

# Paisley Abbey



## Abbey Herald

May 2025

My words in last month's Herald proved prophetic on Easter Sunday. The service was everything it ought to have been: triumphant, happy and confident in its Christian message. The music was glorious. With a slightly enhanced orchestra, *thanks to the Paisley Abbey Musical Society*, the choir acquitted themselves superbly. Easter hymns lend themselves to strong congregational singing, and the large congregation in attendance certainly responded in great voice. With congregations diminishing and churches closing all around, we are truly fortunate at the Abbey to be able to participate in worship of the highest standards and maintain such a strong, steadily growing, attendance. Have you noticed how we are benefitting from the current trend of Gen Z, with ever increasing numbers of young male worshippers making the Abbey their home?

My thanks, also, to those who attended services during Holy Week. Especially on Good Friday. Durufle's 'Requiem' proved so fitting for such a solemn day in the life of the Church and, afterwards, it was simply mind-blowing to listen to Ally, Josh and Zsuzsanna – all members of the Abbey choir – sing the haunting, powerful and evocative words of Buxtehude's cantata 'Membra Jesu Nostri'. They were accompanied by instrumentalists from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland who each freely gave their time to take part. Meditations and prayers interspersed the movements.

But, now, Easter joy and reassurance is leading us forward through a programme of unrelenting activity. Thanks to the enthusiasm of our members and volunteers, we are able to staff the Abbey shop and daily café as well as enable the Abbey church to be open to visitors both local and international. We can never be certain who will turn up. At the beginning of April, we received a phone call asking permission for the north transept to be used as part of a 'Bollywood' film. The next day, actors, directors, technicians of all kinds arrived for more than ten hours of filming. Interesting to watch, what impressed me was the respect for the building everybody showed. Not the first time such activity has taken place in the Abbey and, hopefully, not the last. My thanks to those who made it possible by giving extra time to caretake the building and later restore it to normality.

There is so much happening with regard to the Abbey's property, it's not possible for me to write about everything. I am delighted to report that huge progress has been made with our architect regarding the restoration of the historic King's Apartment.

Agreement has been reached with the interior designer and, presently, decisions are being made regarding the fitting of the kitchen and bathrooms. We hope the specification will soon be complete allowing the work to go out to tender. Applications for funding are already being made.

Over and above this,

- the manse is leased to a young family,
- the Lawn Street Halls will soon be sold,
- the Great West Window is undergoing inspection for repair,
- the organ is expertly being maintained,
- and, our ongoing building maintenance programme for which almost £700,000 has been raised, is awaiting the go-ahead from Historic Environment Scotland.

On the more mundane, yet vital matter, of Abbey finance, our conversations with Clyde Presbytery and the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland continue fruitfully. Thanks to the dogged, highly professional work of our Finance Committee, we are looking to final agreement on previously disputed issues before too long. Once this happens, the Abbey will be on a more secure financial footing than it has been in a long time.

Paisley Abbey has now, officially, been recognised as a leading ‘*Signature Church*’ by the Church of Scotland. Later this month, the Depute Session Clerk and I will represent the Abbey at a meeting in Edinburgh to further the work of the project. The Abbey has been named as number two on the *Signature Church* list – after St Giles’ Cathedral. This has enormous positive benefits for us. Not least among them the support it has brought us from Historic Environment Scotland in progressing our bid – *as part of the Cluniac Foundation* – as a candidate for UNESCO’s World Heritage Site status. To this end, in October this year, a whole weekend of festivity will be held in and around the Abbey celebrating our founding in 1163 and the ministry of the Abbey down through the generations since. Not to be missed!

More news will be given to Abbey members when we hold our third ‘*Back to Church Sunday*’ in June.

Nothing happening at the Abbey?  
Nothing ever gets completed at the Abbey?

Don’t you believe it!  
It’s happening before our every eyes.

The best thing to do – is get involved! Be part of it.

At Paisley Abbey so much is happening bringing new life to the ancient place.

Indeed, so much is being achieved, I can only think God must be with us.

Resurrection, indeed!

Best wishes to all.

Jim Gibson

*Interim Minister at the Abbey*

*Extra Chaplain to His Majesty The King in Scotland.*

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## ELDER DUTY TEAMS

**May -** John Kitson’s Team  
**June -** Michael McGill’s Team  
**July -** Marion Sommerville’s Team

## PARISH REGISTER - APRIL

### Baptism

Max Gordon William McGinnigle

### New Members by Confirmation

Seonaid Eadie

Dylan McInnes

### Funeral

Sheila McLachlan

## ANNUAL STATED MEETING

The Congregation is invited to attend the Stated Annual Meeting on Sunday 18 May which will take place immediately after the Morning Service.

