

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

September 2026



Towards the end of July, the joy of warm summer sunshine was abruptly dimmed for everyone at the Abbey. News reached the Abbey office informing us of the death of our former minister, the Reverend Elspeth McKay. Elspeth was the first lady to become Abbey minister. Though sadly her ministry was so brief in its span, Elspeth impressed during her few months with us with the warmth of her personality and eager enthusiasm for the Abbey's liturgy and music. Supported by her husband, David and son, William, Elspeth had shown in her previous posts that she possessed a creative and imaginative mind and was not afraid of experimenting with different approaches to ministry and outreach. The Abbey congregation had therefore

looked forward with huge anticipation to Elspeth's ministry leading the congregation into an exciting new era of 'being the church' to the people of Paisley and beyond.

Having demitted Office at the Abbey, declining ill-health meant that Elspeth was not able to continue long in her new position as Presbytery Clerk of the North East and Northern Isles. Undeterred however, she became minister of Strathbogie Drumblade Parish Church in Huntly. It was there, on Friday August 7th that her funeral service was held. Thereafter, interment was held within the cemetery of the former St Margaret's Episcopal Church at Forgue close to Elspeth and David's home. Doreen and I had the privilege to attend both these services and conveyed to David and William the deep condolences of the Abbey congregation.

The June *Herald* carried a short report about the restoration work being carried out on the Great West Window of the Abbey. Over a year ago, storm damage to the famous Cottier Windows was sufficient to close use of the Gallery. Mainly thanks to the generosity of the Society of Friends of the Abbey, funds were raised to ensure appropriate repair, restoration and cleaning work could be undertaken. We are grateful that the skilled craftsmanship of Rainbow Glass Studio, based in Prestwick, has resulted in the windows retaining their original magnificence. Whenever the sun shines, colour now floods the Nave floor and walls: a joy for all to experience.

During August, major repair and maintenance work was carried out on the Abbey's famous *Cavaille-Coll* organ. Not only is the organ one of the most historic instruments in Scotland, it is one of the finest church organs in the United Kingdom. We are fortunate still to have the expert services of *Harrison & Harrison* of Durham. Working twelve hour shifts each day, over two weeks, their craftsmen completed necessary work on the *Bombarde* and *Positiv* parts of the organ, while ensuring use of the organ for Sunday worship.!

The Director of Music has reported his delight at the high standard of work done and the improved 'feel' of the organ keyboard. Again, we are most grateful to the Society of Friends, and for a special donation made by the Hammermen Society of Paisley, for funding this important and vital project.

Towards the end of August, a great deal of extra activity commenced within and around the Abbey when contractors arrived to survey the position of their office portacabin: a clear indication that work was finally about to start on our major roof and building maintenance project. This project has taken the best part of five years to organise, negotiate, fund and receive official approvals. Costing in excess of £800,000 completion of this project will ensure the Abbey buildings remain in excellent order given their age and history. None of this delay has been the fault of the Abbey. Rather, Government action in withdrawing VAT relief from historic buildings and procrastination by official agencies, has not only meant an ever-lengthening timescale along with an inevitable increase in costs.

On behalf of the Abbey, the planning of the project and gathering of funding has been spearheaded throughout by one of our elders, Jan Norris. We all owe her an incredible debt of gratitude for her resilience and tenacity in seeing this work through to this stage. Along with Jan's input has been that of our conservation architect, Rebecca Cady, whose professionalism has proved an invaluable asset.

We have been assured that disruption to the ongoing work of the Abbey will be kept to a minimum, with workers abseiling along and down the buildings instead of being reliant on expensive scaffolding. Once work on the roof and building begins, it should be quite a spectacle!

All the above has taken place during what is commonly thought a '*quieter time*' at the Abbey. A misconception if ever there is one. Summer may come and go, with its holiday periods and relaxation times, but the work of the Abbey: its ministry, its welcome, hospitality and outreach never ceases. It is why we so value and are indebted to our members who work so tirelessly, and to our volunteer helpers without whose willing assistance we could not possibly operate as we do. Their faithful and loyal support is essential to everything we do in the name of the Christ in whose wisdom and love we place our trust. The human search for truth never diminishes and the human need for love never tires. It is what makes our witness through faith so crucial to the health and wellbeing of our society. We have been blessed over these last few months to witness the fruit of many peoples' labour; just as we have been reminded of the friendship, warmth and possibilities Elspeth McKay personified during her short time as minister. May we capitalise on these gifts of grace in the months ahead.

