

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

March 2025

The beginning of March brings the season of Lent. For some, a rather turgid, clay-plodding period of six weeks before Easter with themes such as fasting and temptation historically prominent.

For me, Lent is anything but. It offers an exciting and adventurous time of discovery and learning: jolting us out of our sleepy complacency and challenging old, lazy assumptions. Turning our faces away from food and things we normally enjoy may, on occasion, have its benefit for many; but I much prefer to use it as a time to turn towards fresh opportunities to question how my faith relates to life as I know it and let that understanding speak to me in new ways. There is just so much I do not, and can not, understand about both religious faith and human living. No one has complete knowledge. What defeats me I let go. What troubles me and niggles at me, I try to mentally wrestle with, often seeking refuge in the music of this time which confronts our need of forgiveness and salvation and assures us that, even in our darkest times, our human condition is pardoned and restored. *God so loved the world*, says Stainer's '*Crucifixion*'. Victorian language and sentiment he may use but, in doing so, he still proclaims the heart of the Christian Message.

Even more than Christmas, Lent is particularly a time for those who may consider themselves on the periphery of the Church and its Faith. Especially, Holy Week. Those who feel, for whatever reason, they don't quite '**get**' what Christianity is about.

They say, '*there is no gain without pain*'. The same is true about religious faith. It comes to us over the centuries and generations, recorded in written forms that are poetry and metaphor. Translation is required to allow it to live, inspire and comfort. Maybe, that's why I cannot take seriously those who say to me they '*don't have any faith*' or are '*not religious*' when it is obvious they have never made the least effort to try to understand what Christianity is about. Truth be told, I do not consider myself to be particularly '*religious*' either. Religion is a man-made phenomenon; open to all the foibles and hypocrisies of humanity. Christian Faith is a '**spiritual**' matter. Offering a perspective that is completely different. Often at odds with society's prejudices and our accepted principles. It's something to be worked at, shared with others and made our own.

So, there you are. An invitation to you, whoever you may be.

Make Lent work for you as you work through it. Understanding life and death is never easy. Nor is understanding the ways and ever-changing values of society. Peace, contentment, forgiveness do not come easily to us as human beings. But, when we can make them our own, our life can change for the better and our place in the world can become more secure.

Let the language and music of the Abbey speak to you this Lent. You just might be surprised. Maybe, the message of Love will whisper in your ear, or touch your heart, or prompt some kind of action. Or, maybe, it may just bring you the peace of mind that you crave.

Jim Gibson

*Minister at the Abbey
Extra Chaplain to His Majesty The King in Scotland.*

ELDER DUTY TEAMS

March - Marion Sommerville's Team
April - Team 2
May - John Kitson's Team

PARISH REGISTER FEBRUARY

Funeral
Jenny Kennedy

Death
Mary Thallon (Date unknown)
Kathleen Cockburn (Date unknown)

NORAH BEATTIE

Our former Church Officer Norah who recently retired in October sadly passed away on Wednesday 19 February. Norah's funeral will take place on Monday 10 March at 2pm at Woodside Crematorium and afterwards to the Lynnhurst Hotel Johnstone. Norah will be missed by her colleagues and friends at the Abbey. We are all saddened by this news.

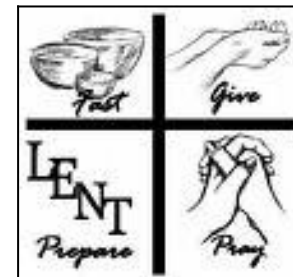
LENT APPEAL 2025

Dear Abbey Members

Every member of the congregation should have now received details of our 2025 Lent Appeal. Details will have been delivered by your Abbey elder. Other worshippers who are not Abbey members are warmly invited to take part in this appeal, whose purpose is to support the ongoing worship and witness of the Abbey Church. Envelopes with details of the Lent 2025 appeal can be collected at the welcome table at the St Mirin Chapel steps on a Sunday.

Every little bit of money, no matter how small, will be really appreciated and put to good use in supporting Paisley Abbey, a community and building that is close to all of our hearts.

