

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

October 2025

October is the season of Harvest. It's a time when, in our thinking and in our worship, we are encouraged back to basics: our basic dependency on the earth for our life and sustenance. It's also a time for asking profound questions about our identity, our purpose and our mortality.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Christians believe that every human being is made in the image of God; and is deeply loved by God. As Christians, we believe that each and every individual is of immeasurable worth, despite our undoubted shortcomings and failings, our flaws and inadequacies. We also believe that God has made us to know God in a way that is amazingly fulfilling, liberating and challenging.

Down through the ages, the true nature of God has been revealed through the beauty of creation, through the vision and understanding of the ancient prophets and, most especially, through the teaching, life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The beginning of faith is to trust in the love of God who knows us more profoundly than we know ourselves. From this initial step of faith a journey begins that will last a lifetime. That is why we come to Church. It is so that, as we travel through life's journey, Love's Spirit may guide and strengthen us, leading us towards the discovery of a place of beauty, wholeness and peace.

A place of beauty, wholeness and peace must surely be the dream of every human being (*even though we may never consider using such words.*) For many people, such a dream ought to be realised by the consequence of political activity and action. Sadly, that is not reality. Day after day, whether they be elderly or young, countless numbers of people endure situations, at home or in their workplace, more akin to *nightmare* than *dream*. A far cry from *'beauty, wholeness and peace.'*

CHURCH'S ESSENTIAL ROLE AS SOCIETY'S CONSCIENCE

The Holy Ministry of all Christian Churches embraces all political affiliations and allegiances. While I may hold strong personal political opinions however, I deliberately refrain from promoting any *'party'* line, either in my preaching or writing. That said, I deeply believe, for as long as the Church of Scotland remains recognised in law as the National Church in Scotland, it has a primary and fundamental responsibility to speak up and out for those unable to speak for themselves. Our Society does not recognise any alternative voice of conscience.

Thus it has ever been. As it was with the teaching of the ancient prophets, calling on their people to regain a sense of their priorities for the common good, so it is with the teaching of Christ's gospel to the laissez-faire attitudes of our contemporary society. Gospel stories do not always make for comfortable hearing! When taken seriously, they can lead us to unexpected understanding and provocative action.

That is why it is such a privilege to lead worship within the Abbey. From its foundation in 1163, the Abbey has been a sanctuary and refuge for the endangered and vulnerable.

A GOSPEL OF HOPE AND UNITY

A place not only of '*beauty, wholeness and peace*' but of physical safety, mental wellbeing and spiritual strength, renewal and hope. It is something it must always remain: something worthy of celebration and thanksgiving.

This month also witnesses a special service of thanksgiving being held in the Abbey for its foundation and history of faithful witness and service. The Abbey's long history can teach us how, though it's foundation and much of its ministry lay within a liturgy which differs from the present day, the Church in all its varied branches and traditions has never more strongly been as one. It will be such a joy therefore to welcome both Bishop John Keenan from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paisley and the Reverend Matthew Stafford, lead vicar of Much Wenlock, Shropshire (*the Priory of which is the Abbey's mother church*). Their presence and participation takes us to the very core of Gospel teaching. It reminds us that the purpose of God's kingdom on earth is the unity of all people. It takes us back to Gospel basics, reminding us that, though through circumstance or history we may follow an alternative liturgy, or disagree politically, or have a different social background: we are all held as one within the love of God. Therein lies the strength of the Christian church and the hope of its faith. How fortunate and blessed we are to be able to witness to it, *together*.

Jim Gibson
Interim Minister at the Abbey
Extra Chaplain to his Majesty the King in Scotland.

AN INVITATION FROM 'ALLOVUS'

As members of 'ALLOVUS' we would like to invite you to come and join us at our fortnightly gatherings held in the Place of Paisley. We meet on Wednesdays at 1.30pm. A wide and varied programme of activities is much enjoyed, ranging from visiting speakers to soothing yoga to visits out together. We always spend time delighting in each other's company over some tea and coffee before, all too soon, our gathering comes to an end.

It's truly a great way to spend time making new friends and enjoying an afternoon. So, whoever you may be, whatever your age, if you have the time, come and join us!
We will be delighted to meet you.

Our next meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, 8th October when the topic is '**Down on the Farm**' and, on October 22nd when we welcome Margaret Dundas speaking about '**Tea Everyone?**'

MUSIC FUNDRAISER

Gathering together while raising some funds for the music of the Abbey, '***Music for an Autumn Evening***' will be held in the Place of Paisley on Sunday 26th October 2025 from 4.30pm till 6.00pm.

