

# Paisley Abbey



## Abbey Herald

**June 2026**

Months of the year are flying past. The article will appear in the June *Herald* marking the half-way point as many of us start thinking about summer holidays and the like. So this month, I want to take a bit of a risk as I write about something I have grown to love about Paisley Abbey. I want to say something about who I think we are, and who we aren't; and a bit about how all of that has lived itself out this last year and how that might help us look to the future. The Abbey is a wonderful place. I want to share some of what I have picked up these last few years since finding myself appointed as Locum and, then, also as Interim Moderator. I know that I will miss some things. That is inevitable. Other things I will have alluded to before. However, some things deserve repeating for they can still be of interest and help.

The obvious thing to say is that the Abbey has survived. Obvious because, otherwise, I would not be writing this. Yet, its survival thus far, has been nothing short of remarkable. The Covid pandemic of 2020/21 proved to be almost catastrophic. The enforced closure of all churches brought no income although bills still had to be paid. The fact that Abbey office-bearers are still in negotiations with Presbytery and officials from the Church Offices in Edinburgh over outstanding allocations, bear witness to the severe financial difficulties we face. Consequent to this was the national readjustment of churches ordered by the General Assembly. The fact that the Abbey was allowed to survive is due, in no small measure, to the tenacity of our office-bearers who refused to lie down and accept the initial closure plans of the Presbytery Mission committee. These were extremely difficult and worrying negotiations and the responsibility carried by our representatives on the congregation's behalf was immense. They are owed all the gratitude we can ever express for their fortitude and loyalty to their church. Since then: credit for the Abbey's survival must also go to the faithfulness of our strong core congregation, to the dedication of so many individuals determined to work all the hours -often at personal cost - to keep their church functioning; to our willing army of volunteers; and, in particular, to the expertise and dedication of the Abbey's finance team who have managed to work minor miracles.

The Abbey is so fortunate in its worshipping congregation. Unlike most Church of Scotland congregations, we are growing - slowly, but undeniably. Most interesting is the fact that many of our recent regular worshippers have tended to be younger than the people who were here before them. This is significant, because it is not the norm. So what does this indicate?

- It indicates that although the numbers of those who are registered as members of the Abbey are likely to decrease as time passes, there is no reason to believe that the numbers attending worship will not continue to rise. Why should this be? In part, of course, because of the worshipful holiness of the Abbey itself. But also because of the high standard of its worship. The Abbey is every preachers challenge. It's music is unparalleled. Combined with the liturgy and preaching, the Abbey must offer worship that is thought-provoking, inspiring and, at times, profoundly challenging as well as comforting and hopeful. Worship is the heart-beat of everything. We dare not forget this.

Paisley Abbey is what the experts term a 'pastoral-sized Church'. And pastoral-sized churches tend to have a lot in common. There are real consequences for our life together. Some of these we like; and some we don't.

Here are some things we don't like:

- We aren't 'huge' in numbers. This limits us. There aren't as many people to do things as there are things to do. Right now, that means our efforts have to be directed towards securing survival. Serving the community as best we can while furthering the maintenance of our buildings and concentrating on the ordinances of our faith. We can't offer the range and variety of activities that a few other churches can. That is just our reality for the time being.
- Consequently, we tend to take our precious workers/volunteers for granted. The result is people get tired. Some get burned out. This means we have to work closely together in team-work, pitching in a bit more when we can and understanding a bit more when people need to step back. Better to do really well what we are already doing than taking on more, and failing.
- The regular maintenance of the physical buildings of the Abbey place an immense burden on us. The Abbey is the largest 'church plant' in Scotland. The few who like to complain/criticise about the Abbey fabric tend to be those with little or no knowledge or involvement. Reality is that the Abbey is one of the best maintained historic buildings in the Church of Scotland. Fact.
- Inevitably, as previously said, money – or the lack of it – will always be a problem. Each year, our budgets are strained. Still, we are able to do what we need to do to move forward; and we will do that.

