



Avoch linked with
**Fortrose, Rosemarkie &
Cromarty
Church of Scotland**
Newsletter 18
December 2023

Closure of Avoch Church of Scotland Building

*There was a good turnout at Avoch church on Sunday 5th November to mark the closure of the building. What follows is the summary of the sermon preached by the minister on the theme of “**Living Stones Built into a Spiritual House: A Chosen People - a Royal Priesthood**”*

Given recent changes in the Church of Scotland, members and money have both been reducing and there will only be around six hundred ministers active from 2025. In Ross, the new Presbytery Plan proposes a

reduction from sixteen charges down to ten. Only three ministers will be left in the Black Isle - down from ten in the 1960s. This decline leads to the loss of buildings and events like the closure of the Avoch church building.

The minister considered three kinds of “sacred space” described in the Bible. He noted that the theme of God’s presence amidst God’s people illustrates something quite intriguing. At the time of the Exodus, the first “sacred space” for the whole people of God was the tabernacle – made of cloth, wood and metal. It was essentially a mobile, portable structure that moved around with the people of God in the wilderness. However, it was to this “tent” that God made himself present to his people. Only in the monarchy era, in Solomon’s time, did the people have the resources and blessing from God to put up a temple - made of stone and wood – essentially a fixed and immobile structure, though one that was at the heart of the community’s worship.

Moving on to the New Testament, we see something very striking in the words of Jesus after clearing the temple in John 2: 19 *Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” 20 They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*

It might seem that a resurrected body is a strange and unexpected ‘place’ for God to be present. But at the heart of the New Testament that’s what we are pointed to – the risen Christ - and the church as the body of Christ.

As the minister reflected on that theme it led him to the even more paradoxical language of the living stone and the living stones. Peter says in 1 Peter 2

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The bible offers this surprising pointer to Jesus Christ: the living stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him. The ‘living stone’ (singular) refers to Jesus as the risen Christ.

This is a very striking image as we know that stones are lifeless – as much as anything on our planet or in the galaxy is lifeless! The ‘living stone’ - is a vivid phrase, a paradoxical phrase, a

mysterious phrase - as we know that stones are lifeless! But it's the phrase the New Testament uses. Stones are lifeless – however, the living stone is “chosen by God and precious to him.” The ‘living stone’ was precious to God and at the heart of God’s purpose. We are told in the New Testament that: “the temple he had spoken of was his body. After Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said ...”

Stones are lifeless, one and all – by contrast the ‘living stone’ is alive and the ‘living stones’ of the Christian community (plural) are to be vital and alive. The Christian community - a plurality of people - needs to be dynamic as the risen Christ is dynamic.

The minister then reminded the congregation that the Church of Scotland has talked about models of the Christian community in mission as the “church without walls” in the 1990s and onwards and we need to think afresh about the church “outwith the walls.” The congregation was then pointed to this phrase in 1 Peter: *9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession ...* The minister suggested that the model of the Tabernacle with the priests taking that with them as they travel around to worship is perhaps a model that we need to look to in our modern Scottish society as we seek to be the people of God, as we seek to offer spiritual sacrifices to God today, as we seek to declare the praises of the God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light in the contemporary world.

As Christians, we need to be going out beyond the walls of the church into the communities as dynamic living followers of Christ Jesus. Romans tells us that we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. In other words, as we go about our everyday lives, our going to work lives, our walking around, eating, working, sleeping lives we are to be ‘living stones.’

The minister concluded by reminding the congregation of Avoch about an activity they had done some years before. A picture of the church building and its structure had been cut up into a number of disparate shapes with verses from Romans 12 written on each one – and then pasted back together to show a picture of the Avoch building but made up of “living stones.” It showed the shape of Avoch church as a collection of people who “owned a verse from Romans” 12 and had applied it to themselves: be humble; we are all different; use your gifts; love genuinely; love and honour others; serve passionately; be joyful, patient and prayerful; share generously; bless the persecutors; be sensitive; no arrogance; no repaying evil; live at peace; no revenge; be kind to enemies; do good!

Hence the people of Avoch church - a chosen people, a royal priesthood - were, like the people of God in the Old Testament who followed the tabernacle, to move from gathering in a church built of stone and fixed to become “living stones” offering their lives as “living sacrifices” of service and worship and living out their faith as the dynamic body of Christ within the communities of the Black Isle.



The wonderful floral display on the font and the basket arrangement at the front door were arranged by Anne Patience, daughter of Margaret who was highlighted back in Newsletter 2 as ‘Flower Lady in charge of all the church flower arrangements and decoration for over forty years.’ Clearly a very talented and committed mother / daughter team. Thank you, both!

Avoch Parish Church of Scotland - A History



For 530 years there has been a church here on the Braehead in a prominent position overlooking the village of Avoch. The first church was built in 1493 during the reign of the Renaissance King, James IV.

From The Inverness Courier 08/06/1871

“The second church, built in 1670, had now deteriorated and was not adapted to the comfort of the sitters. The Heritors, headed by Mr. James Fletcher, Laird of Rosehaugh, resolved to pull down the old fabric and create a new one. The design by Mr. Alexander Ross, architect, Inverness was chosen as they felt it was particularly neat and elegant with great external features.

On 20 August 1870 the foundation stone of the tower was laid, with great ceremony, by Mr. James Fletcher, in the presence of a large gathering including many of the County families.

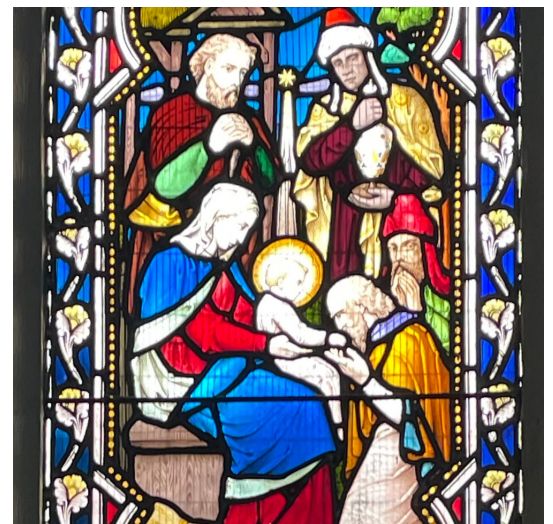


The new building is built from east to west with a west gable featuring a splendid four traceried window (left) filled with paintings representing the Beatitudes from the studio of Mr. H M Barnet of Newcastle and was paid for by Mr. James Fletcher costing almost £200. Below this window are three small quatrefoil lights/flower shaped windows.

Also viewed from the west is the church tower with a spire rising to 100ft. surmounting a beautiful porch which gives access to the church by three Gothic arches creating a beautiful entrance way.

