

Ministers of The United Presbyterian/Free Church

The Rev Peter McGuffie was inducted in August 1841. His ministry lasted for eight years until his death in 1849.

The Rev Andrew Macfarlane (circa 1802 – 1886) was ordained to the charge in June 1851 and held it for around thirty years until his resignation, due to ill health in February 1882. Rev Macfarlane died aged 74 in Mount Florida, Glasgow.

The Rev John Willcock OBE DD DLITT (1853 – 1931) was ordained in December 1882 and served almost 49 years. The Rev John Willcock played a significant part in the founding of St Ringan's and due to his untiring efforts there now stands the present building. The Rev Willcock is pictured left in 1904; he was patron of the Lerwick String Band, involved in the Lerwick Amateur Orchestral Society, the Lerwick Choral Union, the Lerwick Literary and Debating Society and secretary of the Lerwick Penny Savings Bank.ⁱ Rev Willcock was awarded the OBE for his services to, and acting as chaplain for the Sailor's and Soldier's Families Association.



The Rev Willcock (courtesy of Shetland Museum)

His interest in the wider community is also reflected in the fact that he was instrumental in the formation of the first Shetland Boy's Brigade Company and was himself Company Captain in 1894.ⁱⁱ His various literary efforts also made an impression on Prime Minister Asquith, who offered Willcock an annuity, should he wish to retire. In 1909 Glasgow University conferred on him his Doctor of Divinity, therefore some manuscripts refer to him as 'Rev' and others 'Dr'. He was also a great lover of poetry and music, appearing to have

been in his element at the United Free Church Women's Guild's first meeting of the new year in January 1919. 'There was a good attendance, in spite of the snowy evening, and a very pleasant social evening was spent. After ten there was a musical programme, consisting of songs and a duet, charmingly rendered by the younger members of the choir, each piece being encored. Dr Willcock gave a reading "Jeems the door-keeper" by Dr John Brown'.ⁱⁱⁱ Besides this, Dr Willcock held many sacred concerts within his church. It was said of him that he never lost personal touch with any of his congregation and took an active interest in all aspects of church life, hardly ever missing a single meeting.^{iv} For most of his ministry, Rev Willcock preached to a United Presbyterian/Free congregation. At the Union of 1929 however, he joined the Church of Scotland at which point a percentage of his congregation and the St Ringan's church building did likewise.

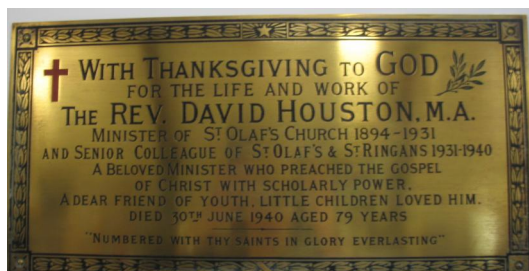
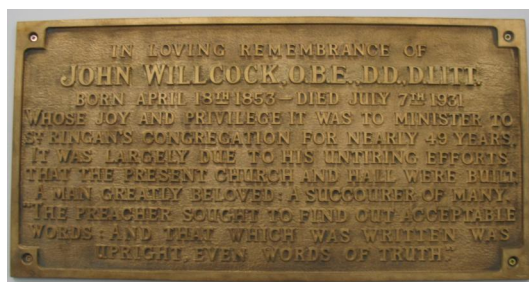
The Rev David Houston MA (1861 – 1940) although not a minister of St Ringan's is mentioned here as one who was an esteemed pastor to St Olaf's United Free Church (1894 – 1931). 'Mr Houston has consistently maintained the best and highest traditions of his high calling'.^v Manson goes on to say of him that his semi-jubilee as pastor of the congregation was celebrated 'with every mark of esteem and respect

from his professional brethren and the members of his congregation' and that this is the best evidence of the high value, which was placed upon his ministry.^{vi}

Right: Sunday school children outside St Olaf's United Free Church, 1958. Below: St Olaf's United Free Church, later to become St Olaf's Hall (courtesy of Shetland Museum).



