
The Chisholmites of Achmore

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Tiny splinter groups from Presbyterian Churches in Scotland have tended to be less strict than the denominations from which they break away; and sooner or later they have shown this by joining larger denominations.¹ In contrast, this article examines a group which claimed to be defending Second Reformation principles, which was arguably more conservative than its parent denomination, and which remained separate for seventy years despite having no office-bearers. Examination of its history suggests that its tiny band of followers retained the respect of those from whom they separated.

This faction consisted of several families in the village of Achmore on the island of Lewis who separated from the Free Presbyterian Church following the departure of a divinity student, Peter Chisholm, from the denomination in 1913.² They were part of a wider reaction against the

¹ Examples include the MacQueenites of Inverness, who broke from the Free Presbyterian Church in 1938, maintained separate services, and joined the Free Church in the 1950s in which they formed the influential congregation of Greyfriars. They left in sympathy with their minister, Rev Ewen MacQueen, who separated himself by a Protest at the 1938 Synod. See *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970* (Inverness, n.d.), p. 176. However, Mr MacQueen's son and a small group of others refused to join the Free Church: initially he carried on the separate services, held in the YMCA building, but eventually returned to the Free Presbyterian Church on Chapel Street in the city. Most of those who separated from St Jude's Glasgow congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church in 1945 in support of Rev Roderick Mackenzie over the Protest issue eventually found their way into the Free Church of Scotland in Glasgow. The residents of Lemreway, a village in the South Lochs district of Lewis, most of whom left the Free Church of Scotland for the Church of Scotland in the 1950s, were arguably in this category too. See John Macleod, *Banner in the West: A Spiritual History of Lewis and Harris* (Edinburgh, 2008) p. 270.

² The writer wishes to thank the many people familiar with the village of Achmore who advised him on this article. Particular assistance was provided by Mrs Catherine Mary

Church authorities' handling of the Chisholm case, which emerged in Stornoway and North Tolsta on the same island and in the city of Glasgow, but they were unique in the stance of neo-separatism which they took up. They have been briefly alluded to in print on only a handful of occasions: this note seeks to tell their story and to draw some lessons.³

I. Rev Peter Chisholm: a brief biography

Peter Munro Chisholm was born in Gravir, Lochs, Lewis, on 24th January 1884. His father Angus was a crofter and fisherman, and his mother's name was Ishbel Munro. Following various spiritual experiences in Glasgow, including studying at the United Original Secession College, he became a communicant member in the Free Presbyterian Church's St Jude's congregation in the city. He was accepted on 20th February 1908 as a divinity student, giving regular supply in Edinburgh. Objections arose – mainly among the elders at St Jude's – to his criticism of the practice of ruling elders speaking from the Word of God when conducting services. In a later defence of his position, Chisholm stated that he had no objections to elders speaking at Fellowship Meetings, or making “general and hortatory remarks” at prayer meetings, “without presuming either to preach from the text or give a lecture”.

The Southern Presbytery decided to stop him from taking services, although he retained his divinity student status, until he apologised for remarks made on several issues, including the question of ruling elders speaking from the Word. Chisholm then appealed against this decision of the Southern Presbytery to the supreme court of the Free Presbyterian Church, the Synod (which met in November 1912). Synod rejected his appeal and after refusing to withdraw from his opposition to Church practices, he was removed by Presbytery from the roll of divinity students. Chisholm left the denomination and held services for some sympathisers in a hall in Glasgow, then issued a book

Macleod, Mr Iain Macleod, Mr Neil Mackay, Rev John MacLeod, and Mr Calum Ferguson, Point.

³ The denomination's *History of the Free Presbyterian Church* states: “Mr Chisholm left the Church and held services for those who sympathised with him,” p. 117. Reference is made to this initial holding of services in *Memoir and Remains of the Rev Neil Cameron* (Inverness, 1932), p. 61. John Macleod's *Banner in the West*, p. 237, was the first occasion on which the word “Chisholmite” was used in print. A *Free Presbyterian Magazine* article of May 1949, “Where do we stand as a Church today?”, surveyed the denomination's various splinter groups but did not mention the Chisholm case or the separate group in Achmore.