## 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. Shortages this month include UHT milk, juice, crisps, sweets, sanitary products, tinned fruit, custard & rice pudding.

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.



## LENT APPEAL

### Thank You for your Lent Appeal Donations

Now that Easter has passed, it is time to thank you all for taking part in our annual Lent Appeal.

The Lent Appeal is now a regular event in the Abbey's fundraising activities and is a tangible way of everyone remembering and being involved in the 40 days leading to the celebration on Easter Sunday.

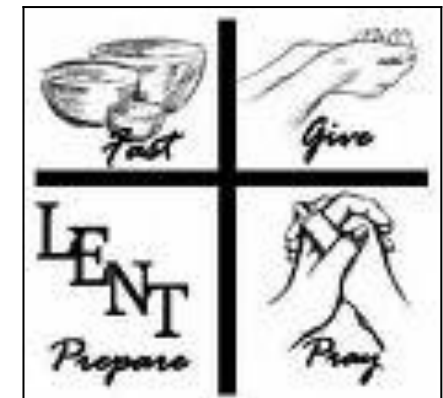
However, if you not yet given to the Appeal, it is not too late. There are many ways to do this

- Wait for you elder to collect your contribution
- Transfer your money directly into the Abbey's bank account.
- Leave the collection box in the Abbey office
- Put your contribution in an envelope marked Lent Appeal in the Sunday collection plates

We had hoped to raise around £7,000 and with the Gift Aid reclaim from the Government, this would raise the total to around £9,000 - a very valuable sum.

Thank you for your support, not only this year but over many years in the past.

Stewart McDougall  
Abbey Treasurer



## PAISLEY CHURCHES HOMELESS BEFRIENDING PROJECT

This is a group from various Churches of several denominations which discuss how we can support those presenting as homeless or in likelihood of becoming homeless. This Group meets regularly in the Abbey and is joined by representatives for the Council who are involved with the provision for homelessness. This work forms part of the initiatives overseen by the Abbey Outreach Committee.

There are a number of locations throughout Paisley where a warm meal can be obtained and we produce a card and posters letting folk know where these are. These cards are distributed through the churches and the Council homeless services. The posters are displayed in doctors' surgeries, supermarkets, the library and other appropriate locations.

We are able to provide vouchers for the staff to assist those being provided with basic accommodation to obtain small items to help furnish the accommodation. We also proved cash to the Council office to help provide emergency food when the Foodbanks are not available. Surplus food at events is taken along to the hostel in Paisley accommodating young folk experiencing homelessness.

We were delighted to receive £1,000 worth of vouchers from P3 (Providing for People in Paisley) which will be used to provide small items to help furnish accommodation. We were also pleased to hand in Easter Eggs to the Hostel in Paisley accommodating young homeless folk. The picture was taken when the vouchers were presented by P3 and also show the Easter eggs ready to be taken along to the hostel.

John Kitson  
Convener  
Paisley Churches  
Homeless Befriending  
Group



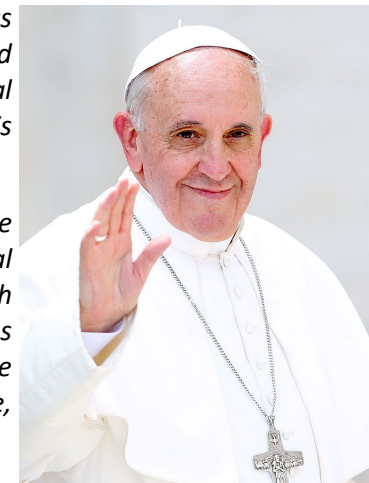
## THE DEATH OF POPE FRANCIS

When the death of Pope Francis was announced on Easter Monday, a Press Release was immediately made available by the Abbey. Its wording is printed below and was also posted on the noticeboard within the Abbey.

The Minister also wrote a personal letter of condolence to Bishop John Keenan, at the Diocesan Offices based at St Mirin's Cathedral.