Many Thanks
Stewart McDougall
Treasurer



RENFREWSHIRE FOODBANK

The congregation of Paisley Abbey generously supports the Foodbank set up to serve our local community in Paisley. By doing so we are trying to assist the most vulnerable people for whom life can prove the most difficult. The Foodbank distributes to those for whom the need is most urgent. If you would like to contribute, please bring along your donations to the Abbey on the last Sunday of the month. Anything you may be able to donate will be much appreciated.

In the last year the Abbey congregation have donated over £700 in cash much of which is gift aided which adds an extra 25p to every pound you give. Thank you to all who faithfully donate each month and to those who now give support. Your donations show the community that the congregation of the Abbey care for others and actively contribute to the wellbeing of all.

ABBEY SHOP

The Abbey Shop now has a selection of cards, books and gifts for Easter.

We also have a selection of coloured glass eggs which are ideal for hanging from an Easter tree.



ALLOVUS SYLLABUS Until June

Wednesdays - 1.30 pm - 3.30 pm
Meeting fortnightly

Varied programme of activities, speakers and outings
Refreshments served

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| *Monday 10 March | Cheesy! (Special Visit) |
| *12 March | (No Meeting) |
| 26 March | Just Relax! |
| 9 April | Speaker |
| 23 April | Spring Fever! |
| 7 May | Paisley's Sma' Shot |
| 21 May | Visit to St Mirin's Cathedral
/fish & chips |
| June (date TBC) | Afternoon tea at Caulders |



THE KNIFTY KNITTERS

The knitters have been busy knitting children's hats .

They all met in the cafe recently to count them 100 in all.

Half are going to the Foodbank for anyone who needs one and the other half are being sent to Ukraine.



ALLOVUS

AlloVus met last Wednesday in the Place of Paisley and passed on some of the hats that were knitted by the Abbey's 'Knifty Knitters' to Renfrewshire Foodbank to distribute.



ABBEY TOURS

This is from a group who visited the Abbey in January and joined one of our 2 pm guided tours.

Our group of 25 dined in Il Pescatore, a local seafood restaurant specialising in Italian cuisine. We then walked across to the iconic Paisley Abbey which looked spectacular in the winter sunshine.

Three excellent and enthusiastic volunteer guides led our groups through the magnificent interior of the Abbey which was founded in the 12th Century and which has strong links with royal lineage.

The tour guides were Jan Leeming, David Davidson & Gilbert Shaw-Dunn.



NAME THAT TUNE & WHAT'S MY LINE

MEDIEVAL MONASTIC MYSTERIES

A headline in the latest edition of *Life and Work Magazine* caught my attention recently. It described how a fragment of “lost” music found in the pages of Scotland’s first full-length printed book had provided clues to what music sounded like five centuries ago. My interest was whetted on two counts: firstly, that the book in question was the “Aberdeen Breviary,” already familiar to any Paisley Abbey historian, and secondly, that the story was redolent of Paisley Abbey’s own “musical fragment” story.

In my search for further detail, I located a news story that Edinburgh University had posted in December 2024 describing a study that had been undertaken at the Edinburgh College of Art’s Reid School of Music in collaboration with KU Leuven, an international research community based in Belgium. Scholars had discovered the musical fragment in the Glamis Castle copy of the *Aberdeen Breviary*, now held in the collection of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. It was not part of the original printed book but had been handwritten on one of its pages.

Consisting of only fifty-five notes, and lacking any text, title, or attribution, it was not immediately clear that the fragment was vocal and, if so, whether sacred or secular. Deduced, however, to be polyphonic, it was then recognised to be the tenor part of a well-known Gregorian chant melody, and a “unique musical harmonisation of *Cultor Dei*,” a night-time hymn sung (topically for us at present) during the season of Lent. From this single line, the researchers were able to reconstruct the missing parts, allowing us to “hear a hymn that had lain silent for nearly five centuries, a small but precious artefact of Scotland’s musical and religious traditions.” For any interested reader, a recording has been made and is included in Edinburgh University’s news story: “Lost score revives sound of music from centuries past.”