A luxury hamper will be raffled. Tickets priced £20 ,including Bubbly and Nibbles, are on sale from the Abbey shop, Everybody most welcome!



ELDER DUTY TEAMS

October	Michael McGill's Team
November	Marion Sommerville's Team
December	Fiona Small

PARISH REGISTER

Wedding
13 September Lynne Bushby & Andrew Paton

Baptism
14 September Sophia Middleton
21 September Valentina Ruby Ramos

RENFREWSHIRE FOODBANK

Over the last five years, the number of emergency food parcels provided to people in crisis by the Trussel Trust has increased by 73% and last year Renfrewshire Foodbank distributed 5595 food parcels to our local community.

Renfrewshire Foodbank is part of the Trussel Trust's UK-wide network of food banks, they provide food and practical support to help people in crisis, including offering advice and signposting people to other services, like debt advice that can help them break free from poverty.

The Abbey collects food for the Foodbank on the last Sunday of each month. The October collection will be on Sunday 26th. You will see trolleys in the Cloisters. The congregation is very generous with their donations of non-perishable goods and money which can be gift-aided. (a form can be provided) If you do not currently contribute, perhaps you could note the date in your diary each month and bring along a few items from the shortages list which is printed in the Intimations in the Order of Service.

The staff at the Foodbank are always really grateful to receive our donations. Every little helps. Thank you.

CHRISTIAN AID

Across the world Christian Aid partners are supporting communities facing multiple challenges.

Their partners in South Sudan continue to provide much needed assistance to those fleeing the conflict and arriving across the border with only the clothes they are wearing.

Cash grants, enabled by Scottish Government funding, given to people who find themselves in camps facilitate food and clothing to be bought, education to be paid for, and small scale income generation initiatives started, all of which supports the local market in what is a fragile state.

In Gaza partners are far from being distant responders, living and experiencing the horrors of the conflict alongside the communities they seek to support.

Getting food to people is a key priority and partners have been supporting families to grow vegetables between tents and in the rubble of destroyed buildings.

Christian Aid agencies are supporting children who have been orphaned, trying to get to people who require medical assistance, and supporting widows to have the legal status to support their children.

Pray not for Arab or Jew, for Palestinian or Israeli, but pray rather for ourselves that we might not divide them in our prayers but keep them in our hearts.

WE REFUSE TO BE ENEMIES

The Nassar family are Palestinian Christians living on land that has been in their family since the time of the Ottomans.

They are now surrounded by illegal Israeli settlements, have had their property damaged, trees destroyed, main access road blocked and have been in and out of court for decades defending their right to their land – something that continues to this day. On their farm, the Tent of Nations, they run educational and environmental events, host thousands of international visitors and provide summer camps to children from Bethlehem to give them freedom and distraction from the daily realities of living under occupation.

Motivated by their faith they continue to live out an example of peaceful resistance, hoping for the day when there will be justice and peace for all people.

Their motto is “ We refuse to be enemies”.

A SHOULDER TO LEAN ON ! The Minister, Revd Jim Gibson with Cluny the Abbey Monk



PAISLEY ABBEY SHOP

From the beautiful Ochil Hills in the heart of Scotland comes an innovative new skincare and gift range; luxurious, natural products with a distinctively Scottish twist.

Siabann – which is Gaelic for soap – is a constantly evolving brand from Fiona Ritchie, founder of the Ochil Soap Company, known for its fabulous little bars of handmade marbled and scented Scottish soap.

The products are fragranced with a blend of essential oils & are tested – as Fiona is quick to point out – on family and friends, never animals. All are vegan friendly.

Soap, hand cream and lip balms all available in the Abbey Gift Shop.



PAISLEY ABBEY FOUNDERS' FESTIVAL OPEN DAY

We invite you to join us for a memorable experience at our Founders' Festival Open Day.

As part of a weekend of special celebrations, the event will take place on Saturday 11 October 2025 from 10 am until 4 pm

Programme of Events and Activities

There will be something for everyone to enjoy, with a host of activities and attractions available throughout the day:

- "CLUNY IN THE NORTH" EXHIBITION: *Discover our brand-new exhibition exploring the history and influence of Cluny in its northernmost outpost*
- TOURS OF THE TOWER: *Offering unique views of Paisley and beyond.*
- FILM OF THE ABBEY DRAIN: *Watch a captivating film documenting the discovery of the Abbey's historic drain*
- WINE AND FOOD TASTING TABLES: *Sample a selection of fine wines and delicious foods at our tasting tables*
- HERB AND PLANT SENSORY INTERACTIVE TABLE: *Engage your senses with our hands-on herb and plant table*
- MEDIEVAL TOUCH TABLE: *Handle authentic medieval objects and learn about the Abbey's past in the time of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace*
- THE CAVAILLÉ-COLL ORGAN EXPLAINED: *Discover the story and mechanics behind our famous organ*
- CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN: *Younger visitors can take part in a variety of creative activities and crafts*
- DRESSING UP COSTUMES AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES: *Have fun dressing up in period costumes and pose for memorable photos*
- BURGERS AND HOT DOGS: *Enjoy tasty burgers and hot dogs available on site*
- ASK ME DESK: *Visit our information desk if you have any questions or would like to learn more about the Abbey*