defending himself in late 1913 before joining the Free Church of Scotland.⁴ He was inducted as minister of the Free Church congregation on the island of Coll on 17th August 1921, which he served until 1925. On October 21st of that year he was inducted to the new charge of Partick Highland Free Church in Glasgow. A historian of the latter charge wrote: “Mr Chisholm had a remarkable personality and was known for being forceful and courageous in action and speech and for being sincere and immovable in his convictions. It was later said of him that no Gaelic preacher in the Highlands could attract and command the attention of his hearers as he could. For sheer flow of oratory there were few to compete with him. He was bold and fearless in presentation of the Gospel.” Chisholm remained in Partick Highland until 1932, “when in deteriorating health, he accepted a call to the quieter charge of Lochalsh”. Following retirement he lived for some time in Ceos on Lewis, but was resident in Broadford, Skye, when he died on 1st July 1957.⁵

Chisholm’s reputation in the Free Church consisted of respect for his outstanding preaching ability and great kindness, and memories of his occasional eccentricity. It is said that the leading twentieth-century Free Church theologian, Prof R. A. Finlayson, once commented that he had never heard a preacher like him. Rev Angus Finlayson of North Tolsta and Prof G. N. M. Collins had a very high view of his abilities. People frequently found that his preaching was suitable to their spiritual situation and “notes” of his sermons circulated for many years after his death. Stories also abounded of Chisholm’s insight into the character of people with whom he dealt. On one occasion when ordaining office-

⁴ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, pp. 116-118. See also *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 18 (1913-4), pp. 26-33; “The Southern Presbytery and the Student Case”. For Chisholm’s view of the events, see his *Defence of Reformation Principles in Relation to the Free Presbyterian Student Case* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. 192-209.

⁵ Elizabeth MacPhie, *Five Into One; A Short History of the Congregations that Formed Downanvale Free Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, c. 2002), pp. 4-6. See also Peter Chisholm, *Wandering in Fields of Dreams* (Inverness, 1952), p. 45. The Partick Highland ministry is also briefly discussed in Tom Lennie, *Glory in the Glen – A History of Evangelical Revivals in Scotland 1880-1940* (Christian Focus Publications, 2009). A sermon by Chisholm appeared in the Free Church anthology of Gaelic preaching: *Dòrlach Sìl: Searmoinean le Caochla Mhinisteirean* (Edinburgh, 1931), pp. 117-128. See also *Stornoway Gazette* of 26th July 1957, letter by Rev Angus Finlayson, North Tolsta, p. 7. The remarks in the book *Five Into One* about his Gaelic preaching, oratory, and fearlessness were copied from this letter by Finlayson. Finlayson (1897-1973) also belonged to the South Lochs area of Lewis: a selection of his sermons and addresses in English were published under the title *No More Sea* in 1975.



Rev. P. M. Chisholm.

bearers, he quoted from John 6:70: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He reassured one of the new office-bearers who remonstrated with him afterwards that it was not him but another specific person to whom he referred. Many years later that individual proved to be a false disciple. Several other stories relate to his mentioning specific sins during the fencing of the Lord's Table, which it afterwards emerged were true of individuals who had stayed back from participation as a result of his fencing. He is remembered for one particular ecclesiastical

controversy within the Free Church: he believed that it was in danger of drifting from its moorings by allowing the entire communicant membership in any given congregation to have the vote in choosing new office-bearers. It is recalled that he opposed women communicants having the vote, but that his wider argument for such a policy was that the existing Kirk Sessions should make the choice. This was on the basis that they knew the calibre of potential new elders or deacons in their congregation better than the communicants in general did, and that the purity of the church could be maintained only by such close control.

