

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

May 2026

I think the month of May is one of my favourites. As I write this, the sun is shining, the temperature rising and the trees are filling and turning green. Already, the grass has received its first cut (*a few times over*) and the garden is calling for further attention. After the dreary greyness and cold of winter, its good to be able to get outside again and witness nature's '*resurrection*'.

For more years than I now care to remember, the month of May meant something entirely different for me. It was '*General Assembly*' month. For most of my forty-three years as a parish minister, I was actively involved in various committees at both Presbytery and George Street, gradually working my way up the ranks from humble member to what was judged a '*controversial*' national convener. It was an honour to work closely with so many talented and faithful people, all doing their best to strengthen the Gospel's influence within our society.

Those were incredibly busy, demanding, challenging and stimulating periods of my working life. Though it meant I had often to be away from home during the week, I always insisted on being able to return home come a Thursday evening so that I could visit where necessary on the Friday/Saturday and be in my own church conducting worship on the Sunday. Without the love and devoted support of my wife looking after the family home and dealing with the usual traumas of a teenage family (while attending to her own professional job) and the support of my congregation, it would all have been impossible. But I was fortunate. This was something my wife and family were happy to see me do. They understood how invigorating I found it and the benefits it could bring to my parish ministry. It raised my sight from the mundane of my own congregation's activities and offered me a far greater vision of what the Church ought to be: the variety of ministry it needs to offer; the depth of society's ills it is called to heal and its desperate needs the Church is called to serve. To carry such responsibility and be so involved was, in many ways, a thrilling but humbling privilege.

Do I miss it all now ? No.

Why should that be?

I think it is because society has so changed – radically, dramatically – and sadly, the Church, in its committee-laden Presbyterian structure, has just not been able to keep pace. As a result, its voice – once valued for its wisdom – has fallen silent. And, because of that silence, it is now largely ignored. There are few things more devastating than for that to happen and the effect that has had on the institution of the Church should not be underestimated.

It has been catastrophic. It has rocked confidence, challenged the Church's role generally within society and is seriously sapping the strength from its servants to be able to fulfil the all-consuming demands made on ministry day and daily.

How do I feel about that ? Sad. Very sad.
Does it cause me to lose heart ? No.

No, I don't lose heart because the Church is not primarily a group of like-minded people sitting round a committee table. It is countless numbers of individuals living their life as best they can, in ways that bring joy and fulfilment not just to themselves but to others, too. All who profess Christian faith share a Christian ministry – clergy and laity alike. We, are the Church, together. A fact so easily overlooked. Perhaps because for numerous years, faith was regraded by many to be a 'clergy' thing. Ordinary people just turned up on Sundays to sing a few hymns, survive the sermon and, then, forget about it until 'Sunday-best clothes were given an airing the following weekend. Such a model for the Church was never sustainable. It was not only wrong but a perversion of what Jesus intended.

These Sundays following Easter we are reminded of the great claims Jesus made about himself. Enormous affirmations that ought to guide us and offer us profound confidence in the future.

For instance, Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd. It was highly political and radically challenging statement, giving us insight into the personality of the man and the nature of his mission and ministry as he saw it. His task was to care for people in every way possible. Their suffering was his as was cause for their future joy. He offered them teaching, guidance, forgiveness and, most of all, love. That was the basis of his ministry. It must be the basis of our too.

Whatever the future may hold for the institution of the Church of Scotland matters little. It was 'man-made' back in time. The important things for us to realise is that it is *we* who are the body of the Church in our day. Wherever and whoever we may be, it is *our actions* that matter. Worship lies at the heart of everything. It is through worship our faith can grow.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, said Jesus.
Believe in God, believe also in me.
I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*

You are welcome to join the worship of the Abbey anytime.

Or, *maybe*, you feel you don't need to know the truth in these words. Your way through life is all mapped out and your happiness secure. *Really?*

Or, maybe you realise that if you opened yourself to the Christian message, *something* life-changing for you just might happen and you are afraid. Jesus taught '*God is Love*'. In a world like ours. In a society like ours. What more powerful message do people like ourselves need to hear? Love can be the basis of our comfort and the source of our hopes. The response must be ours. The invitation is always there. Your active response could be part of the Church's '*resurrection*'!

