

The Exclusive Brethren in Scotland: A Historical Overview, 1838–2018

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ABSTRACT: After a slow beginning, the Exclusive Brethren in Scotland were established by mid-Victorian revivalism, and continued to grow into the early twentieth century. Thereafter, numbers remained stable, with some moderate growth, while there was an increasing introversion that directed attention away from society to internal concerns. The leadership of James Taylor Jr. proved a decisive turning point when the connexion divided over his imposition of rules, culminating in disintegration after allegations over his conduct in Aberdeen in 1970. At present, they have recovered in Scotland to a modest degree while maintaining and reinforcing their separatism.

KEYWORDS: Plymouth Brethren, Exclusive Brethren, Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, Revivalism, Connexionalism, Aberdeen Incident, Sectarian Groups in Scotland.

About 1950, in response to a request for information from two researchers, an unnamed member of the Exclusive Brethren in Kilmarnock in Ayrshire stated:

We shun everything that would draw attention to ourselves in an outward way, specially in this day of the churches' utter failure and breakdown. The path of obscurity, unknown to the world, is ours (Strawhorn and Boyd 1951, 256).

Obtaining information, directly or otherwise, is a problem for any intended historian of the Exclusives (or—as they were commonly known in Scotland—Close Brethren). Because of the paucity of documentary evidence, the scarcity of statistics, and their innate desire for seclusion, it is impossible to trace their history in Scotland in detail. One way to chart their presence is the address lists that were frequently published, and for one crucial decade, newspapers are also important. More sources have become available due to the exodus of members in the late twentieth century, many of whom are willing to share publications,

documents, and memories. Although the testimony of former members is not without its historiographical problems (Wilson 1990, 19), without their help, this paper would have been much poorer. In it, a broad picture of the Scottish history will be attempted.

Beginnings

The first extant record of a Brethren presence in Scotland is from 1838. John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), a scion of the Anglo-Irish landed class, had become the Brethren leader with the greatest influence due to his writings and his itinerancy in Britain and Europe. He reported in 1838 that “I am invited this week to Edinburgh, where thirty-six are gathered together” ([Darby] n.d., 3:234). This church, Darby discovered, had been in existence for some years, and it had evidently seceded from a larger body, for in a letter to a Swiss correspondent, he referred to it as being “*un petit fragment d’un troupeau* [a small fragment of a flock]” (Darby 1838, 294). He taught them his eschatology, which counselled true believers to separate from the professing church to await the imminent return of Christ, and he emphasized the need for an entire dependence on the Holy Spirit that would, he felt, lead to unity among Christians.

It is probable, given the enthusiasm with which Darby wrote of the encounter, and his use of the Brethren phrase “gathered together,” that the Edinburgh church had already been moving towards Brethren views, and the invitation to Darby was to confirm them in them (Dickson 2002, 27–9). A congregation (or “meeting” or “assembly”) seemingly continued to exist in Edinburgh, for a while at least. In 1848, the Brethren movement divided into “Exclusive” and “Open” sections, and from this point in the present paper, when “Brethren” is used without qualification, the Exclusives are intended. During this period, few in Scotland found their way into the movement. By 1860, there were only two or three meetings, which met in private houses (Miller [1879?], 83). If the Edinburgh one continued to exist, then it was probably in a rudimentary form.

The 1859 Revival, and the movements of religious fervor that followed it, proved a turning point for Brethren fortunes in Scotland. In 1859, Charles Stanley (1821–1888), who as “C.S.” was a prolific writer of evangelistic tracts, heard with excitement from a fellow preacher of the “hundreds of souls seeking mercy” in Glasgow. On his first visit to the city, undoubtedly referring to his co-

religionists, he noted that “I only knew four Christians north of Scarborough” (S[tanley] [1889], 65, 97). When his business as a merchant supplying export houses brought him north, he became a frequent preacher in Scotland.

Darby was also in touch with other Exclusives who itinerated in Scotland, and who (to judge from their surnames) were Scots (CBA 1858, 1866a, 1866b). By 1868, a satisfied Darby was reporting “Scotland is opened in a way it never was before” ([Darby] n.d., 1:536). In 1874, one United Presbyterian minister in Coldstream in Berwickshire noted Brethren penetration of the county. He complained that they were “found in the wake of religious awakenings as constantly as sharks follow ships” (Mearns 1874, V, 40).

Year	Mtgs	Year	Mtgs	Year	Mtgs
1873	39	1882	85	1897	89
1874	43	1884	112	1901	122
1877	70	1885	112	1903	116
1878	75	1888	97	1906	120
1880	104	1895	112	1907	119

Table 1. Exclusive meetings in Scotland 1873–1907.
Sources: Printed address lists for the relevant years.

As Table 1 shows, the 1870s saw a marked growth in the number of meetings, with an increase of 161.5 per cent between 1873 and 1880. As the Table also shows, this increase, although slowing considerably, continued into the twentieth century. Most of these initial assemblies were undoubtedly small, of perhaps a dozen to some twenty people, and a number existed only for a few years. In three years—1882, 1888, and 1897—there was numerical decline, undoubtedly due to the schisms in these periods that had originated in England. Numbers quickly recovered, however, as meetings appeared in new places (Miller [1879?], 83). Mid-Victorian revivalism had created the conditions for the Brethren to grow.

About 1879, Andrew Miller (1810–1883), a Scottish-born businessman who wrote church history from a Brethren perspective, noted that the Brethren were well represented in Edinburgh. He put their Scottish growth down to a mixture of their own revivalism and attracting Protestant evangelical proselytes (Miller [1879?], 83). One indication of early success in the city had been the relocation there of Walter Wolston (1840–1917), a native of Devon who was a convert of

Charles Stanley. In 1864, he had moved to Edinburgh to work as a house surgeon, and later as a general practitioner, also becoming president of the British Homeopathic Society (G[ray] 1931, 141–42). The Edinburgh Brethren founded a publishing press and tract depot, which issued a magazine and Wolston's own numerous evangelistic tracts for gratuitous distribution. The latter were often based on a Scottish incident which showed the fragility of life, such as one that described the loss of an east-coast fishing vessel with thirteen people in 1886—a tract which cost 2*d.* for three and had a print run of at least five million (W[olston] [1886?]).

