

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

February 2026

The rain is pouring and the sky grey and hanging. Dreich might be the word to describe it. Makes one think of springtime and summer months when life can blossom into activity in days warm and bright. Well, one can always dream. And, hope. What will this year bring?

For the Abbey, this year is promising to be exceptionally busy and full of intrigue. Not one but three major issues have presented themselves unexpectedly for our serious consideration and prayers:

Paisley North Church. Just before Christmas, we were informed by Presbytery that, because of problems with their buildings and the decline in congregational numbers, the congregation of Paisley: North Church must close. This is always a desperately sad thing to happen: the ending of personal associations with a church that may have meant so much to families over many years. Apparently, it is the wish of the office-bearers that the congregation be united into that of the Abbey. When this was reported to our Kirk Session in December, the news was met with both sadness for the good people of the North Church and, also, great warmth with regard to their wish to join us at the Abbey. Negotiations will be arranged between us by Presbytery as soon as possible. Hopefully, they may prove productive and positive in leading both congregation to a union that will be happy and spiritually enriching for all.

World Heritage Candidature. Since the Abbey's candidature to be named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site was confirmed, an immense amount of work has been done by folks at the Abbey to investigate, develop and promote all that this might mean not just for the benefit of the Abbey but, also, for Paisley and, indeed, the West of Scotland. We have been so grateful for the assistance given to us in undertaking this work by the University of the West of Scotland and various agencies of Renfrewshire Council. Since, by means of the Abbey's founding, it is part of the Cluniac Federation based in France, our candidature is part of a colossal international campaign to have the whole network of Cluniac sites officially recognised. This necessitates the agreement of a number of different European governments.

At the beginning of this month, we received a letter from the Federation President, Marc Fleuret, stating that the governments of France, Poland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Spain have now expressed their agreement in principle with the nomination. Only the United Kingdom government is still to agree. Official discussions will take place later this year in London.

All this represents huge progress being made by the international federation towards the goal of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) recognition. The end is likely still some years off. Nevertheless, work at the Abbey promoting its religious and social history, integrity, continuity of use and depth of spiritual and communal traditions will continue, as Paisley Abbey is acknowledged by the Federation as '*essential to the vitality and coherence of the Cluniac network as a whole.*'

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) formed in 2015, is the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment. Towards the close of last year, HES informed the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland that they are willing to investigate the possibility of accepting a number of Scotland's most historic and architecturally most significant places of worship into public ownership. The Trustees have suggested three possibilities: Paisley Abbey, Dunfermline Abbey and St John's Kirk, Perth. Each is presently regarded by the Church of Scotland as a '*Signature Church*'. This is the first time in over a hundred years since a government agency has made this offer, so it deserves to be taken very seriously.

As yet, no formal discussion has taken place between the Abbey and the General Trustees about this offer. A deputation from HES will visit the Abbey sometime in March. Hopefully, soon afterwards, we may learn more about the process involved. In the meantime, it would be extremely foolish to jump to any conclusion as to what the possible outcome of future discussions might be. The Kirk Session will undertake a thorough and careful examination of the possibilities that may be best for the future of the Abbey as a continuing place of worship and historic site. As with our UNESCO bid, discussions with HES and the General Trustees are likely to be protracted and complex.

Three unexpected developments which no-one foresaw happening towards the end of last year. To be ready for the unexpected is a Gospel lesson we do well to heed. Jesus, in his teaching, has a tendency to surprise. Not everything is necessarily as it seems. Even when we think things are at their darkest, a shaft of light can give new hope. A child born in a Bethlehem outhouse grows into a mature man whose wisdom has the ability to turn the world upside-down.

Because of the Covid pandemic, the Abbey has been on life-support. Thanks to the tremendous dedication and faithful service of its people and volunteers, it has been possible thus far to bring the Abbey to life again. However, it remains far from enjoying the best of health. Could it be that the Holy Spirit is using these three unexpected developments to surprise everyone? Confounding the Abbey's critics ? Showing us that, when faith is kept, and love is shared, and forgiveness is shown, and worship faithfully offered, all things are possible. Dreams can be realised and hopes confirmed.

Kind regards to all.

Jim Gibson

Minister at the Abbey.