Now: these very brief thumbnail observations are meant to offer a context for, and a perspective on, our life at the Abbey. We are not trapped by them; and we need both to work within them and to work beyond them. However, in all our thinking, wishing and planning we must keep them in mind.

We have things happening within our Abbey life that many other congregations don't even come close to:

- Most centrally: we care about one another; and we do that spectacularly. Most people know most people, or want to; and we matter to each other. There is a sense of community here that is rare, precious and at times, awesome. It is because of this reality that we actually can do the things we do. From reaching out to young Mums in Renfrewshire and beyond, experiencing difficulty after birth; to hosting a national Charities Funding conference; to welcoming the University of the West of Scotland for its annual University Service and Graduation ceremonies; to holding services for the local Hospice, Lieutenancy and Council; to forging much closer, practical links with the Diocese of Paisley: and so much more.
- Finally, but just as importantly, there is the '*other side*' to the Abbey. Paisley Abbey is one of the foremost historical and architecturally important buildings in Scotland. It's why we have been listed as the second most important '*Signature Church*' within the Church of Scotland. I know this troubles a few people who prefer to think of the Abbey as simply an '*ordinary*' parish church. And so it is. But it is also much, much more than that. Paisley Abbey is a national treasure. Its history is unique. Over centuries, its service to Renfrewshire and, even Scotland as a whole, is unique. That's why so many come to visit from countries around the globe. While Christian worship must always remain its prime function, we have been gifted the heritage of this special place to savour and share. If the Abbey is ever to grow towards self-sufficiency and extend its pastoral outreach then facilitating that growth needs to be a priority. We need to structure, to staff and to plan for the transitions that lie in our future.

Beyond all this, there are special things to say about today's Abbey that set us apart from many others.

- We are a deliberately open and welcoming congregation. While we can always do better, we do try hard to welcome everyone, regardless. Within our worshipping core we have some conservative and some really liberal Christians amongst us, as we also have some evangelicals: and we just don't worry about that sort of thing very much.

- Theologically, we are pretty moderate. In our faith we try to be open to change, willing to try things and be tolerant – all the while respecting our Reformed traditions. We are not *'mushy-modernist'* and we are not hardline fundamentalist. We are comfortable with ambiguity; and don't go in for long lists of what a Christian *'must'* do and *'must not'* do. We realise that, *sometimes*, there are a variety of answers to the same questions. This we do, as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century theologian Richard Hooker wrote, *"not as a compromise for the sake of peace, but as a comprehension for the sake of truth."*

*(And think about this: being 'in the middle' of almost anything makes us most conspicuous, easy to see, and the easiest to aim at if someone wants to throw things!) We don't hide in the fringes. All of the above activity is part of our ongoing, emerging identity. It makes us who we are, and what we offer, both special and important.*

The Abbey comprises a hugely committed and talented, diverse group of people. Folks come to the Abbey because they choose to be here, because they want to be here. We truly excel in some things:

- Attracting new worshippers of all ages;
- In our music which is a wonderful gift both to the Abbey and to Renfrewshire;
- In our outreach to the homeless, the asylum seekers, and through our *'Talk it Over'* groups;
- In our support of Christian Aid, WaterAid and the Renfrewshire Food Bank as well as children's charities at Christmas.

All of these are our realities. Wonderful realities for which we thank God. They are things we need always to name, to keep in mind, to celebrate and to share. For, in spite of all the difficulties and problems we confront, the Abbey is a uniquely blessed place and we need to be thankful for it.

Though summer holidays begin to loom large for many, the work of the Abbey continues without a break. In the coming months, we will be focusing both on changing some of the things that need to change and strengthening those areas where we excel. The heart of our identity and the energy for our mission both lie in what is distinctive, and strong, and blessed about our church.

- If allowed by the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland with great happiness we will begin conversations with our colleagues of Paisley North Church to try to fulfil their desire to become part of the Abbey congregation.

- We will be furthering ways we can make ourselves attractive and welcoming to visitors and newcomers alike. That's important.
- In order to advance our own income sources, with the support and aid of Renfrewshire Council expertise and financial support of the Society of Friends of Paisley Abbey, we will be continuing our work redeveloping the Place of Paisley, in particular, the King's Apartment.