In addition, Wolston wrote some twenty-five books, and held public lectures, often for university students. As one of the leading popularizers of Darby's theology, he greatly increased the influence of Exclusives in Edinburgh, including, presumably, the city's middle classes among whom he lived in the prestigious Charlotte Square. The reception of ministers in the Scottish churches to the appearance of the Brethren was hostile in the extreme (Gribben 2002, 34–53), and one minister unsuccessfully pestered Wolston to provoke a controversy (Ireland [1873]). One clerical exception was a former Free Church of Scotland minister, William Reid (1822–1881), who defected from his Presbyterian congregation in Carlisle to the Brethren, and returned to Scotland to live in Edinburgh from 1875 (Cross 2003, 126–31).

Darby continued coming to Scotland until 1881, visiting all five of its cities, including Perth ([Cross?] 1992). His presence demonstrates the rising numbers of Brethren in Scotland, and it drew them more surely under his leadership. The address lists show that their meetings were found in much the same places as the Open Brethren in Scotland, especially in communities in the industrial Lowlands. In a number of places, members from the recently formed Open assemblies ceded to the Exclusives in the 1870s and the early 1880s, such as at Larkhall in Lanarkshire and Annbank in Ayrshire (Chapman 1929, 25–6; Hay n.d., 16–7).

There were two significant exceptions to the geographical concurrence of Exclusive and Open assemblies. By 1880, the address list shows that the Exclusives were better represented in the Borders, which might be due to the easy access to the south-east region that the influential Edinburgh Brethren had. Undoubtedly a further influence was the itinerant preaching of John Wilson Smith (1842–1922) of Cumledge House near Duns in Berwickshire, who had become an adherent of the new movement. A former captain in the Indian Army,

and of independent means, he contributed to the construction in 1877 of the Working Men's Institute in Duns, probably thereby ensuring that the Brethren meeting room would be integrated within the building (Wallace 1985, locations 3131–63).

The Brethren also obtained an earlier presence in the fishing communities of the north-east. They first appeared in Aberdeen, which had been visited by associates of Darby since the late 1850s, when a banker who was member of a Baptist church ceded to form a meeting, probably in 1866 (Gammie 1909, 359–60). Their presence in the city was strengthened by the arrival at the university in 1868 of Christopher Davis (1842–1871), an Afro-Caribbean medical student who had joined the Brethren in his native Barbados, and whose preaching and appearance was a sensation in the city (Dickson 1999, 167, 154). Davis was also involved in forming the first assembly of any kind in inland Aberdeenshire at New Deer (R[oss] [1904], 117).

On the Moray Coast, greater detail is available for Brethren origins due to an unpublished history written by a member, William Chalmers (c. 1875–1959), which preserves early oral memories. In the fishing communities strung along its seaboard, the principal herald of the revival was James Turner (1818–1863), a Methodist lay preacher and former cooper. His preaching was dramatic and accompanied by emotional scenes, including frequent “prostrations” (Jeffrey 2002, 184, 192–93). A number of his converts were attracted to the Brethren. Findochty had been especially affected when Turner visited there in 1860, where he stayed with a fisherman, George Flett (fl. 1860s–70s) (McHardie 1889, 116–42). In 1869/70, some ten years after the visit, Flett began commemorating the Lord's supper in his house, joined by, among others, a former Baptist and a Methodist. A group from Banff also met with them, led by one of Turner's converts who had experienced an evangelical conversion in dramatic circumstances in nearby Portknockie.

All along the north-east coastline during the 1870s, meetings were founded, such as in Macduff, where one was commenced after the migration of a meeting member to the town (Chalmers [1949], 11–22, 15–6, 33–4). The north-east movement was put in touch with wider Brethren when an Edinburgh doctor, the son of one of the Findochty members, brought news of similar groups in the Scottish capital. The process of identifying with the Exclusives was completed between 1877 and 1880 when they first appeared in the extant address lists, and

by 1882, there were twenty meetings in the region. They continued to attract the converts of nondenominational revivalism, such as, in the 1890s, those of the evangelist James McKendrick (1859–1938) (Dickson 1999, 159–60), and also others dissatisfied with the condition of their churches, as happened at Lossiemouth in Moray around 1898 (Chalmers [1949], 33–4).

Appeal

Initially on the Moray Coast, according to Chalmers, the emergence of the Brethren was a spontaneous movement, without contact with meetings elsewhere (Chalmers [1949], 152, 155). Features germane to mid-Victorian revivalism generated this extemporaneous impulse. Lay revivalists and their converts were impatient with institutionalism and encouraged the intense fellowship of praying societies. They preached a message of salvation through Jesus, which appealed to the primitive Christian unity they found in the Bible. Brethren assemblies formalized these features (Dickson 2002, 69–73). Kenneth Jeffrey cites various other reasons why they were attractive to revival converts on the north-east coast. The fishing folk were alienated from the established churches due to their neglect; the style of an assembly fitted the piety they had learned in the revivals; and principally, the independent and egalitarian nature of the meetings was congruent with their community life (Jeffrey 2002, 226–28). The “societies of petty entrepreneurs” that common ownership of fishing vessels promotes (Thompson, Wailey, and Lummis 1983, 203) gave rise to an autonomy of action that made assemblies, as churches of the laity, attractive.

