

Avoch Linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland

Quarterly Newsletter Issue 14 December 2022



With the kind permission of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists for the use of Phillip Swanepoel's *While Shepherds Watch* painting.

When I was asked if I would edit the Christmas 2022 newsletter, I wasn't convinced that I could do it. But I was assured that plenty of material would come in and that's exactly what happened. So, I want to start with a HUGE thank you to everyone who responded to my request. You've made my job pretty straightforward – thank you!

We'll have a look back at images from Harvest Thanksgiving, remember the late Queen's impact on all our lives and think ahead to the Christmas season, including a lovely prayer from Catherine Kernahan.

One person who has been thinking about Christmas 2022 from this time last year, is Ethel Urquhart and in the photo (right) are just a few of the 400+ shoeboxes she has gathered in for this year's Blythswood Appeal. An amazing achievement once again. Well done, Ethel!

We'll walk the Camino de Santiago with Marina Huggett, visit a desert island with Margaret MacKenzie, spend a wonderful time with Janice McLeman and visit Palestine with

with the three *amigos*, Douglas Willis, Douglas Simpson and Calum (known on the trip as D1, D2 and C) from their base in the YMCA at Beit Sahour, close to the Shepherds' Fields in Bethlehem.

We'll celebrate the Craft Group in poetry with Maggie Wynton, we'll discover the origins of the tune Crimond with Douglas Willis and we'll laugh at Angels Explained by Children. And much more. I hope you enjoy!

Margaret MacSween



The Queen's Christmas Broadcasts Remembered



This coming Christmas Day there will be one phrase that's missing as the day unfolds, "Oh, it's nearly 3 o'clock – time for the Queen!" Since 1952 and her accession to the throne, the late Queen Elizabeth II gave the annual Christmas broadcast, first on the radio and then from 1957 onwards on the television – starting early enough to have covered the span of my entire earthly life to date ...

Various writers have been reflecting on the impact of those talks and I discovered a few things that I was not aware of – in particular, the fact that the quote from the poem "God knows" that King George VI, her father, read during his opening Christmas broadcast on the radio in the first Christmas of WWII, was given to him by his daughter barely in her teens at the time:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."



In her own first broadcast (above), the Queen commented: "I want to take this Christmas Day, my first opportunity, to thank you with all my heart. At my Coronation next June, I shall dedicate myself anew to your service. I want to show that the Crown is not merely an abstract symbol of our unity, but a personal and living bond between you and me. ... Pray for me ... that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life."

The royal archives describe her Christmas broadcast at the end of 2000 (right) as her reflection on "the true start of the new Millennium" and many commentators have noticed that in her broadcasts from that time onwards she was more open about her own personal faith in Jesus Christ, as noted for example in the preface to the book *The Servant Queen and the King She Serves* (Bible Society, 2016) where she commented about Jesus Christ as follows: "Billions of people now follow his teaching and find in him the guiding light for their lives. I am one of them because Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love."



The late Queen had an extraordinary capacity to recount the events of Jesus' life at Christmas time in a way that made familiar facts fresh and yet connected them seamlessly and authentically to her own experience and to the world that we live in. In one broadcast she commented: "I hope that like me you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing unselfish and sacrificial life."

He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving more in serving than in being served... We can truly be grateful that 2000 years after the birth of Jesus so many of us are able to draw inspiration from his life and message and find in him the source of strength and courage.

Jesus Christ lived obscurely for most of his life and never travelled far; he was maligned and rejected by many though he had done no wrong. In his early thirties, he was arrested, tortured and crucified with two criminals - his death might have been the end of the story - but then came the resurrection and with it the foundation of the Christian faith.

Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person, neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour with the power to forgive.”

At another point she talks about the implications of this reconciling saviour sent from God and his example, in a matter-of-fact manner, whose very simplicity lends it depth and sincerity: “The gift I would most value next year is that reconciliation should be found wherever it is needed. A reconciliation which would bring peace and security to families and neighbours at present suffering and torn apart... Mighty things from small beginnings grow as indeed they grew from the small child of Bethlehem.”

In preparing for this edition of the newsletter, I came across the following comment: “the Queen’s Christmas broadcasts revealed her to be the best evangelist in the Church of England!” A surprising observation, perhaps, but the evidence has been gathering every Christmas for some time now ...

[Mark Greene from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity explores these ideas further at <https://licc.org.uk/resources/the-queens-way/>. The video tribute to the late Queen from All Souls Church, Langham Place, London has an extract from a recording of one of the Christmas broadcasts mentioned above: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK6Z0vM8uWU>]

Warren



And here is the Queen speaking in her final Christmas broadcast: *I am sure someone somewhere today will remark that Christmas is a time for children. It's an engaging truth but only half the story. Perhaps it's truer to say that Christmas can speak to the child within us all. Adults when weighed down by worries, sometimes fail to see the joy in simple things, where children do not.....*

[Children] teach us all a lesson - just as the Christmas story does - that in the birth of a child, there is a new dawn with endless potential It is this simplicity of the Christmas story that makes it so universally appealing: simple happenings that formed the starting point of the life of Jesus - a man whose teachings have been handed down from generation to generation and have been the bedrock of my faith. His birth marked a new beginning. As the carol says, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

MMacS

Paying Respects and Bidding Farewell - A Personal Response

It was a chilly time overnight of 12th - 13th September last in Edinburgh. We had arrived in the Meadows to pick up the required wristbands and then joined a queue which had been estimated we would be in before reaching our destination. At the late hour we arrived I was surprised - but delighted - to see folks of all generations who were prepared to be paying their respects to a lady who had given so much to the peoples and countries over which she had reigned. Some more elderly were asked if they wished a blanket to give them additional comfort during the wait ahead; thankfully, no rain was forecast.



The previous Sunday 11th September, her late Majesty had journeyed from Balmoral Castle via Aberdeen and Dundee to Holyrood Palace accompanied by her daughter the Princess Royal & her husband, Vice Admiral Tim Laurence to spend her final hours in Scotland. On the Monday morning, a solemn procession from the palace wound its way up the Royal Mile to St. Giles Cathedral, the High Kirk of Edinburgh to give its proper title. Thereafter, a continuous queue of people would file past in a show of respect.