Both the Rev **Willcock** and **Houston** have plaques dedicated to them on the walls of St Ringan's, which can still be seen on the East wall of the mezzanine. The **Rev Willcock's** reads 'In Loving Remembrance of / John Willcock, OBE, DD, DLITT. / Born April 18th 1853 – Died July 7th 1931 / Whose joy and privilege it was to minister to / St Ringan's congregation for nearly 49 years. / It was largely due to his untiring efforts / that the present church and hall were built. / A man greatly beloved: A succourer of many, / 'The Preacher sought to find out acceptable / words: And that which was written was / upright, even words of truth'.



The **Rev Houston's** plaque reads 'With Thanksgiving to God / for the life and work of / The Rev David Houston, MA / Minister of St Olaf's Church 1894 – 1931 / and senior colleague of St Olaf's and St Ringan's 1931 – 1940 / a beloved minister who preached the gospel / of Christ with Scholarly power / a dear friend of youth, little children loved him / Died 30th June 1940 aged 79 years / 'Numbered with thy Saints in Glory Everlasting'.

The following is a list of ministers at St Ringan's during which time it was a Church of Scotland.

The Rev John Willcock OBE DD DLITT was minister of St Ringan's Church of Scotland from the Union of 1929 until 1931, when he collapsed at Sunday School on 21st June and died on Tuesday 23rd.

The Rev William Park Jones was minister of St Ringan's (C of S) from 1932 until 1945.

The Rev Kenneth N MacRae was minister of St Ringan's (C of S) from 1946 until 1958.

In 1958 during the ministry of the Rev K T, Thomson and through an agreement with the Parish Church St Ringan's once again became United Free. There now follows a list of ministers of St Ringan's United Free Church.

The Rev K T Thomson was witness to the move from St Olaf's United Free Church to St Ringan's. His ministry lasted from 1958 until 1961.

The Rev J A M McFie ministered at St Ringan's as his first charge from 1962 until 1966.

The Rev T S MacIntyre ministered from 1967 until 1979.

The Rev F B Rosseter served at St Ringan's from 1981 until 1986.



The Rev F B Rosseter (2nd from left) with family and the late Pat Jamieson (far left).

The Rev Gordon Currie served at Sandwick and Cunningsburgh UF Churches from 1988 until 1996, after which he left for a new charge in Glasgow. In the late 1980s, a steadily declining membership at St Ringan's cast serious doubt upon its future. In 1988 however, the congregation enjoyed a brief respite 'with the uniting of their church with the Cunningsburgh and Sandwick UF Churches under the Rev Gordon Currie, who remained in Shetland until the summer of 1996'.^{vii}



Ministers and office-bearers at the Rev Gordon Currie's induction service, May 1998. From left; Rev John Sandell, UF minister, Lossiemouth, Rev John Fulton, UF minister, Glasgow, Rev Gordon Currie, Mr Douglas Halcrow, session clerk, Cunningsburgh UF Church, Mr Arthur Fraser UF minister, Inverness, Dr Ramsay Napier, session clerk, St Ringan's, and Mr Peter Tait session clerk, Sandwick UF Church. (Courtesy of Dr Ramsay Napier).

Notwithstanding the Rev Currie's enthusiasm and charisma, 'membership continued to fall, and after much heart-searching a majority of those left decided that

we could no longer continue as a separate congregation...^{viii} The Rev Gordon Currie was thus the last minister of St Ringan's, whose life as a church building had spanned 111 years, been witness to a great many changes and yet fulfilled its role throughout as a central and integral part of the spiritual lives of generations of members and adherents.

ⁱ Ann Halcrow, *CENTENERY: St Ringan's Church Lerwick, Shetland 1886 – 1986* (Lerwick, Shetland Litho 1986) p9.

ⁱⁱ Halcrow, A (1986), p9.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Shetland Times* 19th January 1919.

^{iv} Halcrow, A (1986), p9.

^v Thomas Manson, *Lerwick During the last Half-Century 1867 – 1917* (Lerwick, Lerwick Community Council 1923) republished (1991), p286.

^{vi} Manson, T (1923), p287.

^{vii} Dr Ramsay Napier (2002), 'St Ringan's' *Shetland Life* no 258 April 2002.

^{viii} Napier, Dr R (1997), *Letter to the editor of Stedfast Magazine* 24th March.