



*Patrick Robson Mackay, CBE, Doctor of Divinity
Photo, Courtesy Executors of the late Mrs Jean Mackay*

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Dr Patrick Mackay, C.B.E., was born at Latheron, Lybster, Caithness on the 6th July 1854. Patrick's father, Free Church Minister the Rev. John Mackay, was greatly interested in education and four of his sons gained their doctorates – two in medicine, one in law and Patrick as doctor of divinity.

On entering St Andrew's University at the age of fourteen, Patrick Mackay's initial studies included literary subjects and philosophy and he obtained honours in both. He was awarded the Gray Prize in his year for the best essay on Metaphysics. On graduation Mackay enrolled in the University of Edinburgh with the intention of following his father into the Free Church. In 1878 he became a licensed preacher then spent nine months gaining experience as Assistant at North Leith Free Church.

In February 1879 he was ordained as only the second Free Church Minister of Prestonpans in succession to the Rev. Bruce Cunningham. He was to remain incumbent there for almost twenty years.

Prestonpans School Board

His ministry differed in several ways to that of Davidson in Prestonpans almost two centuries earlier. He took a hands on approach to religion and was very interested in the social well being of his congregation. Over the years due entirely to his influence that congregation doubled in number and his work became recognised and acknowledged throughout the county. Mackay like his father had a strong belief that education should be available to all children and was soon elected chairman of the Prestonpans School Board. Although funds from old educational trusts existed including those from James Schaw and Mary Murray they were not always administered to best advantage. As chairman he was able to direct those funds more beneficially to provide a greater standard of general education for children of the town.

Patrick Mackay's interests during his Prestonpans ministry were not entirely parochial. In 1882 he was asked by the Colonial Committee of the Free Church to consider an expedition to Luxor in Egypt to determine whether that place was a suitable venue for an expansion of the Free Church.

Colonial Missions to Luxor Gibraltar and India

Permission of his congregation for such a venture was obtained with some degree of reluctance. Mackay arrived in Egypt soon after the battle of Tel-el-Kebir and in addition to the primary reason for his visit he volunteered his services as Temporary Chaplain to the Highland Brigade and remained with that Regiment until he returned to his Prestonpans post late in 1883.

In April 1884 not long after his return to the town the Colonial Committee made a further request for Patrick Mackay to travel on their behalf to Gibraltar but his congregation did not welcome that new proposal. All 243 members of the congregation wrote their Minister a note stating "*We the undersigned, members and adherents of your congregation take the liberty of asking you to consider the matter well before coming to a decision. We earnestly hope you will consider the great work which is yet to be done, in this place and neighbourhood and the risk which all congregations must necessarily run where a change such as this takes place.*" That plea dated Prestonpans 28 April 1884 was presented to the Minister in scroll form.

The plea was successful. Mr Mackay subsequently declined the offer of a Gibraltar expedition on behalf of the Colonial Committee and continued with his normal ministerial duties until 1887 when, with the reluctant permission of his congregation, Patrick Mackay went overseas once more, this time to India. On this occasion he spent a year on behalf of the Anglo-Indian Evangelical Society acting as Minister of the Union Church at Mussoorie while also working in a military sanatorium and directly with the British troops stationed in the Province. The Rev. Mackay also began to write long articles containing details of India, his work and travels which were sent home to Scottish newspapers.

It was during that trip to India that he met Harriet Sprot whom he later married at her family home in Edinburgh on 11 June 1890. Patrick Mackay was then almost thirty six years old and Harriet eight years younger. Her father had emigrated to New Zealand to farm sheep and Harriet was born at Diamond Bay near Christchurch on the South Island. When she met Patrick Harriet was working in India as a children's governess.

On resumption of his Prestonpans duties Harriet proved to be of great assistance to The Rev. Mackay and involved herself wholeheartedly in caring for the working people of the town.

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After Harriet's father died in New Zealand her mother had returned to Scotland and settled in Edinburgh. After Harriet's marriage her mother with her still unmarried sisters and an aunt moved to Prestonpans where they rented accommodation at Northfield.

Mediation in 1893 Miners' Strike

Patrick Mackay's involvement in community matters was often greater than would be expected of the town Minister. In 1893 there was a strike at Prestongrange Colliery which threatened to be disastrous, in a financial sense, for the miners and indirectly for the economy of Prestonpans. The mine workers were becoming organised and most were Federation members but no proper union or political representation existed locally. During May 1893 the colliery was in liquidation and the liquidators had attempted to impose a ten per cent wage reduction on the workforce to allow the mine to operate until a new owner was found.

Not surprisingly the miners would not accept that reduction of income and from the second week of May 1893 staged a protest strike. The Mid and East Lothian Miners' Federation had a working fund of £1600 from which each striking miner was paid eight shillings per week, a sum increased by one shilling for each child of their families. Even for the time that was barely a subsistence income.

After three weeks, recognising the impasse between miners and the liquidators, Patrick Mackay voluntarily assumed the role of mediator. He successfully achieved a solution acceptable to both parties and the miners returned to work on the same wages as before the strike. To achieve the settlement the Rev. Mackay personally volunteered responsibility for six per cent of the miners' wages until a new colliery owner was found. There were 250 miners involved so that six per cent represented a formidable commitment by the Minister and also suggests a personal wealth not entirely dependent on his ministerial stipend. Another indication of some personal wealth was displayed when he became a shareholder and director of the Prestonpans Coffee House Company Limited with Lady Susan Grant-Suttie.

