

THE GERMAN CHURCH IN RENSHAW STREET,  
LIVERPOOL, FORMERLY NEWINGTON CHAPEL.

By *Henry Peet, M.A., F.S.A.*

Read 12 October, 1933.

THIS building was erected, and opened for worship in 1777, and known as "Newington Chapel."<sup>1</sup> The congregation was a mixture of those professing Independent, Congregational and Presbyterian principles, who dissented from the appointment of Mr. Hugh Anderson to the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth.

The entrance to the chapel until 1820 was in Cropper Street. In that year the Gothic façade, facing Renshaw Street, was built, and on the north buttress there is carved the words, "New fronted, 2 Feb., 1820." The school on the south side was built in 1863. At the apex of the gable end of the schoolroom is a large sculptured stone, with a shield of arms, boldly carved. This chapel originated about 1775, when the above-mentioned Mr. Hugh Anderson, by a majority vote, was appointed the Minister of the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth. A considerable minority of the congregation was dissatisfied with the Arian or Unitarian doctrine advocated by their new Minister. He was, if report is true, something of the type of the "Vicar of Bray", and at first showed an accommodating disposition. To the remonstrance of the dissenting minority, he replied that "if the people would

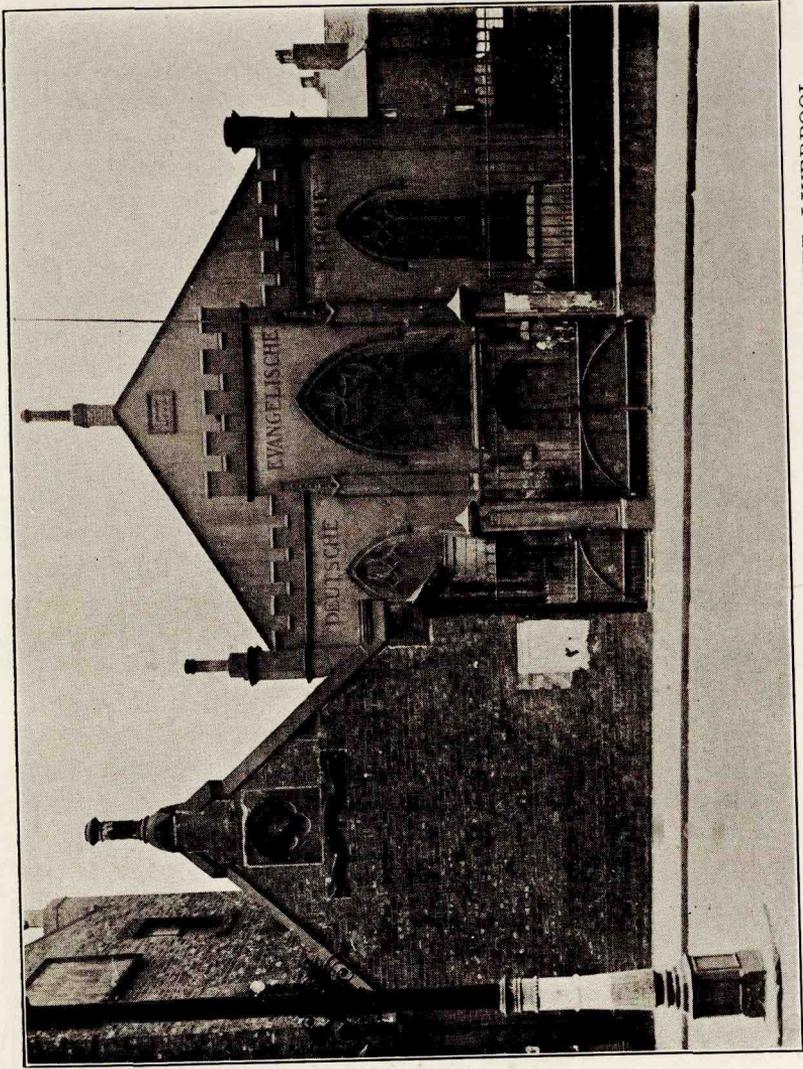
<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the building of the church, in 1777, and of the Ministers officiating there, see *Trans. Hist. Soc., Lancs. and Ches.*, Vol. 5, p. 3, 1853, entitled *Liverpool Churches and Chapels*, by Rev. David Thom, D.D., Ph.D. These papers, with corrections and additions, were reprinted and published in volume form. The Rev. David Thom, a Presbyterian, must not be confused with the Rev. John Hamilton Thom, who was appointed Minister in 1831, of the Unitarian Chapel also in Renshaw Street, and nearly opposite Newington Chapel.

only agree about their doctrine, and let him know what it was, he would gladly preach it." These broad-church sentiments further estranged the minority, and they determined to secede and build a chapel for themselves, and appoint a Minister professing evangelical opinions. Some objection was at first raised to the site chosen in Renshaw Street for the new meeting-house, on the ground that the position was too far from the town!