On the east gable there is a fine rose window depicting the ascension of Christ surrounded by angels. This was donated by Sir John Kirkland of Avoch.

On the east gable there is a fine rose window depicting the ascension of Christ surrounded by angels. This was donated by Sir John Kirkland of Avoch. The Church congregation and friends subscribed to the windows on either side of the pulpit. On the left is The Adoration by the Wise Men (right) and on the right is The Entombment after the crucifixion. All three windows came from Messrs. Ballantine and Son, Edinburgh. The remaining lancet windows are stained glass but not illustrated.



The pulpit or rather the platform – for the modern custom has been followed - stands at the east end of the Church and the pews are of red pine, each with a brass umbrella stand. The church is seated for 400 persons and the congregation has contributed to make the fittings as complete as possible. The total cost of the building will be about £1800.

The only relic of the old building which has been thought worthy of preservation is the Aumbry, a press for keeping the Communion vessels, the stonework of which has been rebuilt into the vestry wall.”

Church Opening

The Rev. John M Gibson M.A., minister of the parish, secured the services of the Very Rev. Principal Tulloch D.D. of St Andrews on the occasion of the opening of the church on 4 June 1871. The church was crowded with a very large and attentive congregation including many persons from the neighbouring parishes of Rosemarkie and Knockbain.

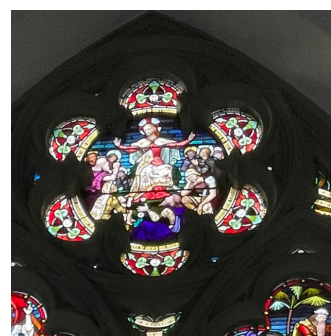
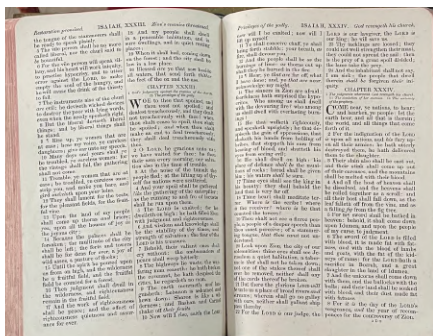
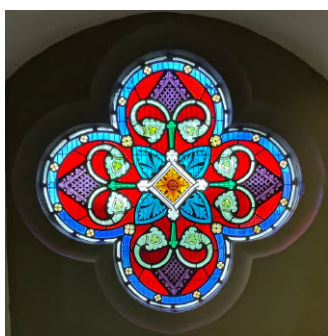
Principal Tulloch preached an eloquent, deeply impressive discourse from St. John xiv v27 –

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” In concluding the sermon, Dr Tulloch spoke as follows:-“As we meet here for the first time in this beautiful house dedicated to God’s service, it is well to bear in mind the great good for which this and all churches are built – to bring us near to God in Christ - to instruct and edify us as God’s children, to make plain to us God’s love, and our need of this love.....May the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost rest upon this building that it may not only be a beautiful but a holy house. May the Lord so bless the ministry of my friend, your pastor here, that years hence many may be found saying – ‘This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven.’ May the message of Peace be proclaimed here that many of you may find Peace.....Peace be within thy walls; for my brethren and companion’s sake, I will now say – Peace be within thee.”

At the close of the service on the day the Rev J Gibson congratulated his people on the auspicious and deeply interesting occasion on which they were assembled and the congregation then slowly dispersed.

Everything connected with the erection of the church has been of a most pleasant character and the building will long stand as a memorial of the liberality and good taste of the heritors and the harmonious relations between minister and people.

Sources Inverness Courier 08/06/1871 Avoch Parish Church Kirk Session Minutes Book



Avoch Church Life

In the early days the minister and Kirk Session were responsible, not only for all church matters and the graveyard, but also they had to uphold the Church Laws of Discipline for all moral issues in the village. Nowadays they are responsible for church matters.

Through the years there were 11 ministers before Rev Beattie. Organists were more numerous – 22 before Aileen. There were two services each Sunday, one at 11am followed by the Sunday School and Bible Class and the evening service at 3pm but the hours changed over the years especially with the coming of electricity. There was a joint service with the United Free Church and the Congregational Church one Sunday each month and a service in Killen on the same day. In more recent years there have been joint services with the Congregational Church and then with our linked church, Fortrose & Rosemarkie.

Communion was held in June and December and at a Kirk Session meeting 25/05/1920 a motion was passed that at following communions, only unfermented wine would be used.

As this was the Parish Church there were many weddings, baptisms and funerals. There are members of our existing congregation whose families either go back to the early days of this church or who left the 1670 church in 1787, when there was strong opposition to the new minister, and formed the Independent Church now called Avoch Congregational Church.

In 1893 thirty-eight ladies from the congregation formed the Avoch Women's Guild. This led to a proposal for the building of a church hall. Once again, the laird, James D Fletcher came to the aid of the church and donated an area of ground in Rose Street, to the church. The Warrant of Registration was 25 Nov 1896.

The cost of the building and furnishings were covered by grants from the Baird Trust (£125), the Home Mission Fund (£50) and a Bazaar held by the Women's Guild which raised £221.6.61/2. This was the start of the Women's Guild supporting the church with large financial donations all through the years until their closure in 2011 when £2,250 was given to the church and £200 to the S Club.

In the 1940s they organised a work party of knitters – socks and gloves for the Red Cross Parcels and the sale of jumpers, bed-jackets and bed-socks to raise funds for a new evening canteen for the troops to be stationed in the village. Sales of work were held to finance Christmas parcels for the poor and elderly and donations were made to many charities – Home, Highland and Foreign missions – giving 19 donations in 1955.

In 1963 they held their first Women's World Day of Prayer which continued until the pandemic of 2020 and in 1966 they chose to support the Leprosy Mission, going out in pairs, annually, to every home in the parish collecting for this fund.

Ekwendeni school and hospital, Malawi, was a charity close to the hearts of the Guild ladies. They sent funds, filled boxes with goods and were a great support to Douglas and Kathleen Willis - warmly welcoming and enjoying the visits from their friends in Ekwendeni.

In 1978 our church was linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie churches so for the first time we shared a minister, Rev. James Forsyth. The congregations met for joint services especially at Christmas time, supported each other's events but kept their uniqueness as village churches. Old friendships were renewed and new friendships made.

We have shared six ministers over the 45 years and it has always been interesting and challenging to experience their new leadership of the congregation. Each were very different as was their teaching of the Gospel, choice of hymns, readings and sermons but, each time our church family have welcomed them warmly.