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING
YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR
A WONDERFUL DAY OUT AT PAISLEY ABBEY!**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

ALLOVUS

Wednesday 8 October from 1.30 pm until 3.30 pm
In the Place of Paisley
'Down on The Farm'

PAISLEY ABBEY FOUNDERS' FESTIVAL OPEN DAY

Saturday 11 October 2025 from 10 am until 4 pm

We invite you to join us for a memorable experience at our Founders' Festival Open Day.
As part of a weekend of special celebrations

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Bruce Barber (USA) Organ*

Saturday 18 October at 12.30 pm
Admission is £5 payable at the door

LONDON CONCERTANTE

Vivaldi's Four Seasons & Vaughan Williams The Lark Ascending
Sunday 19 October at 7.30 pm

Tickets available from candlelightconcerts.co.uk

ALLOVUS

Wednesday 22 October from 1.30 pm until 3.30 pm
In the Place of Paisley
'Tea, everyone?'

PAISLEY ABBEY MUSIC SOCIETY

Music for an Autumn Evening
Sunday 26 October at 4.30 pm
Social get together in the Place of Paisley
Raffle to raise funds for Abbey Music
Tickets £20 available from the Abbey shop



WHO FOUNDED PAISLEY ABBEY?

*“For the monastery was the gift of Walter the Steward of Scotland.
By his invitation the Cluniensians settled on the banks of the White Cart.”*

Anon., *Lichens from an Old Abbey* (1875)

Who founded Paisley Abbey? Ask that question of any of the Abbey's little band of tour guides, indeed, ask most of those who for any reason frequent the Abbey, and the confident response will be “Walter Fitz Alan!” But is it the correct answer?

That adopted Shropshire Lad had been gifted extensive holdings of land north of the Anglo-Scottish border by King David I of Scotland as reward for good service dating back to the 1130s. He gradually rose in rank to assume the stewardship of David's household from around 1150, that office to be held heritably in perpetuity. After David's death in 1153, Malcolm IV and William I successively confirmed Walter's position as King's Steward. He served in that role until his death in 1177 at Melrose Abbey, whence his body was repatriated for burial to the monastery of Paisley with whose foundation he had been associated.

King James I of Scotland would later voice regret that David I had devoted such resources to religious works - founding monasteries and building churches with generous gifts of monies and land alienated from the crown - when he famously characterised his ancestor as “ane sair sanct for the croune.” However, it was undoubtedly through King David's influence, and in gratitude for the favours he had received, that Walter Fitz Alan had resolved to build and endow a monastery on the lands that had been gifted to him. His motivations were multiple. It was an act of piety in keeping with the spirit of an age when there was a tremendous proliferation of such conventual foundations. It was also a political act whereby monasteries were seen as an intrinsic element in the colonisation and “Normanisation” of the so-called Davidian Revolution in Scotland. It was a selfish act in an era of obsessional preoccupation with personal and ancestral salvation of the soul, whereby the fear of damnation could be mollified by the engagement of an entire religious community in the task of securing salvation through prayer.

Whatever his motivation, around the year 1163 while visiting Fotheringhay, Walter entered into an agreement with Humbald, the prior of the Shropshire Cluniac House of Much Wenlock to which Walter's family was devoted. Humbald, for his part, was to send thirteen monks to establish a monastery at Paisley, and to secure the sanction of the parent Order of Cluny in recognition of the new foundation that was to belong to the Cluniac Order independently of the priory at Much Wenlock. The conditions were duly met when, later in the 1160s, the monks arrived from Shropshire and made their first habitation of the chosen site of what was to become Paisley Abbey.

From the outset, the Cluniac Monastery of Paisley was an anomaly. The religious order of Cluny had been founded in the south of the Burgundy region of France in the early tenth century, adopting Benedictine rule in a modified form.

As the Oxford historian Lucy Margaret Smith put it, setting “the example of religious duty and discipline and of dignity of service, from its origin it was zealous for monastic reform.” During the first two centuries of the Order's existence, the Abbey of Cluny established herself as the nucleus of both a great religious and a political network, encompassing perhaps as many as fifteen hundred monasteries across mainland Europe and a further thirty in England but only two of any consequence in Scotland: Paisley and her daughter priory, Crossraguel.