ELDER DUTY TEAMS

February

Marion Sommerville's Team

March

Fiona Small's Team

April

John Kitson's Team

PARISH REGISTER

Baptism

18 January

Vhari Alison McAusland Ferguson

Funeral

21 January

Dr Donald Winton

New Member

Charles Sutherland

ALLOVUS SYLLABUS

Meets every second Wednesday afternoon from 1.30pm to 3.00pm in the glorious Panel Room of the Place of Paisley. The all-age group is comprised of non-Church members as well as folks who have been members of the Abbey for decades. The group's purpose is to enable people to enjoy the company of friends while meeting new folks. In short, everybody is welcome.

11 February

Air Ambulance

Gordon Drummond

25 February

How to Stay Alive!

Morag Thow

11 March

Deryk Docherty
'In Conversation with Dr George McPhee'

25 March

Scottish Pilgrimage

Nick Cook

8 April

Easter Surprise!

22 April

The Science of Bee-Keeping
Jacqueline Ferguson

6 May

Outing to Sma' Shot Cottages/Afternoon Tea

20 May

End of Season Party!



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 February collection will be on Sunday 22nd. 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.



'IT'S PANTOMIME SEASON' CHRISTMAS COMPETITION (answers)

The Competition was drawn on 18th January 2026 - and the winner was (certainly the oldest ever winner of these competitions) ... our own centenarian – **Mrs Helen McPherson**.

I know that every member of the Abbey will be delighted by this result and will send special congratulations to Helen.

The runner-up was **Lesley McDonald** and she too is congratulated and thanked for her participation

The Answers are:

*HANSEL
DAME
APPLE
PUMPKIN
FORTY
PETER PAN
DANDINI
CINDERELLA
GRETEL
BUTTONS
BED TIME
SNOW WHITE
UPON A TIME
STEP MOTHER
SISTERS
BEANSTALK
ALADDIN
GLASS SLIPPER
IN BOOTS
NO ITS NOT*

Thanks to everyone who contributed in any way – particularly to those who, although not members of Paisley Abbey, support it so generously. We greatly appreciate that support.

Thank you all and again congratulations to the two worthy winners of this Christmas Quiz..

Sally Cook

ABBEY GIFT SHOP

'Fox Under the Moon - Seasons of Comfort and Hope ', by Stacey McNeill

We have a new range of cards in the gift shop.

They are inspired by the simplicity of everyday life and the complicated emotions that go with it. Through Stacey's whimsical illustrations you will be introduced to an anxious but inquisitive fox and the wise old moon.



The cards are blank inside for you to add your own message and are priced at £2.75 each.

