



finally lifted and things could get back to normal the people of Galston held a public subscription and made presentations to Dr. Stirling in the Black Bull Hotel.

He became involved also with educational matters in the town and supported in particular, Mr Charles Blair, a manufacturer and philanthropist. Mr Blair had set up a Free School in Polwarth Street and Dr Stirling gave it his full backing, both in spiritual matters and also by donation of the Stirling prizes. After his death these prizes continued and were not done away with until the late 1980s. As well as Blair School he took an interest in the Sabbath School that had been set up by Henrietta Scott of Cessnock Castle at the Cross in Galston. For many years his daughter, Jane Stirling,

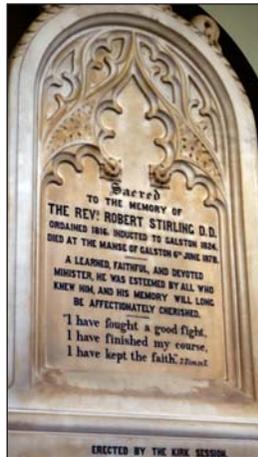
taught there Sunday by Sunday. She later also assisted in the soup kitchen set up to support poor people through the winter.

Dr Stirling died in 1878 and is buried in the Cemetery in Galston. His family in 1909 presented the church with a beautiful Austrian Oak Pulpit to grace the newly added chancel. It still takes pride of place there.

And what of his family? Jane didn't marry but continued to help her father in many ways. She also was a very intelligent lady and as a woman at that time had no recourse other than to assist her brothers in their schemes. She died in Ayr. Patrick and James became railway engineers. William was a civil engineer working on the railway systems of South America. Robert was also a railway engineer and working in Peru while David became a minister, like his father before him, and served the Parish of Craigie for many years and is buried in Galston Cemetery. Indeed the Rev. David Stirling was the Moderator of the Committee set up to elect an assistant and successor to his father. Agnes, the other daughter was a talented artist but gained no general renown. She married John Hunter, manager of Dalmellington Iron Works in 1860.

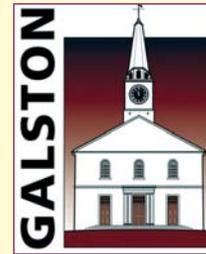
But Dr. Stirling's gravestone in Galston Cemetery fell into disrepair and was replaced by public subscription and dedicated on Sunday 3 May 2015 by Rev. Alastair Symington, Locum Minister in Galston at the time. The Bicentenary of the Stirling Engine was marked on Sunday 4 September 2016 in Galston Parish Church, where Rev. Dr. Robert Stirling served the Parish from 1824-1878.

IRENE HOPKINS.



Galston Parish Church of Scotland (Charity No. SC010370)  
Information Leaflet - *Our Heritage* - REV. ROBERT STIRLING  
[www.kirknews.org.uk](http://www.kirknews.org.uk) - email: [kirknews@btinternet.com](mailto:kirknews@btinternet.com)

# OUR HERITAGE



PARISH CHURCH  
of Scotland  
Charity No. 010370

## Rev. Robert Stirling

*A Minister and a man of science*



# Rev. Dr. Robert Stirling

**ROBERT STIRLING** was born at Cloag Farm, near Methven in Perthshire on the 25 October 1790. He was the third of the eight children born to Patrick and Agnes Stirling who had been married in Methven Parish in 1785.

Although his ancestors were mainly from farming stock there had always been a thread of interest in machinery and mechanical things running through the males of the family. His grandfather, Michael Stirling, is accredited with inventing a rotary threshing machine in 1758 at his farm of Craighead near Dunblane. Michael's son, Patrick, assisted his father in the maintenance and repair of these threshing machines which could do the whole crop of a large arable farm. One of Patrick's brothers, James, rode a power driven bicycle through the streets of Dunblane in 1810, and Patrick's son James, brother to Robert, became a Civil Engineer with interests in a foundry in Dundee. So Robert Stirling was surrounded by mechanics from birth.