Initially, most houses under Cluny were gifted to the Order by emperors, kings, nobles, and bishops. Many were old and in ruin, and it was not until later that new houses were built in any number with monks sent from Cluny to people them. From the outset, governance and discipline was attempted through a highly centralised administration that expected that every monk, however remote the monastery of his adoption, should go to Cluny to make his profession. As the number and geographical spread of Cluniac monasteries grew, such demands became increasingly untenable. Discipline faltered, and by the twelfth century newer, more ascetic, rival monastic Orders – Cistercians and Tironensians – had become the favoured choice for any new endowments. Practically all the great Cluniac churches had been completed by the time of Paisley's foundation. Walter's new monastery was a latecomer, subject to a religious order that was losing its grip on authority. Geographical remoteness and, in subsequent centuries, the hostility of its southern neighbour rendering travel through England to France highly dangerous and at times impossible, served further to exacerbate the situation. Notwithstanding, John Durkan, the Scottish Church Historian writing in *The Innes Review* in 1976 noted of Paisley Abbey in the Sixteenth Century that “as a monastic institution it had always retained its Cluniac links, however tenuously towards the end.”

How did those links manifest themselves and in what way did the Order of Cluny influence the Abbey and Monastery of Paisley up to the time of the Reformation, and even beyond?

This is a tricky question to answer. Lucy Margaret Smith had written: “Great art, that has power to stamp an epoch and influence a cycle of centuries, would seem to concentrate to a definite nucleus of space as distinctly as it does to a point of time, and the one is as limited as the other.” Smith's colleague Joan Evans, herself one of the greatest Cluniac scholars of last century, qualified that assertion: “Such a centre was Cluny, and to trace all the lines of influence that radiate from it would involve an investigation of almost impracticable complexity and size. But if the nucleus of this influence within the Order itself has been made precise and definite, something has been achieved which can form the basis of further specific investigation in the case of any church which seems to show Cluniac influence.” Such a church is Paisley Abbey.

As the Order of Cluny began to decline, its influences became more general. Its greatest churches had been built in the Romanesque style of architecture, adapted to suit its own customs and practices. Latterly, that style presaged the extraordinarily rapid development of Gothic architecture that was to follow Cluny's apogee.

In the century before building at Paisley began, problems of plan and of vaulting had been progressively solved, blurring any line between Romanesque and Gothic, with even the latter's characteristic pointed arch having been in use in France for that hundred years' period. "Once the architectural needs of an age were comprehended, the constructional basis of a style found, and the human spirit at work upon its problems, miracles of artistic creation could be performed in a few decades." Churches of the Cluniac Order, Paisley Abbey not least, are filled with a religious spirit "irradiated by an entirely human love of beauty, dignity and splendour, in which we still share. In virtue of that community of feeling we may perchance still gain spiritual access to the life of cloisters that time has long since violated."

In keeping with Cluniac tradition, our church has a plain exterior, and its plan follows a standard cruciform footprint. In addition to the central tower above the crossing, the substantially greater girth of the two westernmost columns of the nave betrays the intention to build towers above. The flattened inner faces of these massive pillars suggest that they may have carried a medieval tribune beneath which, it might be surmised, would have been a narthex or galilee where lay folk and pilgrims would have gathered before entry to the church. The destruction of the abbey by the English in 1307 denies us the certainty that either intent was ever realised.

Reflecting its centrality to Cluniac life, the choir would have seemed disproportionately long to the awe-struck visitor entering by the west door and confronted with the magnificent vista that culminated in the high altar. In the absence of records, we can only guess as to the detail of colour, ornament, painted sculpture, and festal decoration that was concentrated around the high altar, but we can be confident that it existed in abundance. Although the number of the brethren of the community at Paisley never approached the hundreds at Cluny, space had to be available in the choir to accommodate the chorus psallentium and to allow all the rich liturgical and musical necessities of a Cluniac church.

When the choir was reconstructed in the first quarter of last century, its dimensions were determined by the medieval footprint, but its design was in the imagination of the architects of the day. Latterly, following the death in 1922 of Peter MacGregor Chalmers, it was Robert Lorimer who assumed control. It is to Lorimer and the extraordinarily talented group of artists and craftsmen gathered around him, that we must pay tribute for the resulting magnificent tour de force albeit that, as the medieval architecture and art historian Richard Fawcett wrote, "its appearance would probably be a great surprise to its original builders!"

