

balerno



Blether

the magazine and newsletter of Balerno Parish Church; for the Church and for the Community

Issue number 10



Merry Christmas!

Dec 2021/Jan 2022

Climate Change - a challenge to us all

'This is an issue of justice, and so our concern for the integrity of creation is matched by a concern for fairness for fellow human beings around the world.' Lord Wallace of Tankerness - November 2021

Members of Dutch climate activist group, Urgenda, broke their journey in Balerno on their way to to COP26 on 26 October.



Read Lesley Burt's report on p2 about Urgenda's visit to Balerno

It is some years since Balerno Parish Church gained designation as an Eco Congregation. This came about as there was a recognition of the fact that there were a variety of areas in which we could 'do better if we tried.' We had an 'Eco' committee which oversaw a variety of initiatives and saw significant progress in our care for the environment and we got to a point where we thought that general awareness of environmental issues had improved to a point that would allow the responsibility for addressing these concerns to be embedded with the responsibilities of other committees.

Some years on, it would not be unreasonable for some to say that this strategy has not kept up with the climate and sustainability debates. While the challenges of 10 years ago

may have been met, the questions are changing and the world hasn't stopped warming up. We may criticise India and China for their reluctance to reduce their reliance on coal, but here in Balerno we have been reluctant to abandon gas because of the cost of electricity. There are some uncomfortable truths which we perhaps need to acknowledge.

A recent survey of opinions in the church elicited a view that the church needs to take a lead on environmental issues if it is to be 'relevant' to the younger generation; the idea of the 'good' Samaritan on the road to Jericho perhaps needs translation/application into the context of sustainability and the environment – both domestically and internationally.

Could this be an inconvenient truth?

Please send letters to the Blether Editor by e-mail to bpc-editor@balernochurch.org.uk or post to the Church Office at 2 Main Street, Balerno

FROM GRONINGEN TO GLASGOW – VIA BALERNO!

Leaving Groningen in the north of the Netherlands on October 6, a group representing the Urgenda Foundation set out to walk to Glasgow, arriving at the start of COP26. Urgenda (an amalgam of Urgent and Agenda) is a non-profit climate activist group set up in 2007 by Marianne Minnesma and Jan Rotmans, seeking climate change action by governments through 'climate justice' – the idea that human rights are violated by governments' failure to reduce emissions and prevent climate change. Their walk took them south through the Netherlands, passing through the cities of Zwolle, Deventer, Apeldoorn and Utrecht*. Arriving in Rotterdam, they travelled to London and then on to Edinburgh by train. Their four day journey across Scotland was to take them through Livingston, Falkirk and Cumbernauld to arrive in Glasgow on Saturday 5th November.

Balerno provided a welcome resting point for 52 walkers and their back-up team at the Mill café, where they enjoyed home-made soup and sandwiches laid on by Lynsey and her team of volunteers, and there was time to chat and find out about the

On 20 December 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court, the highest court in the Netherlands, upheld the previous decisions in the Urgenda Climate Case, finding that the Dutch government has obligations to urgently and significantly reduce emissions in line with its human rights obligations. A truly historic outcome!

The Urgenda Climate Case against the Dutch Government was the first in the world in which citizens established that their government has a legal duty to prevent dangerous climate change.



Marianne Minnesma

work done by Urgenda in the Netherlands and beyond.

I spoke to Urgenda's co-founder and now Director, Marianne Minnesma, who trained as a lawyer and has worked for Greenpeace. She became well-known as a climate activist and promoter of green energy policies. Since 2015 they have had marked success in their provision of legal teams to assist

lawyers who are not climate experts in court cases concerning climate change, the latest being a court claim by Torres Straits islanders against the Australian government.

I asked about the involvement of churches in the Urgenda Foundation. Marianne is impressed by the Pope's support for green energy issues. Churches everywhere in the Netherlands are working to make their buildings energy efficient, frequently installing solar panels – one church has put the panels on its roof in the shape of a cross! Green churches are developing where the emphasis is on stewardship of the Earth, husbanding its resources rather than plundering them.

The aim of Urgenda is for a fast transition towards a sustainable society and a circular economy using only renewable energy. We will see what develops out of COP26.

*Balerno Parish Church – and some of our neighbours – meet regularly on ZOOM for Bible Study with members of the Jacobikerk (St James) a historic church in Utrecht. While none of our friends in this group were involved in the Walk, the Bishop of Utrecht walked with the party through his diocese.