He was noted for extreme kindness, particularly to the poor, and was known to have handed over clothes of his own from the drying pulley to poor people who arrived at the manse door in Glasgow. His eccentricity was mainly seen in occasional sharp-tongued remarks over minor irritations: on one occasion he is said to have refused to proceed any further with a service because the window behind his pulpit was shut and the sun was hot on the back of his neck, whereas a few weeks earlier it had been open and emitting a cold draught. He was willing to criticise in public the pulpit efforts of ministerial colleagues, including those of the calibre of Rev Murdoch Macrae (Kinloch) and Rev John MacSween (Point). Those who knew how to deal with him could defuse difficult

situations. As senior assistant at the Shawbost communions on one occasion, he had refused to get out of bed on the Sabbath morning. The local minister told the worried household that he knew exactly how to solve the problem. Chisholm leaped out of bed when the Shawbost minister told him that the junior assisting preacher was quite happy to take his place leading the main service of the day; he went on to preach a sermon spoken of for many years. Chisholm is widely remembered for saying that he believed he was not converted when he first began to preach; but it is not now clear which stage of his early ecclesiastical activities he was referring to.⁶

2. Some aspects of his separation

In 1912-3, Chisholm's supporters signed at least six petitions to Synod covering a wide range of alleged examples of declension in the Free Presbyterian Church. Signatures on two of these came from the Stornoway congregation and its then satellite congregations in Achmore and Tolsta. The other four petitions came from Glasgow itself.⁷ One petition opposed the Church's stance on allowing communicant members of other denominations to the Lord's Table in the Free Presbyterian Church. Another sought to ban communicants from having musical instruments in their homes. Chisholm's own book of 1913 claimed that the Synod treated the petitions with "contempt". He also implied that by copying the Free Church General Assembly's *Act and Declaration* of 1851 with regard to the First and Second Reformation attainments into its own constitution, the Free Presbyterian Church was weak in its stance on the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, as well as its position on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.⁸

There were several official Free Presbyterian responses to the issues being raised by Chisholm and his supporters. The same 1912 Synod which dealt with his appeal also issued a statement in which it defended the practice of ministers asking elders to conduct public worship in their absence and stated that they were not aware of the ministers having breached Scriptural precept or Reformed practice in so

⁶ I am grateful to a number of people for this material including Mr Donald M. Mackay of Gravir; Rev Donald MacDonald, retired minister of Carloway Free Church, Isle of Lewis; and Rev Angus Smith.

⁷ *Defence of Reformation Principles*, pp. 210-218.

⁸ *Defence of Reformation Principles*, pp. 13, 20-28, 218.

doing.⁹ The November 1912 meeting also passed a resolution reiterating the stance taken at the Synod's meeting in November 1911 which had approved the actions of the Stornoway minister, Rev Neil Macintyre, during communion services at the denomination's Canadian outpost of Winnipeg.¹⁰ Free Church communicants had been permitted to join in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The 1912 Synod resolution was essentially a further clarification of the denomination's position on Open Communion which stands to this day, namely that no one is permitted to partake of the sacrament unless known by a majority of the local Kirk Session to be "a God-fearing person". Crucially, the 1912 resolution criticised those who claimed that the Church's constitution had been changed by the 1911 decision in a way that "opened the door to receive members wholesale from other Churches to the Lord's Table". Synod went on to say that it had not and did not "intend to open the door to communion, in the least degree, wider than it has been in the Reformed Church of Scotland since the Reformation, and in the Free Presbyterian Church hitherto".¹¹

The main denominational statement on the Chisholm case came in the form of an article published in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* later in 1913. This underlined the fact that Chisholm's complaints against the Church's practice should have been raised with the Church courts rather than from the pulpit, a procedure to which he had given his assent when accepted as a divinity student in 1908. It added that his appeal against the Southern Presbytery had fallen as he had not submitted his reasons for appeal within the required deadline – a point of legal procedure which a person in his position should have known. More importantly, the statement defended the practice of an elder or layman who had "the spiritual gift" being permitted "on occasion" to "speak upon the Word to the people". Of the attempt to ban musical instruments and pictures in people's homes, the article stated: "The members of Synod decided that it would be absurd to lay down such rules in regard to private houses, and refused to make any pronouncements on the subject." The committee of Presbytery which prepared the article also stated: "the introduction of the changes proposed would . . . mean the constitution of

⁹ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, pp. 117-118. An article by Rev J. R. Mackay, arguing for ruling and teaching elders being one office, was published in the denominational magazine, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 17, January 1913, pp. 354-357.

¹⁰ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 16 (1911-12), pp. 289-290.

