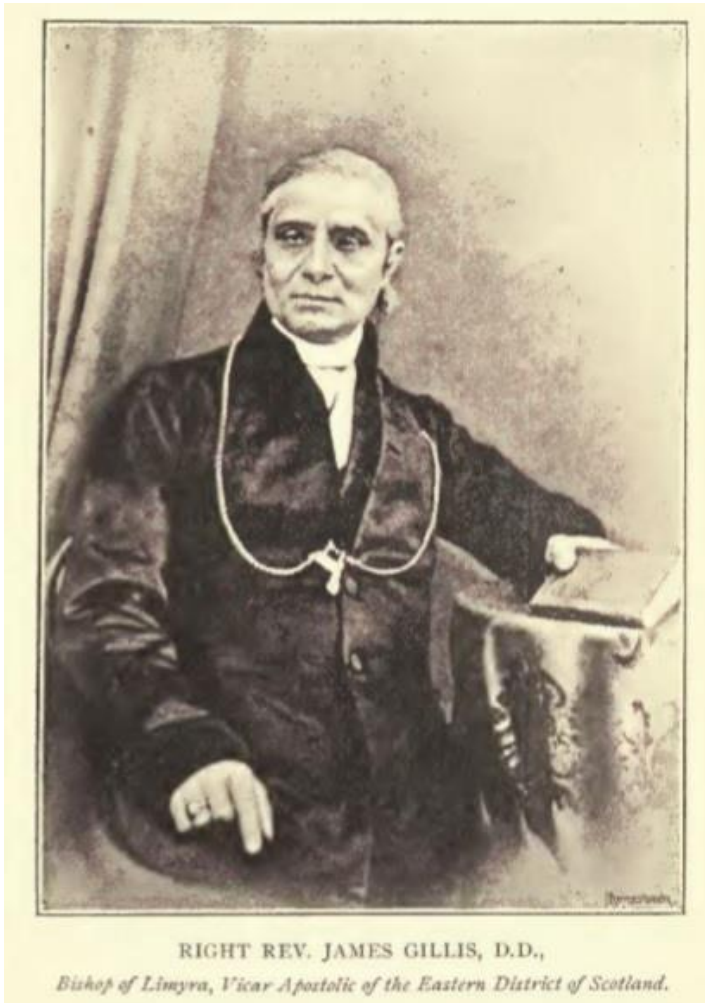




## Bishop James Gillis



RIGHT REV. JAMES GILLIS, D.D.,

*Bishop of Linyra, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland.*

James Gillis was born in the city of Montreal in the province of Quebec, Canada on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1802, the son of a Scottish emigre father, also James Gillis and English mother, a Miss Langley, a native of Kent England who was then a Protestant Episcopalian. At an early age James Gillis jnr was placed by his father at the Sulpician College in Montreal. There he acquired proficiency in French, a skill which was to aide his vocation greatly at a later stage. He was also to meet there several fellow students who later went on to become eminent Canadian politicians, Government Ministers and Advocates at the Canadian Bar.

Having sold up in Canada his father and his whole family returned to Scotland to Focabers in 1816. In 1817 James Gillis entered the Seminary of Aquhorties as an ecclesiastical student.

After a year at Aquhorties Bishop Cameron of Edinburgh dispatched a number of students to Paris where the Scots College in the Rue des Fosses, had been restored to the ownership of the Scottish Church together with some of its possessions which had been confiscated at the French Revolution. So, James Gillis set out with four companions on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1818, from Aquhorties by boat from Aberdeen then via London to Paris where they arrived on the 15<sup>th</sup> and entered the Seminary of St Nicolas – the diocesan seminary of Paris.