In the late 1990s the Guild ladies quietly encouraged others in the congregation to come to the Guild meetings and also to be part of a Development Team for the church. A programme evolved from Jan – Dec. The Church Spring Clean, Soup and Sweet lunches, Men's Coffee Mornings, Strawberry Tea, Open Air Service at the harbour, Children's Summer Club in the park, Gala Stall, Open Garden Days at Aldernaig, Favourite Hymns afternoon, Blythswood Boxes and the Christmas Sale and the wreath making. Busy days, happy days, reaching out as servants of our Lord.

These events raised money for Ministry and Mission and the Fabric of our church and hall but much more important was the outreach which encouraged many newcomers to come to our church and also to our Sunday School or S Club as it became known. Our S Club teachers shared the Gospel story with the children in the Vestry and the large notice board was always decorated with their latest activity. The congregation very much enjoyed the children taking part in the services, the seriousness of their Readings, the joy of their singing, the fun of their Puppet shows and their heart-warming nativity at Christmas. The congregation joined the children for the annual Sunday School picnic, always a day of fun and laughter.

Like many churches our numbers have decreased over the years and now we indeed, are a very small church family with an average of 12 attending on a Sunday.

“Precious Memories” and so God created our warm, supportive and loving church family in Avoch Parish Church of Scotland.

Sources: Avoch Parish Church Kirk Session Minutes Book, Avoch Parish Church Guild Books and Memories *A huge Thank You to Jane Patience for pulling all this information together - such an interesting read.*



Enjoying warm Avoch hospitality after the final service at Avoch Church

Memories from Across the Years



Spring cleaning the church- ladies from the Parish Church and Congregational Church 1960s



Avoch Parish Church & Congregation 2005



Packing items for Ekwendeni



Always a busy kitchen



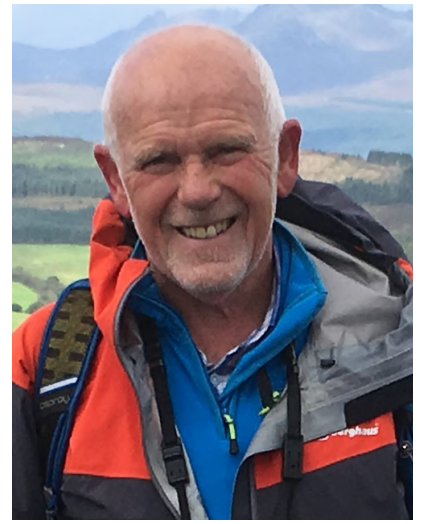
Wreaths aplenty at Christmas time



Men's Coffee Morning 2001

A Wee Word with a Mighty Meaning

When you think about it, **awe** is a wee word to be carrying such a mighty meaning. You don't come across it so much on its own but it's there in the word awesome. The latter seems to creep up in everyday speech of the young to one another these days, as in "I love your new pair of trainers. They're **awesome!**" It seems such a casual, throwaway kind of use of a very special word that had its original sense centuries ago: "filled with awe, profoundly reverential."



We're familiar with the hymn *O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works Thy hand have made...* It's sung frequently at funerals these days. The Psalm writer could no doubt equate with the feeling when he stood looking up to the hills before pondering Where does my help come from? When standing among hills or mountains, or just even viewing them from afar, it's easy to have a sense of personal small-scale, insignificance even, against the immensity of the backcloth.



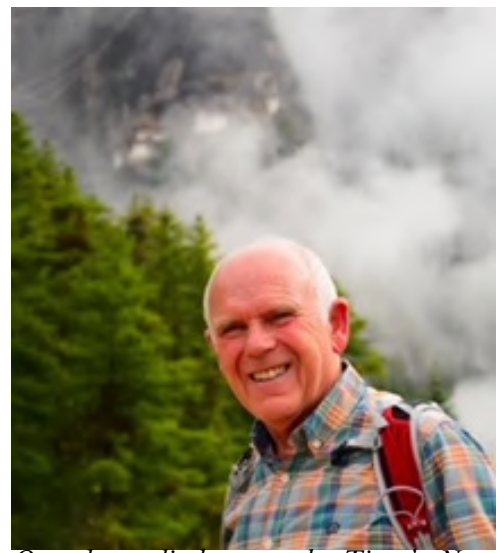
It's something I've experienced on so many days in the high places, from the Pyrenees (left) over to the Alps and across to the High Tatra, as well as in happy times in the mountains closer to home. The Psalmist was doubtless considering himself against the immensity of it all and considering his own relationship with his Maker.

I'd never been to the Himalayas until, having passed the three score years and ten mile-post of life, I went trekking in Bhutan, with around ten others, thinking that this would be, for me, an ambition at last fulfilled, end of story. Four years later, however, and once again the eldest, in a small group with the United Mission to Nepal, I most unexpectedly found myself back in the

Himalayas, this time trekking with the help once again of pack mules into a remote district in Nepal where villages had been devastated by the severe earthquake a few years before. It was humbling and inspiring to see how aid support from sources in different parts of the world, directed through UMN, was making such a difference to shattered lives. Despite the number of people who had died, life in the high-level communities continued and we climbed ancient mule tracks to small villages that seemed to cling to the mountain sides, where people were getting on with the business of growing their crops, rebuilding damaged schools and reconstructing fallen stone-built homes, this time with some basic earthquake proofing ideas incorporated, should further shakes occur.

Very early one morning, I walked along a rough path from the little farm where we'd spent the night up in the loft, protected from the night chill under piles of home-made quilts, on top of bare boards at the top of a long wooden ladder. I stood for a while in the stillness of

the emerging morning, high on the valley side, beside the small, makeshift shelter a family had erected for their single water buffalo, surrounded by the narrow stone terraces where the all-important grain and vegetables grew. When a nearby cock crowed, it sounded incredibly loud in the clear, sharp air. In the distance, the tops of the highest mountain peaks were just being touched by the first rays of the new day, giving the snow-covered slopes a wash of pale pink. I stood for a few moments in awe of the scale of my surroundings: the sheer depth of the valleys with their steep sides and the towering, distant peaks, Mount Everest somewhere among them.



On a long climb up to the Tiger's Nest Temple (just visible through the cloud) in Bhutan.

It's hard at such moments not to experience that sense of reverence and the thoughts that flow around it. *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom* is a recurring phrase in the Old Testament. It crops up in Proverbs and in the Psalms, where the word 'fear' has in its full meaning a sense of deep reverence. In its Latin form, *Initium Sapientiae Timor Domini*, it happens to be the motto of the University of Aberdeen. When my wife died, I got the mason to inscribe those words on the gravestone, for the university was where we first met and where we studied Geography together. But, beyond that, there was something else. Over the years that followed beyond student days and into later life, we were fortunate to enjoy being in many high mountain areas, appreciating them through Geographers' eyes, but mindful also of that sense of due reverence for the works of a Creator God, experiencing true awe in this reminder of something very much greater than either of us.