¹¹ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, pp. 118-119.

a new Church . . . the separation of Mr Chisholm and his few followers shows the schismatic extremes to which misguided zeal will lead people who ought to know better . . . ”.¹²

3. The Chisholmites in Achmore

At the time of Chisholm’s departure from the Free Presbyterian Church, its Achmore congregation worshipped in a small meeting-house (replaced in 1930 by the present building). They were part of the Stornoway pastoral charge, but effectively a congregation of their own with a complete apparatus of two Sabbath services and a week-day prayer meeting, usually led by salaried lay-preachers. The Lord’s Supper was also celebrated separately in the Achmore section of the congregation.¹³ The precise trigger for the separation of several households there from the denomination’s services, in support of Chisholm, is not clear. A deacon in the Stornoway congregation appears to have been suspended from office for involvement in the petitions and there may have been disagreement with this act of discipline. Around fifteen people in the village signed at least two of the petitions, but it appears that seven subsequently withdrew their names as a result of a letter from Rev Neil Macintyre to the signatories claiming that there were differences between the original (in Gaelic) and the English copy sent to Synod. A John Mackay of 9 Achmore took exception to Mr Macintyre’s letter and this may have been the departure point for the Chisholmites.¹⁴

Alternatively, the trigger for the departure from public worship in the Achmore congregation may have been that Chisholm began to hold separate services, “which were finally given up” before he joined the Free Church. A number of people, most of whom returned, left the St Jude’s Glasgow congregation at this time; this may have played its own role in

¹² *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 18 (1913-14), pp. 26-33; “The Southern Presbytery and the Student Case”. The committee also criticised an alleged view among Chisholm supporters that non-communicants should not be asked to pray in public.

¹³ See the sketch in the North Lochs Historical Society’s magazine *Dùsgadh* of September 2010, p. 5; and the material on pp. 10, 12 about the new church building, including a fund-raising poem by the missionary, Captain K. K. Macleod.

¹⁴ *Defence of Reformation Principles*, pp. 210, 216-217. Several of the North Tolsta office-bearers – also part of the Stornoway Kirk Session at that time – appear to have supported the petitions but whether the suspended deacon was one of their number, or resident in Stornoway or Achmore, is not clear.

encouraging separation on Lewis.¹⁵ It seems from Chisholm's 1913 book that he may initially have entertained hopes of gathering a permanent following and perhaps eventually of founding a functioning denomination. The language used reads like an ecclesiastical constitution. At one point Chisholm wrote: “. . . we, though few in number, and not in a position at present to exercise the keys of government and discipline, or to emit a judicial and adequate testimony, deem it our duty, in desiring to be found faithful, to associate together for the enjoying of proper religious instruction and ordinances of worship, and to do what is in our power to do.”¹⁶

The practice of boycotting Free Presbyterian church services out of sympathy for Chisholm was given its own Gaelic name in Achmore: “Creideamh Chisholm” or “the Chisholm Faith”. John Mackay of 9 Achmore seems to have had some form of leadership within the village among pro-Chisholm people. Nicknamed locally as the “Lord” he spent his working life as a gamekeeper on the Grimersta Estate. He was married to a woman called Joan who had professed faith in her early teens.¹⁷ She is remembered to the present day for composing spiritual songs, some of which bemoaned the state of the visible Church. One man in another household – Norman Mackay at croft no 2 – is believed to have joined the Chisholmite boycott (although this was strengthened in later life through sympathy for the separation of Rev Ewen MacQueen from the Free Presbyterian Church in 1938). His wife Lizzie continued to attend the Free Presbyterian services.

The other main household involved was at croft no 23, Achmore, where the children of Aulay and Margaret Mackay lived. The main siblings who sympathised with Chisholm were Christina (Ciorstaidh Aosta), Christina Ann (Ciorstaidh Òg), Mary, Margaret (Peigi) and John (Iain). Another sibling, Malcolm, did not join the separation and worshipped in the Free Presbyterian Church on his return from a period working in Chile. Iain was blind, a condition thought to have been related to childhood measles, but his other faculties were sharpened. He could walk from house to house with a stick, guide others in the dark

¹⁵ *Memoir and Remains of Rev Neil Cameron*, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Defence of Reformation Principles*, p. 10.