*On hearing the news of the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis, Paisley Abbey wishes to be associated with the words of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in expressing his condolences to the Catholic Church in Scotland.*

*We recall the recent visit to Paisley Abbey of the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Buendía, the personal representative of Pope Francis. His retinue, which included Rt Rev John Keenan, Bishop of Paisley, was met by our minister, Rev Jim Gibson, along with the Moderator and Clerk to the Presbytery of Clyde, Revs David Burt and Robbie Hamilton respectively.*



*Rev Jim Gibson led the company in prayer in the St Mirin Chapel. His words were evocative of the Church of Scotland's St Margaret Declaration of friendship with the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland that was welcomed by the 2022 General Assembly as "a decisive and irrevocable statement of our friendship with one another, based on our shared faith in Christ." Archbishop Buendía and the priests in his party then sang the well-known Gregorian chant, "Salve Regina," a fitting echo of the music that monks would have sung daily in Paisley Abbey Church before the Reformation.*

*As Rev Gibson recalls: "The visit was a very moving experience. It was a practical example of the ecumenical commitment of Pope Francis and of the Church of Scotland, mindful of Christ's prayer that all his followers should be one, seeking to share with other denominations in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland and throughout the world. And so, we too pray that the memory of Francis will continue to serve as an example to the faithful people of God in our shared pilgrimage and in our common task of caring for God's creation. May he rest in peace."*

**21st April 2025**

# ALLOVUS SYLLABUS

Until June

Wednesdays - 1.30 pm - 3.30 pm

Meeting fortnightly

Varied programme of activities, speakers and outings  
Refreshments served

Open to anyone who may wish to attend

7 May Paisley's Sma' Shot

21 May Visit to St Mirin's Cathedral  
/fish & chips

*Members should meet at the gate of the Cathedral at 1.30 pm  
and fish & chips will be served back at the Abbey.*

June (date TBC) Afternoon tea at Caulders



ALLOVUS group enjoying their last get together with Margaret Dundas showing the Paddington Bear which she made and the Easter crafts which everyone enjoyed making.



# FLOWERS & FIZZ AFTERNOON TEA



MAY  
SATURDAY 31 1:30pm  
2025

FLORAL ART DEMONSTRATION  
BY JANE GORDON

SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION OF FLOWER ARRANGING SOCIETIES  
AREA DEMONSTRATOR & DEMONSTRATOR'S REP

TICKETS £15

AVAILABLE FROM PAISLEY ABBEY SHOP  
OR PHONE 0141 889 7654



# ABBEY SHOP

New in the shop this month ceramic wish tokens by *Erin*.

The tokens are unglazed on the rear so you can add a drop of essential oil or perfume to make it extra special.

There is space on the back of the card to write a personal message.

On sale in the gift shop price £4.



## EVENTS AT THE ABBEY

**ORGAN RECITAL - George McPhee (Paisley Abbey, Director of Music)**  
**Sunday 4 May at 3 pm**  
 Admission is £10 payable at the door

**CITY MUSIC PROMOTIONS - Vivaldi's Four Seasons by candlelight**  
**Saturday 17 May at 7.30 pm**  
 Tickets from £20.52 available from [citymusicpromotions.co.uk](http://citymusicpromotions.co.uk)

**LUNCHTIME CONCERT - Cheryl & Gordon Cree**  
**Saturday 24 May at 12.30 pm**  
 Admission is £5 payable at the door

**ORGAN RECITAL - David Pipe (Director, York Musical Society)**  
**Sunday 25 May at 3 pm**  
 Admission is £10 payable at the door

**LONDON CONCERTANTE - Bond by Candlelight**  
**Sunday 1 June at 6 pm**  
 Tickets from £21 available from [candlelightconcerts.co.uk](http://candlelightconcerts.co.uk)

**LONDON FILM ORCHESTRA -**  
**'Tribute to Hans Zimmer & Film Favourites'**  
**Wednesday 4 June at 6.30 pm & 9 pm**  
 Tickets available from £37.79 available from [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

**ORGAN RECITAL - Steven McIntyre**  
**St Mary's (Scottish Episcopal) Cathedral, Glasgow**  
**Sunday 15 June at 3 pm**  
 Admission is £10 payable at the door

**LUNCHTIME CONCERT - Douglas Lawrence (violin)**  
**Saturday 21 June at 12.30 pm**  
 Admission is £5 payable at the door

## MUSIC FOR MAY

**4 May**  
 11 am  
 Te Deum  
 Anthem  
**Easter 3**  
**Morning Service**  
 Blessed be the God and Father  
*Ireland in F*  
*SS Wesley*

**11 May**  
 11 am  
 Jubilate Deo  
 Anthem  
**Easter 4**  
**Morning Service**  
 My Shepherd is the living God  
*Howells (Collegium Regale)*  
*McPhee*