Douglas Willis

Flower Festival 2023

Rosemarkie Church was once again filled with flowers and the scent of flowers for our annual Flower Festival. Thank you to all who contributed and helped distribute flowers around the community.



Harvest Thanksgiving 2023



Bringing in the Olive Harvest

A huge thank you to all who contributed so generously with food, time, commitment and service at our Harvest Supper in Avoch Church Hall. A splendid £345 was sent to *Embrace the Middle East*, enough to buy and plant 23 olive trees next March. A further 6 trees will be funded once Gift Aid money is added in April.



Left:
Douglas and Douglas busy harvesting olives October 2022



Right:
A grateful farmer with a small part of the morning's harvest.

Not surprisingly, this year's *Embrace the Middle East Olive Harvest Trip* to Bethlehem did not run. In addition, *Embrace* explained the dire situation farmers face in 2023 : *Usually, farmers need special permits from the Israeli government to access their land (which is often in a different part of the West Bank to where they live) and to be able to harvest their olives. With many checkpoints and roads remaining closed, they are unable to do this, nor can they take their olives to the olive presses to extract the oil, or export this oil to other countries. Many of the farmers rely on their olive harvest for their main income.*



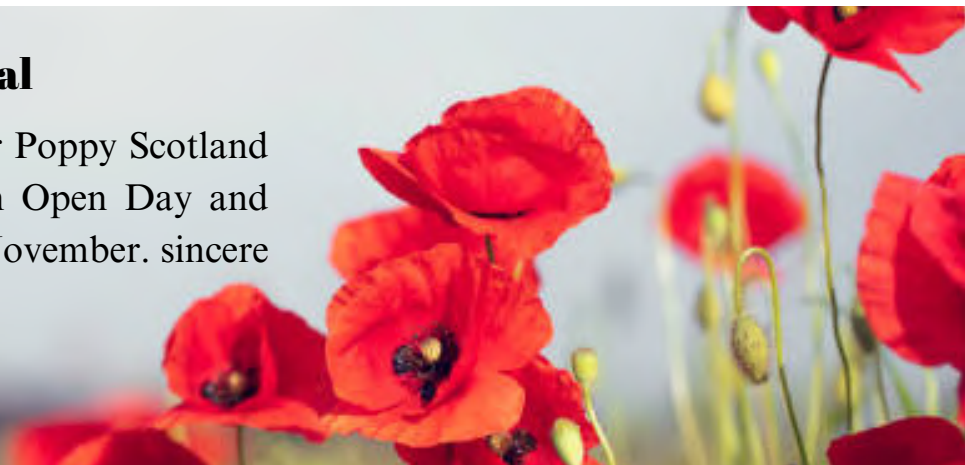
Following the Harvest Supper, a number of people asked for sight of a map to understand what the modern West Bank in Palestine looks like. The one on the left captures it clearly and shows the West Bank gradually disintegrating into islands.

The map is from the **Word Day of Prayer Booklet 2024** which was prepared long before the conflict that erupted on October 7th and will be shared across the world next March.

In the meantime, our attention will be turning to Bethlehem where the Christian community is feeling particularly beleaguered at this time. Please pray for peace.

Avoch Church Poppy Appeal

A wonderful £558 was raised for Poppy Scotland last month - £64 at the Church Open Day and £494 at the final service on 5th November. sincere thanks to all who contributed.



Congratulations!

Bouquets of flowers were the order of the day recently when Joannie Mair reached the grand age of 90 and Alasdair and Georgina Hossack celebrated 60 years of marriage. Happy days!



So What is ‘Religious Art’?

Can a landscape painting and a Bible painting both be called ‘religious art’? This was the challenging topic Warren asked me to address in a talk this year for a Rosemarkie ‘Summer Special’. The basic answer was: “Well, yes. But it helps if you believe in creation!”

A lot of people don’t because they don’t believe in God. And if you don’t believe in God you can hardly believe that he created anything! But – and the Bible is full of wonderful ‘buts’ – if you do believe in God then all sorts of wonderful things follow. For instance, the very start of the Bible talks about God as Father, Son and Spirit creating the world and everything in it. So if he created the world and everything in it, he must like it! Also it must be special and worth our attention, interest and even wonder. In this respect there is something ‘religious’ about all aspects of his creation.

Such thinking opens up all sorts of amazing doors of awareness for all of us – and not least anybody who likes to paint and draw. You can explain all sorts of beautiful things in our world through studies in areas such as science, physics, botany and astronomy. Such findings are valid and vital because they help us understand our world, our differences and promote learning and tolerance.

Historically, for the artist ‘religious art’ has often meant powerful and meaningful works illustrating stories, themes and teaching from the Bible. But if ‘religious art’ also includes all the works of God’s creation then there are boundless opportunities for the Christian artist!



So I found myself bringing together ideas ranging from portraiture to abstracts, to the crucifixion, to images of Jesus and his work and of course landscapes. It follows then that for the Christian artist all his or her work is ‘religious’.

In the same way all of us as Christians are called to different spheres of life. Our work may not seem like obvious mission or ministry but it too can be called ‘religious’.

And the net aim and result – so God is glorified and people are blessed!



William Mather

www.williammatherart.com

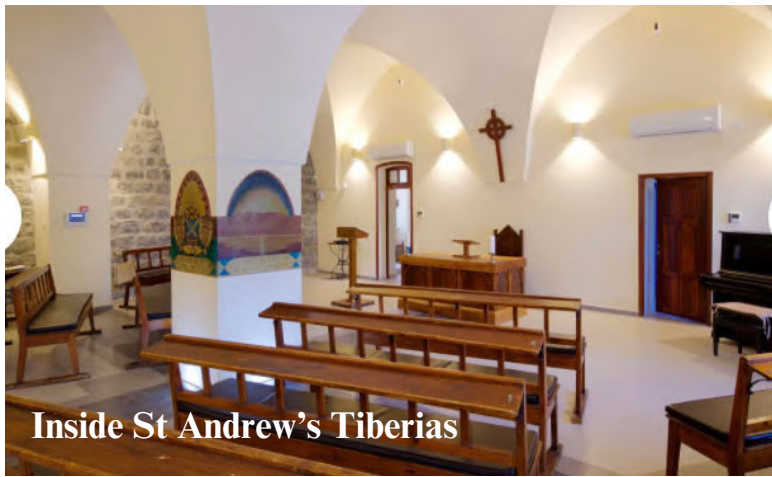


Become a Friend of St Andrew's in the Holy Land?

The Church of Scotland retains a strong presence in the Holy Land through two churches, one in Jerusalem, the other in Tiberias, known jointly as St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias. St Andrew's Church and Hospice in Jerusalem (left) was

established in 1930 as a memorial to the Scottish soldiers who died in the Palestine campaign during World War 1. The hospice is now a popular hotel.