In his tantalising assessment of their research, Dr Paul Newton-Jackson of KU Leuven commented that “further musical discoveries may well lie in wait” that will equally serve as “a source of new insights into [Scotland’s] musical culture.” That at once turned my thoughts to Kenneth Elliott’s essay, *Musical Slates: The Paisley Abbey Fragments* originally published in 1996 in *Musica Scotica* and reprinted in “The Monastery and Abbey of Paisley,” edited by John Malden and published by Renfrewshire Local History Forum in 2000. Following his death in 2011, *The Scotsman*’s obituary described Dr Elliott as a tireless explorer, curator and restorer of Scotland’s often unsung musical heritage.

Unwitting visitors to Paisley Abbey’s exhibition in the Sacristy Museum may well be underwhelmed by the sight of the wee bit of scratched and broken slate that is in its glass display-cabinet. Recovered during the 1991 excavations of the Abbey’s medieval drain the slate, on closer inspection, is inscribed with musical symbols and notation that form a single part of a polyphonic composition, much as is to be found on the written fragment in the *Aberdeen Breviary* alluded to above, except that it is perhaps as much as a hundred years older, dating according to Dr Elliott to the mid-fifteenth century. Our slate is, in fact, the earliest known surviving example of written polyphonic music to have been found in Scotland. Kenneth Elliott describes the remarkable artefact in scholarly detail, lamenting that it is very difficult to identify the larger work from which this fragment in mid-phrase belongs. “Nevertheless,” he concluded, “I hope that identification will eventually be made.” Perhaps the Edinburgh musicologists who described their *Aberdeen Breviary* detective work as a “Eureka” moment would be interested in accepting Dr Elliott’s challenge.

The *Aberdeen Breviary* is a highly significant book for several reasons. It was at the instigation of King James IV of Scotland that the material comprising the *Aberdeen Breviary* was collected by William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen, and it was the latter who commissioned its printing in Edinburgh by Walter Chepman on Scotland’s first press. Published in 1510, it was Scotland’s first printed book and there are only five original copies known to exist, including the *Glamis* copy here mentioned.

The book had been intended to become a national breviary of Scotland, giving the Scottish Church a distinct position within international Catholicism, and aligning with James IV’s aspiration to raise the nation’s prestige, and to establish himself as equal with the rulers of continental Europe. Sadly, the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Flodden in 1513, when the King and most of his leading nobles were killed, so shattered the fabric of Scottish society that the full effect of the *Aberdeen Breviary* was never realised. James had been closely associated with Paisley Abbey through his friendship with Abbot George Schaw, and with the town of Paisley through his granting of the Charter in 1488 that first recognised Paisley’s status as a Burgh of Barony, conferring the rights and privileges that were the foundation of its growth into the largest and wealthiest industrial town in Scotland. He was a frequent visitor to the Abbey, whose records note his regular gifts bestowed on the workmen who were carrying out Abbot Schaw’s building works. He made many pilgrimages to Whithorn, when the royal *cortège* would pause at Paisley to make offerings at the shrine of St Mirin.

Mirin, a contemporary of Saint Columba in the sixth century, is associated with the first preaching of Christianity in the region where the monastery of Paisley was founded. The *Aberdeen Breviary* provides the richest source of information on the



lives and stories of Scottish Saints, and we are indebted to it for most of our knowledge of the legends of Mirin's life. As Thomas Ross, the architect historian, wrote in 1900, "the acts or miracles of St Mirin are sculptured on the inside of the east wall of the chapel dedicated to St Mirin, adjoining the south transept of the Abbey Church of Paisley." The