The queue we were in wound its way towards the Royal Mile. When eventually arriving where George IV Bridge joins the Mile, we knew our destination was not too far away in both distance and time. The time had been spent talking with total strangers, exchanging memories, thoughts and reasons as to why we all found ourselves in the chilly outdoors rather than tucked up in a nice warm bed! Strangely, there was actually a bit of joviality in talking to each other yet remembering the solemnity of the reason for people being where they were.

Before we knew it, the door of St Giles was beckoning us in. A reminder to either switch off or silence mobile phones until we left the church was kindly made; one wondered how often those stewards had said that in their time on door duty! A request to keep moving slowly in order that as many people as possible could get in and through. Inside we went and wandered into one of two queues that would file past the catafalque upon which Her Majesty's coffin had been lain. Then a hush descended upon those who a few minutes before had been blethering away. Ahead, a central area of the cathedral was brightly lit. A couple of ministers robed in red sat a short distance from the catafalque - Chaplains to The Queen.

My mind then went back to a day in 1971 when I had been chosen with three other pupils to represent my school at St Giles to witness an installation service of Knights of the Thistle. We obviously thought we'd be tucked away at the back but to our absolute surprise we got seated at the end of an aisle. When the procession of the knights entered the cathedral, they passed within inches and then suddenly, a tall gentleman with a quite short lady at his side came by - the Duke of Edinburgh and Her Majesty The Queen! Then when the service ended, the recessional procession proceeded up the aisle to leave and The Queen came towards us. Looking her straight in the face, inches away, her blue eyes sparkling, we dutifully bowed, raised our heads and they were gone!



Now, we were approaching our Queen under the saddest of circumstances. There was the coffin over which was draped the Royal Standard and upon which sat the Crown of Scotland, glinting in the light. We slowed down to almost a shuffle, not really wanting the moment to be just that...a moment. The impact of that moment brought tears to my face as I stopped, turned to face the catafalque and once more bow to our Queen, a final bow in the silence and serenity of the cathedral. Then, once again out into the darkness and chill of the September night. **Contributed**

Crimond - A Tune for all Generations

In September, the nation watched all the pomp of the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth the Second. Then in the Abbey we heard the beautiful music and the uplifting singing of the 23rd Psalm to Crimond, probably the best known of all of the old psalm tunes. The Psalm itself is certainly worthy of a good tune to lift up its most powerful of beginnings and statement of absolute faith: The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want...



In my earliest teen days in Aberdeenshire, my passion for the natural world took me to some out of the way spots. But I was rather constrained by lack of transport till things unexpectedly took a turn for the better when an aged great aunt got knocked off her bike one evening on the way to the bingo. (Better for me, I hasten to add. Fortunately, she escaped any damage, though the experience did make her think she should probably give up the bike. She didn't give up the bingo, I'm glad to say, as it was the social highlight her life). You'll have guessed by this time that I'd now unexpectedly become the chosen one for the large, very old and extremely heavy, black, lady's bike with its Sturmey Archer 3-speed gears.

Now my horizons could be widened and I was able to access places up to around ten miles radius or slightly more. Among other locations, this allowed me to travel to the Loch of Strathbeg on the absolute outer tip of what's sometimes called the 'cold shoulder of Buchan'. Being of an exposed nature, right against the North Sea, that part of the world could lay on some challenging weather tricks, not least the



one where I would cycle out on a Saturday morning against a testing head wind, only to find that, perversely, by the time I was ready to head for home, the wind had swung right round against me and I was having to cycle back into the teeth of what now seemed like a gale.

My reason for going to that particular spot was that in autumn, through winter to spring, wild geese and whooper swans down from Iceland gather there in huge numbers, while along the edge of the



seldom calm loch, beds of wind-bent phragmites reeds offer shelter for a host of other wildfowl. Just as I'd arrived on the bike and was enjoying my very first time there, I was accosted by the tweed-clad, ruddy-faced gamekeeper who told me in no uncertain terms that it also better be my last as I wasn't welcome on his patch. I expect he felt he was only doing his job. He was, after all, employed to ensure that the birds were kept

completely safe till the day, that is, when the toffs descended to blast them out of the sky. To cut a long story short, I did go back and there came to be a certain, grudging acceptance of my presence, though I knew I wasn't entirely welcome.

Now, this may seem a long kind of way disconnected from the theme of psalm tunes but there is a link. The small settlement nearest to the loch was one I sometimes cycled through, past the early nineteenth century parish kirk, with its spire and big outside clock. Back in the Victorian era, the Rev Dr Irvine, minister of Crimond parish, had a daughter, Jessie. She it was who penned the tune known as Crimond, the one most widely sung to Metrical Psalm 23, The Lord's My Shepherd.

Crimond is, of course, really well known throughout the land and is widely used at funerals. To many, it's the only tune they've ever sung to the 23rd Psalm and they'd might be hard pressed these days to name one of the other great psalm tunes. My wife and I had a fondness for Orlington which indeed was the tune I chose for her funeral. Its repeated line is really powerful.



But the tune Crimond, as you may imagine, has a special resonance for me for reasons of the days of my youth. When the wild geese call from their wavering skeins here above the Black Isle, the sound still jogs my memory of that wind-blasted corner of Buchan and the geese that filled the skies above the loch in the days of my youth. And sometimes their wild chorus also puts into my mind of that little roadside village kirk where a truly famous tune was born.

When our congregations' joint service was held in October in commemoration of the life and faith of the late Queen Elizabeth, it was great to hear our organist, Aileen Fraser, make it sound so good on the wonderful Avoch Church organ.

Douglas Willis



Postscript - an additional note re Crimond Church Clock

Due to an error by the maker back in 1812, the clock on the tower of Crimond Church, displays a 61-minute hour, with the inscription *The Hour's Coming*. During repainting in 1949, the extra minute was removed. However, following protests from parishioners, it was restored.