St Andrew's Tiberias, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, formerly a centre for medical mission was also established in 1930. The nearby Scots Hotel, run by the Church of Scotland, was originally a hospital, opened in 1878 by Dr David Torrance.



Inside St Andrew's Tiberias



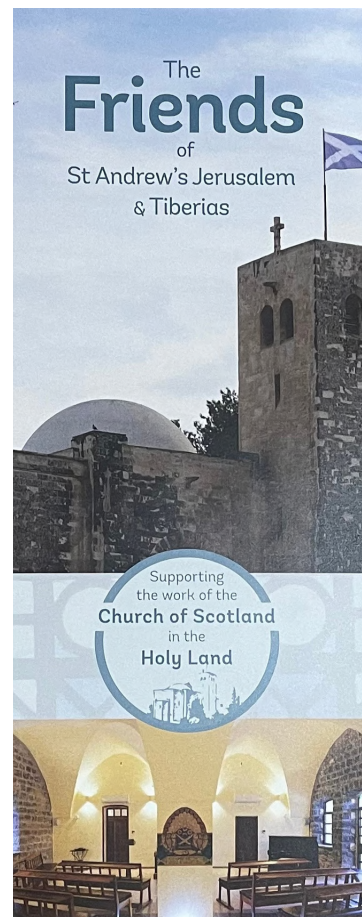
Tabeetha School

Tabeetha School in Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv, is the only Church of Scotland school in the world and provides an education for children of all faiths. As well as maintaining a Christian presence in the Holy Land, the two churches support a range of local organisations which promote peace and dialogue. For example, the 'House of Grace' in Haifa which provides a halfway house for prisoners integrating into society after completing their sentence.

The 'Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias' was inaugurated in 1957 and for over 60 years has been raising awareness of the two churches and the work they do through local partnerships with Palestinian and Israeli justice and peace organisations. Sadly, both ministries have had to be paused due to the current catastrophic conflict.

Calum MacSween and I currently serve on the 'Friends' Committee. If you want to know more, please feel free to speak to either of us or pick up a leaflet at the entrance to the church. Membership costs £20 a year and we'd love to welcome you as a friend.

Douglas Simpson





The Church of Scotland in Tiberias

In the last two newsletters Douglas Simpson referred to the Scots Hotel in Tiberias. Here's the back story...

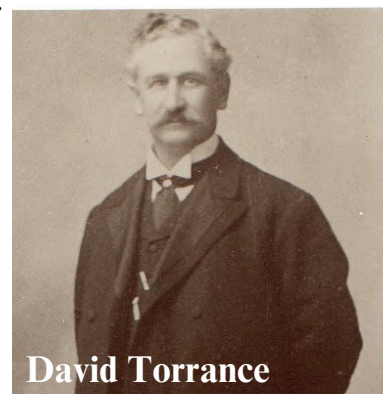


The Scots Hotel, owned and run by the Church of Scotland, was once a hospital but is now a popular destination for visitors to Tiberias on the shores of Galilee. Its operating principles mark it out as being different from most other hotels and include: a place with a firm Christian ethos; a place where the values of the Kingdom of God will be paramount; a place offering Christian hospitality to all people regardless of race, creed or colour. All of these principles are consistent with its founder.

So who was that founder and what was his purpose? A 23-year-old surgeon, David Watt Torrance from Airdrie, who arrived in Tiberias in 1885 to set up a Scottish 'Mission to the Jews' in the Holy Land. The mission was underpinned by an open, honest commitment to preach the gospel of Christ while offering medical services to all.

David Torrance's decision to commit his gifts to the Holy Land and turn his back on a potentially prestigious career at Glasgow Royal Infirmary where his father had been a renowned surgeon was a remarkable one. And it was quite a commitment: David Torrance spent 39 years in Tiberias. When he died the Chief Rabbi commented: 'Tiberias has been blessed by three things – the lake, the hot springs and David Torrance.'

Torrance was a preacher and pastor as well as a surgeon. He held weekly services in Arabic and English. They were received sometimes in silence, sometimes with debate and sometimes with opposition and abuse. Important as these services undoubtedly were, Torrance believed that his most powerful witness came in his unconditional response to the sick and needy. In the summer months he would travel among the nomadic people but for the rest of the year he was



based in Tiberias where people travelled great distances to be healed by The Great Hakim (Healer). Torrance himself felt it was a great honour and privilege to be the first Christian physician in the modern era to walk in the footsteps of Jesus round the shores of Galilee.

David Torrance's first wife, Lydia, died in childbirth. His second wife, died of cholera. Both are buried along with four children in Tiberias. His third wife, Elizabeth, and eight children survived him.

The story of his life is captured in *A Galilee Doctor* by W.P. Livingstone, published in 1925 and, although out of print, is still available in the second hand market. The following quote from the book seems to sum up his life: 'Reason, Service, Love – these three are the talismans which Dr Torrance called to his aid – but the greatest of these was Love.'

Thanks to William Mather for sharing A Galilee Doctor .

'He Lost his Sight but Found a Vision'



It was a wet morning in Scarborough back in 1931. Twelve-year-old John Wilson was in a Chemistry class waiting his turn to heat liquid in a test tube over a Bunsen burner in a simple experiment. Unfortunately, chemicals had been wrongly labelled and, when heated, created a volatile mixture which exploded shattering rows of bottles and peppering the pupils with glass. One boy was blinded in one eye. John Wilson was blinded in both.

Throughout his life, he insisted that his accident was 'a confounded nuisance' rather than a tragedy, a challenge rather than an impediment. A committed Anglican, he humbly accepted divine direction towards what was to become his life's work, saving the sight of an estimated 50 million people across the world.

Sir John, as he became in 1975, is best known for leading the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind now known as Sightsavers International. That's the headline but the real story is his 50,000 miles a year journey to places of real need. Perhaps the most spectacular achievement was the virtual elimination of ocular onchocerciasis, an unmemorable name which he renamed as 'river blindness', a condition spread by the simulium fly. A simple inoculation saved generations of African children from 'river blindness'.

John Wilson was committed to the elimination of avoidable disability and was driven by a belief that there was a special guidance, a sense of mission to his life. Aside from his knighthood, he was showered with awards: Helen Keller International Award, Albert Schweitzer International Award and World Humanity Award to name but three. Much more in *Blindness and the Visionary* by John Coles.

Weekly Freewill Offerings

The printer of the weekly freewill offering envelopes known to many of us for many years has ceased the production of the envelopes, doubtless due to most people now making their offerings through bank standing orders or bank transfers. As tax can be recovered under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme on cash donations up to a total of £8,000 in a year there is now no need for envelopes to be used other than for donations under Gift Aid declarations, where the donor and the amount of the offering has to be identified.

