

# Robert Machray (1831-1904)



## An Aberdeen Boy — Primate of All Canada

In 2008 a small oil painting was bequeathed to the Diocese of what appeared to be an unknown hirsute bearded clergyman. Research discovered that he was a famous ecclesiastical son of Aberdeen.

**Robert Machray**, born in Aberdeen on 17 May 1831, of highland ancestry, was son of Presbyterian parents, Robert Machray, advocate in Aberdeen, and his wife, Christian Macallum. After early education at Nairn he enrolled at Aberdeen Grammar school under Dr Melvin, and entered King's College Aberdeen in

November 1847 as a bejan aged 17 where he graduated MA in 1851, being head of his year and winning the Simpson and Hutton prizes. A brilliant mathematician, he then entered Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he graduated in 1855 as thirty-fourth wrangler, In 1858 he was elected to a fellowship and dean of his college.

Despite the fact that he had been reared a Presbyterian in the East Parish Church, in his teenage years he secretly wished to take orders in the Episcopal Church: he told his mother he was intending to become a clergyman in the Anglican Church and occasionally attended services in St Paul's Episcopal Church Aberdeen

At Cambridge he joined the Church of England whereupon he was confirmed in All Saint's Parish Church. Before long, his presentation to the Bishop of Ely as an ordinand took place and he was seconded to the curacy of a Parish Church in the Winchester Diocese and then transferred as Vicar of Madingley from where his ascent was meteoric. The See of Rupert's Land, the cradle of European settlement and the site of the first Anglican service in western Canada in 1820, was offered to Machray in 1864 by Queen Victoria. Machray was consecrated in the Chapel at Lambeth Palace by Charles Thomas Langley, Archbishop of Canterbury along with other consecrating bishops including, Bishop Suther of Aberdeen. Machray, at a little over 34 years of age was the youngest Bishop in the Anglican See at that date. In an illustrious career in Canada, Machray built up the province from small beginnings; instituted a disused college as a seminary and founded boys schools and a ladies College, teaching the students himself where necessary. He became Chancellor of Manitoba University when that institution was founded.

In 1875 Machray became metropolitan of Canada, and on the union of the Canadian



Anglican churches in 1893 he was created archbishop of Rupert's Land and Primate of all Canada. He arranged the formation of the general synod of the province which met in that year. Machray also played an important role in the establishment of the Lambeth Conferences which he attended in 1878 and 1888.

He died unmarried at Winnipeg on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1904 in the thirty-ninth year of his episcopate and the seventy-third

of his life after a severe attack of pleurisy. He was given a state funeral and was buried in the cemetery of St John's Cathedral —not bad for an Aberdeen boy who was born a Presbyterian?

*Stuart Donald*



The pictures are (clockwise) Most Revd Robert Machray; the memorial window in the south light of the east window depicting the work of (in ascending order) Robert Machray, archbishop of Rupert's Land 1865-1904; Robert McDonald missionary to the Yukon; Walter Barfoot, archbishop of Rupert's Land 1961-1970; Hon Colin Inkster, Sheriff of Rupert's Land and Warden of St John's College 1871-1933; and the exterior of St John's Cathedral, Winnipeg showing the graveyard where Robert Machray is interred.

contact us: [archives@aberdeen.anglican.org](mailto:archives@aberdeen.anglican.org)