



# THE GLASITE MEETING HOUSE TRUST

The Glasite Meeting House, 33 Barony Street, Edinburgh, EH3 6NX  
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## ***Information on the Glasite Meeting House 33 Barony Street***

The Glasite Meeting House is the former place of worship of the Edinburgh branch of the “Glasites”, now better known as the Church of Christ. The Glasites were a small Scottish sect named after their founder Rev. John Glas, who was born in Auchtermuchty in 1695. Originally John Glas was an ordained minister in the established Church of Scotland. However, gradually he began to question the spiritual nature of the Church. This naturally caused a great deal of conflict and as a result he left the Church and established an independent ministry.

Glas opened his first Meeting House in Dundee in 1732, followed by one in Perth in 1733. A year later the Edinburgh Meeting House was opened at a location near Chambers Street but no physical evidence of this building survives other than drawings dated 1792. In time more than 30 Meeting Houses were established throughout Scotland. All churches were structured without a central figure as minister, and instead the services were led by Elders and Deacons who were democratically elected by the congregation. Marriages, funerals and baptisms were not considered religious ceremonies and therefore no services were conducted in the Meeting House for these events.

The main doctrine of Glas’s beliefs was the Word of the Lord as written in the Scriptures. No Meeting House has ever been consecrated as there is no reference in the Scriptures for the need. Meeting Houses were not decorated with superfluous man-made objects, nor art of any kind. The places for worship for the Glasites reflect the simple dignity of their services. There were no organs or pianos, no musical accompaniment of any kind for the singing of the Psalms (never hymns). During the singing the congregation sat with their faces upturned and their arms uplifted to ‘receive the Spirit’.

Given the austerity of Glas’s religious practices one might expect him to have been a dour person, yet he is described in many references of the time as a sweet and gentle man with a very good sense of humour. His marriage to Catherine Black was a long and happy one, and one which produced 15 children. Glas died in November 1773 aged 78 years. He is buried in the “Old Howff” cemetery in Dundee. The inscription on his grave stone reads in part “His character in Churches in Christ is well known and will outlive all monumental inscriptions”.

### **The Edinburgh Meeting House**

In 1834, tenders were sought for a new building for the Edinburgh congregation’s recently purchased plot of land in Barony Street. A bid of £1,850 was accepted by the Elders in April 1834. The Glasites had purchased the land from the Heriot Trust and hired the Trust’s surveyor, Alexander Black, to design their building. The Meeting House was Black’s first commission as an architect and is unlike any of his later designs. The Barony Street building with its modest domestic exterior, simple interior and lack of decoration was

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built to the Glasite specifications. Work was completed on the building on 26th December 1835.

Alexander Black's detailed specifications include the massive moulded mantelpieces for the Feast Room (valued at 30 shillings each) and the cast iron railings for the main stair (7 shillings). All carpenter work was to be of Miramuc yellow pine, and the pews were to have no space for kneeling since they used the ancient method of uplifted arms. External specifications were that the walls of the chapel were to be hand finished with ashlar, the blank windows on the exterior were to be filled with best Arbroath pavement, and the windows of the feast room (now the McWilliam Room) were of polished brown glass, to avoid being overlooked.

The only features not in the original specifications are the pulpit, designed by David Bryce in 1873, and the two circular windows added for ventilation in 1890 by James B. Dunn. The pulpit is arranged so that the Deacons occupied the lowest seat, the Precentor and the Reader the middle, and the four Elders sat in the upper row.

Sunday Services in the Edinburgh Meeting House were all day affairs, beginning around 11am and ending about 4pm. There was a mid-day break for a meal or "love (agape) feast", prepared by the resident housekeeper. Served in the first floor feast room, the meal always began with kale soup, which earned the Glasites their nickname as the "kail kirk". Meals were carried upstairs by means of the dumb waiter located just off the kitchen. Only sworn adult members of the church were allowed to partake of the feast, children and guest members ate in the kitchen.

Worship services consisted of the singing of psalms, prayer, readings from the scriptures, and blessings. Services were conducted by Elders and selected male members of the congregation. The boxed pews within the main meeting hall were family pews and no exception was made for children during service; they remained in the pews with their families throughout the day. To pass the time, they carved their initials in benches, rubbed the finish off the pew backs, and generally did what other children would do under the circumstances.

The Edinburgh building is the largest and most elaborate of the Meeting Houses in Scotland. Graceful architectural details on the interior soften the general plainness. Two clocks original to the building are still functioning today. Three of the original feast tables and their benches are often used for conferences, meetings, dinners and special occasions. The Edinburgh Meeting House continued as a place of worship for the Glasites until November 1989. By that time, the congregation had dwindled in number from over 200 to just six. When the resident housekeeper announced her wish to retire, the congregation, unable to maintain so large a building, gave the Meeting House to the Cockburn Conservation Trust.

At present the building is the national headquarters for the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, and owned by its charitable company, The Glasite Meeting House Trust. ICON and The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in Scotland (SPABiS) also have offices in the building. The Trust has recently carried out an external stonework repairs project, and restoration work to the cupola in the Meeting Hall.

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