I have found a new source of envelopes and these will be distributed for 2024 to those who use envelopes and have made Gift Aid declarations. Otherwise offerings can just be placed in the plate. If you wish to make payment by bank transfer, the congregation's bank details are:

Account name: Fortrose and Rosemarkie Parish Church of Scotland (this will be changed to Black Isle East Church of Scotland at a date to be announced)

Bank sort code: 80-06-83 (Bank of Scotland, Inverness City branch) Bank account number: 00219093

Thank you to everyone who contribute so generously, enabling the congregation to meet all its financial requirements.

Jack Kernahan,
Congregational Treasurer

“Do Not Worry”

Some thoughts on Matthew 6: 25-33

In these anxious times, many people worry. Jack's sermon, entitled Do not Worry last month struck a chord with many. Jack has kindly agreed to provide a summary here.

The Bible has guidance for us in all situations, and some more often than others may cause us anxiety or worry. This passage in Matthew, part of the Sermon on the Mount, is Jesus' most detailed treatment of worry. There is, of course, the type of worry,

such as for a missing child, a disaster-hit home or a serious health diagnosis, which is correct and proper and the absence of which might suggest even irresponsibility.

But there is another type of worry, which is what Jesus is speaking of here, the presence of which in our lives even suggests unbelief or disobedience. The sin of unbelief reigns supreme in the hearts of those who do not know God or who have rejected Him. A crucial phrase appears in verse 30, which appears only in Matthew's gospel, and is spoken not to a crowd, but to his own disciples. Only one word in Greek (oligopistos), it requires five in English – ‘O you of little faith’.

It is our ‘needs’ which are causing the worries in this passage. What will we eat, or wear, or more extensively – the necessities of life. Christ's ‘prescription’, His cure, is found by following the correct priorities in our lives. Some are ‘forbidden’ and others are ‘commanded’. We have to understand all that God has lavished on us. Through the miracle of birth, He gave us life. He gave us our bodies. Will He not also give us what is necessary to keep life going in this world? He has given us His son. His greatest gift. Surely He will also give us the lesser gifts?

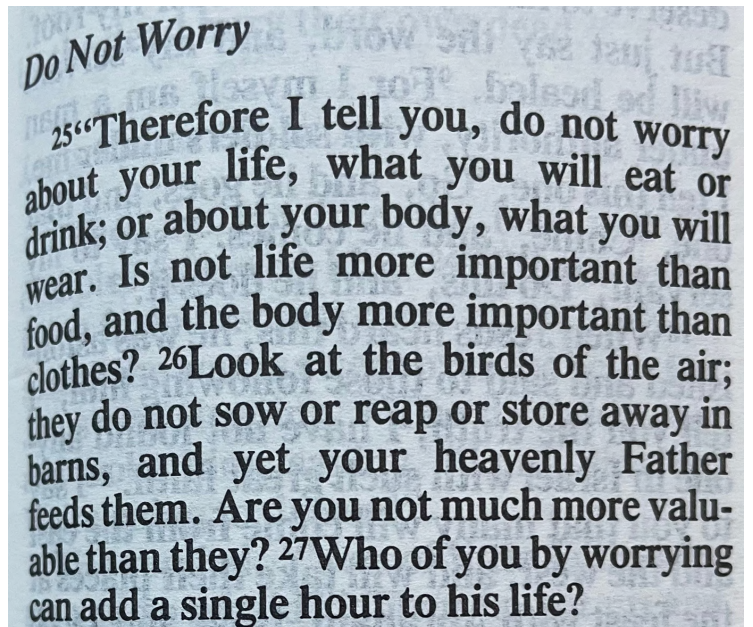
We are given three reasons in the passage as to why we should not be worrying about our physical needs:

- 1. The unfailing care of our heavenly father (v26)**
- 2. The futility of worry (v27)**
- 3. As Christians we are different from the men and women of this world (vv 31,32)**

These are the ‘forbidden’ priorities. There are also ‘commanded’ priorities, summed up in verse 33: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well’

The first verse of Psalm 37 exhorts us not to fret, not to be anxious, not to worry. Maybe we need another commandment like ‘Thou shalt not steal’....’Thou shalt not fret’! The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.

The Bible does not attempt to deny the existence of problems. We are told quite plainly that



problems will always be with us. “Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Worry displays a lack of faith in the reality of God and His ability to meet our needs. **Why should Christians not worry?**

- **God knows what we have faced and gone through with His help, what we are facing just now and what we will face in the future**
- **God cares about what we face in life (1 Peter 5: 7)**
- **God has promised to take care of us (Hebrews 13: 5-6)**

If we are prohibited from worrying, what do we do about a situation? The answer is prayer. God seeks fervent prayer with a passion which moves our heart. And prayer should be absolutely specific – down to the finest detail, not just generalities. ‘Call to me and I will answer you’. Our prayers have to be in an attitude of thanksgiving, because we have a God who cares for us, hears us, loves us and has promised to answer our prayers when we call on him. We must always acknowledge with gratitude His past answers to prayer. We cast our burdens on the Lord, we bring our anxieties to the foot of the Cross and leave them there – how much burden can He bear? The answer is infinite!

So how do we overcome the problem of anxiety? Trust in God! While we may feel insecure, the reality is that the Christian is very secure. (Hebrews 4: 16). While we may feel helpless, the reality is that the Christian has great help (Romans 8: 31). While we may feel isolated, the reality is that God is always by the side of the Christian (Matthew 28: 20). God has promised peace of mind to those who commit their anxieties to Him.

Some practical ways:

- **Read the Bible**
- **Be realistic – not pessimistic, not over optimistic – just realistic**
- **Be flexible – adapt to change**
- **Focus on what is good to care about**
- **Learn to live one day at a time**
- **Stay busy. Anxiety and idleness often go hand in hand**
- **Learn contentment (Philippians 4: 11)**

Think of the words of Joseph Scriven’s (below) famous hymn ‘What a friend we have in Jesus’ (CH4 547) and in particular a verse which is not included in modern praise books:

*Blessed saviour thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to thee in earnest prayer
Soon in glory, bright, unclouded, there will be no need for prayer
Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.*

Jack Kernahan



Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength. Corrie Ten Boon
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 73:26

In Conversation with Archie

A few weeks ago, it was a real pleasure to catch up with Archie MacTaggart who is now a regular attender at Rosemarkie Church following the closure of Cromarty West Church. We had a great conversation! **Margaret MacSween**



Your early years were in Islay, Archie?

Yes indeed. The war was on when I was born. My father was a marine engineer and living in Australia, when he received a letter from his cousin who owned the Port Charlotte Hotel built by my great, great grandfather. The

hotel was really prosperous at that time and my father was encouraged by his cousin to come home and run the hotel. And that's what he did. So, my sister and I grew up as 'hotel children' with the best of everything, plenty food in wartime, rationing hardly noticed.