Such Brethren evidence there is from elsewhere also suggests that assemblies appealed to individuals with a high degree of autonomy. Table 2 sets out those sixty-seven individuals in three early address lists who gave their employment as an aid to contacting a meeting through them. There are problems with the classification, as it is not known whether, for example, the bakers or masons were employers or employees, and there would be a considerable difference in wealth between a tenant farmer such as the one listed for Shapinsay in Orkney and James Stone (1830–1914), listed for East Kilbride and lessee of one of the largest Lanarkshire farms of the Earl of Eglinton (1841–1892) (Dickson 2002, 76–7, 296–97). It is a reasonable supposition, however, that the majority, if not all, the trades people, were owners. Shopkeepers who might readily be found were more

likely to be listed than assistants whose employers might regard citing their workplace as an unwarranted liberty. Availability probably explains why a coastguard is listed for Peterhead rather than a fisherman.

Manufacturer	Farmer	Manager	Intermediate professions	Trades people	Skilled worker	Unclassified
iron founder	farmer (7)	banker (3), steward	teacher (2)	baker (2), blacksmith (4), bookseller (2), cabinet maker, confectioner, draper (6), general merchant, grocer (4), ironmonger (2), shoemaker (6), tailor (2), upholsterer (2), watchmaker	coastguard, drill instructor, engine driver, fisherman (3), gardener, joiner (2), mason (5), painter, plumber, postman, sick nurse, station master	female railway goods station employee

Table 2. Employments cited for contact addressees in meeting address lists, 1873, 1877, and 1882.

Sources: *List of Meetings, January 1873*; *List of Meetings* [1877]; *List of Meetings, June 15, 1882*.

Note: numbers in brackets indicate how many were listed as being in a particular employment. Care has been taken to eliminate double counting.

Despite these caveats, the pattern is suggestive. None of those listed appeared to belong to the middle class, although clearly members of this class were present elsewhere in Scotland, such as John Murray Robertson (1844–1901), who, as his entry on the online “Dictionary of Scottish Architects” makes clear, ran a highly successful architect’s practice in Dundee, and was responsible for several of the city’s significant public buildings (Dictionary of Scottish Architects 2016).

The address list contact for Bo’ness in 1873 and nearby Linlithgow in 1880 and 1882 was William Gardner (1821–1904), a small-scale rentier and the owner of the Linlithgow Iron Foundry, a small manufacturing firm. Probably, like

the majority—however they are classified—he belonged to the intermediate lower-middle class—the farmers, teachers, and the largest group of all, the trades people, comprising just over half the sample, who, as has been argued, were probably shopkeepers. The next largest category is the skilled workers, though at least some of those listed as masons, and probably others among the skilled workers, were also employers.

Doubtless in communities with greater homogeneity of employment, such as Cockenzie in East Lothian, for which two fishermen are listed in 1877, or Gardenstown in Banffshire, for which one was listed in 1882, many meeting members would follow identical callings. Invisible in the Table are the colliers, although there were meetings in villages in which mining was the dominant occupation as well as in small hamlets, such as Glenbuck in Ayrshire or Haywood Colliery in Lanarkshire, that were composed entirely of miners' rows. The social pattern that emerges from this limited sample is similar in this period to the better evidence for the much larger Open Brethren, but the substantial number of trades people listed suggests a higher degree of modest prosperity among Exclusives. Like the Open Brethren, however, they evidently appealed to independent and self-directed individuals in the intermediate and skilled working-class who were searching for meaning (Dickson 2002, 288–97, 305–9).

Brethren membership also encouraged literacy. James McBroom (1868–1951), a coalminer from Ayrshire, as his biographical entry on the Stem Publishing website notes, was illiterate when he had an evangelical conversion, but he taught himself to read and write from a Bible and a concordance he had bought. His subsequent religious writings show an extensive vocabulary, a knowledge of Greek, and that he also read secular authors.

A later example also shows the cerebral piety adherents found in the Brethren. Table 3 is an analysis of a probably unique instance of a Scottish Exclusive library list (McBeth 1930). It was compiled in 1930 by one member from a lower social class, Alex McBeth (1899–1985), a farm byreman from Hamilton in Lanarkshire. McBeth was in one of the secession connexions, but his sizeable library might be taken as typical of Exclusives as a whole. It was composed almost entirely of Brethren writers or periodicals, but among the mainly religious reference books was a Greek grammar and Joseph Angus' (1816–1902) *Hand Book of the English Tongue* (1861). The movement appealed to autodidacts, and in turn encouraged literacy.

Author	W. Kelly	J. N. Darby	C. H. Mackintosh	C. E. Stuart	Misc. Exclusive
Vols.	42	23	13	13	31
Misc. other works	Open Brethren	Non-Brethren Religious works	Periodicals	Reference works	Unidentified
Vols.	1	1	89	7	2

Table 3. Alexander McBeth’s library, 1930.

Source: University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections, MS Gen 1676, Papers of Alexander McBeth, “Number, Description, and Name of Author of books in my library.”

Note: Due to the number of multi-volume works in the collection, volumes rather than individual works have been counted.

When the Edinburgh doctor had connected the north-east meetings with the Brethren, he had also informed them, notes Chalmers, that they were in some respects too “loose.” From this point they had withdrawn from association with other churches (Chalmers [1949], 15). That dissatisfaction with the existing denominations also formed part of the appeal of the Exclusives, can be seen from the words placed, relatively plausibly, into the mouth of a “Darbyite” in 1879 by one versifier in Scots from Duns. Speaking of the Established Church, he has his character say, “I’m gled, that frae yon ruins, the Lord / Has rescued *me*, a *precious jewel* [*sic*]” (Watts 1879, 4).

The approach made to potential recruits from evangelicalism can be seen from the example of Donald Ross (1823–1903), an influential Open Brethren evangelist. When Ross moved to Edinburgh in 1874, he was invited to take tea at the house of an Exclusive, where two of the leaders met with him. If he agreed to join with them, he was told, he would have to confine his activities to their circle of meetings and also judge George Müller (1806–1908), the celebrated Open Brethren pastor of Bethesda Chapel in Bristol, “a defiled man.” Stringent conditions like this would limit the appeal for most evangelical leaders, and Ross rejected the approach (Ironsides 1942, 72). Those who did become adherents, however, evidently found attractive the moral and ecclesial purity that Exclusivism offered (Shuff 1997).