Harvest Thanksgiving 2022

Harvest Thanksgiving was celebrated in Avoch and Rosemarkie in gifts of vegetables and displays of flowers, later distributed in local communities.



An Afternoon with Janice...

What a lovely way to spend a wet autumn afternoon reminiscing and sharing experiences with Janice. What follows is just a fraction of what we covered!

Margaret MacSween

So, what are your earliest memories, Janice?

I was born in Cromarty Cottage Hospital because my father was a farm worker at Farness Farm near Cromarty. Unfortunately, he died when I was only one year old but my mother got to keep the cottage if she milked the cows and worked in the Big House as we called it.



Seemingly, from about one year old - not that I remember it – I used to be down at the byre in my pram at five in the morning when she'd be milking the cows. What would they say about that nowadays! The work lasted until I was about 7 years old and the farmer and his wife retired and bought St Ann's in Fortrose. We moved there with them but had a separate flat of our own. I was in a small school at Peddieston and then moved to Fortrose which was primary and secondary in those days. It seemed enormous to me! We stayed at St Ann's until I was 14 by which time the couple had passed away. We then moved to Rosemarkie where my mum was cook and housekeeper to General Sir Richard O'Connor at Kincurdie. That was our home, a separate annexe to the main house – apart from being away at university in Aberdeen – until I got married. My poor mother really didn't have an easy life - she had a widow's pension of five shillings (25p) a week but we seemed none the worse for it.



Janice with mum Annie and Rex

different to anything we ate. Some of the men worked in the forestry too.

A memory vividly comes to mind. I was 5 and I remember when I saw and got my first banana. I had no idea what it was - do I peel it or just eat it? I do remember the sharing of apples on the farm. Another memory is of the Italian prisoners of war. There were dropped off at the farms and I liked every one of them, they were lovely. One of them, Sabino, made me a wee ring out of a threepenny bit because he had a little girl at home. They used to make Italian meals which tasted so

And you then went from Fortrose Academy to Aberdeen University?

Yes, my grandchildren find it very amusing there were only 7 of us in Sixth Year! In these days there was an A class and a B class which wasn't good because some children are late developers and, back then, ended up leaving school early. As well as that, Avoch and Cromarty had Junior Secondary schools and if they did well in first year they could go on to Fortrose Senior Secondary. But that was too early and some pupils, especially boys, didn't get the chance they should have got.

When I finished school I headed to Aberdeen University – a culture shock for a country girl! At holiday times I spent a lot of time with my grandparents in Ardross. I just loved my grandad. I think he was a father figure. Sadly, he died three months before he was due to give me away at my wedding. That was hard. My oldest boy, Roderick, is called after him. My granny was 95 when she died and saw her three great grandchildren which was good. She was blind but alert mentally and knew when they were there. There are blessings always.



And growing up did you have part-time jobs?

Oh, yes I had my first job in the Beach Café in Rosemarkie which is where Mario's garden is now. It was good to have pocket money but we'd have it spent before you earned it! Later, there were grants and bursaries at university I think we were well off as students compared to today. Our digs, breakfast and evening meal for £2.50 a week in today's money.

What was social life like growing up?

We had dances every Friday night in Cromarty, Rosemarkie or Avoch and then there was Strathpeffer, the Strath, the big one, with buses running there. Locally, Barbara and William Skinner used to win the jiving competitions regularly. They were brilliant dancers!

What a nice memory! And on Sunday was there an active church life?

Oh, yes. I joined the church at Fortrose when I was 17 with another teenager when Rev Craig was minister. Much to my mother's disgust, I'd sleep in to 11am on a Sunday morning and run all the way from Kincurdie to Fortrose to be in time (just) for the 11.30 service. Sunday schools were full and busy in these days. For teenagers there was Bible Class and Girls' Guildry too. I was even in the choir! Mr MacLeod, the Rector at the Academy, was keen on Scripture Union and took us round different schools for quizzes against other schools. Such happy days. We had a full life, playing hockey against other schools, going to the pictures in Inverness, with a ferry then bus back home but always church on Sundays. In Aberdeen University I joined the Christian Union I went to Holburn Church where the minister was Rev William Still a great evangelist and a great church for students.

When and how did you meet your husband?

We met at a dance in Rosemarkie. He was local to Avoch, not a fisherman but he was a butcher and we went out for 6 years before we married. I remember well the minister, Rev Russell, talking about this whirlwind romance when he married us in Rosemarkie Church in 1963! Our first home was a flat in Avoch, room and kitchen, with only cold water. We then moved into my husband Sandy's family home on George Street in



Avoch, 2 up and 2 down, bathroom and kitchen. Family came along after that: three sons, Roderick, William and Duncan. I do feel this was the proudest achievement of my life. When you've been an only child, it's lovely to have more than one child. Later, my first grandchild was a girl, Poppy, and I was so, so excited. Poppy was followed by 5 grandsons!

Locally, what are the biggest changes you've seen over the years?

You don't know so many people locally these days. When we were growing up we seemed to know everybody. We didn't live in each other's pockets but there was a chat over the fence and you knew where there was need in the area. You'd often get a fry of fish from local fishermen, Our lives seemed to be busier, fuller and with leisure activities. That apart, the caring and sharing is still there. We see the sharing and community spirit with generous giving to foodbanks and local larders. We also give in different ways now - to charity shops and that's a positive, for both parties, as people are paying something for these items and that is good for self-esteem. When I was a child we had relatives in Glasgow and there was great excitement when a parcel containing clothes would arrive now and again. I can remember a special parcel which arrived one year just before Christmas and contained a pink woollen dress, rolled up at the collar and with three-quarter length sleeves. I thought I was the Queen - what a special childhood memory! Christmas was special - I didn't get much but I was always happy with what I got. I wasn't into dolls but as long as I got a book, I was happy. I really looked forward to parties, as you all had to do your own party piece.

Do you think Covid has had a social impact, Janice?