J.S. BACH ST JOHN PASSION

PAISLEY ABBEY
SUNDAY 15 MARCH 2026, 7:30PM

PAISLEY ABBEY CHOIR
GEORGE MCPHEE CONDUCTOR

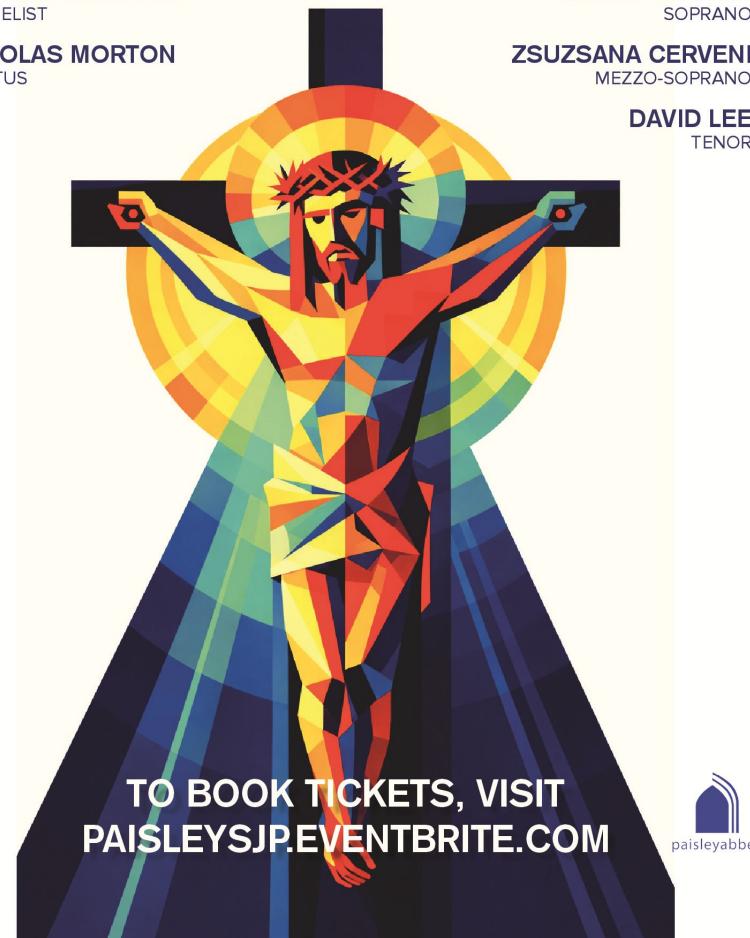
MATTHEW MCKINNEY
EVANGELIST

NICHOLAS MORTON
CHRISTUS

MHAIRI LAWSON
SOPRANO

ZSUZSANA CERVENI
MEZZO-SOPRANO

DAVID LEE
TENOR



TO BOOK TICKETS, VISIT
[PAISLEYSJP.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://paisleysjp.eventbrite.com)



J.S. BACH ST JOHN PASSION

PAISLEY ABBEY
SUNDAY 15 MARCH, 7:30PM

A special performance of J.S. Bach's powerful masterpiece in the spectacular Paisley Abbey.

One of the most dramatic works in the choral repertoire, Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion is a vivid and intensely moving portrayal of the Passion narrative and the Easter story, combining virtuosic arias, stirring choruses, and moments of profound reflection.

Under the direction of the inimitable George McPhee, Paisley Abbey Choir is joined by a lineup of stellar soloists and an orchestra made up of leading Baroque musicians from across the United Kingdom, drawn from ensembles including Dunedin Consort, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music and English Baroque Soloists.



MATTHEW MCKINNEY
EVANGELIST

NICHOLAS MORTON
CHRISTUS

MHAIRI LAWSON
SOPRANO

ZSUZSANA CERVENI
MEZZO-SOPRANO

DAVID LEE
TENOR

Tickets available via
The Abbey Office
0141 889 7654
paisleysjp.eventbrite.com



Paisley Abbey (Church of Scotland)
Registered Charity No. SC007633
www.paisleyabbey.org.uk

... THAT WHICH WOULD BE HIS FINEST HOUR

***To every man there comes in his lifetime that special moment
when he is figuratively tapped on the shoulder
and offered a chance to do a very special thing,
unique to him and fitted to his talents . . .***

Winston S. Churchill

In the late 1160s, Humbald, Prior of Wenlock set off from the calm enchanted rolling hills of his home monastery. It must have been with apprehension that he began his journey northwards. He was destined for an unknown and possibly hostile territory far to the north. His commission was to ensure the safe passage of the thirteen monks who accompanied him.

There is no surviving record to describe the route taken, how the party travelled, or the duration of their expedition. These elements, being of necessity left to our imagination, ended with Humbald's safe arrival amid what must have been reassuringly green pastures and virgin woodlands, traversed by a clear, gently flowing river. The scene was redolent of the land from which he had come.

Some recently constructed but simple buildings betrayed the beginnings of a new monastery that his fellow monks were to have the task of populating. Here was to be the new foundation that would serve as their home for the foreseeable future.

Humbald's task was complete but for one final undertaking before he would return south. He oversaw the election of the one of his thirteen travelling companions who was to be their prior. His name was Osbert, the first Prior of Paisley, which office he was destined to fulfil for the succeeding ten years.

So it was that the work of establishing the new priory fell to Osbert. He instigated the order and observances that followed the Cluniac model, and directed the construction of the monastery, its principal buildings and, most importantly, its church. He could not have envisaged the future destined for his little priory, but he might have supposed that it would be dependent on the achievement of his foundational work which, with God's help, he was to complete.

