

## The Origins of St Serf's Parish Church

It all began when the Kirk Session of St Cuthbert's Church, West End, decided that, as part of their mission work in the North side of Edinburgh, it was urgent that a place of worship be built in Goldenacre. A meeting took place in a house in Arboretum Road on 28th of February 1899, to consider how this might be achieved. First, an application was made to the Governors of George Heriot's Trust for permission to feu an area of ground on the north side of Ferry Road, and west of a road still to be built, which became Clark Road. Heriot's agreed to feu the land.

It would take some few years before a stone church could be built and so, because a place of worship was so urgently required, a church made of iron and wood was purchased from a company in Glasgow to hold 350 people. It was erected roughly where the church halls now stand. It became known as the Iron Church. On the 15th of May 1899 it was dedicated the Church Of St. Serf Goldenacre. The opening service in the Iron Church was on the 21st of May 1899 and it was conducted by the minister of St Cuthbert's, our Mother Church.



Detail from the Choir Screen depicting the head of Saint Serf.

Why St. Serf? Well, we are very close to what may be termed "St. Serf territory". He devoted his life to spreading the Gospel throughout Fife, having begun his mission in Culross, just across the Forth estuary, and this church was built in the part of St Cuthbert's Parish nearest to the Firth of Forth. St. Serf was also a 6th century A.D. contemporary of St. Cuthbert. And although he died in Dunning in Perthshire on July 1st, he is buried in Culross.

Immediately the Iron Church had opened, it was decided that a stone church should be built as soon as possible, and plans for its erection got going in 1899. Ten architects were invited to submit plans (only nine did), and voting

took place in St Cuthbert's Church Hall on 18th of July 1900. The winning design was by George Mackie Watson: a cruciform church with two transepts, a tower supporting a high pointed spire at the south-east corner, a tall wide nave with wide pointed arches and carved window tracery each with a different design, all in grey and red sandstone. The north transept was never built because the Iron Church was at the time in the way. Nor was the spire ever built, because money became short.

The foundation stone was laid at the base of the pillar against which the pulpit stands on the 19th of July 1902 by the Provost of Leith, and buried beneath it are a foundation jar, a casket and some coins.

The opening service took place on Saturday October 17th, 1903 when the church was "dedicated to the service and worship of Almighty God", and the sermon was preached by the Right Rev. Dr John Gillespie, Moderator of the General Assembly. A Children's Service was held on the afternoon of the following day, and in the evening of that day, the church was full for the service, which means a congregation of about 600.