With best wishes to all.

Jim Gibson
Interim Minister at the Abbey.

ELDER DUTY TEAMS

Sept
October
November

David Davidson's Team
Marion Sommerville's Team
Fiona Small's Team

PARISH REGISTER

Death
28 May
Wedding
25 July

Jo Hannah

Seonaid Eadie & Toby Reid

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 September collection will be on Sunday 27th. 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.

ABBEY EVENTS DURING THE SUMMER

**We have had a busy time during the Summer months
with various events and visits.**

Abbey Guided Tours took place on Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays during June, July & August.

We also had several groups joining the 2 pm tours including Lanark Braehead Lunch Club, Kilsyth Heritage Group, Largs History Group, National Womens Register to name but a few. Some of the groups visited the café for a soup & sandwich lunch before their tour and a few of the groups opted for tea, coffee and cake after their tour. Thank you to our experienced Abbey guides and our hard working café volunteers who make all this possible.

Gleniffer Football Club had their Football Presentations on Friday 5 June

London Concertante performed on 7 June

Scout Visit on Friday 12 June

Lunch Time Concert on Saturday 20 June

Sunday Organ Recitals on 21 June & 29 June

Sma' Shot Day on Saturday 4 July

University Summer Graduations were held from 6 - 10 July



ALLOVUS COMMENCES ON WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER

**September - December Syllabus
Meets fortnightly on Wednesdays at 1.30 pm**

9 September

'Welcome to All!'

Jim Gibson

23 September

'Elizabeth is Back!'

Iain Morton

7 October

'Planting Out'

Janet Roddick

21 October

'Staying Safe'

Roger Roddick

4 November

'Caring for Veterans'

Roger Roddick

18 November

'Spooky times in Paisley'

Jim Gibson

2 December

'Advent Surprise'

Janet Roddick

16 December

'Party time!'

ALLOVUS Team

ALL WELCOME!



TALK IT OVER GROUP AND CRECHE

TALK IT OVER

GROUP AND CRECHE

Feeling low or anxious since having a baby?
A bit overwhelmed being a new Mum?
Come and chat with us - you are not alone

We are here for mums who are struggling with post natal depression or anxiety.
You can find us on Facebook or contact us direct by email or phone before you come along.

We are a free service, offering peer support, opportunity to meet other mums and crèche for children from birth to 5 years of age.

- Access to further counselling services if required
- Group meets throughout school term times.

 talkitoverpaisley@gmail.com

 Talk It Over Paisley

 07969 351318 - Joanne
07763 128911 - Fiona

Crèche available



We meet Tuesdays
10.30am - 12.00 noon
Talk It Over Group Room
Paisley Abbey
Abbey Close
Paisley PA1 1JG

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Gusztav Fenyo (Piano)*

Saturday 19 September at 12.30 pm

Admission is £10 payable at the door

Sunday 20 September at 11 am

Celebration of Paisley's historic links with the United States of America and Commemoration of the Revd John Witherspoon as a Signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Invited Guests in attendance.

Service open to all.

MACMILLAN CANCER CARE

Saturday 26 September between 10 am & 12 noon

The Abbey cafe will donate their proceeds to Macmillan Cancer Care.
Please come along to support this worthwhile cause.

HARVEST LUNCH

Sunday 4 October at 12.30 pm

There will be a lunch in the Place of Paisley after the Harvest service.
Everyone is welcome.

Tickets £10 will be on sale after the Sunday services.

LONDON CONCERTANTE

A Night at the Opera

Friday 9 October at 7.30 pm

Tickets available from candlelightconcerts.co.uk

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Programme of Traditional Fiddle Music)*

Douglas Lawrence (Violin), Maureen Rutherford (Piano)

Saturday 17 October at 12.30 pm

Admission is £10 payable at the door

Sunday 25 October at 11 am

University of the West of Scotland service.