Scarcely half a century had passed before the priory had attained wealth and importance enough to advance its case with the Pope and the Abbot of Cluny to be granted permission to appoint an abbot as its senior cleric. Paisley Abbey garnered the patronage of nobility and royalty, became a major site of pilgrimage, and with its increasing wealth embarked on rebuilding of a calibre commensurate with its newfound status. The resulting aspirational edifice was short lived, however. In 1307 it was razed at the hands of the English in whose eyes it was totemic of the Scottish cause in the nation's fight for independence.

Despite the victory at Bannockburn, Scotland's struggle for its very survival in the years that followed was desperate. Its economy was crippled and its population decimated by the combined effects of the continuing wars of independence and of the arrival of plague. Practically no new church building was undertaken in Scotland in the 14th Century until its last quarter but somehow, the Abbey continued its monastic life and function as a parochial church.

The Abbey's future looked hopeless. Its administration was in complete disarray. There was no competent stewardship of its income or property rentals due. It was at this point, in 1444, that the Pope intervened and appointed a new Abbot, Thomas Tarvas by name. Tarvas came from Arbroath and was not a Cluniac monk but a Tironensian. Crucially, however, he was a man of proven ability who, by applying his experience and energy, rapidly put Paisley's finances in order such as to make new and more ambitious building possible. The triforium was completed and the clerestory well advanced by 1459 when Tarvas died, leaving the monastery fabric in its greatest attained splendour, and its economy well-run.

The disastrous fire of 1497, collapse of the ill-conceived steeple in the 1550s, and the closure of the monastery following the Scottish Reformation in 1560, combined to bring this chapter of the Abbey's life to a close. Despite these vicissitudes, remarkably, the function of Paisley's parish church was continued throughout, and uniquely, has been maintained from the 12th Century foundation until the present day.

As a post-Reformation church, the fabric of the building was dreadfully neglected to the extent that the Heritors, responsible for the church's maintenance urged its demolition to make way for a newly built and more commodious replacement. Fortunately, the minister at that time was Robert Boog. Boog had been appointed to the Abbey Church's Second Charge in 1774 and translated to the First Charge in 1782. He was a well-educated Enlightenment man, something of an antiquarian, who understood the significance of the medieval monastic buildings, and was able to dissuade the Heritors from their declared intention. Having saved the church from demolition, he went a stage further and oversaw a programme of restoration that incorporated clearance of accumulated dirt and debris along with repairs to the aisles and roof. Boog's long ministry ended with his death in harness in 1823.

In spite, or perhaps because of having been browbeaten into paying for Dr Boog's restorations of 1788, the Heritors had quickly reverted to their previous habit of neglecting the church fabric's maintenance. Once again it was reduced to a deplorable state necessitating a second and more extensive scheme of repair and improvements which was completed during the ministry of Andrew Wilson who had been appointed to the First Charge in 1852. This work, completed between 1859 and 1861, restored the nave and included the installation of the present pews and the return to the church's pre-Reformation west-to-east orientation. The architect employed was James Salmon who exceeded his brief by producing designs for the complete restoration of the Abbey Church, including its ruined crossing, tower, north transept, and choir. These were never executed but had the effect of sowing the seed of the idea that such a project was desirable and should be attempted.

Thomas Gentles translated to the First Charge of Paisley Abbey from Edinburgh in 1878 and served as its Minister until his death in 1910. He assumed the baton in pursuit of complete restoration and had Robert Rowand Anderson, Scotland's leading architect, draw up new plans and estimate the likely cost of such a project. Gentles devoted great energy to the task of fundraising, preaching a series of sermons which were published under the title, "A Plea for the Restoration of Paisley Abbey." He was able to secure the royal patronage of Queen Victoria, who visited the Abbey in 1888 - the first reigning monarch to do so since James VI of Scotland. When building work began in the early 1900s, it was in a spirit of great excitement and optimism, but it soon became apparent that the £40,000 estimated by Rowand Anderson to be sufficient to meet the costs of the full scheme would prove woefully inadequate. The monies raised were almost entirely expended on repair of the four columns of the crossing alone.