All of the above is consistent with our Transition Document: *'Five Year Plan of Action'* unanimously agreed by both the Abbey Kirk Session and at a special meeting of the congregation three years ago. As with any such plan, the target is not to complete its suggestions within the time frame (that's ridiculous), but to progress them as far as possible towards completion. This is being done enthusiastically.

There is so much more about which I could write. It's impossible to mention everything.

Suffice for me to say, it is truly a great joy, and a gift, to serve at the Abbey as your Interim Moderator at this particular time. In spite of all the demands and challenges the task brings, I happy align with the Psalmist that, *"my boundaries enclose a pleasant land, indeed I have a goodly heritage"*. Together, we share a wonderful calling to witness to the presence and love of Christ in our community and look forward, with God's blessing, to extending his grace, mercy and love to all.

*(Wish to ask a particular question about anything I have written above or any matter concerning all that is happening in and around the Abbey. You are welcome to do so anytime. A good time is always 'Back to Church Sunday' when, after the service, the congregation is invited to gather for this purpose. The Kirk Session is always happy to convey such information when possible. To allow for important meetings yet to be held, such an opportunity will be held on Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> at 12.30pm).*

Warmest regards,  
Jim Gibson  
Interim Moderator at the Abbey.

## ELDER DUTY TEAMS

June	Marion Sommerville's Team
July	Fiona Small's Team
August	John Kitson's Team

## PARISH REGISTER

### New Members

Manfred Hassler  
Alistair Mackay  
Audrey McKinnon  
Helen Stewart

## 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 June collection will be on Sunday 28th. 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.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR LENT APPEAL DONATIONS

Dear Members of the congregation

The United Kingdom has just experienced the warmest May temperature since records began and it is likely that the same will be said about this year's Lent Appeal - almost certainly a record total.

So far £12,865 has been donated and with money still coming in, last year's total of £13,075 is likely to be exceeded. With Gift Aid of around £2,500 still to be claimed from HMRC, this will have been a magnificent effort from everyone who donated, irrespective of the amount, and will reflect the love and dedication of all those who worship in the Abbey.

The Lent Appeal started in 2014 and from a modest total of just over £7,000 has become one of the major fund-raising activities in the Abbey year,

If you have 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

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

*Stewart McDougall*  
Abbey Treasurer

## CHRISTIAN AID

The Outreach Committee held a lunch on Sunday 17th May at the end of Christian Aid week .

The total raised this year was £979.11 through donations, lunch tickets and a raffle. - an admirable sum.

We wish to express our thanks to all who contributed and to all who helped at the event.

## ALLOVUS

Our bimonthly meetings of ALLOVUS have come to a close for this session. Our final meeting was held on May 20<sup>th</sup> when an almost full turn-out of members enjoyed a varied afternoon of activity. One of our team leaders, Janet, recounted the past session's events and encouraged members to offer suggestions for possible activities/ speakers for the year ahead. This proved quite encouraging and, so, the team look forward to putting together an other attractive syllabus for when the group meets again in September. A talk covering the history of the Place of Paisley and, in particular, the possible restoration of the King's Apartment preceded our annual end-of-year party feast of fish and chips.

Our penultimate meeting was held at the Sma' Shot Cottages at George Place in Paisley. Earlier in the year, a fascinating talk about the Cottages and the annual Sma' Shot Festival held each July, was much enjoyed by members of the group who then expressed a wish to visit. Small group tours were given and everybody had an opportunity to gather for Afternoon Tea before buying mementoes from the shop. Well worth a visit, a couple of photographs show Alison at the Spinning Wheel and one of the cottage rooms.

For your diary, Allovus commences its third session on Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> at 1.30pm when the team look forward to welcoming back old and new friends.



## TALK IT OVER

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Mrs Jo Hannah, the woman behind the vision for the Talk It Over group. Jo recognised a lack of support for mums with post natal depression. Understanding their feelings of isolation and the need to talk, and share with other mums going through similar experiences.