Contributed - LB

Differing perspectives

On 6th November something like 100,000 people marched in Glasgow's biggest ever demonstration, demanding that governments take action on Climate Change. One demonstrator, Vanessa Nakate, from Uganda, said, 'Leaders rarely have the courage to lead. It takes citizens, people like you and me, to rise up and demand action. And when we do that in great enough numbers, our leaders will move.'

In 2019 the Dutch Supreme Court upheld the complaint of 886 plaintiffs who had argued that the Dutch government had an obligation to protect its citizens from the impacts of climate change. The judges directed the Dutch state to reduce greenhouse gases by the end of 2020 by at least 25% compared to 1990 levels.

The *Urgenda Climate Case* was the first in the world establishing the legal duty of governments to prevent dangerous climate change. Climate change cases have since been filed all over the world. In June 2021, a Belgian Court in Brussels established for the first time the negligence of the Belgian public authorities in the fight against climate change. In April 2018 the Colombian Supreme Court ruled in favour of 25 young people from ages 7-25 who had sued the Colombian Government, claiming that Colombia's failure to reduce deforestation and meet its 2020 zero-net Amazon deforestation target threatened their fundamental rights. On 29th

April 2021, the German Federal Constitutional Court – the country's highest court – found that Germany's climate protection law violated the fundamental rights of young people and future generations and must be improved.

We may be more accustomed to seeing mass demonstration as a method of choice for persuading governmental change, than dry argument in court rooms.

The Oslo Principles, produced by eminent international jurists, were launched in 2015. They argue that regardless of the existence of international agreements, governments already have a legal obligation to avert the harmful effects of climate change, based on existing international human rights law and environmental law.

'Politics', said Otto von Bismarck, 'is the art of the possible.' Sometimes things which appear impossible can become possible through a process of debate and discussion. Mass demonstration of public opinion may well be effective. Using the language of human rights may be less dramatic but, at least in those parts of the world where the rule of law is observed, may ultimately be the most persuasive

One wonders, what could a chance visit by Urgenda to Balerno on 26th October 2021 lead to?

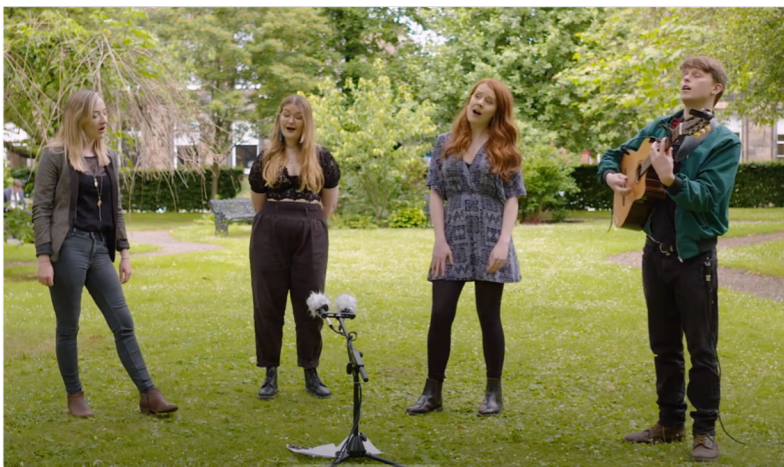
contributed RH

Creating Music in Lockdown

Live Music Now was founded by legendary violinist Yehudi Menuhin in 1977, along with philanthropist, Sir Ian Stoutzker. During the Second World War, Menuhin played for the Allied Forces, often in the most challenging of circumstances, and directly experienced how music could benefit those who were sick, lonely, traumatised and reconcile differences between people and nations. *Live Music Now* was born out of these wartime experiences. *Live Music Now* continues to keep alive Yehudi Menuhin's vision of music being accessible to all members of society, regardless of their circumstances, while simultaneously developing the skills of young, talented musicians.

Live Music Now Scotland started delivering in 1984, putting on 60 concerts in its first year with a handful of classical ensembles. Before the outbreak of the pandemic that number had increased 10-fold to nearer 600, with an ever-evolving pool of around 120 musicians, covering a wide range of musical genres, delivering work in all of Scotland's 32 local authorities.

Live Music Now Scotland concerts are presented in unexpected places for the benefit of everyone but with particular focus on the elderly and children with additional support needs. Not only do they provide welcome entertainment for the audience, but they provide a stage for aspiring professional musicians to perform and develop their talents.



Understandably, the pandemic had a significant impact on the work of *Live Music Now Scotland* as opportunities for sharing performances disappeared overnight. *Live Music Now Scotland* responded to this by making the most of the opportunities offered by Zoom to allow young musicians to share music and experiences with some of those most isolated by the pandemic – elderly people in care homes. In collaboration with *One City Trust* and three residential homes in Edinburgh, a project developed which resulted in the composition of two new songs by Karine Polwart based on the reminiscences of the residents in the homes. One of the songs written around the memories of childhood visits to Portobello beach and the other, entitled 'Meet me at Loganlea,' has its origins in Balerno and the Pentlands.

