Haigs' "H" motif in the shape of the main door handles. We have also been glad to continue the use of the building for matters of the spirit, albeit not in liquid form! In spite of the unfortunate aesthetic considerations, the building has suited our purposes well, and has been a practical and flexible solution to our accommodation needs for the past 40 years. Long may it continue to do so as Glasgow Unitarian House!

Kerr Jamieson
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