Oh yes, we lost two years to Covid and I feel we are still recovering. We seem to be indoors more and find it harder to get motivated. There is bound to be social isolation in our neighbourhood, sad as that may seem. My cousin, who doesn't live here, was sweeping her path when someone stopped to speak to her. The lady said she appreciated that very much as she hadn't spoken to someone for a week.

Janice, we spoke about the big numbers who went to Sunday School and church when you were growing up? How do we re-connect with young families?

We live in different times but we have to explore different ways and try different things. Perhaps it will be through young families, perhaps different times for services which take account of family needs. There are seeds of hope across all the churches. Perhaps we all need to work together more to take account of modern life, in a family way. It's a challenge to us all. We have a great asset in the church hall in Avoch, right at the heart of the community. It has been so well maintained by Lewie Patience over many years, as has the church building too. The togetherness events such as soup and pudding lunches, the making of holly wreaths and many other activities are invaluable. Talking about this evokes a warm memory of Sheena McLeman and I'll never forget the start of her funeral service with Rev Donnie MacSween singing Psalm 23 to the tune, Bays of Harris. It was so moving. Such fond memories of Heather Moore too, a special lady.

Thank you Janice, we've had a wonderful afternoon reminiscing. I'll now edit it and send you a draft by email.

I have many skills, but not IT ones. My family think I'm a 21st century dinosaur because I do not own or have a mobile or an email address and I've no intention of getting either!

On that note, coffee and fresh scones were served.

Craft Group Preparing for Christmas



Creative Christmas Crafts

(Can be sung to the tune of *My Favourite Things* from *The Sound of Music*)

Cotton and velvet and muslin and chiffon
Chenille and crepe and satin and rayon
Threads of all colours of all different hues
Set out on the table for us all to choose.

All round the table some ladies are sitting
Some sewing or crocheting some busily knitting
Chatting and laughter rings throughout the room
Lifting the spirits dispelling the gloom.

With grateful thanks to Sylvia Brooks who makes this class so enjoyable.

Maggie Wynton

Beautiful hangings and hand bags and
baubles

Sylvia explains and makes it a dawdle
Covering circles to make Christmas rings
These are a few of Sylvia's favourite things.

When the clock strikes
Then it's break time
We all stop for tea
And pause to admire all our wonderful crafts
On display for all to see.

Sylvia and the Craft Ladies would also like to thank Maggie for her helpful knitting tips. MMacS

In October Douglas Willis, Douglas Simpson and Calum MacSween joined an Olive Picking Trip to Palestine organised by Embrace the Middle East, formerly known as BibleLands. Here they reflect on three different aspects of their experience.

Apartheid in the Holy Land

When we come across the word apartheid we may well immediately think of South Africa and Nelson Mandela and remember the way in which a black majority suffered prolonged persecution and discrimination by a white majority. Thankfully, global pressure brought an end to South Africa's unjust system but several visits to the Holy Land over the past decade have revealed a similar system of settler occupation, colonisation and oppression inflicted on the indigenous Palestinian population by the Israeli government in flagrant violation of UN resolutions and International Law. The diagram below from Amnesty International shows the loss of Palestinian land over the decades, all in contradiction of international law.



A huge power imbalance ensures that Palestinians are subjected daily to a range of crimes against humanity including denial of nationality and citizenship, systematic seizure and destruction of land and property, unlawful child arrests, drastic restrictions on movement, denial of fair access to water and electricity and the illegal killing of protesters.

All this is achieved through laws and policies which ensure relentless repression, discrimination and humiliation, ironically all taking place in the land where Jesus exhorted us to love our neighbour. Meanwhile, those nations who could help bring about positive change remain in denial, or actively support the ongoing persecution. The UK is particularly culpable, the calamitous Balfour Declaration of 1917 having been instrumental in creating the current situation.

During our trip this year we worked alongside Palestinian farmers who have worked the land for generations but now live each day with the threat of dispossession, violent attacks by illegal settlers and destruction of their olive crops. Their courage and resilience in the face of injustice and aggression is inspiring to experience as is the support of the many courageous Israeli activists we

have met who campaign against the current gross inequity.

It is encouraging to note that 80 members of parliament have put their names to a letter denouncing the ongoing apartheid and as the parallels with the discredited South African regime are increasingly recognised, it can only be hoped that pressure will grow to dismantle the current iniquitous system.

Even more encouraging is a report earlier this year from Amnesty International which is unequivocal in its condemnation of Israel's apartheid regime. The Holy Land is a wonderful and fascinating land to visit for a whole host of reasons but until a just solution is found for the Palestinian people it will remain a dark stain on British history.

Douglas Simpson

Further information: 1) Google Amnesty International's Report - Israel's Apartheid against Palestine. Feb 2022. 2) Watch 'The Present', a short but powerful film on Netflix.

Palestine's Incredible Survivors

When Calum, Douglas (the other one) and I headed out to Palestine in October as part of a small group, we were on no 'conventional' Holy Land trip. Instead, we had decided (pre Covid) to go and help small-scale farmers in the olive harvest that takes place at that time of year. But why go to pick olives up a ladder, olive tree after olive tree?

To understand the question, it's necessary to understand something about the olive tree itself and the fruit it produces. Since ancient times, olive oil has been a prized product from places with a warm climate where the resilient tree can put up with dry conditions and thrive in the kind of hard, stony ground guaranteed to make Black Isle farmers wince. Some olive trees in Palestine are incredible survivors, the oldest (in the Bethlehem district where we were based) being reliably dated by experts at over four thousand years old. Olive trees and the areas where they grow are incredibly important to the Palestinian people and have come to symbolise resilience in the face of great pressures. At the moment in some places, trees are threatened by efforts to uproot them by Israeli settlers, which is a tragedy for both the trees and the people who tend them as both have been in that place since ancient times.

Our aim was to support some olive farmers by performing a useful task, namely ascending the ladders and dropping the ripe olives on to blue tarpaulins spread on the dusty ground around the grey-green trees with their gnarled old trunks.