From 1805 to 1808, he attended Edinburgh University, studying Latin, Greek, Logic, Mathematics and Law. In November 1809 he studied Divinity at Glasgow University and completed five sessions before returning to Edinburgh in 1814 to complete his training for the ministry. In 1815 the Presbytery of Dunbarton agreed that he was competent to preach and a licence to do so was granted the following March. He was presented by The Commissioners of the Duke of Portland to the Presbytery of Irvine, and after examination was ordained Minister of the Second Charge of Laigh Kirk, Kilmarnock on the 19th September, 1816

However during this period of study, Robert had not ignored his love of machinery and of invention and he had been busy before coming to Kilmarnock working on an engine known as The Heat Economiser and continued to do so after his induction. On 27 September, 1816, Robert Stirling applied for a patent for his heat engine. This patent was registered at Trades House on the 20 January 1817. Robert's brother, James, had been closely associated with the project and he took forward the idea to use in his own foundry business. He also encouraged his brother to look even further forward into the future of engines.

Meanwhile Robert had made the acquaintance of Thomas Morton in Kilmarnock. He too was brimful of ideas and had already set up a workshop at Morton Place. He was interested in astronomy, an interest that Robert Stirling began to share. Thomas Morton gladly allowed Robert Stirling the use of his premises both then and over the next 20 years.

Robert married in Kilmarnock on the 10 July 1819, Jean Rankin, daughter of William Rankin, wine merchant in Kilmarnock, and Jean McKay. She had been born in Kilmarnock on 27 June 1800, so was only 19 when they married. They had seven children; Partick, born 29 June 1820 in Kilmarnock; Jane, born 25 September 1821 in Kilmarnock; William, born 14 November 1822; Robert, born 16 December 1824 in Galston; David, born 12 October 1828 in Galston; James, born 2 October 1835 in Galston and Agnes, the youngest of the family, born 22 July 1838, also in Galston.

In the summer of 1824 Robert Stirling became the minister of Galston Parish Church, some five miles from Kilmarnock. The manse was built in Brewland Street in 1790 to replace the one in Old Manse Close. Dr. Stirling built himself a work

shop in the garden. It was said that anyone passing late at night could see the glow of an oil lamp and hear the clink of metal coming from his workplace as he continued with his great love of engineering as a dedicated hobby.

At the time of his death a contemporary wrote "his small, neat, dapper figure would be sorely missed as he marched about his Parish. Often his lips appeared to be moving apparently talking, seemingly to himself, as if his brain could not shut down and he was wrestling with some problem or other. He did not only hold to the comfortable and better set up homes of the town but was a true friend to the poor and hopeless, often bringing comfort in a material as well as a spiritual way. His sermons were well thought out and delivered with fire, but he did not talk "above the peoples' heads" but seemed to be able to reach hearts and souls."

It was also said that if he had entered the world of science he would likely have achieved great fame and fortune but his chosen occupation was the ministry and in it he achieved great respect and devotion. Men quoted that if his name had been spelt with an "e" then it would fully have described the man, a person of sterling quality in all aspects. Much has been written of his great scientific achievement in the invention of the Stirling Engine but what of the man himself? The book *History of Galston Parish Church* from 1909 gives us some insight into the man.

About the year 1832 he preached at a sitting of the General Assembly in Edinburgh. His text was Psalm 91 vv 14-16 "because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation." That was a text very appropriate to the man himself. He not only lived to attain his jubilee as a minister he was, for some years before his death, the Father of the Church of Scotland.

But he did not prevaricate. If he saw injustice he spoke out, if he saw a need he was there, if he held a strong view he told it out. For example at the time of the Disruption he showed sympathy to the cause. In May 1842 he and nine others were suspended for nine months by the General Assembly for holding Communion with the deposed ministers of Strathbogie. Much to the dismay of the General Assembly his reputation did not suffer from this act. Indeed it was increased among the congregation of his Parish and also among ordinary people for the part he played at that time.

Then in 1848-49 a terrible calamity came upon the town of Galston and of the surrounding countryside. The scourge of cholera laid its deadly hand on the folks. It was then that Dr. Stirling showed his true mettle. Then he proved his true courage as a man of Christ. Fearlessly he went about the homes struck down by cholera. He ministered to the physical and spiritual wants of the sufferers. He toiled among them night and day, he tended them, he prayed with them and he buried them. When the threat of disease was