A celebration of Education for All.

*Guest speaker: Magnus Linklater CBE.
novelist, journalist and commentator.*

Service open to all.

LIGHT AND MUSIC IN PAISLEY ABBEY

*Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.*

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1. *Stained Radiance*

Shelley saw eternal beauty in the pure white light from Heaven. He described the effect of that light passing through coloured glass and being transformed into “stained radiance.”

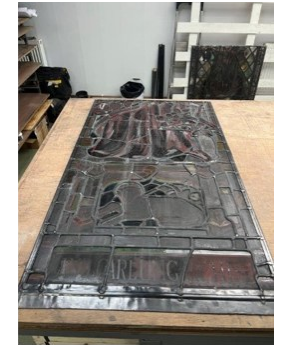
It was a romantic vision. Metaphorically, Shelley was alluding to the purity of spirit that was his brother poet's. He had just received the news of John Keat's tragically early death and, written in mourning, his elegy envisioned Keats's muse freed from the disfiguring effect of life on earth and eternal in its beauty.

A century later, the Scottish author James Leslie Mitchell adopted “Stained Radiance” as the title for his partly autobiographical first novel. Having adopted his better-known pen name, *Lewis Grassie Gibbon*, he went on to describe the stained glass windows of Arbuthnott (“Kinraddie”) Kirk in his best-known novel, *Sunset Song*.

Paisley has a little-known connection to Arbuthnott amongst the “hidden treasures” of its museum collection. Described as “just too precious to be on display,” the Arbuthnott Manuscripts comprise a Book of Hours, a Psalter, and a Missal (the only complete service book of its kind) which together comprise three extremely rare surviving pre-Reformation illuminated liturgical manuscripts created between 1471 and 1492. They are extraordinarily beautiful to behold. Remaining in the possession of the Arbuthnott family until 1897, they were purchased by one of the Coats family who then gifted them to Paisley Museum. Scholars now believe that, although written by the parish priest, their illumination was undertaken at an institution in Scotland capable of such elaborate work. That must have been a monastery, and Paisley Abbey is considered to be one possible origin. It would be an extraordinary quirk of fate were the manuscripts to have accidentally found their way home to Paisley after three hundred years!

Apart from the masonry of the Abbey Church, there is no artwork associated with the monastery of Paisley known to have survived the Reformation. All medieval stained glass was destroyed and the fragments discovered in the Drain give no clue as to what any complete window would have looked like. As a new spirit dawned, stained glass began to be reintroduced to Scottish churches in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Paisley Abbey followed the trend when its first post-Reformation windows were installed in the Nave in the 1870s. That predated the restoration of the Crossing and the Choir which remained in ruin until the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the absence of a planned scheme of stained glass, several individual artists and manufacturers provided the windows of the Nave. All were notable in their own way and none more so than Daniel Cottier and Company, who designed one window in each of the aisles in the 1870s and then, in 1888, the Crown Window of the West Gable. Daniel Cottier (1838-1891) was a prolific artist in many fields of the arts. His early apprenticeship in glass staining had been in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and he became manager of an Edinburgh firm before opening his own business there. He also worked in London, and in 1873 opened his New York Gallery and Studio while simultaneously starting business in Sydney, Australia. He is credited with introducing the Aesthetic Movement to America and Australia, and with influencing many artists, including Tiffany and Stephen Adam. (*“200 Scottish Stained Glass Artists,” Rona H. Moody, 2006*).



One hundred and fifty years of accumulated grime had rendered the windows very dirty with a black sooty film attributable to a time when there was gas-lighting in the church. The cleaning process resulted in a dramatic difference, most noticeable during the midsummer evenings when the sun was low in the west sky. Then it was possible to see what is meant by “stained radiance” – a wonderful effect.



2. *Czech Mate*

In August, another necessary scheme of works was undertaken. That was for a long-awaited repair to the organ, delayed by the lengthy lead-time required by the Organ Builders, Harrison & Harrison, such is the demand for their services. The organ is always regularly maintained and tuned but problems had developed that required more major remedial work involving two weeks' labour by the organ builders.