¹⁷ See Appendix 1. The dates in Appendix 1 are courtesy of the Stornoway Register Office. Information on the context of these family trees is provided in rich detail in Bill Lawson, *Croft History Isle of Lewis, Volume 18* (Comann Eachdraidh Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, Harris, 2009).

when they went poaching and was a skilled craftsman, remembered for his skill in making baskets.¹⁸ On one occasion the Free Presbyterian elder in the village, Murdo MacDonald, (Murchadh an t-Saòir) was asked to mend their chimney. After Mr MacDonald had completed the task, blind Iain went up to check his work, by touch. He proceeded to tease Murdo that the repaired chimney was like his godliness, as it could be blown away by the wind. (“Tha seo mar an diadhachd agad, falbhaidh e leis a’ ghaoith”.) On checking his work again, Murdo found that the repair had indeed left room for improvement.¹⁹

The sisters in the household at no 23 were resident in part of the village known as the Glen and came to be known affectionately as “Cailleachan a’ Ghlinne”, “the Old Ladies of the Glen”. Margaret (Peigi) maintained the stance on return to Achmore after a lengthy period of service in the household of the Duke of Gloucester. There she would kneel down with the children to pray before they went to bed, refused to do Sabbath work, and was reputed to have told one young boy that a royal relative of his was “bunk” for having used the same word “bunk” for the things of God. She later returned to Achmore – complete with upper-class English pronunciation in that language. Vague memories persist in Achmore of the occasion when grown-up children of the Gloucester family visited Peigi and some neighbours during a holiday on Lewis.

On Sabbaths, the family at no 23 would sit at home, dressed for church during canonical hours and reading their Bibles. Some contact with the visible Church remained. Their unusual behaviour for what was a church-going community at the time led to some strange rumours. One of the sisters was happy to quash a suggestion by a doctor in the Stornoway hospital that a family in Achmore spent the Sabbath reading their Bibles but not talking to one another! Visits to their home from some elders of whom they approved took place. Hospitality was offered to people attending communion seasons in the village, Finlay Smith of Breascleite, Dr Peter MacAulay of Carloway (related to the family), and

¹⁸ For the basket-making, etc., see Neil Mackay, Montreal, “Achmore: A village full of characters”, *Back in the Day* monthly history paper; September 2011; p. 18. This was a reprint of material published previously in the North Lochs Historical Society’s publication *Dùsgadh*. For more on the family, and the Achmore/Lochs and Harris diaspora in South America, see Greta Mackenzie, *Return to Patagonia* (Island Books Trust, 2010).

¹⁹ For an obituary of Murdo MacDonald, see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 85 (1980), p. 211.



The Achmore school, where Rev Peter M. Chisholm held occasional services well into the 1950s. To the right can be seen the Free Presbyterian Church building.

Dr Hugh Gillies of Stornoway, being regular and esteemed visitors to the home. Long after they refused to follow him into the Free Church, the sisters would join villagers of all denominations in going to hear Chisholm preach in the Achmore schoolhouse at occasional week-day evening services. These he arranged so as not to clash with the prayer meetings in either the Free or Free Presbyterian Churches in the village, and he continued to hold them into the 1950s.²⁰

The Chisholmites would also attend services at which Chisholm preached to packed audiences at the Stornoway Town Hall. These were organised by a Nessman called Kenneth Morrison, nicknamed “Spriga”, who ran a successful watchmaker’s business on Kenneth Street in the town. Chisholm’s preaching ability at regular stated services of the Free Church’s communion seasons was noted by the Rev Kenneth MacRae of

²⁰ The Free Church employed salaried laymen – “missionaries” – to hold services in Achmore until 1961. Sabbath services were discontinued in 1984. Prayer meetings continued on Wednesday evenings until 2003; the very last before the building was sold being held on 7th January 2004. *Dùsgadh*, North Lochs Historical Society, No. 59, September 2010, p. 5.

