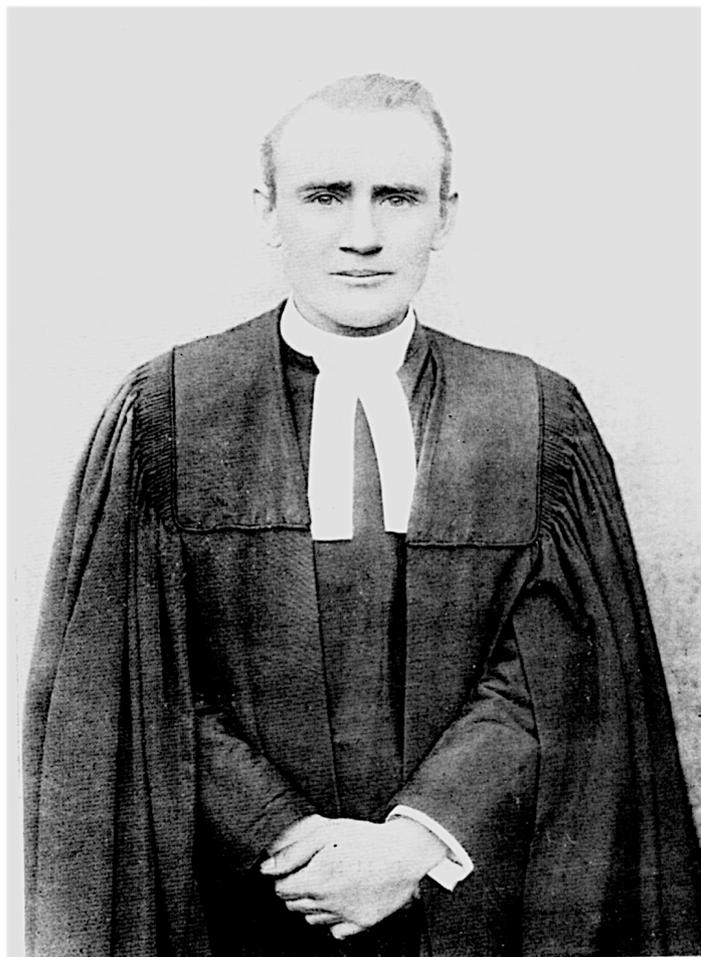


### 3.23 Rev. William James Guy Macbeth

Wilbert Garvin



Reverend pipers are of course nothing new. Francis O'Neill, in his *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* devoted a whole chapter to them. In particular we remember Rev. Canon Goodman and the Rev. Richard Henebry. The Rev. Guy Macbeth is however the first Presbyterian minister that I have come across who played the Uilleann pipes.

Originally from outside Derry, Guy Macbeth was from a family of Presbyterian ministers. His grandfather, Rev. William James Guy was minister in Irvinestown, County Fermanagh; his uncle Rev. James M. Guy was minister in Ballindrait, County Donegal, and another uncle Rev. J. C. Guy was a minister in America.

Mr. Macbeth was assistant minister to Rev. William Witherow of Westbourne, Belfast, when he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1912. A description of Rev. Macbeth at that time was a notable one – ‘There rested on young and virile shoulders, the head of a wise old man.’

He then received a call to the Presbyterian Church in Ballyclare, where he stayed until retirement in 1954.



Ballyclare Presbyterian Church

Some of Rev. Macbeth's relatives – the Guys – lived in Irvinestown, 17 miles south west of Omagh near the banks of Lower Lough Erne. His cousin Joseph's shop, a general store known as Liverpool house, was taken over a few years ago and converted into what is now the local library.



When he was young he often went to visit his friends in County Fermanagh and when there loved to fish in a local river. When he returned he gave the fish to the poor folk living in Foundry Lane in Ballyclare. This lane still runs off the main Ballyclare to Doagh road, right beside the church.

It was through his contacts in County Fermanagh that he developed a liking for Irish music. His interests in music were wide, but like most traditional musicians he could not read music and so, played by ear. He played the fiddle and the cello and could pick up tunes very quickly. Apparently he had a very good sense of pitch. He often played the pipe-organ in his church and could tell when it needed to be tuned. He also played the Highland pipes, but later on in the 1930s – he would have been in his 50s then – he heard R. L. O'Mealy on the radio and was taken by the sound of the Uilleann pipes.

One day when looking around Smithfield market in Belfast, he spied a set of O'Mealy pipes for sale and purchased them. According to Cecil Colville, many years later - possibly after his death - the set of pipes was bought by an elder of the church, and eventually was returned to Smithfield market where they were bought by Jim McIntosh; this is the set now played by Trevor Stuart, in silver and ebony, with the double bass regulator<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> See 3.10 *A deluxe Richard O'Mealy full set of pipes* by Bill Haneman

Rev. Macbeth normally played his pipes in the bay window of his upstairs study when he was accompanied by his Highland Terrier, appropriately called Jock, who always sang to the pipes. (*Author: I have a Jack Russell terrier that does just the same.*)



*Jock*

Rev. Macbeth died on the 25 Oct. 1961, in his early 80s and is buried in Ballyclare cemetery., Newtownabbey.



*The Reverend Macbeth's grave in the Ballyclare Cemetery, Newtownabbey*

#### *Acknowledgements:*

I would like to thank the Rev. Macbeth's daughter Juliette Lyle for her lively chat, and who supplied me with the information for this article. She was married to Rev. J. Lyle (deceased), who was minister of 1<sup>st</sup> Ahoghill Presbyterian Church (near Ballymena).

I would also like to thank Rev. Robert Bell, the present minister of Ballyclare Presbyterian church, who introduced me to Mrs. Lyle.