4 pm  
 Responses  
 Psalms 113,114  
 Canticles  
 Anthem  
**Choral Evensong**  
 Rejoice in the Lamb  
*McPhee*  
*Howells (Collegium Regale)*  
*Britten*

**18 May**  
 11 am  
 Te Deum  
 Anthem  
**Easter 5**  
**Morning Service**  
 Haec Dies  
*Stanford in C*  
*Byrd*

**25 May**  
 11 am  
 Communion Setting  
 Anthem  
**Easter 6**  
**Holy Communion**  
 O taste and see  
*Duruflé (Messe Cum Jubilo)*  
*R Vaughan Williams*

**1 June**  
 11 am  
 Introit  
 Te Deum  
 Anthem  
**Sunday after Ascension day**  
**Morning Service**  
 Psalite Domino  
 O clap your hands  
*Byrd*  
*Howells (Collegium Regale)*  
*Gibbons*

## PAISLEY ABBEY ~ A TEMPLE OF CONCILIATION?

### WHO AM I TO JUDGE ANOTHER?

The article “Paisley Abbey Rediscovered” in the April edition of the *Abbey Herald* highlighted the forthcoming Sesquicentennial of Prince Leopold’s visit to Paisley Abbey. Readers will recall that by coming to the Abbey, Leopold was the first member of the royal family to have done so since James VI in 1617. The inspiration was his fascination with his Stuart ancestry, and the occasion led to his mother Queen Victoria’s visit in 1888 since which, members of the royal family have regularly graced the Abbey with their presence.

The *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser* of October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1875 reported details of Leopold’s visit. It was apparent that, in one respect, Paisley had fulfilled its reputation, for “the weather in the early morning was extremely wet and unenticing for the Prince to visit any place!” Happily, however, by the time the royal party arrived at “the venerable Abbey of Paisley,” “the sun shone out brilliantly” as “the party were met at the western entrance by the Rev. Dr Lees, minister of the First Charge. The National Anthem was played [on the organ that had newly been installed and] the Rev. Dr Lees pointed out to the Prince the more interesting monuments and tablets in the venerable building, explaining that Robert III and five [sic] head stewards of Scotland lie buried beneath it. In the north-east corner was shown a tablet of the Stuarts of Cardonald, the ancestors of the family of Lord Blantyre; also the monument to the last Abbot of Paisley, the Archbishop of St Andrews, a great supporter of Queen Mary. The Prince seemed considerably interested in the beautiful sacred edifice. The Sounding Aisle [St Mirin Chapel] was next visited, where was seen the monuments to Margery Bruce [removed to its present position in the Choir in 1956] and the Earl of Abercorn. Proceeding to the exterior of the building, the Prince and party walked through the ruined portion of the Abbey, and seemed greatly interested.”

Leopold’s cicerone, Dr James Cameron Lees, had been appointed minister of the Second Charge of Paisley Abbey in 1859 at the age of just twenty-five and translated to the First Charge in 1865. When he saw the Abbey for the first time, as he later recalled in his history, “The church was in a deplorable state . . . a more dreary place of worship could scarcely be conceived.”

His predecessor as minister of the second charge had been Patrick Brewster, described as “a man of brilliant gifts, imbued with the social mission of Christianity, a Chartist and a pacifist.” Brewster’s pacifism, however, did not appear to have extended to his relationship with his colleague, Andrew Wilson, the minister of the First Charge with whom he “could not in any matter see eye to eye.” Collegiate charges, as Paisley Abbey then was, in which two ministers of equal position and authority were given charge of one congregation were notoriously fraught with discord, and “as the two colleagues must act together before anything could be done, nothing was done in Paisley Abbey.”

It was only the death of Brewster after a forty-year ministry, and the arrival of Lees who was immediately able to cooperate with Wilson, which allowed for a desperately needed scheme of repair and restoration to be undertaken.

The Church of Scotland, which had licensed Lees as a preacher in 1855, was still in a state of shock following the Disruption of 1843 when nearly a third of its ministers and perhaps half of its adherents left the established church to form the Free Church. Lees was one of “an extraordinarily gifted group of young ministers who were ordained in the later 1840s and 1850s,” and were more liberally minded than their older reactionary colleagues and the conservative Calvinists of the Free Church. At the same time, a number of ministers sought to reform and renew aspects of the practice of religion relating to worship, liturgy, and church architecture, and many were emboldened to promote their increasingly ecumenical views.