Stornoway. In 1924, while Chisholm was still on Coll, he recorded: “Mr Chisholm preached a sermon of extraordinary power from Isaiah 4:5 on the words *thar a’ ghlòir uile bithidh còmhach*. I was amazed at such a sermon. I never heard such originality, such flashes of doctrine, such depth of experience, and such power. A number in the congregation were overcome, and he was overcome himself. I had to struggle my hardest to keep from betraying my feelings also.”²¹ Chisholm’s piercing eyes were remembered many years later by a lady who had heard him preach at a cottage meeting in Applecross.²²

The Chisholmites are remembered in Achmore for their hospitality and dignity. The Free Presbyterian minister serving Achmore in their latter years included them in his regular circuit of pastoral visitation and was treated with kindness and good manners. It is said that people knew that hackles would rise in no 23 if the subject of Churches was raised in their hearing; but it was thought that they remained Free Presbyterians at heart, taking its side if differences with other denominations were discussed. However, they are also remembered as having been somewhat stricter than the local Free Presbyterian sub-culture. They left instructions for their burial that were far more austere than normal Free Presbyterian practice in late twentieth-century rural Lewis. In common with almost all Protestant denominations on the island, that practice consisted of simple family worship – a Psalm, Bible readings, and prayers – at the bereaved home on the day of burial led by elders. (Increasingly in latter years this was led by ministers and by the 1980s had begun to be held in church buildings.) The worship would normally then be followed by the traditional procession. This involved two parallel queues of men walking behind the coffin, from each of which a man would step in, after every six or seven steps, to help carry the coffin several yards until all had taken their turn at least once. Subsequently, transport by hearse to the

²¹ Iain H. Murray (ed.), *Diary of Kenneth Macrae* (Banner of Truth, 1980), pp. 191-2. On other occasions, however, Macrae noted Chisholm lapsing into harangues (p. 271), a phenomenon recalled by those who heard him preach regularly. One sermon in Glasgow was ruined by a harangue on the exorbitant size of a utilities bill that he had received. People would sometimes attend his preaching in the hope of hearing these harangues. According to the late Dr Duncan MacSween, Chisholm was aware of his tendency to digress from the subject and had an arrangement with his wife for her to raise her hand from the back pew of the church to warn him that he had wandered from the sermon. Notwithstanding Chisholm’s various eccentricities, Macrae retained a high regard for him to the end of his life (*ibid.*, p. 485).

²² Source: Matthew Vogan, Inverness.

cemetery would be followed by the interment and then by a very brief religious address at the graveside suited to the solemnity of the occasion.²³ The Chisholmite sisters went much further: Achmore Free Presbyterian elder Murdo MacDonald was left instructions to take family worship on the day of the burial but not to ask anyone else to pray. They also forbade the procession with the coffin, on the grounds that this public display of the coffin amounted to idolatry.

The sisters at no 23 took Sabbath-keeping to a point which some might argue bordered on the legalistic: the frying of an egg was forbidden that day, as it was too noisy, while the relatively quiet boiling of an egg was acceptable. The Chisholmites never accepted British Summer Time and would tease local Free Presbyterians that it was a sign of their Church's shortcomings that not even the clock in the church building told the right time. A Free Presbyterian elder who visited them after holding services was reproved for using the Gaelic phrase "*a' leantainn na h-eaglaise*", literally, "following the Church".²⁴ One of the sisters gently told him, "You should follow Christ". They were scathing about other denominations but as seen in the funeral instructions, they got on well with individuals whom they respected.

The last of the Chisholmites died in the 1980s. Margaret (Peigi) passed away in July 1982 and Christina Ann (Ciorstaidh Òg) in July 1986, both having lived well into their 90s.²⁵ However, the sisters at no 23 Achmore had helped raise two nephews, Aulay Macleod and his cousin Allan Mackay (Ailean Chalum Amhlaigh). Mr Macleod stayed in the village in adulthood, married, worshipped in the Free Church and died in 2002. Mr Mackay – son of their brother Malcolm – lived latterly in Helensburgh and passed away in 2009. While neither nephew continued the Chisholmite practices, nevertheless with their passing the last people who had lived in Chisholmite households were gone.

4. Discussion

Wider under-currents may have influenced the genesis of the Chisholmite movement:

²³ For Lewis and Harris funeral practices, see *Banner in the West*, pp. 306-309. The Free Presbyterians forbade prayer at the grave, but shared other Churches' practice of the graveside address, *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, p. 382.

²⁴ This is the Gaelic idiom for those who start to use the means of grace in earnest.

²⁵ I am grateful to the Stornoway Register Office for this information.