Were you brought up with Gaelic?

No. My mother was from Lismore and was a Gaelic speaker but we didn't speak it in the home. There were parts of the island where Gaelic was spoken widely but not so much where we were living. Church services were in English, for example.

My memory of Islay is that it's quite fertile?

Yes, up to a point. Parts are fertile like Ayrshire and sustain cattle and sheep as well as good arable land. But there is also a lot of rock and moor too. It's a lovely island, though! There was little unemployment as I grew up and the island has had a population of around 3000.

Tell me about school life, Archie.

Well, I went from seven enjoyable years at a small, very well taught, primary school in our village of Port Charlotte to Strathallan, a boarding school in Perthshire. I wasn't sure about going but I had 6 years there before taking up an accountancy apprenticeship and qualifying as a CA. I loved Glasgow, went to Wellington Church and also spent a lot of time in the Mitchell Library.

You're a keen reader I hear.

Oh, yes, I have a lot of books. They kind of fall into three sections. First, seafaring accounts, charts, sailing guides and that sort of stuff. Then books about religion and spirituality. The third section is all about Arctic and Antarctic exploration. One of my great heroes is Tom Crean, an Irish seaman who sailed with both Scott and Shackleton. Crean made the amazing voyage with Shackleton from Elephant Island to South Georgia and crossed the mountainous, unmapped island to reach the whaling settlement eventually enabling the rest of Shackleton's crew to be rescued without the loss of a single life. When in County Kerry in 2005 we visited the amazing monastery on Skellig Michael and in Annascaul, east of Dingle where Tom Crean grew up and where we visited the South Pole Inn which Crean and his family ran after WW1.



So you're interested in the sea. I won't mention the ferries, Archie - but did you have a boat of your own?

Oh, don't get me started about ferries! But, yes, I love sailing and have had several boats. I built an Enterprise dinghy with a joiner friend and then later had a number of Drascombes – a lugger, and a coaster. The photo is of a Drascombe on Port Charlotte beach. At one point I had one moored just off our house in Cromarty and another below our house in Port Charlotte. In my eighties now I no longer own a boat but my son Sandy does. This autumn he made a special trip to Islay so he could take me sailing in his new Drascombe.

Going back a bit, did you stay in Glasgow after you qualified as a CA?

No, I went home to Islay to run the hotel! By that time, it wasn't as prosperous as it had been and it was a challenge and required great effort to make it viable. So, I sold it and then practised as a CA before going on to work with the Local Authority. I did everything in faith and felt I was being guided. That continued when I saw an advert in the Glasgow Herald for an accountant post in Inverness and I was successful in my application. By that time, my first marriage had broken down and I had married Jennifer. All in all, it was a good move for the whole family.



Archie on his return to Islay to run the Port Charlotte Hotel.

You mentioned your son Sandy. I think he was in church a while back?

Yes, he was and so was my daughter, Jane. Sandy was in the navy for 10 years and that gave him a terrific grounding. He's now a director with SSE. Jane is the C.E.O. of a Canadian oil and gas company. My grandchildren are all grown up now. In fact, I have my first great grandchild, Kota who lives in Osaka, Japan. It's a long way from Islay!

And you've settled well into Rosemarkie Church?

Oh, yes, I enjoy it very much. When I was young, we went to church now and then but every day there was a morning and evening service at Strathallan and that had a tremendous influence on me. There was a strong Christian ethos there and strong values. I found my faith there and it's been with me ever since. I feel it has upheld me and brought me into contact with so many great people. The church family is tremendously important to me.

You're a great singer, Archie – it's a pleasure to be in the pew in front of you.

Ach, well I do my best. I loved the organ playing at Strathallan and I so enjoy the music in Rosemarkie Church, particularly Aileen's playing and singing. It's wonderful. I'm enjoying my worship tremendously too – it is worth rubies as I see it. The closure of Cromarty Church has hurt us all. I was an elder there for a long time but I've experienced a great warmth of welcome at Rosemarkie. I think it has been a thoroughly positive move.

And so has this chat with you, Archie – we've covered a lot. Time for a cup of tea, I think!

With Carol in Ekwendeni

Back in the 1990s, inspired by the geography teaching of Douglas and Kathleen Willis, who were also great ambassadors for Ekwendeni Hospital, Carol Jack decided to go to Malawi to complete her MB CHB, a 6-month mandatory elective. After qualifying as a doctor, she returned for a further two years. Carol (right, with parents Anne and Sandy) sent regular newsletters and what follows is an edited version of one of these newsletters as she settled into her new post. It's a fascinating insight.



Mwatandala!

Greetings from sunny Malawi! I've been in Malawi for just over 3 months and the time has flown past. I spent the first week in Ekwendeni Hospital (unofficially!) before completing the mandatory six weeks orientation in a government hospital in Mzuzu Central Hospital, about a 20 minute drive, though with public transport it could take up to 1.5 hours! Then I started (officially) at Ekwendeni, where I had spent my elective year back in 2005.



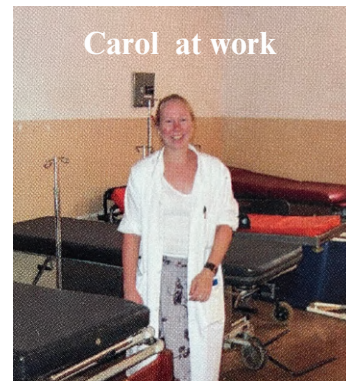
Life at the hospital....well, it starts with a handover meeting at 7.30am where the nurses read out a report of new cases or worrying patients, and have discussions on their treatment. Once a week there is a teaching session after this. There is also morning devotion three mornings a week at 7.15am, in Tumbuka, the local language, held by the chaplain. Songs are sung, Bible verses read followed by a short talk. The first morning I was there, they were singing a hymn in Tumbuka but the tune was Auld Lang Syne which made me chuckle!

There are four clinical officers, two medical assistants and the number of doctors varies. When I arrived there was a Dutch doctor, Anneke, here with her husband and two children but they left for her maternity leave back in Holland the week I started in Ekwendeni. For a month I was the only doctor. Last week an American doctor, Martha, arrived back. She's worked in Malawi for years and is very experienced in tropical medicine. There is also a Dutch surgeon, Pieter, in his 60s who has been here with his wife since the 1970s. He comes to the morning handover meetings and helps with difficult cases but mostly works on the training programme to teach surgery to clinical officers..

I thought it would be very stressful being the only doctor working full time, but that month was actually very quiet (maybe they heard I was working there!). Mornings are taken up with ward rounds - usually, one clinical officer looks after one ward each (female, male, maternity and paediatric) and there is also a TB / isolation which is usually empty. If one of the clinical officers is off, then I take the ward round on whichever ward it is, and I also see any problem / difficult cases. I have been spending one week in each ward with the clinical officers, learning

how they do things and trying to learn about things I hadn't come across at all, or very much, in Scotland (malaria, TB, measles, dysentery, rheumatic fever, HIV, malnutrition).

