

## Brief History of Raloo Presbyterian Church



The history of Presbyterianism in Raloo goes back to the seventeenth century when permission was refused by the presbytery to call a minister in November 1671, but the people decided to support a minister themselves. Mr Robert Kelso was ordained in May 1673, but due to the congregation being unable to provide sufficient maintenance for their minister he was released from his charge in April 1674.

No further attempts were made to establish a congregation in Raloo until 1838, when Mr James Whiteford, a licentiate of the Presbytery was called and ordained on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1840. The ministry of the Rev Whiteford extended over a long tenure of 48 years until his retirement in 1886 and he died at his home on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1888.

The Rev Ewing Gilfillan succeeded the Rev Whiteford and was installed on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1887. The Rev Gilfillan retired in 1927 owing to ill health and for many years was confined to bed at his home in Londonderry until his death in 1938. During his ministry at Raloo the manse known as 'Ailsa View' was built and the church was renovated including the addition of the gallery, lighting of the church with lamps, installation of heating system and the purchasing and laying of the new cemetery.

The Rev Gilfillan was succeeded by the Rev William Cowden who was installed on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1928. The Rev Cowden was minister until March 1948 when he was given permission to retire from active duties due to failing ill health. During his ministry in Raloo renovation and redecoration of both the Church and Manse was carried out and many improvements and modernisations were the result of his faithful leadership.

The Rev Cowden was succeeded by the Rev J Sloan who was installed on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1948. The Rev Cowden died on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1948. During the Rev Sloan's ministry in Raloo the church was extensively renovated by adding a new minister's room, kitchen, choir room and installing a new Conacher Piper Organ 1961. The Rev Sloan's wife (Barbara) was very proactive within the congregation and instigated the PWA in 1960. The Rev Sloan had a tenure of 31 years until his death on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1979. A granite tablet in remembrance of his ministry is on the wall of the church.

The Rev Sloan was succeeded by the Rev D Byers who was installed in 1981 and left in 1994. During the Rev Byers ministry the congregation finally built a church hall for which they had been saving for 40 years. This was a great achievement and marked a major milestone in the life of the congregation and the hall was opened in 1991. The new hall provided the opportunity for various organisations to form, such as Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade and Youth Club which have added to the life of the church and growth of congregation.

The Rev Byers was succeeded by the Rev Robert Beggs who was installed in 1996 but had a short tenure being called to another church in 2001. During the Rev Robert Beggs ministry the 'Alisa View' manse was sold and a new manse was built which was a very difficult decision for the congregation but was the right decision for finances.

The Rev Beggs was succeeded by the Rev B McMillen in 2002, who again had a short tenure being called to another church in 2007. During the Rev B McMillen's ministry Raloo Congregation celebrated one of its most memorable occasions and one that certainly will be remembered was the call to the ministry of one of our congregation William Buchanan. It was a very proud occasion when William was licensed at a church service in Raloo in June 2007.

After the Rev McMillen's departure the congregation was without a minister for two years but due to dedicated leaders, congregation support and guidance of Rev R McCullough (Vacancy Convener) and ministry of the Rev H McConnell (Retired Minister) the congregation continued with all church business, running of organisations and God's work and mission. Due to policy changes by the Union Commission and shortage of Ministers, it was decided to make Raloo a joint charge with Maghermorne congregation and the Rev Neil Bingham was installed on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2009 as minister of both congregations. While a very challenging charge the Rev Bingham has increased membership, grown the youth activities and strengthened the spiritual work within the congregation. Raloo congregation is very fortunate to have so many flourishing organisations, enthusiastic and dedicated leaders that they have outgrown the present church hall and have the approval of the congregation to add an extension. This is very encouraging at the present time with so many distractions, especially for our youth and when we look back to those early beginnings in 1671 God really has been very active in growing the congregation through spiritual power and bringing people from all walks of life to His house.