Among James Gillis' companions at the Seminary of St Nicolas in Paris was another student destined to become Monsignor Surat, Arch Deacon of Nôtre Dame and Vicar-General of Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris. 'Abbé' Surat as he was known, was to become a victim of the violence of the Commune. He was shot by the Communards at the prison of La Roquette during the Semaine Sanglante [Bloody Week] in the closing days of the Paris Commune on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1871. Before his death, Monsignor Surat recalled his time with James Gillis in the Seminary of St Nicholas by saying, 'At the Petit Seminaire de Sant Nicolas, he (James Gillis) was always at the head of his class, always had the first places in competitions, the best prizes and highest distinctions in examinations. He worked and studied with indefatigable ardour, even to the prejudice of his health. He spoke with remarkable facility and eloquence, and excelled his companions in everything without effort, and with great simplicity. In his conduct he was always extremely exact to rule, pious and edifying.' Another of James Gillis' fellow students at St Nicolas was Felix Dupanloup the future Bishop of Orleans – an episcopal contact that was helpful to know in future years.



Monsignor Surat, Arch Deacon of Nôtre Dame and Vicar-General of Paris

James Gillis left St. Nicholas Seminary in Paris in October 1823 and entered the Sulpician Senior Seminary of Issy in Paris to study philosophy and theology – a return to his early education under the Sulpicians in Canada. However, after a period of two and a half years of study, his health gave way, and he was obliged to return to Scotland, which he did in April 1826. In the autumn of 1826, he was able to resume his studies under the direction of Bishop Scott, in Glasgow. He was eventually ordained a priest at the age of 25 by Bishop Paterson at Aquhorties, on the 9th of June 1827.

A great part of the first year after his ordination he spent at Blairs (later to become Blairs College) with Mr. Menzies of Pitfodels, an extremely wealthy businessman whom he had first met in Paris whilst ministering to the expatriate Scots Catholics in Paris as an ecclesiastical student prior to his ordination.

On the death of Bishop Cameron, 7th February 1828, his successor, Bishop Paterson, took Fr. Gillis with him to Edinburgh, and gave him the task of conducting the ceremonial of the deceased prelate's funeral. It was on this occasion that he began to display to the priests and laity of the Eastern District of Scotland his flair for religious ceremonial for which he became so well known throughout his priestly ministry.

Fr. Gillis' eloquence in the pulpit now also began to attract notice. Later in 1828 he was tasked by Bishop Paterson to appeal for money in France for the repairs of St. Mary's Chapel, Broughton Street, Edinburgh. The French archbishops and bishops received the young missionary with the utmost kindness and furthered his undertaking by their sympathy and recommendations. He raised a considerable sum in Paris and other large towns – no doubt helped by his fluency in French from his Canadian education, and thus enabled Bishop Paterson to make the necessary repairs, to enlarge the Church and adorn the interior. He took advantage of his stay in France to make a spiritual retreat in the Monastery of La Trappe.

It was on his retreat at La Trappe that Fr. Gillis had the idea that if religious orders once common throughout Scotland could be restored, they would be of much help in building up the Catholic faith once more in Scotland. In the 1830's the Catholic Church in Scotland had not yet fully re-established itself after the 300 years of banishment, suppression and persecution that it suffered as a result of the Protestant Reformation. Fr. Gillis' idea was to re-establish the presence of religious communities in Scotland. For over 200 years there were no Religious Communities left after having been closed by law and having had to flee Scotland to safer places abroad in Italy, France and Spain during this period of history. Also on the same retreat to La Trappe was a Monsignor Soyer, Bishop of Luçon whose own diocese was then just recovering from the devastation caused by the French Revolution, and he could well understand the difficulties in attending to the restoration of the Catholic faith in Scotland. Amongst Monsignor Soyer's priests at Luçon there was a holy man who had done much to repair the evil wrought by the storm of the French Revolution, this was the Rev. Fr. Louis Marie Baudouin. Besides seminaries for the education of the priesthood, the Abbe Baudouin had founded a congregation of religious women, called Ursulines of Jesus, devoted chiefly to the education of young women. Monsignor Soyer was of much help in refining the idea which Fr. Gillis took back with him to Scotland together with contacts made in Luçon.