Some in the congregation will remember the last major overhaul of the organ in 2009 when the instrument was out of commission for eight months. Fortunately, on this occasion, such a scale of restoration was not required, and the organ remained in use on Sundays thanks to the consideration of the organ builders in making that possible.



At the time, the "Daily Record" published a story about the 2009 renovation, noticing that "experts from as far afield as the Czech Republic were called in" to do the work. "One of the men" it continued, "who worked on restoring the organ was Czech-born Jaroslav Strazovsky. The organ builder, who travelled from his native Czech Republic to work on the historic organ, said 'It is a very nice organ and is quite a different sound to normal British organs. It is a very French-sounding organ. The usual British sound is smooth whereas this one has a much brighter and more powerful sound.'"

It was a delight to discover that Jaroslav had continued to work for Harrison & Harrison throughout the intervening years and to be able to welcome him back as an old friend to the Abbey on this occasion.

3. *Heartfelt Hope*

Regular readers of the "Abbey Herald" will be familiar with the story of the musical slate, one of the finds from the archaeological excavation of the Drain in 1991, that is believed to be the earliest surviving evidence of polyphonic music extant in Scotland. Musicologists since the discovery had speculated as to what the piece of music might be, but it was only last year that Professor Michael Scott Asato Cuthbert, by the application of computation (A.I.) and algorithms that he has developed, was able to solve the puzzle with certainty.

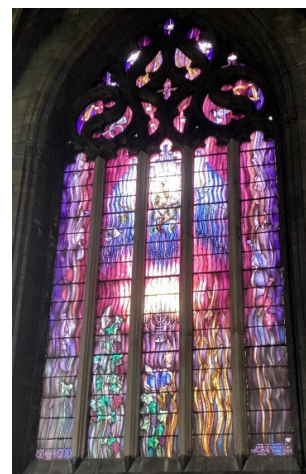
It is a fragment of a secular song from the late Fourteenth or early Fifteenth Century, widely known throughout the European mainland, entitled "Esperance qui en mon cuer," translated as "Hope that is in my heart." Its origins are unknown and its composer anonymous, but there is every possibility that it might have been written in Paisley, notwithstanding the greater probability that it was imported from somewhere in Europe.

The Abbey Choir, under the direction of Dr George McPhee, was anxious to make a recording of "Esperance," and have now compiled a soon-to-be-released album featuring the work in a playlist containing an exciting range of French choral works and solo organ pieces. Composers include Fauré, Poulenc, Alain, Dandrieu, Duruflé and Gounod.



The album is an outstanding celebration of Paisley Abbey's European connections - its importance as an international centre of culture and commerce in the pre-Reformation period – its roots in belonging to the monastic Order of Cluny based in Burgundy – its continuing tradition of creative affinity and shared cultural values, founded in the Auld Alliance but still manifest in its membership of the Federation of European Cluniac Sites and championing its candidacy for UNESCO World Heritage status.

Taking its title from the song of the slate - "Heartfelt Hope" – the album's release will be eagerly anticipated, and readers will undoubtedly relish the opportunity to acquire it. The following note was written to complement the programme commentary:



Most Scottish monasteries, certainly the key Royal foundations, were built under the patronage of King David I. By the time of his death in 1153, David's ambition to bring continental European monastic orders to Scotland had already been largely realised. Paisley's monastery came later, one of a small number established in respect of David's legacy. Alone of the Scottish monasteries, it was Cluniac monks who first populated Paisley, bringing with them their particular focus on performing the liturgy with a care for music that had developed in sophistication beyond that of the other monastic orders' practices.

The monks at Paisley were subject to the strict authority imposed from their order's hub in Burgundy where the Abbey Church of Cluny was the largest in Christendom. Unlike the Tironensians and Cistercians however, Cluniacs did not favour extreme isolation and self-sufficiency. Instead, they engaged with outsiders to provide their needs. That resulted in a market economy developing around Cluniac monasteries and gave origin to villages and towns such as Paisley. In return, the monastery met the spiritual needs of these new communities by becoming their parish church and providing education, especially in the *Sang Scales* that trained young boys in liturgical singing, reading, and music.