The drive towards purity is evident in a letter of excommunication issued by one East Lothian meeting in 1889 to a nameless young woman for an unspecified misdemeanor:

The Assembly of God in Dunbar have to inform you that you are no longer in fellowship with the Saints gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The honour of God and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit demands at the hands of the Assembly the exclusion of you from it. It is a solemn thing to be put outside the Assembly of God, and ought to be thought of as such by you. God has a habitation on earth, and you have been excluded from it; distance and reserve towards you, of the whole household which has put you outside as a wicked person, becomes each one who remains in it, who knows and honours that house and the God who dwells there (Scott 1889, 4).

Also apparent in the letter are the high-church claims being made for the meetings. The perception of the offender's essential malignancy necessarily entailed the separation of the members from contamination.

Increasing Introversion

Turned inwards, these attitudes created divisions, which were due to conflicts over either doctrinal issues or ecclesiastical procedure. The secession which affected Scottish Brethren most was of the latter sort. This was the Glanton division of 1908, named after the village in Northumbria that was at the center of the dispute. The point at issue was the proper process by which to receive members back into fellowship from the divided neighboring meeting in Alnwick. The central London brothers' meeting rejected the course adopted by the assembly in Glanton, thus precipitating a worldwide division. In Scotland, at least fifty-two meetings formed the new connexion ([Wolston] [1907]), undoubtedly partly due to the influence of Wolston, who had adjudicated in the original dispute and was among the dissenters from the London judgement. The majority of Edinburgh Brethren went with the separatists (Wolston 1908, 15–27). Shetland, too, was badly affected, with two assemblies splitting and the other three meetings and three preaching points seceding. In this they were following the “leading brother,” the itinerant preacher, William Huggins (1854/5–1932).

The decisions of the London brothers' meeting were determinative for the connexion worldwide (Akenson 2018, 311–19), from which came the unofficial name, “London Exclusives,” but they were also informally named after the principal contemporary individual in the connexion, which, for much of the twentieth century, meant “Taylorite.” Wolston felt those who adhered to the London decision,

were those before whose minds that which pertained to the Church—its privileges, its blessings, its destiny—loomed much more distinctly, while points of ecclesiastical procedure held great sway (Wolston [1908], 28).

Evangelism ceased to be their principal concern, partly due to secession of those such as Wolston, and they became increasingly preoccupied with in-group ideology.

Some evangelicals, however, particularly within the Open Brethren, did continue to be attracted to Exclusivism. After the First World War, a significant number of their members in Peterhead transferred to the Exclusives (Adams 1972, 49). Elsewhere in Scotland, c.1925, Open Brethren seceders re-formed the Exclusive meeting in Leadhills in Lanarkshire, and in the 1930s a significant number seceded to the one in Bo'ness in West Lothian (CBA 1987; [Gibb] c.1980, 15).

One significant accession in the 1930s was Stanley McCallum (1904–1987) from Macduff. A cook on a fishing trawler, after his conversion through the Open Brethren, the boat's owner won him for the Exclusive meeting in the town (Oberg n.d.). The evangelistic emphasis probably lasted longest in the north east, where the Fisherman's Revival of 1921 had again impacted deeply on the Exclusives (Webster 2013, 33). There are examples of later converts, such as the Peterhead house painter who in the early 1960s was won from an alcoholic's life (Adams 1972, 18–9).

This conversionist emphasis might be found elsewhere, like the Stornoway meeting, founded by A.P. Cecil Lawrence (1900–1972) in 1934, when as a partner in a Peterhead textile firm, he had established a factory on Lewis. There, Lawrence could be heard preaching for conversion in the light of the imminent rapture (Mair 1994, 23–4). But the more general displacing of evangelism from a central place is clear from the narrative arc of Chalmers's Moray Coast history, written in 1949. It follows the pattern of Miller's widely read, three-volume *Short Papers on Church History* (1873–8) in first tracing the history of the Western church and then the emergence of the Brethren from radical evangelicalism, but unlike Miller, it concludes on a purely internal note on contemporary theological concerns among Exclusives, that the “ministry now before the saints is largely concerning the Spirit of God” (Chalmers [1949], 31).

Year	1907	1911	1923	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1931	
Meeting rooms	119	92	88	89	88	83	84	87	91	
Year	1933	1935	1936	1937	1938	1943	1946	1951	1952	1953
Meeting rooms	87	89	89	92	96	93	93	96	96	100
Year	1955	1956	1957	1962	1963	1965	1969	1970	1971	
Meeting rooms	100	101	103	95	78	75	68	66	13	

Table 4. Exclusive meeting rooms in Scotland, 1907–1971.

Sources: printed address lists for the relevant years; [Graham Pillar], “Atlas of Meeting Rooms, October 1969;” “Assemblies in Scotland, June 1971,” reproduced sheet.

Note: due to the capping of assembly size in 1933, meeting rooms in which the Lord’s supper was commemorated have been counted, rather than the whole assembly in a town or “city” grouping.

Perhaps inevitably, Wolston had complained of the rise of a sectarian spirit (Wolston 1908, 28–30). He had had been critical of the new “American teaching” propounded by James Taylor Sr. (1870–1953), who held there could be no gospel without the assembly, an idea inimical to the low-church nature of evangelicalism (Holden 2020, 79–101). Taylor, according to his biographical profile on the “My Brethren” website, was born in Ireland and had first joined the Brethren in 1884 in Paisley in Renfrewshire, where he had been extending his knowledge of the linen trade, before emigrating in 1888 to North America, settling in Brooklyn a year later (Mybrethren.org n.d.). He created further distance from evangelicalism when in 1929 he rejected the sonship of the Second Person of the Trinity as eternal (Holden 2018, 249–77).