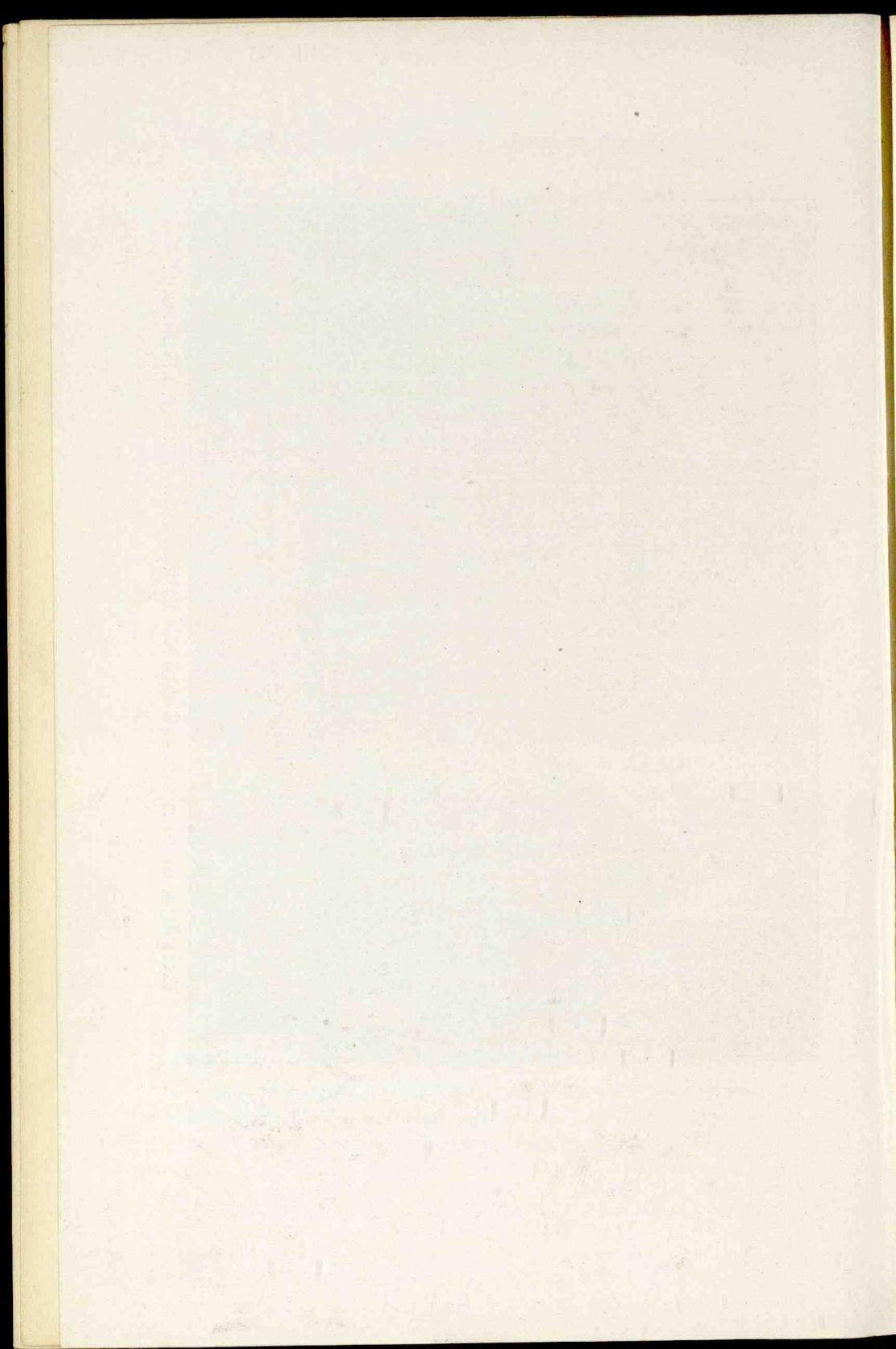
The first Minister was the Rev. David Bruce, who remained there until his death on 28 June, 1808, at the age of 56. He was buried in front of what was later to be the main entrance to the chapel. His wife, Elizabeth Bruce, died in May, 1832, at the age of 72. Her name, and the names of six of their children, are inscribed on the not now very legible gravestone.