Once picked off the branches, the olives (themselves often incredibly dusty) were packed into sacks ready for transport back to the farm buildings. In one case, the family's white working donkey stood patiently beside us in the sunshine, waiting to perform this task, providing a touch of the past for this is how things would have been done in Biblical times. On the last farm where we picked, we ascended a rough track to the top of a slope where the whole landscape had been reformed into ancient, stone-built terraces where olive trees stood in lines across the steep face of the hill.

Once off the farm at harvest time, the fruits go to the olive press where the oil, a valuable commodity, is squeezed out. For so many Palestinian farmers, producing olive oil is a key part of living in terms of economics, while olive oil for cooking and olives for eating play an all-important role in family life. The families with whom we spent time were generous in providing food to sustain the hungry pickers (ourselves and students, Muslim and Christian) along with the strong coffee that is a feature of that part of the world, served in tiny cups.

In history, the olive branch came to be a symbol of peace. Palestine, a land of countless thousands of olive trees, is at the moment sadly lacking in that most precious of things. After we left those olive groves with trees that speak both of the resilience of nature and the resilience of those who tend them, we were in Jerusalem. At this Christmas season, we should remember the people of troubled Bethlehem and direct our own prayers through the one who came into the world in that place and who was called the Prince of Peace.

Douglas Willis

Worshipping in the Holy Land

It is Sunday morning, the heat is rising and we are hard at work stripping olives at a farm close to Bethlehem. Just before 10am, our trip leader, Su, an Anglican curate, invites us to share Communion in a quiet part of the grove.

We gather and sit in a circle on a blue tarpaulin. Some of our Muslim friends sit close by to observe while others continue to work creating a soundscape of easy chatter and the pitter-patter of olives dropping on to tarpaulins.

Su begins, 'The land on which we sit today is the cradle of our faith. Jesus lived, died, and rose again in this very place. It was in this land that he commanded us to make his presence real to us again and again in the sharing of bread and wine. So come as you are. Whether you come to communion regularly, if you've never been before or if it's a long time since you were last here, you are welcome. Join in as much or as little as you would like and know that the invitation to God's table is for everyone.'



And so, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians, United Reformed, Methodists, Roman Catholics and non-aligned listen to the words of Isaiah 42: 1-7 and Matthew 5

1 -12 read from modern iphones in an olive grove that has been farmed for hundreds of years. We share the peace, share communion, share thanksgiving and share a period of reflective silence before returning to our work. It feels significant.

A week later in a different grove, much too stony to sit on. It's 10am and we gather for Communion, this time led by David, a United Reformed minister. The emphasis again is on welcome and inclusivity. 'Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.....'

David has an Advent hymn, *The Olive Tree Against the Sky*, and threads the verses, sung to the tune of the Sussex Carol, through the service. Readings are from Mark 14 and the lead up to Communion is prayer, slowly and meaningfully delivered. Communion over we head back to work, the carol tune (On Christmas night and Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring.....) being hummed by most as we join the others harvest pickers.

A few days later we are in Jerusalem at Pater Noster (Lord's Prayer) Church which is said to be the site where Jesus taught the disciples the famous prayer. The Church displays the prayer on ceramic tiles in over 100 languages including Doric. Douglas delights everyone round about by reciting the prayer in Doric captured for posterity on video.



The Fortrose Three are left to explore Jerusalem on our own on the basis that Douglas S and I know our way about - a view that Douglas W has reason to doubt as we later meander aimlessly through the Old City.

Prior to that, as a trio, among hundreds of other pilgrims that day, we are able to slip unnoticed in to Dominus Fleuit (The Lord Wept) Church, said to be the site where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. It is a small but beautiful church, shaped like a tear drop. As we enter via the vestry, we realise we were joining the end of a mass. The small congregation are singing *Nearer with my God to Thee* with great feeling and highlighting the wonderful acoustics of the small church. A short prayer follows and the service finishes with a soaring version of *How Great Thou Art* that creates an emotionally charged atmosphere for all of us as we focus on the cross in the window looking over to the Old City.



As we emerge blinking in to the sunshine, we stop briefly at the Garden of Gethsamene, teeming with tourists being marshalled like a football crowd, and head for the sanctuary that is St Andrew's Church of Scotland, Jerusalem - an oasis of calm in a turbulent city. Much more about St Andrew's Church in the next newsletter.....



Calum MacSween

Walking the Camino - Sarria to Santiago

At the beginning of September this year my husband Chris and I, along with my sister Margaret and her husband John, walked one of the routes of the famous pilgrimage trail, El Camino de Santiago. Santiago de Compostela the capital of Galicia in north west Spain has a magnificent cathedral. It contains a shrine which, according to medieval legend, contains the remains of the Apostle Saint James. Pilgrims have been making their way to the shrine since the 8th century.

The Camino Frances is the oldest and most popular route which starts in St Jean Pied de Port in France, crosses the Pyrenees then following the Iberian peninsula to Santiago de Compostela - a distance of 760km. It is one of the most popular walking holidays and spiritual journeys in Europe. Although pilgrims originally made the long walk to Santiago de Compostela to see the legendary remains of the Apostle Saint James since 1211, today people walk the Camino for all sorts of different reasons.

We decided to just undertake the last section of the route from Sarria to Compostela a distance 110km! This is the minimum distance required for pilgrims to receive the traditional "Compostela" certificate verifying they have completed the Camino de Santiago. The route is the most popular section and is perfect for pilgrims who want to capture the essence of the Camino de Santiago.

The scallop shell is the symbol of St James and is used to mark the route pointing pilgrims towards Santiago on markers along the way. The route is well signposted and there is no fear of getting lost along the way. In olden days clergymen would give shells to pilgrims as accreditation for completing the pilgrimage and, even today, shells are carried by pilgrims as a badge of those on their way to the cathedral - most pilgrims hang them from their rucksacks to identify them in this way.

