

# The Church of Scotland – Article 1

The Church of Scotland is a mainstream Protestant Christian church, but like all churches it has developed its own authentic and individual character.

The history of Christianity in Scotland goes back to 400 CE, although the institution itself did not become the established Church of Scotland until 1560, following the Reformation, and the work of John Knox and others.

Despite schisms that led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, loyalty to the Church has remained strong.

In 2000 Church membership was estimated at 607,714. This figure only represents those officially listed as members. The number of people who consider themselves part of the Church in a more informal way is significantly higher.

## **The early church**

The history of Christianity in Scotland goes back to Saint Ninian in 400 CE. He is said to have led a mission to Scotland which resulted in many conversions.

In the 5th Century another influential figure, Saint Columba, arrived on the Scottish island of Iona where he established a monastic community. This worked to spread the Christian gospel in both Scotland and Northern England.

In the 7th Century, the Celtic branch of the church gave way to the more widespread Roman tradition, and the church in Scotland became more unified.

The mediaeval church in Scotland was highly influential and its clergy held great secular power. Education was run by the church, and by the time of the Reformation the Church owned half of Scotland.

Political disputes, corruption within the church and new religious ideas from the continent led to discontent with the church. Some church leaders shared this discontent and tried to take action, but were not able to bring about change.

The church was determined to maintain its power, and people who would not conform were sometimes killed. One of those was the scholar George Wishart, a scholar who was condemned for teaching New Testament Greek, preaching Protestant Christianity and denouncing the practices of Rome.

Wishart influenced the thinking of many Scots, among them John Knox, the pivotal figure of the Scottish Reformation.

***This is the first part of a series of articles sourced from the BBC on the Church of Scotland that will appear in The Parishioner over the coming months.***