Lees was one of the founding members of the *Church Service Society* when it was formed in 1865. They sought to prepare and publish forms of prayer for public worship and services for the administration of the Sacraments and other acts of worship. Liberty to introduce organs into churches was sought. Stained-glass was installed in churches for the first time since the Reformation. In their day, such ideas were regarded by many establishment figures with suspicion as dangerous innovations, and the General Assembly had over several years passed Acts against innovations in worship.

Dr Robert Lee of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh, was accused of reading his prayers from a printed book. In consequence, in 1859 he was brought before the bar of the General Assembly to answer for his conduct and “enjoined to discontinue the use of the book in question, and to conform in offering up prayer to the present ordinary practice in the Church.” He conformed, but only to the extent of reading his prayers from a manuscript. Despite, or perhaps because his opinions were becoming increasingly popular amongst the laity and younger clergy, factions within the Church again mobilised in opposition to Dr Lee. When he introduced an organ into his church, the controversy increased, and he was cited to appear again before the General Assembly in 1867 with the likelihood that he would face expulsion from the Church. That outcome he avoided only by having suffered a disastrous stroke that prevented his trial from going ahead and eventually led to his death. One of his biographers opined that he had “died just in time to save himself and his cause from defeat, and that it was by his death his triumph was secure.”

That same biographer, John Cunningham (who was the great-great-grandfather of the writer of this article) had been born in Paisley in 1819 and served as the minister of Crieff from 1845 until his appointment to be Principal of St Mary’s College at St Andrews University in 1886 - the same year that he served as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.



He was a devotee of Robert Lee, and in 1867 when Lee suffered his fatal stroke, Cunningham won a court case that gave him the right to install an organ in his church and triggered a wave of church organs to be installed in churches across Scotland. Cunningham expressed what must at the time have appeared to be astonishingly liberal ecumenical views in a paper that he published in 1849 as his “recognition that what we share in common with other sects and denominations is the foundation for reconciliation of our differences:

. . . . I hold salvation is not confined to any particular Church.

Wherever there is a devout worshipper, there, there is a present God; wherever there is a believing people, there, there is a compassionate High Priest able to save them to the very uttermost.

I confidently believe that the consummation of all things will reveal that Christ has gathered his people alike from the Papal, the Episcopal, and the Presbyterian Churches; and that, purged from the prejudices and imperfections of our respective systems, we shall yet be united into one, and enabled, with no dissonant note in our song, to praise our common God and Saviour.”

James Cameron Lees completed his eighteen-year ministry at Paisley Abbey when he translated to St Giles’ Cathedral, Edinburgh, in 1877. According to one of his biographers, J. C. Carrick, “many people were greatly surprised at his leaving his beautifully-restored sanctuary for what west-country critics described as “a hole of a place in the Edinburgh High Street.”” It was a thriving congregation that he left behind, imbued with a pride and appreciation of its Abbey Church’s heritage, architecture, and art embodied in Lees’ published history, the introduction of stained-glass, and the installation of a fine organ. St Giles’ presented new challenges, however, and he quickly became the driving force for its restoration too.

There is much more to tell of the life of James Cameron Lees than can be included here. What can be said is expressed in the words of another of his biographers, Norman Maclean, that, in an age when the “bitterness of ecclesiastical controversies had soured the religious life of the people,” Lees stood as an “apostle of reconciliation when there was scarcely a voice heard in Scotland for peace.”

In writing about the troubled times that affected our church in the nineteenth century – its deep divisions and schisms - its focus on differences rather than on what sects and denominations had in common – it is impossible not to reflect on the church of today. The death of Pope Francis has made many think about his legacy and wonder whether he too “stood as an apostle of reconciliation when there was scarcely a voice heard for peace.”

He did not live a blameless life and, in the words spoken from the Abbey’s pulpit, “even he was not without his critics. He was a member of the church: how could it be otherwise?” And it might be added that he was human: how could it be otherwise?

Francis himself said this, and in acknowledging his own shortcomings, asked if we are able to blame ourselves before we blame others. He reminded us of the words of Luke: *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

If asked if there was any one memorable thing that Francis said in his lifetime, many would reply that it was the question that he said he often asked himself: “Who am I to judge another?”

*David C Davidson*

## ABBEY CONTACTS

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

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

*The Abbey, shop & café are 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](http://www.paisleyabbey.org.uk)*

*Facebook - @paisleyabbey*

*Instagram - @paisleyabbeyofficial*

*X (formerly Twitter) - @paisley\_abbey*