We chose to take 5 days to complete the 110km walk. We set off each morning about 8.30am after a hearty breakfast and with our rucksacks stocked up with spare socks, blister plasters and some water and snacks. Our luggage was collected each morning from our accommodation and taken to our next lodging so there was a definite target to reach each day. We were very fortunate in that the weather was mostly perfect for walking. The temperature stayed around the low 20's despite 40 degrees in some of the other areas of Spain. The NW region has a different climate which is affected by weather patterns similar to those which affect our weather here. The region gets quite a bit of rain so the countryside is green and lush and similar to the North of Scotland.

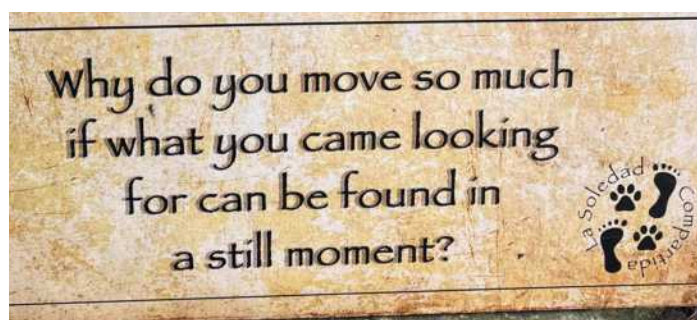
The route takes you along some lovely country roads and through small villages where many of the residents have set up restaurants and cafes to support the travellers along the way.



There are not many sections where you go longer than 5km before there is a lovely place to stop, rest and have a coffee. You have to be very disciplined though and make sure you reach your destination by early evening. At each of the stopping places there is an opportunity to have your Camino passport stamped and most of these were located at small churches along the way. Mainly manned by volunteers or monks who are always very interested in finding out why you are taking the journey.

One of the most special parts of the trip was in meeting people from all over the world, some who had fulfilled lifetime ambitions in taking the journey. Some take the trip alone, some couples and some groups as we did. Along the route you find moving tributes left in memory of people no longer with us. It was also meaningful for us as it provided an opportunity to have the time to reflect over times past and to remember how much we have to be grateful for in life. The added bonus was a chance to bond with family and to share quality time taking a journey that thousands of others have over hundreds of years.

Each day was a test of stamina and resilience and there is a definite camaraderie in taking a journey along with others. With everyone taking the same route, you would meet fellow pilgrims each day and swap stories and enjoy their company along the way. The most memorable day was also the longest some 28 km.



On completing the section we were picked up by a local farmer and taken to his home located next to a lake and surrounded by magnificent scenery. There we were treated to a wonderful meal cooked by his wife. Neither spoke very much English but their hospitality was simply outstanding.



We finished our journey in Santiago de Compostela by joining the mass in the evening in the Cathedral. It was delivered in Spanish and standing room only with a half hour still to go ! We were told that if it wasn't for the pilgrims the Cathedral upkeep would not be sustainable. We were fortunate enough to observe the swinging of the famous Botafumerio which is an enormous incense burner, the largest in the world, swinging the lengths of the naves. It took a team of eight " Tirabolerios "to launch the burner which symbolises the true attitude of the believer and as the incense reaches the roof of the naves so must the prayers of the pilgrims reach the heart of God.

All in all a wonderful experience and one we would all recommend.

Marina Huggett

Desert Island Discs with Margaret MacKenzie

I was born and raised in Glasgow. Mum was from Skye and dad was from Avoch. Every holiday we spent two weeks in Avoch visiting relatives and staying with my granny. I looked forward to going to the Congregational Church. I found it was comforting being there in a full church, all wearing their Sunday best, ladies with hats and gentlemen in dark suits. In Glasgow we attended Maxwell Parish Church. Sunday school was on a Sunday afternoon and every Thursday evening I attended the Junior Choir which I loved.

One Thursday Mr. MacNicol, the choir master, had a very puzzled look. He took me aside and asked me to sing. He then said, “Margaret, when I do this (pinching his thumb and forefinger together on both hands) I would like you to stop singing and whisper the words.” He then placed me in the centre of the second row but, despite what he said and did, I continued to look forward to my weekly choir practice. I believed in myself.

It was a very busy choir overall. We competed in the Glasgow Praise Festival every year. We also put on a mini panto just before Christmas, numbers permitting. At other times we performed a concert for the public. On one such occasion Mr. MacNicol asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to sing solo. Enthusiastically I shot my hand up as I had already written out the words of the song I wanted to sing. *The Hiking Song* sung both by Andy Stewart and Kenneth MacKellar (below).

*Then swing along to a hiking song / On the highway winding west /
Tramping highland glens and bracken bens / To greet the Isles we love the best*

As I sang I became aware of the delighted and surprised faces around me. Being immersed in music from the choir around me had clearly improved my ear dramatically. But I had not appreciated the full implication of Mr MacNicol's instructions and, more importantly, none of the other children had ever made any



detrimental comments on my singing ability. I remained unaware that I couldn't sing in tune. Music has always remained a huge part of my life continuing through Maxwell Road Academy, Maxwell Parish Church and Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church choir, the latter under the dedicated guidance of the late Mrs MacInnes.

Dark Lochnagar by Lord Byron is my second choice of song. I find the words as much as the music of this piece hauntingly beautiful. It is so descriptive it conjures up vivid images every time I sing it. *Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses / In you let the minions of luxury rove, / Restore me the rocks where the snow-flake reposes / Though still they are sacred to freedom and love.....*

I have chosen yet another Scottish song for my third choice, *MacCrimmon's Lament*, a song sung

a song sung by many artists over the years but most beautifully sung by Barbara Dickson (right) in the early eighties. It is extremely atmospheric and melancholic. She sings it a cappella and its power is as much due to her vocal performances as the lyrics.



No more, no more, no more forever MacCrimmon / In war or peace shall return MacCrimmon / No more, no more, no more forever / Shall love or gold bring back MacCrimmon

My fourth choice is ***The Messiah*** by Handel. Following a rendition of “Hallelujah”, orchestra, choir and audience are uplifted by the power of the music and words.