To take account of the new thinking, the hymn book used by Exclusives was revised in 1932 (Holden 2014, 215–17), which led to some local divisions. Pamphlets protesting against the alterations were issued from places as far apart as Aberdeen and Ayr. The Ayr pamphleteer complained about the lack of consultation. Along with others, he had been excommunicated, and he claimed that the use of the revised hymn book was being “enforced” and made “a test of fellowship” (Middleton [1932], 12–3).

In the earlier twentieth century, such secondary separation from fellow believers did not necessarily mean equally absolute separation from society. One Edinburgh member, John Storey (1879–1965), a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, for example, had his career as first assistant to the Astronomer Royal of Scotland interrupted in the First World War by working in Naval Ordnance, for which he was awarded an MBE (*Scotsman* 1918).

More usually in times of war, however, as conscientious objectors, tensions between Brethren and society increased. In Port Seton during the First World War, David Stott (1875–1939) found his shop ostracized by many of the locals. After he returned from Wormwood Scrubs, where he had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector, he decided to move with his family to England (Stott 2017, 79–82). Even when conscientiously objecting to National Service, they could be treated unsympathetically as one Exclusive doctor found at an appeals tribunal in Dundee (*Courier and Advertiser* 1952). The connexion had increasingly moved during the twentieth century, in Bryan Wilson’s (1926–2004) typology, from being a conversionist sect to being an introversionist or pietist one, ‘which directs the attention of its followers away from the world and to the community’ (Wilson 1967a, 28).

The Taylor Years

Table 4 shows the drop in the number of meetings by 1911 due to the Glanton division. The Table also shows that the numbers remained relatively stable until the mid-twentieth century, with allowance for dips undoubtedly due to war and migration, for probably, like the Open Brethren, they were more likely to emigrate (Dickson 2002, 306–7, 392). Membership perhaps increased to a degree, as Scottish Exclusives almost certainly shared in the evangelical resurgence in Britain after the Second World War. Roger Shuff has argued that in England the connexion probably reached its maximum strength at some point in the early to mid-1950s (Shuff 2005, 184), and possibly the same was true for Scotland. Endogamous marriages and the retention of members and of their children in close-knit families kept numbers buoyant. Most meetings had been long-established since the previous century and possessed a strong sense of Exclusive identity. The continued rise in the number of meeting rooms from the

late 1930s until 1957, however, shows some of the problems in using them as a guide to membership numbers (Table 4).

This rise was partly because of the new system of organization expounded by Taylor Sr. in 1933 by which meetings were to have no more than fifty members ([Taylor Sr.] 1933, 179–80). Some of the bigger congregations in cities and large towns had “hived off” into smaller companies, each with their own communion service (or “breaking of bread”), by which a meeting marked its existence. By 1952, the greatest concentration was in Glasgow with ten meeting rooms within the city boundaries and also a number of meetings nearby in Lanarkshire ([Trowbridge] 1952, 66–7). In 1960 the membership in Scotland was estimated at 3 to 5,000, with the latter figure undoubtedly the more accurate (Highet 1960, 37). The sense of identity was reinforced by connexion members coming together in the various regional districts in the “care meetings” and “Bible readings”—both held monthly—and places with larger concentrations of Brethren held annual three-day meetings.

From 1962, a number of smaller meeting rooms were closed, and the members moved, most usually, to nearby towns with larger meetings, although in Shetland the members had to move to Peterhead, over 250 miles to the south and on the Scottish mainland. The sharp decrease seen in meeting rooms from that year (Table 4) had also been due to many in 1959 not accepting the elevation to leader of James Taylor Jr. (1899–1970), who came to succeed his father (Lineham 2015). A sizeable proportion of British Exclusives were unhappy with the imposition by Taylor Jr. of stricter rules, especially one in 1960 over “separate eating” from non-members, including fishing-boat crewmates and spouses and dependants living under the same roof (Shuff 2005, 180–1). From 1959, the “eating issue” led to a protracted series of secessions. Taylor Jr.’s rulings came to be known as “the system.” One significant loss was A.P. Cecil Lawrence. In 1962, he was writing in a letter that,

anyone who has judged the system and come out to simply follow Jesus could never, with their eyes on Him, find themselves again in such a system!! (Lawrence 1962).

From such polarization, it was difficult to step back. If in the 1950s, the number of meeting rooms had probably risen faster than the membership, in the 1960s, the membership fell faster than the number of meeting rooms would indicate. The journalist Norman Adams (1936–2011) claimed that some 2,000 members out of 5,000 in the north east had left (Adams 1972, 20). I have argued elsewhere

that their numbers in the north-east fishing communities have been greatly exaggerated: with the exceptions of Aberdeen and Peterhead, their meetings there have always been small (Dickson 1999, 160)—although in 1952 the small Banffshire fishing villages of Portknockie and Gardenstown, each had two meetings ([Trowbridge] [1952], 66, 72). Adams's figures are perhaps more accurate for Scotland as a whole, as is the ratio in the north east of 2:3 for leavers to remainers (or "Outs" to "Ins"). All along the coast, large groups, sometimes the majority, seceded (*Press and Journal* 1962).

Many Exclusives were economically prosperous. There was money to be earned from pelagic fishing. One journalist claimed in 1960 that half the boats sailing out of Peterhead were Brethren owned (Singer 1960). Another commented in 1970 on the affluent appearance of Brethren women in the north east:

They live in traditional bungalows carpeted wall to wall. Some have even gold-plated bath taps. They wear well-tailored but not mod [*sic*] clothes and expensive hats (Borthwick 1970).

They stood out in the tightly knit fishing communities, where they were acknowledged as good neighbors (Ritchie 1970; Nimmo and Mackenzie 1968).