At the Miners' Federation of Mid and East Lothian Annual General Meeting during August 1893 it was formally agreed to recognise the assistance provided by Patrick Mackay. He was subsequently presented with a silver watch which the miners paid for personally by subscription.

Back to India Alone with a Dream

After the first Indian mission which among other benefits had resulted in his marriage to Harriet the Reverend Mackay remained in Prestonpans Free Church Manse with his wife, his children and two domestic servants until his tenure in Prestonpans came to a formal end late in 1898.

It was at that time that the Rev. Mackay is reported to have “received a Call which a servant of Christ may not without dishonour decline.” However Harriet gives a different version in her short autobiography. She suggests that in 1898 the Anglo-Indian Society required a deputy to undertake an expedition to India where the appointed person would conduct evangelical work, carry out surveys to determine the areas occupied by Europeans and their numbers, and assess the religious requirements of each sector.

Patrick Mackay was never in fact ‘called’ but rather volunteered to undertake the Indian expedition. His offer was initially declined by the Anglo-Indian Society because he was a married man with three young children. So the minister gave the Society two months to identify a suitable replacement, and if they failed to do so he would again offer to go.

Mrs Mackay’s autobiographical account continues: “*You* may be sure I was not willing to let him go, indeed I was most unwilling, especially as another baby was coming. I was constantly haunted with the thought.” However, before the aforementioned two months deadline expired Mrs Mackay had a dream in which she says: “the Saviour appeared and spoke to me.” As a direct result of that divine intervention she withdrew her objection to her husband going to India and in fact instead insisted that he *must* go.

So Patrick Mackay with some familial reluctance and at some personal expense, which would somewhat be defrayed by his resumed activities as newspaper correspondent, resigned as Minister of Prestonpans Free Church. The family had to find suitable alternative accommodation prior to the Patrick’s departure. And because of her condition Mrs Mackay insisted that any new accommodation should still be within reach of her doctor, William McEwan. Since Mrs Mackay’s mother had moved from Prestonpans to Stair Park in nearby Tranent she too moved out of Prestonpans and set up home with her children there in Hopetoun Cottage.

Mackay sailed to India leaving his wife at home pregnant with daughter Harriet. He travelled extensively preaching as

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he went. During those travels he assimilated the required information and met with people of all faiths and levels of society. Such was his success that he was able to arrange joint Anglican, Presbyterian, Hindu and Muslim meetings where the different religions were amicably discussed which could not even have been contemplated in immediately post-Reformation times.

At Darjeeling, following an earthquake, which became known as the Darjeeling Disaster, Mackay became physically involved in the rescue of an entire family from beneath a collapsed house. For that successful involvement, he and others were presented with a specially struck gold star medallion and a silk bound record of the presentation proceedings.

Shortly after he became ill and was ordered home but he recovered during the voyage and after a short spell with the family in Tranent, including his first sight of daughter Harriet, he therefore returned to complete his Indian mission. When his youngest son Patrick Hugh Robson Mackay was born on 23 January 1901 Patrick Mackay Senior was still apparently absent and in addition to being present at the delivery the child's birth was registered by eminent Prestonpans doctor and Town Provost William McEwan.

Although the Census of April 1901 shows the infant Patrick still living in Tranent there is no record anywhere in Scotland of his mother or father in the Census. But later in 1901 the Rev. Mackay was most certainly back in Scotland because for his achievements both at home and abroad he was granted the degree of Doctor of Divinity by St Andrews University.

Military Ministry and the Great War

Following his return from India Dr Mackay served as a locum in Perth and subsequently at Bonar Bridge near Inverness. From there he traveled fairly extensively throughout Scotland on behalf of the Anglo-Indian Society until he was invited to become Minister of the Free Church congregation in Wick. An entry in *The Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland 1900 – 1929* records him being translated from Prestonpans to Wick in 1902.

While at Wick Dr Mackay undertook much deputation work visiting places where “the feeling was difficult about the union” of the Free Church. He also edited a monthly magazine *The Highland Witness* and never lost his interest in military matters. That military interest was recognised in 1908

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*Patrick Robson Mackay,
CBE, Army Chaplain
Photo, Courtesy Executors of the
late Mrs Jean Mackay*

when he was offered a post at Army headquarters in Edinburgh.

Dr. Mackay resigned his Wick ministry and with his family returned to live at Chalmers Street in Edinburgh. He remained associated with the military for the remainder of his life and never returned to parish ministry.

Whitefoord House became the first of three residences for destitute veteran soldiers in Edinburgh and there is an engraved stonework dedication to Dr Mackay outside the hospital wing of these premises. The doctor was also founder and chairman of the Naval and Military Institute in Edinburgh.

During the 1914–1918 Great War he served as an Army Chaplain and was created Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Military Division) at Buckingham Palace on June 3rd 1919 “in recognition of valuable services rendered in connection with the war.”

Patrick Mackay died at 11 Cumin Place, Edinburgh two years later on 17 June 1921 at the age of sixty six. He was apparently still employed in an ecclesiastical capacity for in addition to being described as a Minister of the United Free