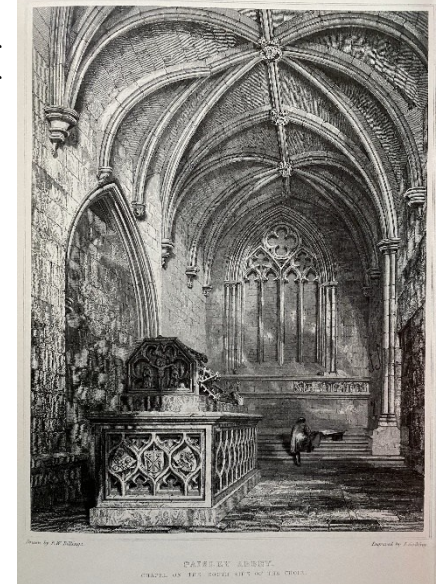
Very Rev. Dr James Cameron Lees, the Abbey's great Victorian minister and historian, wrote that "any person who will read the legends of St Mirin will have no difficulty in recognising what these sculptures represent. The reference of them to Mirin is clear beyond all doubt."

Before Cameron Lees published his history of Paisley Abbey in 1878, it must be assumed that few if any visitors to the Abbey had read the legends St Mirin. Probably the earliest published description of the St Mirin Chapel (or the "Sounding Aisle" as it had become known) was in Thomas Pennant's "A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides." It must be assumed that the Welsh traveller and antiquarian was given to exaggeration or overindulgence in local hospitality when he wrote in 1772: "The Earl of Abercorn's burial place is by much the greatest curiosity in Paisley: it is an old *Gothic* chapel, without pulpit or pew, or any ornament whatever; but has the finest echo perhaps in the world: when the end-door (the only one it has) is shut, the noise is equal to a loud and not very distant clap of thunder; if you strike a single note of music, you hear the sound gradually ascending, till it dies away, as if at an immense distance, and all the while diffusing itself through the circumambient air: if a good voice sings, or a musical instrument is well played upon, the effect is inexpressibly fascinating, and almost of a celestial character."

Perhaps it was as well that Pennant did not extend himself to any description of the sculptures. Charles Mackie writing in 1835 suggests that Pennant may have been guilty of hyperbole regarding the echo but then himself proceeds: "the echo is very pleasing; and many a female heart palpitates when, to give effect to the sounds,

the exhibiter closes the door, and, shutting out the light of heaven, leaves the unconscious stranger to hearken to the solemn vibration ascending gradually in the air till it dies on the enchanted sense." He alludes to "meagre" descriptions of the sculptures given by "Crawford and his continuators" as priests and a bishop in various postures, alongside a scene of the "holy babe, his mother Mary, Joseph, and the rest of the holy family." "On comparing these figures with other catholic relics," he ventures, "I am of opinion, that they represented the works of Charity and Mercy, which not unfrequently ornamented the altarpieces of our catholic chapels."

Next, in 1852, Robert Billings in "The Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland" adds his analysis of the "series of sculptured groups, in compartments." "They are the work of an ancient and rude age – probably they existed before the chapel itself, and were fragments of an earlier edifice. The ingenuity of antiquaries has failed to discover the subjects they represent." Finally, in 1873, Paisley's local historian and antiquarian David Semple had his say. (It was another of his erroneous opinions that was used as justification for the demolition in 1874 of the buildings that formed the west range of the cloisters.) Never lacking in confidence, he asserted that the frieze of sculptures "evidently represents the seven sacraments of the Church of Rome, - 1st, Matrimony; 2nd, Communion; 3rd, Extreme Unction; 4th, Ordination; 5th, Confirmation; 6th, Penance; and 7th, Baptism.



John Malden writing in 2000 (see above) credited Thomas Ross in 1900 with providing the first accurate interpretation of the scenes depicted in the frieze, based on the *Aberdeen Breviary*. Why had so many earlier descriptions failed to recognise what Lees had described as "clear beyond all doubt?" In part, it may have been that the layers of whitewash thickly applied in post-Reformation times had so blunted the definition of the sculpture that detail had been rendered undiscernible. It was also the case that the legends of Scottish Saints contained in the *Aberdeen Breviary* had not been widely read and the *Aberdeen Breviary* itself was little known until recently. According to the Edinburgh University Library at the time that they had completed the Breviary's digitisation in 2018, it had still not been entirely translated from Latin to English!