Table 5 sets out the occupations of those in employment or retired in two west of Scotland meetings in the late 1960s, data which correlate well with the evidence for English Exclusives in the mid-1950s (Wilson 1967b, 330–1, 341–2). As in the earlier period in Scotland, the intermediate and lower-middle class were still present, and skilled workers were well represented in Meeting Room 2, which was in a large, inter-war, Glasgow housing scheme. Especially in Meeting Room 1, in a large industrial town, a few were members of the professional middle class. In Edinburgh, professionals were more common, where the city meetings had some accountants and lawyers, and elsewhere in Scotland there were a number of teachers, particularly in the independent sector, and small business ownership was common, especially in Glasgow. The driver, motor mechanic, salesman, and storeman in Meeting Room 2 worked in their long-established, substantial family-owned car dealership, which they would eventually inherit, while the cobbler's business consisted of a chain of shops. The trades open to skilled workers were limited, as union membership had become an excommunicable matter. So too was professional association. The shopkeeper in Meeting Room 1 had been an employing pharmacist who had sold his business

because he could no longer retain his Pharmaceutical Society membership. He had bought another shop for which associational membership was not required. Professionals, however, are better represented in these meeting rooms than in the mid-1950s English evidence. Nevertheless, the precept against associational membership reduced their number, and as university attendance also became impermissible, the ones in these tables would be among the last in this occupational group.

	Professional	Business owner	Manager	Sales person	Skilled	Retired
Meeting Room 1	architect; management accountant; naval architect (2)	photographic supplies shop	factory manager	shop assistant; travelling salesman	cook; electrician	marine surveyor
Meeting Room 2	engineer; naval architect; teacher	cobbler; motor-car dealership; wool shop		car salesman	bookkeeper; driver; factory worker; motor mechanic; painter; storeman	engineer; retired (occ. unknown); teacher

Table 5. Occupations in two Taylor connexion meeting rooms in the West of Scotland, 1968.

Source: oral information in March 2017 from two former members.

Note: the number in brackets is the number in that occupation.

In 1960, there had been other difficulties with employment when the north-east fishermen at a packed session at the Glasgow three-day meetings in St Andrews Halls in Glasgow, with some 4,500 present, raised the question of membership of the Scottish Herring Producers Association. Without subsidy from the association’s pooling, they would suffer financial hardship. It was presided over by Stanley McCallum, who had emigrated in 1925 and was now a factory worker in Detroit and emerging as the loyal lieutenant of Taylor Jr. As Ian McKay informed me in e-mail (February 26, 2017), the meeting determined they must withdraw.

A later ruling that there should be no work on Saturdays to be available for attendance at the meeting on that day, introduced further complications to work. The new decrees forced some to leave the sea, such as in Peterhead, Campbell

Stephen (1930/1–2008), who bought a shoe shop instead (Shivas 1972). By 1961, the three meeting rooms then in Gardenstown had all seceded over the “eating issue” with its profound implications for a small, interconnected community. The following year, when McCallum visited the village, he could find only some twenty individuals who remained in the connexion, and was rabbled by a noisy group of youths (Murray 1961; *Press and Journal* 1962).

Those who stayed within the Taylor Brethren had been led to expect a progressive unfolding of new truths (Wilson 1967b, 316–22). They also accepted that it was right their lifestyle should be harder and narrower. Journalists hunted down visits to the country by Taylor Jr., christened by them as “Big Jim.” Factual accuracy was not always preserved in pursuit of a sensation, but sometimes misreporting was due to the arcane, opaque nature of the connexion, such as when a division among the “Outs” was reported as involving the “Ins” of the Taylorites (Beattie 1964a). In a departure from the more usual Exclusive seclusion, Taylor Jr. spoke to the press on occasion, to defend the connexion’s practice of separation as biblical, and maintain he had the confidence of the membership (Beattie 1964b; [Taylor Jr.] [1964]).

There were those within the movement, however, who did feel that the increasingly rigid system was due to the will-to-power of Taylor Jr. Brethren theory as established by Taylor Sr., taught that disputes should be settled by the nearest assembly (Taylor Sr. [1951], 158–62), but in July 1968, Scottish meetings were told to withdraw unilaterally from the Hamilton “city” assembly, comprising the meeting room there and ones in three nearby towns. Although the point at issue was not known by the members, Glasgow “city” assembly was informed, as Ian McKay, then a 24-year-old student and one of the Glasgow members, recollected in e-mail to me (February 27, 2017), that “it was now a matter of simple obedience to the Lord’s servant.” He continued:

I later found out that in Hamilton on Wednesday 12 June 1968 one brother had disagreed sharply with the rest of the assembly about whether a certain sister should be restored to fellowship. This brother was a staunch supporter of Jim Taylor, so he phoned Mr Taylor and told him his side of the story. Mr Taylor then phoned Glasgow and told them to excommunicate the whole Hamilton assembly, except for his staunch supporter.

McKay’s perception that there was no justification for the judgement apart from Taylor Jr.’s will, turned him into a dissident, which eventually led to him being withdrawn from in 1969. The practice of strict separation (Introvigne 2018,

105) meant the loss of his friends and extended family. The exclusion of Hamilton created a shock within Scottish Brethren, and many others who continued within the connexion were increasingly uneasy. The steady attrition of the 1960s is shown in Table 4 by the percentage decrease in meeting rooms of 30.5 per cent between 1962 and 1970, by which time there were perhaps some 2,500 in the connexion in Scotland.

Aberdeen, 1970

The sudden drop in 1971 for meeting-room numbers shown in Table 4 was due to events at the three-day meetings in Aberdeen in the summer of 1970. Taylor Jr. had come to be regarded as “the Universal Leader” and “Our Beloved” (Deayton [2004], [5]). Towards the end of the 1960s, his behavior became increasingly erratic. Sometimes new symbols relating to, for example, women’s hair and head coverings seemed to be based on his personal preferences (Dickson 2018b, 24–7). He would provoke laughter at his meetings, and the range of his references, as is apparent from his published ministry, was eccentric, sometimes sexual, and often acutely personal (Shuff 2005, 245–52).