Why not think about that ?

Best wishes,

Jim Gibson
Minister.

ELDER DUTY TEAMS

May	David Davidson's Team
June	Marion Sommerville's Team
July	Fiona Small's Team

PARISH REGISTER

Baptism	
19 April	Mirin McGowan Markie
Memorial Service	
28 April	Sir Craig Reddie

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 May collection will be on Sunday 31st. 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 WEEK 2026



Christian Aid Week this year is 10th - 17th May

There will be a lunch for Christian Aid on **Sunday 17 May** in the Place of Paisley at 12.30 pm.

This marks the end of Christian Aid week, envelopes will be available for donations on Sunday 10th and 17th

Tickets for the lunch are £10 and will be on sale in the cloisters each Sunday.
Please come along.

REMAINDER OF ALLOVUS MEETINGS

We normally meet 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 groups purpose is to enable people to enjoy the company of friends while meeting new folks. In short, everybody is welcome. The next group of meetings will resume in September after the summer period.

6 May

**Outing to Sma' Shot Cottages/
Afternoon Tea**

20 May

End of Season Party!



PAISLEY FOOD FESTIVAL

This years Paisley Food Festival brought out record numbers of visitors and the Abbey certainly saw quite a few of them.

We had the tower open which gave those who managed all 197 steps up (and back down) an amazing view over the whole event. With thanks to Lewis and Dylan who escorted everyone up and down throughout the day, they both certainly walked more than 197 steps!

The dressing up section was very popular, as was the mouse hunt, and we think the minister has missed his vocation as he was a sales power house on the Bric a Brac stalls.

The ladies of the Cloister Cafe had barely a cake or a scone left at the end of the day. A big thank you to all our volunteers who came out and made this a very successful day for the Abbey.

The Minister, Revd Jim Gibson working hard at the Bric a Brac Stall



The Abbey looking spectacular in the sunshine!



Our thanks to Gilly, Irene & Jan (& camera shy Shirley!) who were on the go on another very busy day in the Café and at the end of which there wasn't a scone or cake to be had!!



VISIT SCOTLAND CONNECT 2026

I was lucky to be able to attend the Visit Scotland Connect Travel Trade show at the SEC in Glasgow on Thursday 16th April. The aim of the event was to connect Scottish tourist business with domestic and international buyers, tour operators and travel companies. The show had over one hundred exhibitors, all trying to encourage travel companies to bring their clients to their business. The day started at 9am and was set out in twelve minute appointments for you to make your pitch to each buyer, over the course of the day I had fourteen appointments and few drop in customers. It was a great opportunity to sell the Abbey to a world wide market and I now have several very promising enquiries to follow up on. We have subsequently had two visits to the Abbey by Visit Scotland who brought 40 travel trade buyers for an onsite tour. The attendance at the trade was made possible by funding received from Renfrewshire Council and the help of Damon Scott, Economic Development Officer for Tourism.

Linda Barrett
Abbey Manager



ABBNEY GIFT SHOP

We now have a selection of quaichs back in the shop, some old favourites and some new designs.



SATURDAY LUNCH HOUR CONCERTS

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

23 May
Choral Scholars of Paisley Abbey

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

SUNDAY ORGAN RECITALS

Recitals at 3 pm
Admission is £10 payable at the door

17 May
David Hamilton
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

24 May
Marjorie Bruce
Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews

31 May
Mark Browne
Paisley Abbey

21 June
Damin Spritzer
USA

28 June
Richard Dunster-Sigtermans
Harrogate

MUSIC FOR MAY

3 May
11 am
Benedictus es
Anthem

10 May
11 am
Jubilate Deo
Anthem

4 pm
Responses
Psalm 86
Canticles
Anthem

17 May
11 am
Introit
Te Deum
Anthem

24 May
11 am
Introit
Jubilate Deo
Anthem

31 May
11 am
Communion Setting
Introit
Anthem

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
Morning Service

Haec Dies

McPhee
Byrd

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
Morning Service

Descendit in hortum meum

Lassus
Anon

Choral Evensong

Leighton

Howells (St Paul's Service)
When Mary thro' the garden went *Stanford*

Sunday after the Ascension
Morning Service

Psallite Domino

Byrd
Stanford in C
Finzi

God is gone up

Sunday after the Ascension
Morning Service

If ye love me

Tallis
Schütz
Palestrina

Dum complerentur dies Pentecostes

Trinity Sunday
Holy Communion

Laudate nomen Domine
Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Vaughan Williams in G
Tye
Bairstow