In Scotland, surviving physical evidence of these early *Sang Scules* is rare. The discovery in 1991 of some fragments of slate inscribed with musical notation that appeared to be the earliest surviving example of a polyphonic composition in the country was astonishing. They came from the medieval drain that served the monastery of Paisley Abbey. Precise identification of the music remained obscure despite twenty-five years of speculation. It is wonderful at last to have the certainty of its recognition and to be able to make the musical slate sing.

“Esperance qui en mon cuer” is a secular song from the late 14th or early 15th century. It was then that Paisley Abbey was approaching its greatest splendour as a church-building and prominence as a centre for trade, becoming one of the wealthiest monasteries in Scotland up to the time of the Reformation. Various finds from the Drain confirm that imported goods from France and other European countries were coming to Paisley Abbey during this period and allow us to infer that the monastery was a major spiritual, cultural and commercial axis in a European-wide network.

The monks who populated that Cluniac Monastery in pre-Reformation Scotland used music as an expression of their faith and belief in the love of God. The long life of Paisley Abbey has been punctuated with many challenges, but music was evidently a constant and enduring source of hope. Even in the post-Reformation years when Puritanical beliefs muted music in churches, people longed for its return. The faltering steps that allowed psalmody in the Abbey to reach “a high pitch of excellence” at the beginning of the 19th century, were gradually recruited into the more general desire throughout the nation for improvements in church music. Finally, as this new and more worthy spirit demanded, organ accompaniment of psalm and hymn-singing was allowed. Paisley Abbey, as if instinctively drawn towards its ancient French connection, purchased an instrument from the Parisian organ-building firm of Cavaillé Coll. That original organ has been much enlarged and altered over its 150-year lifetime yet still has at its golden heart the unique French reeds that so wondrously gild the repertoire of their mother country . . . a repertoire that expresses hope . . . *heartfelt hope*.

4. Your Support

Building projects, fabric repairs, organ maintenance, music in support of the Abbey Church’s worship and mission – how can all these possibly continue?

With your help!

Donations large and small are vital to the future of Paisley Abbey’s life and work.

Consider specifying what you want your donation to be used for:

- “Fabric” – the maintenance and repair of our buildings

- “Psalmody” – the music of the worshiping church, including the choir and the organ
- Paisley Abbey Music Society – the organisation and staging of concerts and recitals

Consider joining The Society of Friends of Paisley Abbey:

- An independent charity designed to support any project connected with the maintenance or improvement of the Abbey and the Place of Paisley

Remember to *Gift Aid* any donation if you are eligible for the scheme.

Thank you **David C Davidson**

SERVICES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Sunday 20 September at 11 am

*Celebration of Paisley’s historic links with the United States of America and Commemoration of the Revd John Witherspoon as a Signatory of the Declaration of Independence.
Invited Guests in attendance.
Service open to all.*

Sunday 25 October at 11 am

*University of the West of Scotland service.
A celebration of Education for All.
Guest speaker: Magnus Linklater CBE.
novelist, journalist and commentator.
Service open to all.*

MUSIC FOR SEPTEMBER

6 September 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Trinity 14 Morning Service O Lord, give thy Holy Spirit	<i>Stanford in C</i> <i>Tallis</i>
13 September 11 am Te Deum Anthem	Trinity 15 Morning Service A new Song	<i>Ireland in F</i> <i>MacMillan</i>
4 pm Responses Psalm 119, 41-48 Canticles Anthem	Choral Evensong A Hymn for St Cecilia	<i>Smith of Durham</i> <i>Dyson in D</i> <i>Howells</i>
20 September 11 am Introit Jubilate Deo Anthem	Trinity 16 <i>Commemoration to Celebrate Paisley's Connection to the United States of America on the 250th Anniversary of American Independence</i> Morning Service Peace I leave with you Alleluia	<i>Amy Beach</i> <i>John Houston in C</i> <i>Randall Thompson</i>
27 September 11 am Communion Setting Anthem	Trinity 17 Holy Communion O sacrum convivium	<i>Howells (Collegium Regale)</i> <i>Messiaen</i>
4 October 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Trinity 18 Harvest Thanksgiving Morning Service Sing joyfully	<i>Howells (Collegium Regale)</i> <i>Byrd</i>

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*