(1) The fact that the communion issue in Winnipeg arose from the action of their own minister, Neil Macintyre, may have disturbed some of the then Stornoway congregation. This nervousness may have been particularly intense if, as the Synod resolution of November 1912 suggested, inaccurate information about the denomination's intention towards other Churches was in circulation. A previous minister of the Stornoway congregation, Rev George Mackay, had left for the Free Church in 1905 and it may be that some Lewis people mistakenly worried that Neil Macintyre was no longer so strong on the need for a separate witness. However, in the debates at the Synods of June and November 1905 about the agitation for conference with the Free Church, Macintyre had consistently voted with Neil Cameron for the most conservative motions opposing closer links. Similarly, he went on to oppose closer links during the revival of this issue in 1917 and 1918 and 1931-2. Indeed, Mr Macintyre's reputation as a gospel minister and loyal Free Presbyterian remained intact. He had personally witnessed the historic moment when the Church's founding father, Rev Donald Macfarlane of Raasay, tabled his protest against the Declaratory Act at the Free Church General Assembly.²⁶

(2) It is possible that during his period as a divinity student, Chisholm expected that a more robust attitude might emerge *vis-à-vis* the position of the Free Presbyterian Church with regard to the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. Whether the motivation for this was the hope that it might help further differentiate it from the Free Church is not clear, but he was unhappy that the Free Presbyterian constitution was identical to the Free Church of Scotland's *Act and Declaration* of 1851 on the Second Reformation attainments. The issue of the Second Reformation attainments (and the failure of the 1690 Act in the Scottish Parliament which followed the Revolution of 1688 to return entirely to the position of the Church of Scotland between 1638 and 1660) had been discussed in the July 1909 Synod. A paper on the subject by Rev Neil Cameron of Glasgow was commissioned. Part of this was adopted by Synod in summer 1910 and published in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*.²⁷ It

²⁶ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, pp. 102-108, 121-129, 153-154. For the Synod tribute to Neil Macintyre see *Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland: Proceedings of Synod May 1954* (Glasgow, 1954), p. 25.

²⁷ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, pp. 115-6.

reiterated the position taken in 1851 by the Free Church that the 1690 settlement was unsatisfactory in that it left on the statute book the Act Recissory which had repealed all the work of Reformation achieved by the Covenanters.²⁸ It is possible that Chisholm was under the same misapprehension as Rev J. R. Mackay as to the task which Neil Cameron had been given by Synod in July 1909. Mackay and other individuals had thought that the denomination's relation to the Covenants themselves was the topic to be scrutinised, while Cameron and most members of Synod appeared to have understood that the task was to vindicate the character of those who undertook the work of the First and Second Reformations.²⁹ If Chisholm was unhappy about the Free Presbyterian position on the Covenants, his attitude was diametrically opposed to that of Rev Walter Scott who joined the denomination, seemingly as a result of the 1910 "Statement Anent Reformation Attainments".³⁰

(3) It is ironic in several ways that Chisholm ever joined the Free Church. First, he had opposed the admission of its communicants to the Lord's Table in the Free Presbyterian Church. Secondly, the Free Presbyterians' alleged weaknesses with regard to Reformation attainments were by his own implication shared by the Free Church. Thirdly, the practice of ruling elders speaking from the Scriptures at public worship was to be found in the Free Church. Fourthly, having served the Free Church for the rest of his life he found himself reviving the issue of elders speaking in a book of 1952.³¹ Sadly, it appears that after his retirement, Free Church ministers were reluctant to ask him

²⁸ "A Declaration anent Reformation Attainments, and the Church's relation thereto", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 15 (1910-11), pp. 147-153.

²⁹ "Competent Business", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 15 (1910-1), pp. 292-3.

³⁰ Walter Scott (1854-1916) had personally renewed the Covenants while belonging to an Original Secession congregation in Edinburgh, of which his brother William eventually became pastor. The congregation met at the Oddfellows Hall on Forrest Road, Edinburgh, and fifty-five of them had renewed the Covenants in October 1875. They had seceded from the Lauriston Street congregation of the Associate Synod of Original Seceders in 1873; see Archibald McWhirter, "The Last Anti-burghers: a footnote to Secession History", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. 8 (1944), p. 277. Walter Scott was described as having the "intensest admiration" for the witness of the Covenanters. He immigrated to Australia and was ordained and inducted into the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria, later joining part of his congregation in successfully applying to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. In older age he accepted a call to the Free Presbyterian charge in Ontario, Canada, centred around the settlement of Chesley. See *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 20 (1915-16), pp. 420-1 and Vol. 21 (1916-17), pp. 19-24.

