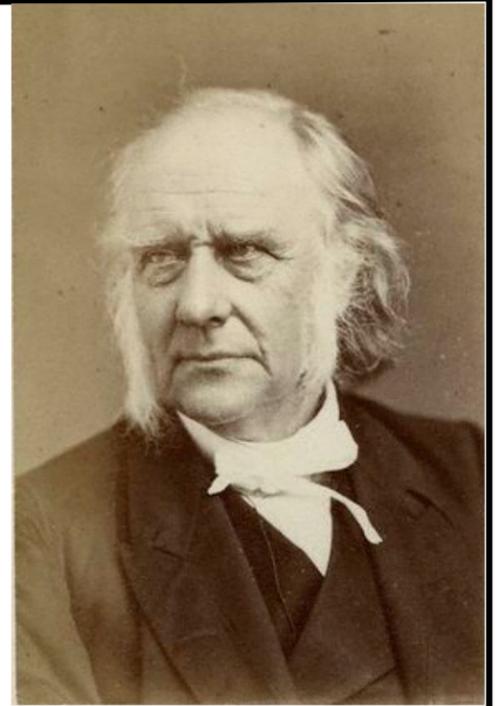


# Thomas Guthrie 1803-1873

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## Minister and philanthropist

**B**orn in Brechin in 1803, **Thomas Guthrie** was twelfth of the thirteen children of David Guthrie (1761-1824), a banker and Provost of Brechin from 1815 to 1820, and Clementina Cay (1764-1841). At the age of 12, Thomas spent two years at Edinburgh University training to be a Church of Scotland Minister and then went on to study surgery and anatomy. Still keen to be a Minister, he was unsuccessful in getting a parish because of his evangelical views, so went to Paris in 1826-27 to study medicine and science at the Sorbonne. After that he spent two years in banking before finally being ordained as Minister at Arbirlot, near Arbroath, in 1830. He stayed there for seven years, with a growing reputation as an eloquent preacher, and setting up a library and savings bank.



*Guthrie in early 1870s*

Reluctant to leave Arbirlot, he was persuaded to move to Edinburgh in 1837. He started at Old Greyfriars and in 1840 took charge of the new parish of St. John's. Guthrie played a prominent part in the run-up to the Disruption and from 1843 was Minister of the new Free St. John's. With the Established Church keeping the assets, Guthrie proved useful in raising substantial funds for the Free Church. He remained at Free St. John's, a hugely popular preacher, until ill-health forced his retirement in 1864. He had served as Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly in 1862.

Guthrie had wide interests but used his oratorical and publicity skills to particularly good effect in two matters: the Temperance movement and addressing the dire poverty of the homeless children he saw in the city. He regarded his own greatest achievement as the Ragged Schools he set up "to save many a poor creature from a life of misery and crime" by giving them education, food, clothes, industrial training and Christian instruction in a disciplined but kindly atmosphere.

Thomas Guthrie was living at 1 Salisbury Road in the 1871 Census but died in 1873 in East Sussex. His funeral in Edinburgh attracted massive crowds.

In 1830, Thomas had married Anne Burns (1810-99), daughter of Revd James Burns of Brechin. They had 11 children between 1831 and 1853, several of whom went on to have distinguished careers. His impressive monument records all his children and many other descendants.



*Princes Street statue*