**The Glasite Meeting House**

**a. Why were the meeting house and St Andrew’s kirk adjacent?**

Of the two buildings the biggin’ of St Andrew’s is precisely documented. It stands on rising ground in the Cowgate, originally being on the outskirts of the burgh. The foundation stone was ceremoniously laid in 1772 and the building completed in 1774. It was designed by Samuel Bell and probably adapted from plans of 1769 by James Craig, designer of the New Town Edinburgh. It came under the Presbytery of Dundee and was administered by the Nine Incorporated Trades (bakers/baxters etc) and the Three United (building) Trades of Masons, Wrights and Slaters, unlike the Burgh Kirks which were administered by the Town Council.

In 1769 the radical theologian Rev John Glas (1695-1773), who had been suspended from the Church of Scotland in 1728 for his tenets, returned to Dundee where his four remaining years of his life were spent until he died in 1773.

My successor, Martin Allan, kindly searched for deed evidence about this time and came up with the cracker of a Disposition by John Glas of his interest in the buildings of the Independent Congregation of Dundee in August 1773, 3 months before his death. It is quite clear that his congregation were worshipping in a building south of the Seagate as late as August 1773 and that no mention was made of plans for another building. Therefore when St Andrews was being built from 1772 there was no building to the east.

The staff of Local History kindly allowed me to take shots of their 1776 and 1793 Crawford maps. In 1776 there is an octagonal "Ind'pendent Meeting" [house] structure marked to the east of St Andrews but here we have a problem. Keith Walker, a volunteer with FDCA, has successfully established that the original 1776 engraving plate was further altered on one or more occasions, as you might expect, to provide later “editions”. The fact that the 1776 key does not refer to the building, but that the 1793 does, and that the letter font is different from that used for St Andrews, suggests to me that the building that we refer to as the Glasite Hall was not on the original 1776 plate and was built after the 1776 publication.

Enclosed are excerpts of the 1776 view showing the two churches with their parallel curtilages with entrances on the Cowgait with Glas’ church titled as “Ind’pendent Meeting”, i.e. Independent of the Church of Scotland. Both churches are on the edge of the burgh boundary with green garden ground to their North and East boundaries. By 1793 burgh building extension had created King Street, which had taken away a significant amount of ground from the south of St Andrew’s approach and had bisected the approach of the Glasite Meeting House. The “Glassite (sic) Meeting House” was given the number 16 in the key to the plan.

By the time of the development of the Wellgate development area in the early 1970s the congregation had dwindled and the building was barely wind and watertight. In 1973 it was proposed that the Glasite Church would be conveyed to the Church of Scotland Trustees without payment, on the basis that the building would be renovated building internally and externally, and maintained it in use as part of the new hall complex.

There would have been no shared ministry because the theology behind the two charges would have been miles apart. Although Glas started as a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland while minister at Tealing after 1725, the Synod of Angus and Mearns suspended him in 1728 as a minister because of his views which included that Christ's Kingdom is purely spiritual and wholly separate from the state; the *osculum pacis* (Kiss of Peace); and the ritual washing of feet. The *agape* of communion was celebrated as a common meal with broth, from which custom his congregation was known as 'the kail kirk'.

**Why octagonal?**

Dundee University Archives have a manuscript collection relating to the congregation and it may be fruitful to consult this.

It had predecessors. The Octagon Chapel in Milsom Street, Bath, had been completed in was built by 1767 and had been designed as a church by the architect Timothy Lightholder, whose specific brief was to produce a structure which would be warm, comfortable and well lit. A fashionable church, it attracted distinguished visitors, including Jane Austen, who made a point of engaging a pew for as long as they stayed in the city, hiring it at the same time as they hired their lodgings.

A more likely influence for a Glasite congregation that decidedly would have avoided the tag of “fashionable” would have been from the Norwegian log church tradition such as the Hospitalskirken in Trondheim of 1707. The octagonal shape allowed the pulpit to be the focal point, according to the ideals of the Reformation where the spoken word (the sermon) should be the central act.