David C Davidson

MUSIC FOR MARCH

2 March 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Transfiguration Morning Service O nata lux	<i>Schütz</i> <i>Tallis</i>
9 March 11 am Venite Anthem	Lent 1 Morning Service O Lord, in thy wrath	<i>Weelkes (Short Service)</i> <i>Gibbons</i>
4 pm Responses Canticles Anthem	Choral Evensong Tomkins Noble in B minor Hear my prayer	<i>Mendelssohn</i>
16 March 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Lent 2 Morning Service Civitas sancti tui	<i>Weelkes (Short Service)</i> <i>Byrd</i>
23 March 11 am Benedictus Anthem	Lent 3 Morning Service Like as the heart	<i>Byrd (Short Service)</i> <i>Howells</i>
30 March 11 am Communion Setting Anthem	Lent 4/ Mothering Sunday Holy Communion Alma Redemptoris Mater	<i>Palestrina (Missa Brevis)</i> <i>Cecillia McDowall</i>
6 April 11 am Te Deum Anthem	Lent 5 Morning Service God so loved the world	<i>Gibbons (Short Service)</i> <i>Stainer</i>

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER SERVICES

9 March—First Sunday in Lent
11 am Morning Service

30 March—Mothering Sunday
11 am Morning Service

13 April - Palm Sunday
11 am Morning Service

Monday 14 April
7.30 pm Service with Sermon, Choir & Organ

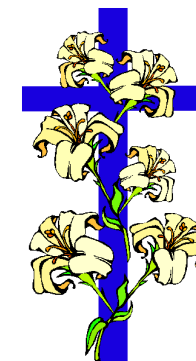
Tuesday 15 April
7.30 pm Service with Sermon, Choir & Organ

Wednesday 16 April
7.30 pm Service concluding with Compline

Thursday 17 April—Maundy Thursday
7.30 pm Service with Choral Communion and anthem sung by the Abbey choir.

Friday 18 April— Good Friday
Three Hour Vigil
12 noon - 1 pm - 'Durufle Requiem (sung by the Abbey Choir)
1 pm - 3 pm - Music, Meditations & Prayers

Sunday 20 April - Easter Day
11 am Easter Celebration with Choral Communion
The Abbey Choir sing Mozart's 'Coronation Mass'
accompanied by a small orchestra.



EVENTS AT THE ABBEY

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Scottish Clarinet Choir*
Saturday 22 March at 12.30 pm
Admission is £5 payable at the door

RSNO CHORUS
Saturday 15 March at 7.30 pm
Tickets £20 (under 26 £6) available from www.rsno.org.uk

COATS CHORAL & GLASGOW CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Poulenc's Gloria, and Faure's Requiem
Sunday 23 March at 7.30 pm
Tickets £15 (students free) available from Eventbrite

LONDON CONCERTANTE - *Music from the Movies*
Sunday 6 April at 7.30 pm
Tickets from £21 available from candlelightconcerts.co.uk

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Abbey Strings*
Saturday 26 April at 12.30 pm
Admission is £5 payable at the door

ORGAN RECITAL - *George McPhee*
Sunday 4 May at 3 pm
Admission is £10 payable at the door

ABBEY CONTACTS

Minister:	Revd. Jim Gibson
Director of Music:	Dr. George McPhee
Church Manager:	Linda Barrett
Church Secretary:	Karen Kerr
Session Clerk:	Marion Sommerville
Depute Session Clerk:	Dr David Davidson
Treasurer:	Stewart McDougall
Abbey Herald:	Karen Kerr

The Abbey office can be contacted on 0141 889 7654 or by email at -
info@paisleyabbey.org.uk

The Abbey, shop & café are now open
Monday to Saturday from 10 am - 4 pm with last entry at 3.30 pm
Tuesday & Thursday tours are at 2 pm.

Abbey website - www.paisleyabbey.org.uk
Facebook - [@paisleyabbey](https://www.facebook.com/paisleyabbey)
Instagram - [@paisleyabbeyofficial](https://www.instagram.com/paisleyabbeyofficial)
X (formerly Twitter) - [@paisley_abbey](https://twitter.com/paisley_abbey)