Jo recruited some women from the congregation and took the idea of a peer support group being part of the Abbey's outreach to the community to the Kirk Session. She contacted Children and Family Services within the NHS, pitching the idea that if they could supply a health visitor to lead the group then the Abbey would provide accommodation and a crèche. Recognising this as a valuable resource to both mums and health professionals, a health visitor Grace Rankin was seconded to lead the group.

Fundraising with soup and sandwich lunches were carried out in order to buy toys to set up the crèche, and pay for counselling. While women from the Abbey ran the crèche Grace facilitated the mums in peer support. The group gave mums 1 to 2 hours just for themselves. Along with a cuppa they chatted and helped each other. Recognising they were not alone in their feelings helped mums to no longer feel isolated. Over the years many new friendships have been formed in cooperating play dates, birthday parties and lunches.

The same format remains the same today as it always has been. As well as for those with post natal depression, we also support mums who feel anxious or overwhelmed following the birth of their babies. The crèche is still run by volunteers, now from other churches as well as the Abbey. Although the NHS no longer provides the assistance of a health visitor, the group is still facilitated by a retired health visitor and a mum who attended the group for herself and understands the value of the group. The NHS continues to support this work through Public Health and health visitors still regard the group as an excellent resource to them.

The vision that Jo Hannah had for the Talk It Over group around twenty years ago is still helping mums today.

*Fiona Small*

## PAISLEY CHURCHES HOMELESS BEFRIENDING GROUP

The Group meets quarterly to discuss how the churches can help to support folks locally who are experiencing or in danger of being homeless. This group is hosted in the Abbey and comprises of local Churches of Scotland, Salvation Army, Catholic Church, Episcopal Church and representative of the Council Homeless department and the Blue Triangle hostel for young homeless folk here in Paisley.

At the moment there are just over 500 folks being supported by the Homeless department at the Council. The majority of these are in short term accommodation and around 30 in B&Bs. The council strive not to use B&Bs but this is required in some cases when nothing else is available. The council is very busy and struggling with systematic difficulties despite being lauded as one of the best performing Councils on Homelessness in Scotland.

These numbers are high due to many factors. The rise in cost of living. The speeding up of processing asylum seekers claims as, when permission is granted to stay, they become entitled to seek accommodation from the local council. There is increasing numbers coming from out with the area including England as Scottish legislation allows claimants from any area whereas in England claimants must have a local connection.

The Group has received various funding grants and local contributions which allow us to produce cards and posters, outlining where hot meals and support can be obtained, to distribute throughout council homeless departments, libraries, GP surgeries and supermarkets. We have also been able to fund Easter and Christmas Gifts for the young folk in the Hostel and to children of homeless families. We fund events run by the homeless department and hostel for their residents. We provide funds to the council homeless office so they have a small stock of essential foodstuffs for distribution in emergencies or when the foodbanks are not available.

All this support is very much appreciated as it lets the recipients feel someone is caring for them.

*John Kitson  
Group Convenor*

## CLOISTER CAFÉ

Following the relaunch of the café in summer 2022, a small, dedicated band of volunteers welcome visitors, locals and fellow volunteers for a cuppa and a chat 6 days a week. Last year the café and shop combined added over £78k to the Abbey's income.

Currently concentrating on coffee, tea, scones and cakes, the café sources food from both commercial suppliers and home bakers. On occasions, freshly made soup is available at lunchtime.

In order to develop the café further, and to support the Abbey's finances, we need a greater number of customers (and volunteers!). Can I urge each and every member of the congregation to become a customer of the Cloister Café at least once per month? Ideally, more frequently would be better.

If you are meeting friends for coffee in Paisley, why not arrange to meet in the Café?

Would you like to bring a small group of friends? Why not ask the Abbey office if you can pre-book a visit, and we can explore whether we are able to provide what you were looking for.

Support the Café and the Shop to enable the Abbey to continue.