After an interval Mr. Bruce was succeeded, early in 1811, by the Rev. Thomas Spencer, a young man of great talent, and of remarkable oratorical powers. So great was the number of people who crowded the chapel to hear him, that it was found necessary to erect a larger building, and in April, 1811, Spencer laid the foundation-stone of Great George Street Chapel—but he was never to preach there. Within a few months, 5 August, 1811, he was accidentally drowned whilst bathing on the south shore of the Mersey, near the Herculaneum Potteries. He was buried in Newington Chapel-yard, and during the recent disinterments the lead coffin, with his name on the breast-plate, was found. The names and appointment of the succeeding Ministers, some of them men of note in their day, will be found in the paper by Rev. Dr. David Thom, in Volume 5, referred to in footnote 1. See *Life of Thomas Spencer*, by Rev. Dr. Raffles, 1814, and also Philip's *Life of Geo. Whitfield*, page 553.

By the year 1871, the congregation had much diminished. Some found their way to the Scotch Church, in Oldham Street, and some to Great George Street



EXTERIOR OF THE GERMAN CHURCH IN RENSHAW STREET, LIVERPOOL.



Chapel, and others to the Presbyterian and Congregational chapels which had sprung up in different parts of the expanding town. In the above year (1871) Newington Chapel was sold to the trustees of the German Evangelical Church, and the next year the German community commenced to worship there.

The early history of the German people's church activity in Liverpool will be found in a book published at Stuttgart in 1921, from the pen of A. Rosenkranz, now Minister of the German Church in Kreuznach, who came as the Minister of the Renshaw Street church in 1908, and remained until the War broke out in 1914.

The 27 December, 1846, however, may be said to be the real foundation of any organised German religious community in Liverpool, and the founder was Dr. Baylee, Principal, from 1846 to 1868, of St. Aidan's College, Birkenhead. He was the first person who interested himself in the German sailors he found employed on the ships, and at the Docks. He appealed to the Bishop of Chester for help in this work amongst the poor German people. The Bishop was not slow in responding to this appeal, and forthwith ordained David Jacoby Hirsch, a converted German Jew, and sent him to Liverpool as assistant to Dr. Baylee; under the Bishop's licence services were allowed to be conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer, translated into the German language, at St. Michael's Church, Pitt Street. This mission started with 86 people, and soon afterwards numbered 130. The seamen who had attended the Bethel Union, and the Seamen's Friend Society, soon found their way to St. Michael's Church. Previously they rented a room in Rathbone Street, and also assembled in a building in Sir Thomas Street. At a later period a Mission Room in William Mault Street, off Scotland Road, was frequented by the German sugar-bakers, pork-butchers and seamen. This Mission Room

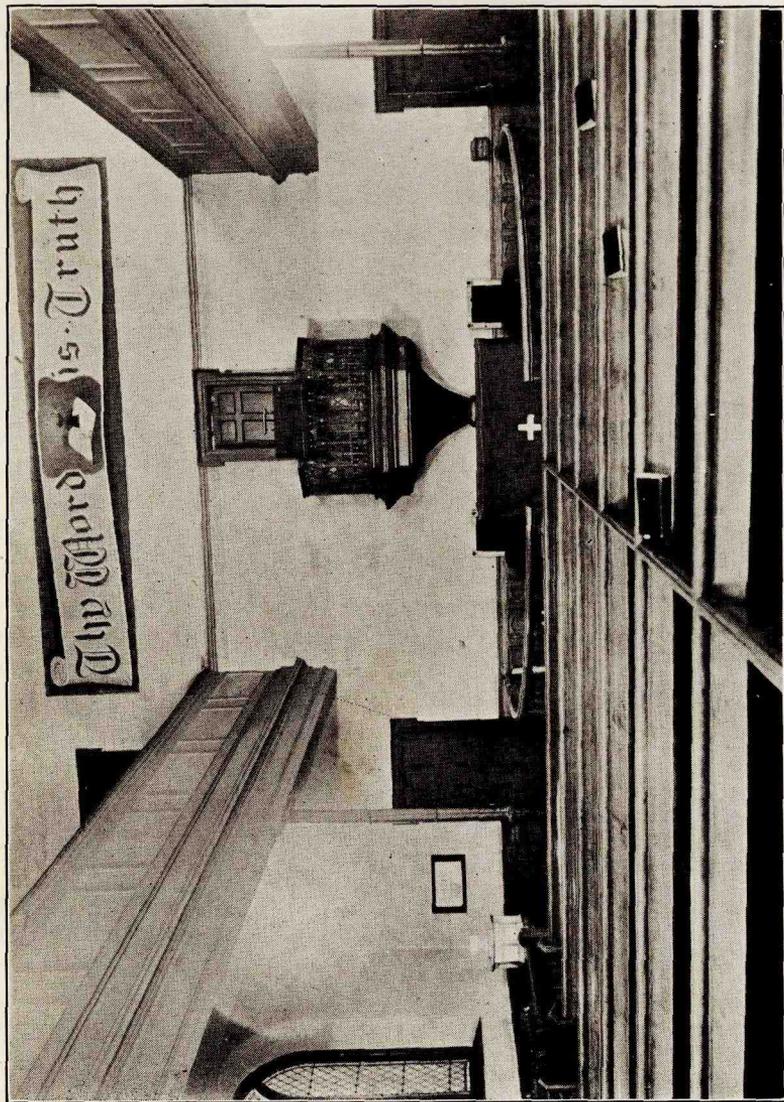
is still in existence, and used by the Calvinistic Methodists.