After serving as a priest in Edinburgh for 3 years thereafter, Bishop Paterson, who had brought Fr. Gillis from Aquorties to be a priest of the Eastern District and had appointed him as his secretary, died on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1831. Bishop Patterson's death sparked a debate about who his successor should be. It would appear that Bishop Paterson had looked forward to having the assistance of Fr. Gillis as his coadjutor! When his papers were examined after his death a form of postulation was found, in which he petitioned the Holy See for the appointment of Fr. Gillis to be appointed as his successor. The petition, however, was never sent. A group of priests none the less nominated the 'exuberant' if inexperienced James Gillis to be his successor as Bishop. In the end Propaganda Fide in Rome appointed Fr. Andrew Carruthers as Bishop of Edinburgh as the other Vicars Apostolic in Scotland considered that, notwithstanding the high qualities of Fr. Gillis, he was too young to be intrusted with the burden of such significant a role. The new Bishop Carruthers was a far more experienced man, then aged 61 and compared with the young 29-year-old Fr. Gillis was a much better choice for the role at that time. (Bishop Carruthers himself had written to Rome to object to the nomination of Gillis for the episcopate on the grounds of his youth and inexperience.) However, the incident served to highlight the esteem in which this young man was held by many of his peers and the potential which he held as an individual – a situation which did not go unnoticed in Rome! Later in 1833, Fr. Gillis was again nominated for high office

– this time to be Co-adjutor of a province in Canada with Dr. Macdonell, Bishop of Kingston, but fortunately for Scotland this was not to come to pass either.

After his return from France in 1828, Fr. Gillis had previously expressed his wish to Bishop Patterson to establish a convent in Edinburgh as part of an initiative to re-establish religious communities in Scotland. So, shortly before the death, Bishop Paterson, sent Fr. Gillis back to the continent again to raise funds in France, Spain and Italy. On his journey via London, he was introduced to Miss Ann Agnes Trail, the daughter of a minister of the Church of Scotland. Subsequently on his later return to England, Miss Trail wrote to him offering herself as a member of his proposed Community. Another Scottish lady, Miss Margaret Clapperton, who was to be one of the founding members of the Community, came from Fochabers and had known Fr. Gillis for much of her life. It was agreed that Miss Trail and Miss Clapperton should go together to Chavagnes in France, the Mother House of the Ursulines of Jesus to study for the Noviciate under the watchful eye of Abbe Baudouin and Monsignor Soyer. They eventually arrived there on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1833.

In 1830 another Revolution was breaking out across France and only with some difficulty Fr. Gillis escaped and returned to Scotland. The French royal family arrived shortly thereafter after in Edinburgh having had links with the city since the French Revolution of 1792. Then they had been welcomed by King George III in London and given permission to establish the French court in exile using Holyrood in Edinburgh as their base with a generous allowance from London. During their period of exile Fr. Gillis as the best educated French speaker of the Catholic Church in Scotland was much in demand by the royal exiles at Holyrood Palace after the July Revolution of 1830 when they once again returned to Scotland.

When Bishop Paterson sent Fr. Gillis again to France, Italy and Spain to help to raise funds to establish a convent in Scotland he was furnished with letters of introduction from the French royal family in exile. He set forth as planned but due to the turmoil in France and a culture in Italy and Spain not used to charitable fundraising – he found his mission difficult however, he eventually returned home with a considerable sum of money. It was during his absence on the continent this time that Fr. Gillis received the sad news of the death of Bishop Paterson. On the eve of his death, Dr. Paterson had written him a letter full of affection and encouragement — lines which he later said served to cheer him in many a subsequent trial.

