

Benefactions to St Luke's, Cuminestown and St Andrew's Cathedral, Aberdeen

St Luke's Church received a very big legacy from a prominent Aberdeenshire family, the Grant Duffs, Fanny Morgan wife of Ainslie Grant-Duff Ainslie and her daughter, Rachel, both of whom made substantial donations to St Luke's in their own way. This family played a large part in the history of St Luke's between about 1880 and 1925. The origins of the Episcopal Church in Cuminestown begin prior to 1660, the first chapel can be traced to a cottage now known as 45 Main Street; a



St Luke's Episcopal Church Cuminestown

feature of a stone ball, which identified the chapel, being prominently embedded in the gable-end. The present church dates from 1844 and was originally seated for 130. A wooden gallery, an original feature of the structure has now been removed and this probably accounted for almost half the 'sittings'. Compared with St Drostan's Inch, it portrays the natural building material of the region, which is red granite exuding a very attractive and welcoming church, almost beckoning you to see what treasures reside inside.

Fanny Grant Duff, [maiden surname Morgan] was surprisingly of Russian decent and heiress of a Russian Banking House. She married a career diplomat, Ainslie Grant Duff whilst he was attached to the British Embassy at St Petersburg. When he retired and inherited the great house of the Grant Duffs named Delgatie Castle, his wife spent most of her inheritance on the Delgatie estate and church and adding in 1903 a Sacristy in an extension to the south and a Baptistry on the west wall. The Grant Duffs were probably responsible for building the Church Hall.

It is however, their daughter, Rachel (baptised 1873 as Edith Fanny) who was acknowledged as a talented artist and antiquary with whom this article is concerned. Although records are sparse, there is no dispute that Rachel painted the reredos to the Altar of St Luke's. The Aberdeen & Buchan Churchman described the gift as a painting of high merit depicting a scene after the crucifixion with angels in adoring

attitudes while on the top of the Cross is the writing of Pilate, L. N. R. I. The right hand panel of the triptych represents an angel in a dark blue robe kneeling on a mass of cloud and presenting a cup to the figure on the Cross; local information states that this was a likeness of her mother, Fanny. The left hand panel a red robed angel standing on a wreath of clouds in an adoring attitude. The massive framing which is of dark oak has finely beaded pillars, moulded bases and carved capitals from which spring three Gothic arches; in turn these are surmounted by well-proportioned finials. The 'Buchan Churchman eulogises that Miss Grant Duff's handsome gift is a study in the blending of delicate colours which shows off the fine proportions of the various figures in beautiful portrayal, such, that it exclaims that artists are akin to visual poets.

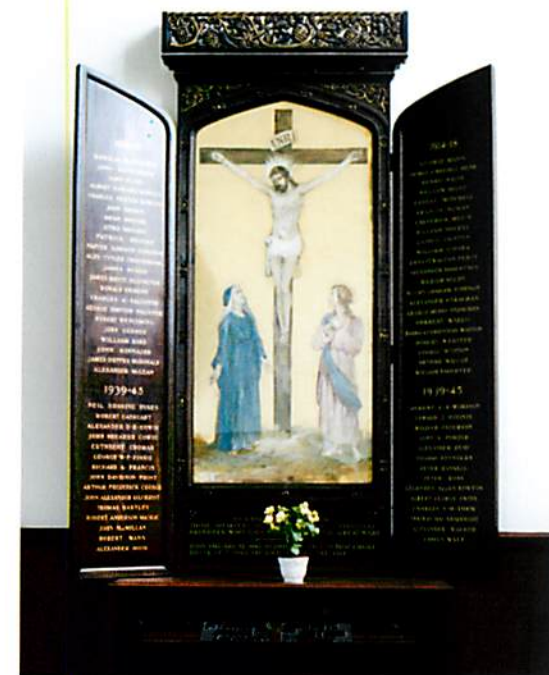
The background of the St Luke's reredos has been painted in gold which leads to the similarity of the other artwork also known to be by Rachel Grant Duff. I refer to the War Memorial in St Andrew's Cathedral, Aberdeen.

"The War Memorial was an important addition to the Cathedral. The cathedral magazine of December 1919 intimates: "It would not be at all creditable of us as a congregation if, in some form or another, we did not arrange a memorial to keep the names of the congregation who laid

down their lives in the Great War enshrined worthily in the Cathedral to which they belonged, and in which they have so often been prayed for. We are glad to announce that Miss Grant Duff of Delgatie Castle, a well-known artist, has very kindly offered to paint a picture illustrating self-surrender. The picture would be about 7 foot high by 3 feet wide and would need a carved oak frame with a panel on which the names could be put".

Aberdeen Press & Journal dated 29th November 1923

reports, "the war Memorial consists of a large dark oak triptych richly carved to the design of Sir Robert Lorimer Edinburgh, whose designs in carved oak is famous in every part of the country. The cresting work, which is very beautiful, has been picked out in gold, and the names of the fallen, are painted in gold on the panels. In the centre is a large picture of the Crucifixion, a real work of art; painted on a gold background, while on either side stand the figures of the Madonna and St John. The hands of the Blessed Virgin are open in surrender as showing that she is uniting her will to that of her divine Son in His great act of self-sacrifice, though that heroic union of her will with His, in conflict with all the instinct of a mother's heart pierces her soul like a sword. The face of St John is interesting. Through the horror of the scene he is beginning dimly to realise the profound spiritual meaning of it all. The artist is Miss Grant Duff of Delgaty Castle,



The painted panel in the War memorial of St Andrew's Cathedral Aberdeen is by Rachel Grant Duff,

who has presented the picture to the Cathedral. Underneath the picture the words are written, 'Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?' They say unto Him 'We are able.'" The names inscribed on the War Memorial are written in gold leaf on panels either side of the painting, shown very graphically in the picture by Chris Priestley. The 1939-45 information was added at a later date.

For the information on St Luke's and the Grant Duff family, I am indebted to Revd Canon Patrick Jones, a doyen of church historians, who has researched the Grant Duffs' genealogy, and the history of St Luke's.



The reredos at St Luke's Cuminestown