



**Cairns Church, Buchanan Street Milngavie**  
**Architect J B Wilson**  
**1903**

Although basically a traditional church design with much gothic detailing including tracery and trefoils, J B Wilson's design is consistent with other work of that date (1903) and includes Arts and Crafts/Scottish Art Nouveau influences. From the outside its dominant position on the hill presents proportions less vertical than might be expected in true gothic design with a beautifully balanced apse-inspired main church entrance. The red roof of the bell tower makes a singular statement and can be seen from a distance.

Internally, the space is mainly square in proportion with a typically United Presbyterian form of pulpit and organ pipe background. The soaring roof is a simple open truss form with dark stained timber lining. The main Arts and Crafts detailing here are the light fittings.

The original building complex of Church, hall, session room, vestry and small accommodation was extended in 1957 with the addition of a large multi-purpose hall with stage, small kitchen and toilet, this accommodation being built on a slightly higher level than the existing buildings, necessitating steps between them. A new rear door was introduced, and this through time became the most used access to the church.

In (2000), Cairns commenced a review of its direction as a Christian body in fulfilling its responsibilities to both the congregation and the wider community of Milngavie. Under the banner of DOVE a far reaching plan was agreed which had accommodation implications. Page and Park, Architects, were appointed to interpret these requirements.

Two clear phases were established: the reorientation and enhancement of the halls and ancillary accommodation; and the renovation of the sanctuary itself.

## First Phase

Located centrally in the building complex was the existing small hall, part of the original church buildings as described above.

In order to respond to the DOVE requirement of presenting an open and welcoming aspect to congregation and visitors, this room provided the ideal welcome and mixing space, a springboard to all the other accommodation within the complex: to one side the sanctuary itself; to the other, the halls; and adjacent to new toilets.

This mixing space, now known as the central court, was also at the same floor level as the sanctuary thus allowing for a level access from the adjacent car park making things easier for the less able. Between the central court and the main entrance is a vestibule and office, which also acts as a control point. Externally there is a large covered porch which, in aesthetic terms, continues the roof space and line of the new hall accommodation.



An internal ramp provides wheelchair access from the central court to the upper level of accommodation.

An open and airy hallway leads to new front and back rooms, both with steeply pitched roofs, these projecting out over the porch. Extensive glazing is a feature to the front and back. A strategically located skylight allows a framed glimpse of the cross on the roof of the sanctuary.

The hallway also links the new kitchen and existing large hall. Another small room beneath the stage is reached by a separate stair.



The new entrance approached from Buchanan Street is of modern design with exposed steelwork and simple cedar panelling.

The orientation of the roof covering porch and new rooms reflects the massing and orientation of the existing small hall (now central court), yet is quite different in design approach - a successful marriage of traditional stone with contemporary glass and cedar.

The entrance fully satisfies the overall architectural brief by being accessible and welcoming. Visitors, drawn into the centre of the complex, can then radiate through a variety of linked, well lit spaces to their chosen destination.



## Second Phase

Three key actions were taken within the sanctuary itself: removal of pews, reconfiguration of the chancel and upgrading of lighting.

As previously mentioned, the lights within the sanctuary express the Arts and Crafts movement. The dilemma was how to improve the level of illumination. On the front four units spot lights were added achieving extra directional illumination while still retaining the original fitments.

In the longer term, finances allowing, it is intended to introduce a number of up-lighters. As an interim action, several inexpensive freestanding up-lighters have been installed. All the lighting is controlled centrally and there are also a number of pre-set lighting formats which can be switched by anyone at the doors to the central court.

All the downstairs pews have been removed and replaced with loose seating providing the opportunity for different formations and to suit a variety of purposes. The main area is square which means that the seating arrangements can range from a complete circle through to more formal theatre layouts. The entire space downstairs has now been carpeted.



The chancel area had previously been modified with a balustraded surround added in the nineteen fifties, specifically to accommodate the choir; the organ console, previously in the centre of the church, was then moved to the side. The balustrades have now been removed which offer more flexibility. The chancel front is now concave in shape, thus forming a part of the circumference of the complete circle.

It is also important to note that, while the sanctuary has been remodelled to provide for flexibility, the pulpit forms an important part of the integrity of the overall design of the sanctuary and will remain although it is now less used in worship.