My chosen hymn is ***In Christ Alone***, MP 1072 Words: Stuart Townsend Music: Keith Getty

I love the music in this hymn and the words are so powerful - my unwavering love of hymns has carried my ongoing faith.

*In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song,
this cornerstone, this solid ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.*

*In Christ alone – who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied,
for every sin on Him was laid.
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

I am not an avid reader but when the children were growing up a standing joke was when they shouted through from the television, “Mum, come quickly, it's a murder one for you!” Time was not a luxury I had then but I often succumbed to easy television viewing, particularly Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple mysteries. Recently as I passed Waterstones' window a book with a white cover with Richard Osman's name in bold letters stood out, titled *The Thursday Murder Club*. Intrigued I read readers' appraisals which were excellent. For example, ‘I've never read a murder mystery like this one before, should be on prescription.’ I'm now hooked - so a murder mystery book would be my choice.



My luxury item would be a book of photographs from my birth through the years, compiled by my family for my 70th birthday.

But, if it was possible I would like to smuggle my Mission Praise hymn book. I could sing hymns to my heart's content!



The Meaning of Christmas

When I think of Christmas a flurry of images from the past crowd into my mind. The year my parents did not look at the clock properly so when my brother and I asked whether Santa had been we were allowed to rush down to see the presents. It was only half an hour later, knee-deep in unwrapped Christmas paper, that they realised, somewhat belatedly, it was 3 o'clock in the morning! Family Christmases in the UK had their focus on the turkey lunch and Christmas pudding followed by the Queen's Speech and sometimes the featured TV film such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Sound of Music* or *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

Then there was our first Christmas away from home in Korea. We had just left the lush green of the hot, humid tropics (+32°C) to find ourselves in the dry intense coldness of a South Korean December. There was very little vegetation, bare ground and the temperature was -11°C. In the early 1990s, December 25th was not a public holiday in Korea. We had only just moved into our flat and the furnishings were minimal to say the least. There is a rather woeful picture of Warren sitting on the floor next to the small pot-plant we had bought, as a substitute Christmas tree, with a card stuck into its leaves.

On our return to the UK, we had one Christmas when work meant that we could not travel to be with family - something which felt particularly hard given that, after many years apart, we were actually on the same island. It afforded us the opportunity to welcome two international students - lonely, away from home, far from family and their own traditions - to celebrate Christmas with us. We tried hard to make it special for them with mixed results, one student struggling to find any consolation for her homesickness.

Of course, always there has been church and church services, evangelistic events, a play in the street in Edinburgh, mincemeat pies and opportunities to share the Christmas message. Being married to Warren, most Christmases have meant music – “Carols from Europe” became a feature of Christmases in Singapore - evenings when our friends would invite many from their social circle, Christians and non-Christians alike, to share food and music together, a small group singing and playing music on the open verandah in the warmth of a tropical evening, with Warren explaining each carol's origin, and showing how the words and musical style illuminated a particular aspect of the Christmas story.

However, despite all these images and memories, the real meaning of Christmas is not the tinsel, the lights, the traditions, the food, the loneliness or homesickness, the deep sense of loss at those missing from the table, the weight of expectation as families gather from afar. Rather it is the mystery of God with us, the Almighty Creator God stooping low to be born on this earth, in the finite span of a human body, despite being the Maker and Creator of all things....coming down into our world to live amongst us to bring God's peace, reconciliation, salvation and freedom, light and life. This Christmas may we all be able to see the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, so that we might find ourselves coming, as our former minister used to quote each year:-

*To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.*

Stroma Beattie

A Christmas Prayer

Heavenly Father, we lift our hearts towards you as we approach the Christmas season and worship you anew in a spirit of thankfulness for the birth of Jesus Christ. Thank you for Jesus, our Saviour, the greatest gift of love to all, born on that first Christmas. Show us again the joy and beauty of that holy night so many centuries ago. Your name is still called, “Wonderful”, “Counsellor”, “The Mighty God”, “The Everlasting Father” and “The Prince of Peace”.

As your children, we cry out to you for a fresh filling and a new awareness of who you are. Teach us to be living witnesses for you and bring the good news of great joy to those with whom we come into contact, that our lives be a refreshing light pointing to you this Christmas. Oh Lord, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Thank you for being Immanuel, God with us.

Fill us to overflowing with your love and grace as we reach out to one another, to those in our communities and beyond who feel isolated and alone. Show us creative ways to connect with others outside our own homes.

Oh Lord, we are so aware that this season is not easy for many. Draw near to those who have lost loved ones and who miss their presence sorely, especially in this season. Bring your comfort and loving care to each grieving heart. Thank you that you know them all by name.

We pray for our new monarch King Charles III and the Royal Family in their own loss of our beloved Queen Elizabeth II. Heavenly Father, thank you for her long reign and witness for you.

Be very close to those who are unwell, are in hospital or in care homes. Loving God, strengthen those who cope with debilitating illness and pain as part of their lives and show them afresh touches of your loving care. Give daily strength to those who are tired, anxious and overwhelmed by their circumstances. Touch them with your special tenderness, grace and love to bring strength and comfort. Heavenly Father, give them your peace.

Dear Lord, we pray for the many families who struggle with the rising cost of living and energy prices. Help us to be wise stewards of your provision to us. Give us grace to be salt and light through our communities.

In a world where worry, not peace, prevails, stir up that good news of great joy again and help us to look to you in expectation for a Saviour’s birth.

Oh Lord, in your mercy, provide food, nourishment and care for the hungry of the world, for the homeless and for refugees. Please give them a place and people to call ‘home’. Be very near to those who feel helpless: encourage them, Oh Lord, and bring your living hope into their lives.

We pray for the food banks throughout the winter season, giving thanks for the many volunteers and those who contribute. Lord we bless you for them. We praise you for the work of Blythswood, thinking especially of those who fill and distribute shoe boxes.

In a year where there have been such political changes, we pray for wisdom and stability for our country. Be with the new Prime Minister and other world leaders. Please guide them and give them courage to do what is good, right and just.