The need of a church of their own, centrally situated, in which the Evangelical Lutheran rites could be celebrated, became more and more manifest as the community increased both in numbers and wealth. An opportunity presented itself in 1871, when Newington Chapel came into the market. At that date many well-to-do German merchants were settled in Liverpool; with their support Newington Chapel was purchased, and was thereafter known as the "German Evangelical Church." They appointed as their first Minister the before mentioned David Jacoby Hirsch, who had for so many years faithfully laboured amongst their countrymen. He continued to hold this position until 1876, when owing to blindness he retired. He died in 1898.

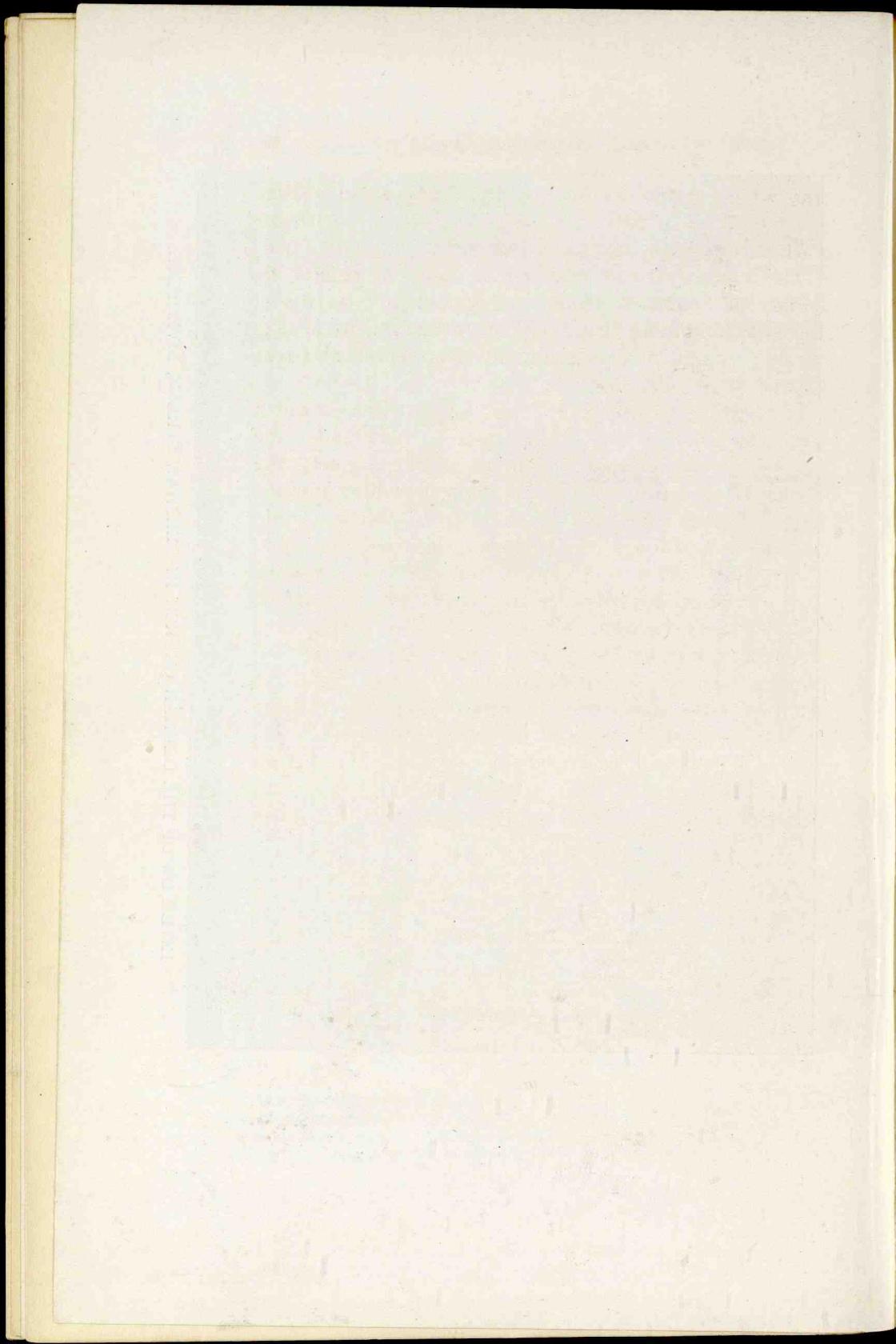
The scattered congregations assembled in their new home, and had a prosperous career. A capital sum sufficient to bring in an endowment of £300 a year was raised, placed in the hands of the more opulent members, as trustees, and a succession of German Ministers were from time to time duly appointed. Two years ago (1931) the property was sold to the Cheshire Lines Railway Committee<sup>1</sup> for £14,000, and the trustees purchased a disused church, at the corner of Canning and Bedford Streets, for £4,000, so that the balance, if judiciously invested, will considerably increase the endowment fund. The congregation removed to this church, in Canning Street, and the first service was held on Sunday, 25 October, 1931.