Although completed to Lorimer's design less than a century ago, it is not difficult to recognise the inspiration of Cluniac art and history. The stained-glass windows alone insinuate such. The subject of Douglas Strachan's Great East Window above the holy table is Christ ascended and enthroned, the Lord of all. Christ is depicted as the central figure, his right hand raised in benediction, redolent of the great seated figure of Christ with his right hand raised in blessing, painted towards the end of the eleventh century above the high altar in the semi-domed apse of the choir of the great church of Cluny.

Strachan's window representing Christ as the Bestower of Peace on the south wall of the choir features a Mandorla depicting the Christ Child with Mary his mother. Some might consider this a surprising feature to discover in a Presbyterian church not given to Mariolatry, but is this not an allusion to the original pre-Reformation dedication to the Virgin Mary, appropriately overlooking the supposed site of the long-vanished Lady Chapel? Paisley Monastery's Treasurer Accounts mention the chapel of "oure Lady of Paisley" which was a pilgrimage shrine along with the one dedicated to St Mirin. Even today, as a member of the Federation of European Cluniac Sites, Paisley Abbey is referred to on the Federation's "Clunypedia.com" website as *Abbaye Notre-Dame de Paisley*.

Finally, turning to the most recent of our stained-glass windows, the subject of John K. Clark's masterpiece is Light and Music, referring to the Abbey church's great musical heritage. Founded in the supreme accomplishment in the art of chanting Gregorian music achieved in the church of Cluny from the tenth century onwards, Paisley Abbey continues to maintain the highest standards of church choral music in the country. The stunning central feature of the window is a candelabra, surely inspired by the great seven-branched candlestick which stood before the high altar of the church at Cluny, more than eighteen feet in height, made of copper gilt and richly bejewelled. It was the gift of Henry I of England's daughter, the Empress Matilda, whose mother Queen Matilda was the older sister of King David I of Scotland – in whose name the story of Paisley Abbey began.

In considering who influenced the institution of the Monastery and Abbey of Paisley, David I began a list that includes his High Steward, Prior Osbert and the twelve monks from Much Wenlock, the Abbots of Cluny, and the traditions and practices of the Order of Cluny. In modern times, Paisley Abbey Church has continued to be influenced by that history in diverse ways – its art, architecture, and music especially – and the process is unending. The ministers, members of the congregation, adherents and interested visitors, past and present, have all played their part in the foundation of Paisley Abbey and continue to do so.

In recognition of such an extraordinary heritage and the part that so many have played in the life of our church in ten centuries, the Abbey is about to stage its first "Founders' Festival." The weekend of festivities will feature a Family Fun Day on Saturday 11th October followed on the Sunday by a special service of worship in the morning, and Choral Evensong. We are all part of the continuing story of Paisley Abbey, and it is right that we should celebrate the busy life and dedicated work of our church today while recalling the generations of servants in times past.

David C. Davidson

[An earlier version of this article was published in May 2024 in the *Abbey Herald*.]

MUSIC FOR OCTOBER

5 October 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Trinity 16 Morning Service Sing joyfully	<i>Britten in C</i> <i>Byrd</i>
12 October 11 am Benedicamus Domino Anthem	Trinity 17 Morning Service Cantique	<i>School of Notre Dame (c1175)</i> <i>Fauré</i>
4 pm Responses Psalm 144 Magnificat Nunc Dimittis Anthem	Choral Evensong Laus, honor, imperium Domino (Psalm V XII)	<i>McPhee</i> <i>Finzi</i> <i>Holst</i> <i>Servin</i>
19 October 11 am Te Deum Anthem	Trinity 18 Morning Service Wo ist ein ein so herrlich Volk	<i>Elgar</i> <i>Brahms</i>
26 October 11 am Communion Setting Anthem	Last Sunday after Trinity Choral Communion Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake	<i>Palestrina (Missa Papae Marcelli)</i> <i>Farrant/ Hilton</i>
2 November 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Eve of All Saints' Day Morning Service Faire is the new heaven	<i>McPhee</i> <i>Harris</i>

ABBAY CONTACTS

Minister:	Revd. Jim Gibson
Director of Music:	Dr. George McPhee
Church Manager: Church Secretary:	Linda Barrett Karen Kerr
Session Clerk: Depute Session Clerk: Treasurer:	Marion Sommerville Dr David Davidson 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 normally open
Monday to Saturday from 10 am - 4 pm with last entry at 3.30 pm
Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday tours are normally at 2 pm.
Please check the website for up to date information.*

*Abbey website - www.paisleyabbey.org.uk
Facebook - @paisleyabbey
Instagram - @paisleyabbeyofficial
X (formerly Twitter) - @paisley_abbey*