PAISLEY ABBEY

“An unusually complete image of a Medieval Monastic Church”

Richard Fawcett

(From the latest edition of the *Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire* volume of the *Pevsner Architectural Guides* featuring the Buildings of Scotland)

Many first-time visitors to Paisley Abbey enter the church and are immediately filled with awe and wonder. Not a few of these admit to their lifelong habitation in the town of Paisley. Often, their astonishment comes with the realisation that the Abbey Church as we know it today is an assemblage of original medieval building and “extensive restoration and rebuilding in the 19th Century and early 20th Century.”

It is a special tribute to the success of the latter reconstruction that there is such a common misperception that the whole edifice is an authentic survivor of the original. It has reasonably been stated that “few ecclesiastical buildings in Scotland present a more complete presentation of all the various stages through which the Gothic of Scotland had passed from the Transitional of the twelfth century to the Flamboyant of the fifteenth century.” However, it must be admitted that the description is of the Nave alone, and that the church otherwise had fallen into an increasing state of ruin from the 16th Century until the Victorians, with their grand ideas, first reimagined it. It was as late as 1897 that the Rev Dr Thomas Gentles – “the indomitable pioneer of a complete restoration scheme” – raised large sums of money to create a fund that it was thought would realise the aspiration.

Sadly for Dr Gentles, that was not to be, as the woefully underestimated cost exhausted the amount of the restoration fund before the tower could be completed or any work on the choir begun. It was 1913 before the disappointment and frustration subsided sufficiently for a new fundraising programme to be launched. Building work began but once more was thwarted in its progress, this time by the onset of the First World War, by the end of which work had ceased and all energy had been lost from the project and those who had been its driving force.

In these days, there were two charges of the Abbey Parish with a minister appointed to each of the First Charge and the Second Charge. It was an unusual arrangement. They worked as a team rather than as one substantive post and the other an assistantship, nor did the Second Charge minister have the rights of a colleague and successor to the First Charge. The Kirk Session Minutes reveal some harmonious working relationships between the ministers of the First and Second Charges, but more of an acrimonious or even downright bellicose nature.

In June 1918, Rev John Wallace died. He had been appointed to the Second Charge of Paisley Abbey in 1916 but had served as chaplain to the forces in Egypt during 1916 and 1917. His successor, appointed after the war had ended in 1918, was the then 47-year-old Alexander Rutherford Howell.



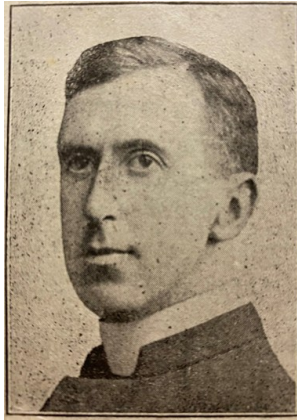
A.R. Howell had begun his ministerial career as first a reader and then an assistant in St Giles’ Cathedral, Edinburgh. He had completed assistantships in Buenos Aires and North Berwick before his ordination to St Stephen’s Chapel, Inverness, from which he translated to Kincardine-in-Menteith in 1904. During 1917, he served for a time in France as General Superintendent of the Scottish Churches Huts. These were volunteer-run recreation centres established to provide comfort, refreshments, and spiritual support to Scottish soldiers on the Western Front, offering tea, writing materials, and a space for worship or relaxation.