During public speaking, his preferred lubricant was whisky (*Daily Record* 1970a). On 25 July 1970, at the Saturday afternoon meeting, for which Taylor Jr. was late, according to the later recollections of Alastair Deayton, then a teenager:

He spoke directly to certain brothers, with personal remarks, sometimes using bad language and strange gestures such as thumbing his nose at people, unfamiliar at the time and later interpreted by some as being obscene. At several points, all the young people in the gallery fired volleys of paper aeroplanes down on the older folks on the ground floor, accompanied by much stamping of feet and cheering (Deayton [2004], [12]).

Taylor Jr. was staying with a leading Aberdeen Exclusive, James Alex Gardiner (1928–2014), who lived in a bungalow in Nigg, on the outskirts of the city. Gardiner and Stanley McCallum became concerned at the lengthy periods a young, English Exclusive mother, Madeline Ker, was spending in Taylor Jr.’s bedroom, and on the Saturday evening they burst into his room, where, according to Gardiner’s later account in a letter, they found her sharing the bed with Taylor

Jr. who was in his pajamas, her nakedness covered only by a sheet (CBA 1970a 19–22).

The events of the day have been disputed (Shuff 2005, 266–68; Denny et al. 1999; Introvigne and Maselli 2007, 115–16; Introvigne 2018, 85). A tape was circulated, which in more recent times was on WikiPeebia (a website critical of the Brethren), purporting to be of the afternoon meeting, and a transcript was published (Stott 1970, 3–17; Adams 1972, 119–32). On it, the presiding individual can be heard swearing; blaspheming in a strong Brooklyn accent by punning on “[H]’ell/El” (the Hebrew name for God); and conducting a rambling and haphazard discourse while the congregation frequently laughs, often with a hysterical edge.

Taylor Jr. claimed the tape was a fake (CBA 1970b; Adams 1972, 118). There is evidence that suggests it was not. A facsimile of a letter exists in which one of Taylor Jr.’s sons, Benjamin, states that it was his father’s voice, and that his son, Taylor Jr.’s grandson, agrees (CBA 1970d). Revealingly, there were about 500 Exclusives present at the Saturday afternoon session, and none of them has ever claimed the tape was forged (CBA 1970c; Stott 2005, 28–9), including the seven supporters of Taylor Jr., at least some of whom had been present, who in 1988 made a notarized deposition in Edinburgh (Shuff 2005, 266–68). As Alistair Deayton stated to me in an interview (February 20, 2017), there are people alive at the time of writing who were present and can recognize the voices on it, including himself.

The day after the incident in Nigg, Taylor Jr. had left early on the Sunday morning for America. It was he who provided the first public account of events inside the bungalow when he gave an Aberdeen newspaper permission to publish his version, given in a letter to a female connexion member, and it was printed in a front-page leader (*Evening Express* 1970; Adams 1972, 103–5). Several other newspapers covered the story during August, often in a front-page leader too. The press was told by Ker’s husband, Alan (c.1935–2015), that she had only been covered by a sheet (Jarvis 1970; Barrett and Wight 1970).

In 1987, Madeline Ker made a sworn legal deposition in the Netherlands, in a case in which it was claimed the deceased Taylor Jr. had been defamed by Dutch writer, who belonged to the largest of the Exclusive branches, the Kelly-Lowe-Continentials. Ker’s deposition agreed with her husband’s earlier statement but made it clear that her nakedness was consensual (Ker and Ker 1987).

Taylor Jr.'s own version shifted. At the outset, he claimed Ker had been in his room to massage him at the end of each day's proceedings, and when the story broke said it was a "dastardly lie" he was in bed with her (*Daily Record* 1970a, 1; Adams 1970, 1–2). After Alan Ker's interview, he maintained that "She was not naked, but she was under the covers of the bed" (*Daily Record* 1970b). In the final press interview he gave, he stated: "It is true that she was lying under the sheet on the same bed as myself" (Finn 1970). In this last interview, given in New York, he ill-advisedly allowed himself to be photographed in unseemly poses with Ker while her husband was absent on business, one of which the newspaper published. The more lurid use of "adulterer," first employed by Taylor Jr. and repeated with relish in the newspapers (*Evening Express* 1970; Adams 1970), was never applied to Taylor Jr. by Gardiner or McCallum. Only the latter responded to press enquiries, but his terse replies did not give an account of the events in Nigg.

Interpretation was crucial. Most simply, Benjamin Taylor argued his father was "sick" (CBA 1970d), which is supported by the Brethren doctor who attended Taylor Jr. in Aberdeen and diagnosed dementia (Shuff 2005, 268). Various biblical precedents for Ker's presence were claimed by those loyal to Taylor Jr.: Abishag comforting the elderly King David (Jarvis 1970); the woman washing Christ's feet (Borthwick 1970); or the Apostle Paul's privilege of taking around a wife (Price 1970, 20–1). The spiritual, it was claimed, like Noah's sons faced with their father's drunken nakedness, would have covered up the incident (Price 1970, 35–6).

Eventually the most widely promoted justification was that to the pure all things are pure, and the events in Aberdeen were an "ambush," set by Taylor Jr. to entrap those who resisted the truth he had taught (Price 1970, 11–2; Shuff 2005, 268). More recently in public, his defenders deny that any woman shared his bed, but maintain he was ill and both Kers were "providing much needed care" (PBCC 2014). To Madeline Ker belongs the most telling interpretation. Of Taylor Jr., she said, "To us he represented the Lord Jesus" (Ker and Ker 1987).

On October 14, Taylor Jr. died in Brooklyn. His successor, James Harvey Symington (1913–1987), a farmer from Nebraska, claimed the "Aberdeen Incident," as it came to be known, was the breakthrough for the religious revival of the Exclusive Brethren (S[y]mington] 1973, 8; Shuff 2005, 232–36).

Aftermath

For a decade, the Exclusives had been vilified by the media. One newspaper unconscionably embellished the events in Aberdeen by having half-naked women dancing before Taylor Jr.—though perhaps someone in the north east was having a laugh at a journalist’s expense (*The People* 1970). Norman Adams wrote a book on the Taylor Jr. years. Although he later withdrew some of his claims, he charged the connexion with family breakups and producing mental health problems. He heavily hinted that “Bible John,” a serial killer then at large and infamous in the Scottish news media, might be an Exclusive (Adams 1972, 85–9). The anti-cult bias in press reports, as well as the difficulties inherent in the medium, has to be recognized, although this does not invalidate them as a source. Like any historical testimony, they need to be read critically (Baumgartner 1981, 256–68).