Dear Lord, be close to us in our concerns regarding the rising cost of living. Our thoughts are particularly with the many who are considering whether to eat or stay warm. Help us to serve you well and to be your hands and feet, to be lights in dark places.

We remember the continuing war in Ukraine and pray for the thousands who have lost loved ones and are displaced from their homelands. You have promised rest for the battle scarred, peace for the anxious and acceptance for the broken hearted.

Thank you for sending your son to us.

As I get caught up in the preparations for Christmas, help me to keep my eyes focused on the reason for the celebration. Let me not forget the struggles and strife that Mary and Joseph faced in bringing your son, Jesus, into the world. Yet Lord, I remember the blessings you bestowed on them in the wonderful gift of Jesus. Help me to trust you as they did when they arrived in Bethlehem, where they took a room in a stable, trusting in your provision. You came through for them, giving hope that you are the Lord who will always come through for all of us even in times of trial. God of all grace, give me the faith and patience to wait on your perfect timing. Thank you for your faithfulness.

May you always be my strength and stay, dear Lord. Amen..... Catherine Kernahan

Angels Explained By Children

I only know the names of two angels, Hark and Harold. - Gregory (5)

Angels work for God and watch over kids when God has to go do something else. - Amy (7)

My guardian angel helps me with maths, but he's not much good for science. - Henry (8)

When it gets cold, angels go south for the winter. - Sara (6)

Angels live in cloud houses made by God and his son, who's a very good carpenter. - Jared (8)

My angel is my grandma who died last year. She got a big head start on helping me while she was still down here on earth. - Ashley (9)

Some of the angels are in charge of helping heal sick animals and pets. And if they don't make the animals get better, they help the child get over it. - Vicki (8)

What I don't get about angels is why, when someone is in love, they shoot arrows at them. Su (8)

Contributed

Favourite Christmas Carols



How to start writing about carols? Choose my favourite? Impossible - I enjoy them all. Library research? No time, lately. Read up on Wikipedia? Unsure which 'volunteer information' to trust...

Ask other people? Yes, a worthwhile avenue - the topic introduced, impromptu, in chats. People glowed when asked. They simply love carols. Nobody needed time to plan what to say.

Reasons varied from warm early childhood memories of performing *Away in a Manger*, with three sisters to mother at home, to *Once in Royal David's City* singing in Edinburgh's vast, but full, St Mary's Cathedral - 'The magic of the first verse, sung solo, coming out of the darkness, processing with real candles - only allowed on Christmas Eve - and then the best descant at the end.'

Hark The Herald Angels Sing was favoured for a different reason. 'When the organ gets going, even people who can't sing, raise the roof' as well as *O Come All Ye Faithful* 'because there are always some folk capable of making it sound good in the later verses.' For nearly forty years, up to two hundred singers, among them families re-uniting for the holiday, have gathered in the ruins of Fortrose Cathedral on Christmas Eve to raise their voices in traditional carols. Playing a keyboard, I welcomed the hot water bottle provided by a member of the Community Council

The Gaelic *Leanabh an Aigh* (*Child in a Manger*) was favoured by Gaelic speakers and remembered by one who sang it as a successful audition piece for a specialist music school.

In The Bleak Midwinter was especially popular - both words and music (either melody). 'Christmas doesn't start until you've sung that,' said one busy musician. *Good King Wenceslas* - 'A very good story and poetry - *deep and crisp and even.*'

A few carols were more recent. The Christmas song *Mary's Boy-Child Jesus Christ* as sung by Harry Belafonte, was enjoyed by a teenager in the 60's. *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* (Elizabeth Poston version) was enjoyed for its 'crunchy chords'.

O Come O Come Emmanuel was favoured for its modality, and *The Holly and the Ivy* for its non-sentimental story. *See Amid The Winter Snow* was admired for its 'nice breadth'. *See In Yonder Manger Low* was appreciated 'for its satisfying musical repetition' and *Quem Pastores* 'for its words'.

Only one carol was disliked: *The First Noel* because 'it just goes up and down the scale'. (However, that does make it a useful teaching tool)

The only one I didn't know was *This Christmas Night* with music by Malcolm Williamson, and words by poet Mary Wilson, wife of former Prime Minister Harold Wilson. 'It is quiet and very poignant, looking at life and death, and praying for peace. We always need to pray for peace each year, at Christmas.'

Hallelujah to that!

Aileen Fraser





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Gifts - the word can mean many things. Some have the gift to play music, paint, create to a very high standard. There's the gift of being able to talk to others and put them at their ease - a truly wonderful gift.. Then there are gifts that are given, gifts that are received. In my younger days we called them presents. At school I didn't understand why we had to stand up and say, 'Present, miss.' But nobody ever got a present!

I love to receive a homemade gift that tells me that someone really has thought about it. But, most of all, I love giving presents and watch people's faces as they open them. A few years ago Murray gave me a large present, all wrapped up. I thought hopefully it was a mirror. No, no, it was a new ironing board! I fell about in hysterics - why would you give someone who hates ironing such a gift! But there was a new watch stuck onto the back of the board.

As Christmas draws near, there will lots of gifts /presents being given and received. Take time on Christmas morning to give thanks for the gifts and remember those who have so little. The Greatest Gift ever given to the world was our Lord Jesus Christ and we can return that gift every day by thanking God for all we have. Merry Christmas!

Anne Fiddes x

Key Contacts:

Minister: Rev Dr Warren Beattie 01381 620111
wbeattie@churchofscotland.org.uk

Avoch: Bob Moore 01381 620043
bob.knockmuir@gmail.com

Fortrose and Rosemarkie Session Clerk: Jack Kernahan
01381 621610 jackkernahan@aol.com

That's my stint as editor over - it was actually easier than I thought it would be because so many people were willing to contribute material. I can't thank you enough for that! In fact, there wasn't enough space for all that came in so there is already some material for the March edition. Thank you again!

Margaret

The deadline for the next edition is Friday 3 February but, as always, it is really helpful to have articles submitted before then via: calummacsween76@gmail.com