On beginning his ministry in Paisley Abbey, Howell inherited the Church’s stalled and unfulfilled restoration scheme. He at once threw himself into the work of resuscitating and reinvigorating the project with characteristic energy, overcoming the challenges of post-war gloom and despondency, such that building work was able to be resumed in 1923 leading to the completion of the entire rebuilding of the choir in 1928. According to one account reflecting on his time as minister of Paisley Abbey, “the exquisitely restored building owes much to his artistic genius and comprehensive knowledge of church architecture. The stately and appropriate form of service observed in the abbey is also largely his work.” In addition, his other great legacy to later generations of aficionados, is his definitive manual entitled “Paisley Abbey: Its History, Architecture and Art.” First published in 1929, it comprehensively fulfilled the aspiration of its subtitle and was, indeed still is, “A Complete Handbook of the Building.”

It is hard to imagine the emotions with which Rev Howell attended the Service of Dedication of the Choir in November 1928, having seen the project through to completion and knowing that the completed Choir was the magnificent fruition from a seed first planted in the minds of his predecessors seventy years previously. What adulation and praise must he have received?

The answer might be unexpected but, at the same time, characteristic of the swinging pendulum of life’s fortunes. Sadly, in October 1929, Dr William Main who had become minister of the First Charge in 1925, died suddenly, not long after Howell’s masterwork – his book about Paisley Abbey – had been published. The practical consequence was that the First Charge became vacant and a new minister had to be found. Although it had never been automatic that the minister of the Second Charge would succeed to the First Charge, that had been common practice and Howell accordingly agreed to be nominated for election and appointment to the vacant charge.

The Minutes of the Kirk Session meeting held on the 8th of January 1930 record that that election had duly been held and that its result was a vote of 407 for Mr Howell and 489 against, the majority against therefore being 82. The Minute of the next Kirk Session Meeting on the 20th January records that the Moderator had suggested that Mr Howell, “the minister of the Second Charge,” should be offered a period of leave of absence and, once Presbytery approval had been confirmed, poor Mr Howell was granted an absence of three months, for which he wrote humbly to the Session “thanking them so kindly for agreeing to it.”



Howell returned to the ministry of the Second Charge and eventually resigned on 13th April 1937 owing to ill health. He retired to St Andrews and died at Edinburgh on the 2nd of December 1943. The First and Second Charges of Paisley Abbey were united on 14th April 1937.

The “Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ” records that “in the wider work of the Church of Scotland Mr Howell took a considerable share. For a year he acted as Organising Secretary for the Foreign Mission Committee. At the invitation of the Colonial Committee, he ministered for a period in 1907 at Homburg, and in 1927-8 at Cairo. He was on the Council of the Church Service Society and in 1935-6 was President of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society.”

“His publications, in addition to ‘Paisley Abbey: its History, Architecture and Art,’ included contributions to the devotional literature of the Church, notably a book of ‘Church Prayers for War-Time,’ which had a large circulation.”

“On artistic questions, his judgment was fine and his advice greatly valued. He served on the Executive Committee of the Scoto-Russian Fellowship of St Andrew, was a member of the Executive Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Holy Rude, Stirling, and was convener for some years of the Ceremonials Committee of the Presbytery of Paisley. Ever an enthusiastic student of antiquity, he was also a trustee of the Dalrymple Archaeological Fund.”

The Fasti lists his sons — “Edward Alexander Howell, in the R.A.F., O.B.E. and D.F.C. and David Logan Howell, Navigator in a Bomber Squadron, and his daughters — Anne, who served in the A.T.S. and Isabella in the W.A.A.F., who married Flight Lieutenant Leslie Shepherd.”

As we have of late been giving thought to the commemoration and celebration of the Centenary of the Choir’s restoration in 2028, it had been in our minds to search for any living relatives of A.R. Howell with the idea that they might be interested in participating in some of the events that we are planning.

Imagine my surprise when, entirely by coincidence, Mr Howell’s grandson made unsolicited contact from his home in England to enquire if he and others of his family might be able to visit, and so it was with especial pleasure that we welcomed them to Paisley Abbey last month. It was a timely opportunity to record our gratitude for the lifework of A.R. Howell and to acknowledge his magnificent lasting legacy in print and in the fabric of the Abbey Church.

David C. Davidson

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](https://www.facebook.com/paisleyabbey)

Instagram - [@paisleyabbeyofficial](https://www.instagram.com/paisleyabbeyofficial)

X (formerly Twitter) - [@paisley_abbey](https://twitter.com/paisley_abbey)