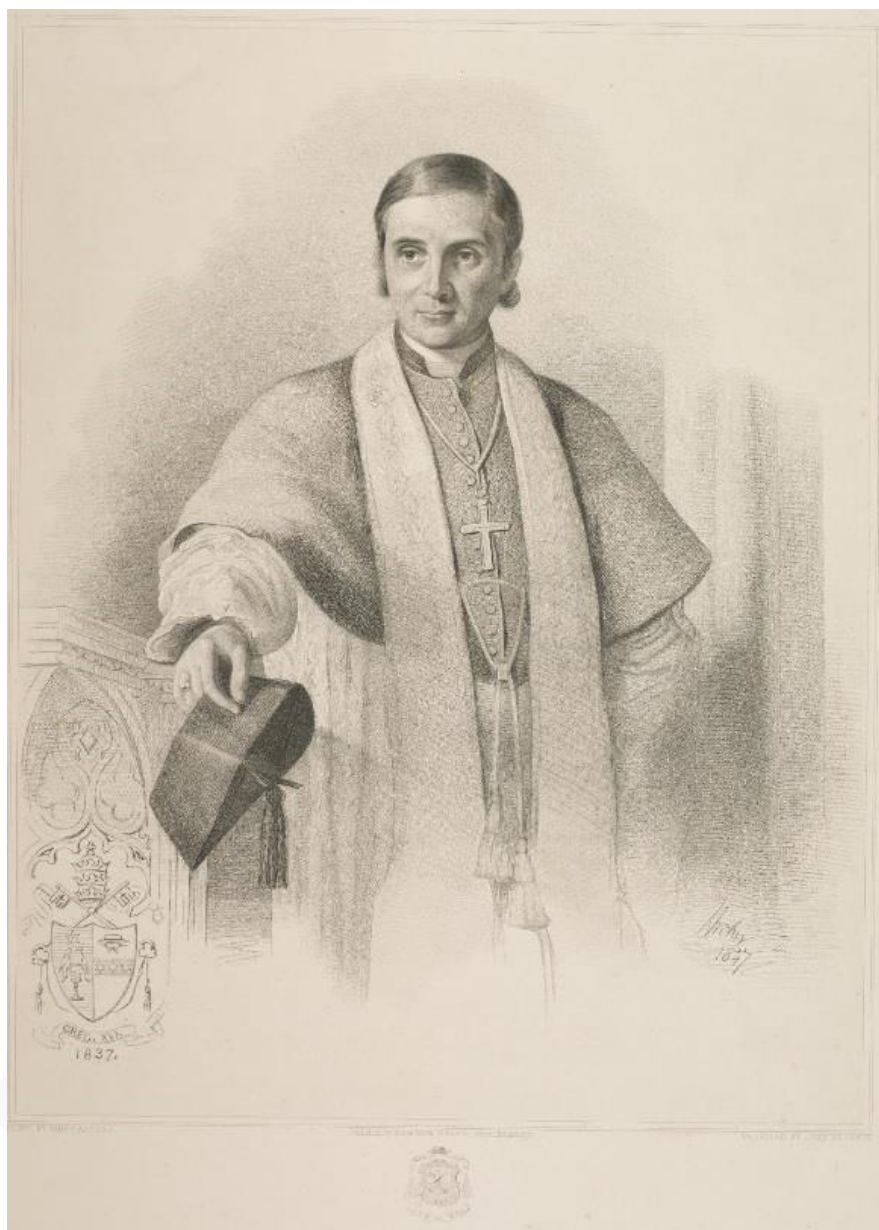
In June 1834 Fr. Gillis managed to purchase a suitable house with the funds donated by John Menzies of Pitfodels, known as Whitehouse, for his proposed Convent with 2 acres of ground for the sum of £3,000. The initial group of eleven Sisters comprising Miss Trail (now professed as Sister Agnes Xavier), Miss Clapperton (now professed as Sister Margaret Teresa), The Reverend Mother St Hilaire, Mother St Paula, Sister St Damian, Sister Alexis, Sister John Chrysostom, Sister Mary Emily, Sister Angelina and two lay Sisters, Sister Stephen and Sister Eustelle then travelled from France to Scotland but had to live elsewhere for four months while the Convent was being made ready. On 26<sup>th</sup> December 1834, the Ursuline Community took possession of St Margaret's Convent, which was the first post-Reformation convent to be established in Scotland. At St Margaret's, arrangements had been made for the reception of young lady boarders, whose education was to be the principal work of the Sisters. In 1835, the Feast of St Margaret was kept on 16<sup>th</sup> June in the new St Margaret's Chapel, which had been built alongside the Whitehouse Mansion House, was opened.

It had been clear to all that knew and worked with Fr. Gillis that he had both the talent, intellect, and ability for high office. It was also clear that his exposure to the French Royal family and his many successful fund raising trips to Europe and the fact that he had been responsible for the historic re-introduction of a religious community to Scotland now gave him experience and credibility with Bishop Carruthers and also with the Holy See.