*Jan Norris  
Café Co-Ordinator*

*Jan, Fiona &  
Sandra looking  
stylish in their café  
aprons!*



## ABBEY STAINED GLASS

We had a visit to the Rainbow Glass Studio in Prestwick on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May to see how the repairs on the Abbey stained glass windows was progressing. Moria Malcolm, director of the company, gave us a tour of the studio and workshop, and told us a great deal about the manufacture, restoration and repairs they carried out on various types of glass, from a range of buildings. These included churches, private houses, public buildings and even Jenners in Edinburgh. She and her husband Stephen explained the work they had carried out on the Abbey windows, and showed us the bag of specialist cloths which had been used to take all the years of dirty from the windows, before conservation work could begin. The difference in the colour and brightness of the windows was incredible, and wonderful to be able to see them up close. We can't wait from them to be back in the Abbey for all to enjoy.

*Linda Barrett  
Abbey Manager*



## MUSIC NOTES

As we enter the summer months it is hoped that, with no immediate diminishing of quantity and quality, spiritual nourishment will be available in what we offer each Sunday as well as in our concerts. Choir-wise we will be singing two exciting, challenging and virtuosic works by Sir James MacMillan on 14th June . 'Data es mihi omnis protestas' is the anthem at the morning service and, later on the same day, his startlingly dramatic Evening Canticles can be heard during evensong at 4.00 pm. The morning anthem, in Latin, is a setting for 8 part unaccompanied choir based on a text from Matthew 28, verses 18 and 19. 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. In addition during June, the choir will be singing standard works by Gibbons, Walton and Britten and culminating with the Communion setting of Zoltan Kodaly's beautiful Missa Brevis on the 28th.

Thank you to all those who have been coming to the Sunday afternoon organ concerts. There are two more programmes in the series: On Sunday 21st June at 3 pm, the internationally acclaimed United States organist, Damin Spritzer, will be playing works by the French composer and improviser Charles Tournemire along with pieces by American composers. Dr. Spritzer's visit is part of a UK tour. She is Area Chair and Associate Professor of Organ at the University of Oklahoma and Artist in Residence for Cathedral Arts in Dallas. On 28th June, the recitalist is Richard Dunster-Sigtermans who. has held organist posts at St. James Piccadilly and the King's Chapel of the Savoy. From 2003 - 2012 he was Director of Music at Rugby School. Admission is £10.

With growing numbers attending the Saturday lunch hour concerts, we had a splendid treat on 23rd May when the performers comprised some of our talented choral scholars. This proved so successful that on 19th September we hope to organise something similar. The Saturday lunch hour concert on 20th June will be given by the ever-popular Diane Merson-Jones (Violin) with Aimee Penman (Soprano) and Callum Johnstone. (Piano). Diane, of course, usually leads our orchestra at Christmas and Easter.. The programme will include music by Handel, Maria-Theresa von Paradis, Fauré and Gershwin. Admission is £5.

*George McPhee*

## MUSIC FOR JUNE

<b>7 June</b> <b>11 am</b> Jubilate Deo Anthem	<b>Trinity 1</b> Morning Service My Shepherd is the living Lord	<i>Martin Dalby</i> <i>McPhee</i>
<b>14 June</b> <b>11 am</b> Jubilate Deo Anthem	<b>Trinity 2</b> Morning Service Data es mihi omnis potestas	<i>Walton</i> <i>MacMillan</i>
<b>4 pm</b> Responses Psalm 93, 150 Canticles Anthem	Choral Evensong O clap your hands	<i>McPhee</i> <i>MacMillan</i> <i>Gibbons</i>
<b>23 June</b> <b>11 am</b> Te Deum Anthem	<b>Trinity 3</b> Morning Service O Lord, increase my faith	<i>Britten in E</i> <i>Loosemore</i>
<b>30 June</b> <b>11 am</b> Communion Setting Anthem	<b>Trinity 4</b> Choral Communion My soul there is a country	<i>Missa Brevis (Kodaly)</i> <i>Parry</i>

## 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](mailto: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](http://www.paisleyabbey.org.uk)  
Facebook - @paisleyabbey  
Instagram - @paisleyabbeyofficial  
X (formerly Twitter) - @paisley\_abbey*

*There will be no Abbey Herald in July & August*