The removal of the bodies from the burial-ground commenced early in 1933. The last burial took place on 23 August, 1853, when the grave of the first Minister

<sup>1</sup> Under the provisions of the Act of 63 Vict. cap. 6 (25 May, 1900). This Act empowered the Railway Committee to demolish the chapel, and to use the whole of the site for building and commercial purposes, subject to the removal and reburial of bodies interred in the adjacent burial-ground.



INTERIOR OF THE GERMAN CHURCH IN RENSHAW STREET, LIVERPOOL.



was again opened to receive the body of his eldest daughter, Mary Bruce, who had died at 39 Upper Parliament Street, at the age of 71.

The earliest Burial Register is lost. It cannot be found at Somerset House, or elsewhere. A Burial Register containing the record of 70 burials, from 1837 to 1853, is still in existence, and is preserved at Great George Street Chapel.

It is estimated that in the 121 separate graves which were identified in this small cemetery, and under the Schoolroom (there were no burials in the Chapel), the bodies of approximately 550 persons, including infants, were interred. The soil is of a light, porous, sandy nature, and the remains had mostly dissolved into dust. Three lead coffins were found, but were not opened. Three hundred and eight perfect skulls were unearthed, and portions of several others. A few thigh-bones and fragments of other bones were found. These scattered remains were all collected and placed in 39 coffins, and reburied in the consecrated Parish Cemetery (now known as Walton Park Cemetery), Rice Lane, Walton.

The gravestones were mostly undecipherable. That of the Rev. David Bruce was the best preserved.<sup>1</sup> Another stone of some interest recorded the death

<sup>1</sup> In memory of the REV. DAVID BRUCE, who was the first pastor of this church and congregation, and continued to exercise his ministry for upwards of thirty years, whose faithful labours will be long remembered by many and will be his crown of rejoicing on the Great Day. Died 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1808, aged 56 years. Also ELIZABETH, relict of the above, who departed this life on . . . May, 1832, aged 72. Also JOSEPH HALL, sixth son of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, who was interred 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan., 1802, aged 2 years and 7 months. Also THOMAS, eldest son of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, died 2 March, 1818, aged 34. Also SAMUEL HIGGINSON, fourth son of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, who died in Charleston, S.C., 20 Sep., 1819, aged 25. Also HANNAH, widow of the above Thomas Bruce, died 12 Oct., 1821, aged 31. Also RICHARD, fifth son of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, died 5 July, 1827, aged 30 years. Also DAVID BRUCE, R.N., second son of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, died 28 Aug., 1843, aged 55. Also MARY, eldest daughter of the above David and Elizabeth Bruce, died 18 August, 1853, aged 71.

of Elizabeth Clayton, on 6 April, 1834, at the age of 101.

Two brass tablets, finely engraved, were until recently in the church. One, to the memory of Emil Springmann, erected by his son, was removed to Canning Street. The other, to the memory of David Jacoby Hirsch, has mysteriously disappeared.