Disappointment in the failure of the Rowand Anderson scheme eventually, and after the appointment of Dr Gentles' successor, Alexander Miller Maclean, gave way to renewed determination to complete the vision. Peter Macgregor Chalmers was appointed as architect in 1911 following the inauguration of a new movement towards complete restoration, and an appeal was launched in 1913 to raise funds for the work to be carried out according to Chalmers's designs. With the outbreak of war, works that were underway had to be discontinued in 1917 when only the walls of the choir had been completed. It was not until 1923 that work resumed. Sadly, Chalmers had died the previous year, and Robert Lorimer had been appointed to succeed him.

A.M. Maclean had been much involved in wartime activities with the armed forces. His health was failing by the end of the conflict and he died in 1925. Fortunately, Alexander Rutherford Howell had been appointed as Minister of the Second Charge of Paisley Abbey in 1918, and he immediately engaged himself in driving the stalled project to its completion in 1928, harnessing his artistic genius and comprehensive understanding of church architecture in the process. His research and knowledge are reflected in his definitive publication, "Paisley Abbey: its History, Architecture and Art."

Historical perspective affords us the means of recognising the contributions that individual clerics have made to Paisley Abbey Church during the first 750 years of its existence. Osbert, Thomas Tarvas, Robert Boog, Andrew Wilson, Thomas Gentles, A.M. Maclean, and A.R. Rutherford are all deserving of their place in the Abbey's Hall of Fame. That historical list is not comprehensive. There are omissions, and it would be invidious to single out any more recent candidates.

Whether providential or serendipitous, the Abbey has been fortunate to have had able and willing clerics to take on leadership roles when the most challenging circumstances have presented. Over the past five years, Paisley Abbey has been faced with the latest iteration of the many such challenging circumstances that have punctuated its long history.

Time will allow others in future to rate the relative severity of our latest predicament and the degree of success with which it has been tackled.

Jim Gibson has been our Minister during this period. He has brought a wealth of experience to bear in encouraging and cajoling us to undertake our duties in ways that will turn the ship around. It has not been an easy or straightforward task, and the job is far from complete, but he did not shrink away when he was "figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered a chance to do a very special thing, unique to him and fitted to his talents." We are delighted that his work has been acknowledged by the University of the West of Scotland through their award of an honorary doctorate. Congratulations and thank you, Jim, for all that you are continuing to do for Paisley Abbey, and may this prove to be your finest hour.

David C. Davidson

SATURDAY LUNCH HOUR CONCERTS

**Concerts at 12.30 pm
Admission is £5 payable at the door**

**21 February
Richard Craig (Flute) & Michael Bonaventure (Organ)**

**14 March
Alistair Savage & Friends**

**21 March
Scottish Clarinet Choir**

**18 April
Abbey Strings**

**23 May
Choral Scholars of Paisley Abbey**

**20 June
Aimee (Soprano), Diane Merson - Jones (Violin),
Callum Johnston (Piano)**

MUSIC FOR FEBRUARY

1 February	The Presentation of Christ in the temple
11 am	Morning Service
Introit	Senex puerum portabat
Jubilate Deo	Byrd
Anthem	<i>Gabriele à 8</i>
	Bairstow
	Blessed city, heavenly Salem
8 February	The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
11 am	Morning Service
Te Deum	The heavens are telling
Anthem	Harwood in Ab Haydn
4 pm	Choral Evensong
Responses	Smith of Durham
Psalm 148	
Canticles	Howells (<i>Collegium Regale</i>)
Anthem	Wood
	Hail gladdening light
15 February	The Sunday next before Lent
11 am	Morning Service
Jubilate Deo	Stanford in C
Anthem	Tallis
O nata lux	
22 February	The First Sunday of Lent
11 am	Holy Communion
Communion Setting	<i>Palestrina (Missa Papae Marcelli)</i>
Anthem	Palestrina
Sicut cervus	
1 March	The Second Sunday of Lent
11 am	Morning Service
Benedictus	Byrd (<i>Short Service</i>)
Anthem	Stainer
God so loved the world	

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 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 - \[@paisleyabbeyofficial
X \\(formerly Twitter\\) - \\[@paisley_abbey\\]\\(https://twitter.com/paisley_abbey\\)\]\(https://www.instagram.com/paisleyabbeyofficial\)](https://www.facebook.com/paisleyabbey)