³¹ *Wandering in Fields of Dreams*, pp. 76-80.

to provide supply or to assist them at communion seasons. It was suggested that the latter policy was carried out as a “kindness” to Chisholm himself.³²

(4) The whole rather sad account, and the Chisholmites’ separation, suggests a number of lessons. It is recalled that three of the family at no 23 Achmore who boycotted the public means of grace for decades were communicant members. This cannot but have weakened the cause in the village. It also seems highly probable that Chisholm gave too much credence to dreams and mental visions as a way in which the Most High communicated His will. One strain of Highland evangelical tradition gave, and gives, some place to the possibility that conclusions consistent with Scripture may be drawn from dreams; and that to that extent, some of these may be regarded as sent in Providence.³³ A number of conflicts through which Chisholm passed were resolved, to his own mind at least, when he sensed divine vindication for his own position or stance through dreams or visions.³⁴ Again, Chisholm’s case suggests that an ecclesiastical dispute may arise, and great damage and disruption be caused, over matters which the prime agitator later no longer believes to be sufficient reason for separation from other Churches. Finally, the case underlines the need for timeous and orderly transparency on the part of office-bearers and divinity students who find themselves resiling from the position held by the denomination to which they belong.

³² *Stornoway Gazette*, 9th August 1957, letter by Rev Angus Mackay, p. 7; *Stornoway Gazette*, 23rd August 1957, letter by “Free Churchman, Kyle”, p. 7. See also *Wandering in Fields of Dreams*, p. 81.

³³ See for example Rev Murdoch Campbell, Resolis, *Gleanings of Highland Harvest* (Christian Focus Publications edn.), pp. 122-125.

³⁴ A number of these dreams are described in detail, and the context provided, in Chisholm’s autobiographical *Wandering in Fields of Dreams*. One dream outlined on pp. 32-3 clearly encouraged him in his stance over opposing the practice of elders speaking, and making his remarks at St Jude’s. Another dream seems to be taken as vindicating his position in a dispute with some people in a Free Church congregation of which he was pastor.

APPENDIX I
THE TWO HOUSEHOLDS MOST INVOLVED
IN THE CHISHOLMITE DIVISION IN ACHMORE

Croft no 9, Achmore. Parents Donald Mackay (1852-1901) and Catherine Macleod, born 1856. Nine children, one of whom was John (Chisholm's supporter). John, born 1879, married Joan Mackay of 11 Achmore (1884 - 29th December 1966); John died 4th January 1970.

Croft no 23, Achmore. Parents Aulay Mackay (died 1899) and Margaret Mackay. Children: Christina (Ciorstaidh Aosta), born 1874, died 11th October 1969, aged 95; Catherine, born 1876, date of death unknown; John (Iain) born 1878, died 24th May 1959; Mary, born 1882, died 1st March 1964; Malcolm, born 1885, married Christina MacDonald of 17 Leurbost, died 16th June 1972; Margaret (Peigi), born 1886, died 30th July 1982; Marion, born 1887, married J. Macleod of 17 Balallan, died 8th October 1950; Kirsty Ann (Ciorstaidh Òg) born 1889, died 11th July 1986.

The semi-derelict house (centre) was that of croft no 23, Achmore, Isle of Lewis, where the Chisholmite sisters lived. The trees to the left are on croft no 9.



APPENDIX II
PETER CHISHOLM'S PUBLICATIONS

Defence of Reformation Principles in Relation to the Free Presbyterian Student Case (Glasgow, 1913), 221pp.

Sign of the Times (Glasgow, 1916), 20pp.

Sermon in the Free Church anthology of Gaelic preaching: *Dòrlach Sil: Searmoinean le Caochla Mhinisteirean* (Edinburgh, 1931), pp. 117-128.

Is There Not a Cause? Being Unfoldings of God's Grace through His Church (Pickering & Inglis, 1937), 200pp.

Wandering in Fields of Dreams (Inverness, 1952), vii+114pp.