Often patients present late, so can be very sick or have very marked signs eg a goitre (enlarged thyroid gland) the size of a melon which they have had for years, as they see hospital medicine as a last resort and will have seen the 'traditional doctor' before, not trusting conventional medicine.



At times it seems like the clinical officers can manage just fine without the help of a foreign doctor who doesn't know much about malaria etc but then there are cases medical problems more familiar to me, diabetes / CVA / heart failure, so I feel more useful then. After ward rounds, the clinical officers go to help the medical assistants in the out patient clinic and most days there are private patients who pay around £4 to see the doctor which is a bit more like GP work compared to the hospital work.

Lunchtime is anytime from 11:30 am and can last 1.5 to 2 hours. The hospital seems deserted then, with only a few nurses staffing the wards and all the clinical staff go home. However, if there are problems, the clinical officer on duty is called in. Then in the afternoon, new patients on the ward are seen, there are more outpatient clinics but generally it is quieter. I started doing on-calls a few weeks back which means from 5pm until 7:30am and I can be called at anytime. When you have to go in while on call, the ambulance, it is a 4 x 4 vehicle which needs a push start down hill! It comes to collect you from home, then takes you back again which is very different from Scotland.

***Life in Ekwendeni** – happy smiling faces mostly everywhere you go, People have lots of time, nobody seems in any hurry and love to stop and chat. Children run up and say "how a u" (how are you) then laugh when you speak in Tumbuka. Colourful markets selling everything from live chickens, medleys of fruit, to mobile phone chargers, Noises everywhere; African music, people shouting for trade; cars tooting their horns excessively.....*

***Church life** - church here is at 8am on Sunday mornings and can last up to two hours. There is an English service followed by a Tumbuka service at 10am. The singing is not what you expect from a country where there are so many lively singers but is slow, using old hymns from the Scottish missionaries who came here over 100 years ago. A lot of people, myself included, go half an hour late deliberately in order to avoid the many announcements for this that and the other. Some people come one hour late, just as the sermon is starting!*

The newsletter ends with Carol looking forward to her parents, Sandy and Anne along with her sister Grace, travelling out to Malawi on Christmas Eve. Her Prayer Points include prayers that they all travel safely despite the snow back in Scotland. Carol's two other prayer points are as relevant today as they were in 2010 as Christmas approached.

Give thanks for friendships, new and renewed, for good health and safe travels. Pray for patience when situations seem frustrating, that we can be a good Christian witness in all areas of our lives.

'A Great Community Event'



The Gordon Memorial Hall, Rosemarkie was bedecked with the colours of India and the air filled with the warm aroma of different curries on Saturday 18 November as the Hossack family hosted a fundraising evening for Phoenix India. It was a wonderful evening and, as one attendee commented - expressing exactly how we all felt - a great community event.



The centrepieces were both the meal and Ken's fascinating, informative talk on the work of Phoenix India and the key role of the Comprehensive Rural Tribal Development Programme (CRTDP) founded by Rev Karim David in 1980. Ken's presentation was a joy to listen to, memorable stories humbly delivered by someone committed to transformational change in the Nagpur area for the best part of 30 years....so far. At the time of going to print the total funds raised from all sources is around £3500. Can we have another one soon, Ken?!



Setting up



Posing briefly before.....serving the best of curries



Nagazari village in the 1980sand now

Cycling Across India

The last time I tried a long bicycle ride was about 50 years ago when Douglas and I set off to cycle the 56 miles around Arran on a rather miserable day. It didn't end well, finally being picked up halfway up the String road by a passing policeman. So, it was with a degree of trepidation that I agreed to join three local ladies (all experienced cyclists!) on a coast to coast trip across India. Having done as much training as I could during the months before the trip we set off on November 4th – 460 miles of Indian roads lay ahead from Chennai in the east of the country to Cochin in the west.



There were 15 in the group, all worryingly young and fit looking but they turned out to be a great bunch and we all got on very well from the start. The trip leader was also very professional, organised, enthusiastic and supportive.

Having dipped our back wheel in the Indian Ocean we set off knowing that we would be averaging 50 miles per day. Very soon I realised that I would be the back marker on this journey but, thankfully, was invariably escorted and encouraged by one of the others in the group and also by Shibo, the Indian bike mechanic and outrider. He was my hero!

Physically, I found it gruelling from the start! The combination of high temperatures, rough roads (we had 8 punctures in one day) and often challenging terrain meant I was pushed to my limit and wondered how I'd be able to get back on my bike the next day.

However, helped by the camaraderie of the group, the frequent breaks and the knowledge that the support vehicle would rescue me if I reached my limit (which I did on one occasion!) I managed to complete the trip without any serious difficulty. It was incredibly satisfying to eventually dip the front wheel of my bike in the Arabian Sea – and pack my cycling gear into my suitcase!

Overall, it was a truly memorable adventure – amazing landscapes, fascinating local culture, experiencing people going about their daily business and being met by smiles, friendship and brilliant hospitality at every stage of the trip. Thanks to Exodus Travel for first class organisation and to Sue, Sue and Barbara for inviting me to join them.



Sometimes the terrain was flat (left) as we passed ladies planting rice but then there were the hills..... (right)



In completing the trip, Linda raised an impressive £1500 sponsorship for Phoenix India. Sincere thanks to all who supported Linda and added such a substantial contribution to the overall total.

Blythswood Christmas Boxes

Ethel Urquhart once again filled her house with Christmas boxes for Blythswood to distribute. Thanks to Ethel and all who supported her, a superb total of 333 boxes were filled and collected. Well done, all!



Be EXTRAVAGANT this Christmas

- Listen, laugh and encourage others
- Share smiles and words of kindness
- Give thanks again and again and again
- Do good turns without being noticed
- Light many candles in the darkness
- Take delight in the natural world
- Always allow time for worship and thankfulness

Adapted from 'It's All About Christmas' by Rt Rev James Simpson

A minister who was providing supply cover in the north coast of Highland began his Advent talk to the children, 'Boys and girls can anyone tell me where Jesus was born?'

To his surprise there was silence. Assuming it was shyness rather than any thing else, he began to spell it out B - E - T.

One tentative hand went up and voice with a degree of incredulity said, 'Was it Bettyhill..?'

With the closure of Avoch Parish Church and Cromarty West Church this will be the last newsletter entitled Avoch linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie (and, latterly, Cromarty).

A sincere thanks to all who have contributed such a wide variety of interesting articles over the 18 issues. Much appreciated. Calum

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