Fr. James Gillis was appointed the Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District and Titular Bishop of Limyra by Propaganda Fide on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1837, still aged only 35 and was subsequently consecrated to the Episcopate in Edinburgh on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1838. The principal consecrator was Bishop Peter Augustine Baines Bishop of the Western District of England, and the principal co-consecrators were Bishop Andrew Scott of Glasgow, Bishop of the Western District of Scotland and Bishop James Kyle of Aberdeen, Bishop of the Northern District of Scotland.

Bishop Gillis now set about working with Bishop Carruthers for the next 14 years as his Co-adjutor – Bishop Carruthers, the senior Bishop but knowing that Gillis would automatically succeed to the office of the Bishop of the Eastern District of Scotland upon his death. This type of arrangement meant that in areas where the Church was not yet re-established in the post reformation times, there was continuity of leadership and no absence of leadership during the time between the death of a prelate and the appointment of his successor, as would otherwise be the case.

It was from this position as Bishop Co-adjutor that James Gillis then set out to revive Catholicism in Edinburgh and also more widely across Scotland to as near its pre-reformation diversity as possible. His legacy can best be seen from this point as one where he oversees, working in conjunction with others, the resurrection of the many Catholic Religious Orders in Scotland.



**Bishop James Gillis**

In 1841 he set about establishing the Holy Guild of St Joseph a lay society for self-help of the poor and afflicted. In 1848 he helped, with the permission of Bishop Carruthers, to establish the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The Society of St Vincent de Paul was a lay order founded in Paris in 1833 by 6 Catholic students including Frederic Ozanam. The Society, no doubt, came so quickly from France to Edinburgh due to the by now extensive French contacts that Bishop Gillis had made on his many trips to France over the years utilising the language skills he had learned in Canada as a boy taught by the Sulpicians. In time, the Society of St Vincent de Paul was to absorb the Holy Guild of St Joseph.

In 1858 Bishop Gillies oversaw the establishment of a second Religious Community in Scotland with the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in 1859. The following year yet another religious congregation was established with the arrival in Scotland of the Oblates of Mary. His work continued and in 1863 another 2 Religious Orders were re-established in Scotland – The Little Sisters of the Poor and The Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. It was clear that by now Religious

Communities and Convents were again now a visible part of Scottish life and the banishment of the Reformation was over. It was also during the episcopate of Bishop Gillis that the Society of Jesus – The Jesuits, returned to Scotland.

In the introduction to *'The History of St Margaret's Convent'* published to mark the 50th Anniversary of the founding of St Margaret's convent in 1886 and 22 years after Bishop Gillis' death, it is said *'Surely the man who accomplished the resurrection of Religious Orders in Scotland deserves to be held in everlasting remembrance!'* – Published by John Chisholm of Edinburgh and printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.



Following the death of Bishop Andrew Carruthers on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1852, Gillis automatically succeeded as the Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland and was sole Bishop of the Eastern District for a further 12 years.

Another notable milestone in the episcopate of Bishop Gillis was the remarkable return of a relic of Saint Margaret of Scotland to Scotland for the first time since the Reformation.

Bishop Gillis was summoned to Rome to assist at the canonisation of the Japanese Martyrs on Pentecost Sunday 1862. He presented the customary reports of the state of the Eastern District of Scotland to Propaganda Fide (Scotland being Mission territory under the auspices of Propaganda at that time, prior to the restoration of the hierarchy to Scotland in 1878). He was received by Pope Pius IX several times on this trip. Bishop Gillis asked the Pope for a Brief to remove from the Escorial Palace in Spain the relics of St Margaret of Scotland if the Queen of Spain gave her assent.

St Margaret had died in Edinburgh Castle on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1093 and her body was brought back to her beloved Dunfermline by way of the ferry that she had endowed to transport pilgrims across the

Forth. She was buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity that she had caused to be built and was canonised a century and a half later in 1249. A shrine was built behind the High Altar of the Abbey Church, so that pilgrims could come and venerate her relics and seek her intercession. Her relics were translated to the new shrine in June 1250. Dunfermline Abbey became a great place of pilgrimage and Robert the Bruce paid for a lamp to burn in front of her shrine. Dunfermline succeeded Iona as the burial ground of the Kings of Scots, with Robert the Bruce himself buried in Dunfermline Abbey, desiring to be close to St Margaret in death.