Before the events in Aberdeen had reached the press, those in the connexion in Scotland had made their decision over Taylor Jr. As the nearest one, it had fallen to the Aberdeen assembly to judge the issue. It withdrew from him on the grounds of his behavior at the meeting on the Saturday afternoon (CBA 1970c). McCallum’s initial reaction to the evening in Nigg as reported by Gardiner—that Taylor Jr.’s actions showed “corruption”—was widely accepted in Scotland. Most in the country followed Aberdeen, withdrawing from Taylor Jr. en masse, including all those in the north-east fishing ports (apart from four families). There were too many Scottish witnesses to the Saturday afternoon for them all to be thought wrong. Some 200 remained in the Taylor-Symington connexion in Scotland in thirteen meeting rooms in as many places (Deayton [2004], [13]). Many among those who withdrew were left with bitter feelings, which found one expression in interviews through analogies to twentieth-century political tyrannies (*Evening Express* 1968; Shivas 1972; Borthwick 1970).

In the post-Taylor-Jr. years, most continued for a while in the “Aberdeen” secession, which itself split in 1972; many then joined those others who had already quietly left for conservative-evangelical churches, especially the Open Brethren. Representative of others is the poetry of Iain Bamforth, whose parents were Glasgow Brethren, in its expression of the vacuity of faith (Bamforth 1992, 31–4).

The various secessionist bodies produced by schisms since the nineteenth century have fared badly in Scotland, and most look likely to be soon extinct.

Under the successive leaderships of Symington and, from 1987, the Australian businessmen, John Hales (1923–2002) and his son Bruce, the greater organizational capacities of their connexion has allowed it to recover to a degree within Scotland. Under Bruce Hales, they initially tried to reduce tension with the wider society and avoid the negative publicity of the Taylor Jr. years (Doherty 2013, 32–3; Introvigne 2018, 105–6), something in which they were not always subsequently successful. When a dispute arose after 2006 between the Brethren and the UK Charity Commission (Doherty 2020, 101–26), one newspaper carried a story about an alleged incident in 1970 when Taylor Jr. was said to have sexually abused a child (Nicol 2013). There was more negative reporting in 2018–19 when Ian McKay, by now a retired Glasgow University academic, was pursued for copyright infringement (Kenber 2019; Blackstock 2019). These press reports have been subject to formal complaints by the Brethren.

In 2009, the Symington-Hales Brethren had 804 members in Scotland, which by 2015 had risen to 895 members, including children. Meetings were strengthened by mergers, the migration of members into Scotland was encouraged, and biological growth continued, giving the connexion in 2015, twenty-one meeting rooms in eight towns and cities, which, true to their doctrine of “separation,” are now built without sanctuary windows (Dickson 2018a, 34–5; Webster 2018, 315–35). International uniformity is ensured by an increasing number of regular meetings held globally (Doherty 2014).

They avoid the professions because of the need for university degrees but own a number of flourishing small businesses that provide income and employment for the members. They ensure apartness from offending members through the practices of “shutting-up” and “withdrawing.” In 2019, there were 209 pupils at their independent school, the OneSchool Global Caledonia Campus, which has two centers, one at Balmedie, near Aberdeen, and another at Alloa, near Stirling. There the curriculum can be monitored, and the children enculturated into the ethos and values of the sect, which include, as its website states, “fundamental Christian teachings and beliefs, especially those of purity, integrity and godliness.”

The nature of Exclusivism in Scotland was not distinct from that elsewhere, but it did have a distinctive history. By reifying the biblical metaphor of the “one body” in the aggregate of assemblies that composed the Exclusive Brethren, the sect was globalized, mainly in those countries colonized by emigrants from

Britain and Ireland, where the bulk of the membership is now to be found. That the church should be undivided in its judgement drew the meetings into the universal order of Exclusivism. In Scotland, they largely grew from the local awakenings of mid-Victorian revivalism. In north-east Scotland especially, factors specific to the fishing societies functioned in the community revivals of the region that generated an unusually intense piety (Webster 2019).

The intellectualized spirituality of Exclusivism, developed among the English and Irish upper classes, its rigorous ethical and social demands, lay ethos, and concept of a pure gathered church, separate from “the world,” proved attractive to both revival converts and, over time, some evangelicals in lower social classes throughout Lowland Scotland. A system to maintain, and even intensify the purity of assemblies, was devised, particularly during the Taylor family years, that increased sectarian isolation.

From Darby onwards, the leaders were tireless intercontinental travelers. The Taylors took advantage of the more widespread use of the new technologies of the telephone and airplane to increase the homogenization of Exclusivism, and recently, electronic communication software is being used. Additionally, the attractiveness of loyalty has been amplified by the closeness of the religious community and the increased cost of seceding.

Centrifugal forces, however, acted against the pull of the center. It might be argued that the large number of independent-minded small businessmen was one such. One Presbyterian elder in Gardenstown linked—undoubtedly too neatly—the frequent splits among Exclusives to occupational independency when he commented, ““They’re their own bosses at sea and their own bosses in their meeting; every man is his own skipper, and he can go *wherever* he likes”” (Webster 2013, 59).

Potential fracture lines had always been present in the ideology. One other counterforce was confidence in local leaders, such as Dr. Wolston or James Gardiner, who were often trusted more than decisions in remote centers in London or Brooklyn. Evangelicalism was another, which can be seen in the ease with which many in the post-Taylor years fitted into churches that prize its conversions. The decisive counterforce came in 1970, and affected Exclusivism in Scotland uniquely. Being at the epicenter of the tremor that shook the connexion, it was finally fragmented into several diminutive bodies.

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