In March 1560, the monks of Dunfermline received word that the Reformers were coming to “cast down” the Abbey, so they removed the relics of St Margaret and her husband, Malcolm III, and took them to the Abbot's House at Craiguscar, above Dunfermline. They remained there for several years.

The reliquary containing St Margaret's head was brought to Mary Queen of Scots, to help her when she was in labour with her son, James VI, in Edinburgh Castle. This relic together with the rest of her remains were sent to the Scots College at Douai and were enshrined at an altar there. During the upheavals in Paris at the French Revolution the large reliquary containing the head of St Margaret was lost, believed destroyed. At least some of her remains however then made their way to safety in Spain

King Philip II of Spain provided a haven for many relics from France during this period. The relics of St Margaret had been kept with many other Scottish documents and artefacts that escaped the Reformation to the Scots College in Paris. During the French Revolution, the remains of St Margaret and Canmore were sent for safekeeping to Spain and were largely forgotten about for over 100 years.

Bishop Gillis had applied for permission from the Pope, a Brief, in 1847 to investigate the relics but it was not given until his trip to Rome on 1862 and his private audience with the Pope. Having obtained the Brief, Bishop Gillis travelled to

Spain to seek the Queen's permission to initiate a search of the Escorial for the relics which were believed to still be enshrined there. Queen Isabella II and King Ferdinand received Bishop Gillis and granted permission. A Spanish Royal Decree, dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1862 was in favour of Bishop Gillis:- *“Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to authorise Your Excellency (President of the Escorial) to deliver to the Bishop of Edinburgh a portion of the relics of St. Margaret which are preserved in the monastery of the Escorial; which command I submit to your Excellent to carry into effect.”* So a portion of the surviving relics of St Margaret were returned to Scotland and the rest remain to this day in the Escorial.

The relic of St Margaret when returned to Scotland was kept at the Ursuline Convent of St Margaret in Edinburgh, which Bishop Gillis himself help to found, right up until 1986 when the convent eventually closed. In recent years since then it has been housed in the altar of the St Margaret of Scotland Memorial Church in Dunfermline.



The reliquary containing the scapula of St Margaret of Scotland



A replica of the missing presumed destroyed head reliquary of St Margaret of Scotland

Bishop Gillis died in office on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1864. His funeral was in keeping with his own liturgical flair. His coffin lay in state in the Cathedral Church of St Marys and was guarded by uniformed members of the Guild of St Joseph and the church was filled with Nuns dressed in white from the religious Communities which he had helped to resurrect in Scotland. His body was later interred in the crypt of St Mary's where he remains.

The Scotsman in covering his funeral at the time expressed disgust at the *'vulgar heartlessness'* of some *'extreme Protestants'* who had placarded and bill posted the streets surrounding the Bishops' funeral with slogans *'intended to offend the mourners and indeed the dead Bishop'*.

In terms of his legacy, whilst Bishop Gillis was a major fund raiser, his financial skills were less than perfect. For example, he commissioned Augustus Pugin to design a new Cathedral for Edinburgh at an impossible estimated cost of £400,000! He eventually abandoned the project in favour of making St Mary's, an existing church, into the mother Church of the District. His want to ignore the reality of economic restraint meant that he undertook many projects which he later had to shelve at great cost. Many of these financial issues then fell to his successor Bishop John Menzies Strain to deal with later in history.

There can be little doubt however, that Bishop Gillis left his mark not only on the Catholic Church in Edinburgh and in the whole of the Eastern District, but that he was also a major figure in the revival of Catholicism in Scotland more generally. The resurrection of many Religious Orders and the establishment of the Society of St Vincent de Paul as

national assets of the Church in Scotland which continue to this day. He left the Eastern District of Scotland in much better shape with a greater number of churches, schools, priests and laity than when he took charge and a culture completely changed from that of monotone post Reformation survival to one of flourishing growth in the colour, complexity and rich diversity of global Catholicism.

St. Patrick's, Kilsyth