Music means nothing to many people when it is on a page, but it is when it is performed that it comes alive. These songs bring to life the memories of the care home participants but can evoke our own memories of these well loved places and activities. If you want to hear the songs which were the result of this collaboration, then go to:

<https://youtube/8SG2ass5aGE ht>



More information about *Live Music Now Scotland* is available at: <https://livemusicnow.scot/>

Contributed JB

Happy Christmas from the Blether team

Welcome to the December issue of Balerno Blether! This is a special issue because it is the first issue which is being published in any numbers in printed form. The first eight issues were only available on-line, and there were only a relatively few print copies of the November issue. For those who have been reading previous issues on screen, now you won't have to pore over your smartphone, tablet or PC, and you'll be able to do the crossword without having to print off the page. Don't say we're not trying to meet customer demand!

For those who haven't encountered the Blether previously, we are, as it says on the front page, 'the magazine and newsletter of Balerno Parish Church; for the Church and for the Community'. And as we said in the first issue, way back in March 2021 (or was it February?) 'As well as keeping people up to date both with news both of what is going on and what is being planned in Balerno Parish Church, we hope that Balerno Blether may also be entertaining and fun with stories and articles.' So, a warm welcome to all our readers both old and new.

In future we hope that the Blether will be available in the Mill and at the Farmers Market, and if there is demand we'll see what else we can do to make for easier access to Balerno's top periodical. When the library reopens we'll be asking whether we can pop copies in there.

Printing the Blether will incur some costs however and so, if you'd like to make a small donation to production costs that would be hugely appreciated.

In early November we had decided that the Crossword was taking up space and we should be using that for something directed at a younger audience. Now, it was clear that we don't really know our readership beyond the mailing list, so we don't know whether we have a younger readership; but we do know we have at least one reader who appreciates the crossword, and looked slightly shocked when we said we might discontinue it. So we obviously have to improve our audience research. And the Crossword is included again. But we do need to know what our readers want to hear about. Are we getting it right or are there things you'd like to see us doing?



Demise of the Loo.....

Do you know this man?

He was Josiah George Jennings - an English sanitary engineer and plumber who invented the first public flush toilets. He was born on 10 November 1810 in Eling, at the edge of the New Forest in Hampshire

His claims to fame were numerous - As well as installing 'facilities' for Princess Eugenie, he received a medal from Prince Albert to commemorate his achievement. His 'piece de resistance' was the installation of flushing toilets at the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was pronounced a great success.

The toilet has been the star of many writings over the years and one of the most notable was Lucinda Lambton's 'Temples of Convenience' in 1978 which sets out to describe one hundred and fifty 'jewels of sanitation'.

So then, where is your nearest public loo? - Are you sure? Since 2015 local authority public toilets have decreased in number by over 20% to a total of around 2500.



So popular are these humble 'facilities' that they now have their own support group, 'The British Toilet Association', with its own logo, seen on the right, and website. Readers will no doubt be pleased to read that next year is the Association's twenty-first birthday and to celebrate, a membership recruitment drive is under way (at £20.00 per person pa.) to add strength to their call for re-introducing them in areas now practically devoid of any.

As a demonstration of their importance, I list below some pieces of legislation to which each such facility must comply:

- BS 6465 - parts 1-4
- BS 8300
- Building regulations parts M & R
- Equality Order - formerly the Disability Discrimination Act
- British & European Standards

There are more, but we'll leave those for another issue ?

Contributed DB

JOB OPPORTUNITY

Part time Bookkeeper required.

The Mill is a community café at the heart of Balerno. It is a non-profit venture run by Balerno Parish Church.

Our bookkeeper has moved on to pastures new and we are therefore looking for someone to join us. In this small but important role you will be an integral part of a team. The position is on a freelance basis and will require approximately 2 hours a week with a few hours more required at month end and year end. A more detailed job description is on the church website, <https://www.balernochurch.org.uk/>

All applications for the role should be sent care of Balerno Parish Church marked for the attention of Martin Petty, Mill Convenor. If you wish to find out more about the role, please contact Martin or the Mill Manager Lynsey Inglis.

Applications should be in the form of a short covering letter explaining why you would like to join our team, accompanied by a CV setting out your relevant experience.

The closing date for applications is 31st January 2022. Please note that we reserve the right to offer the position to the right applicant at any time.

We look forward to hearing from you.



reduce, reuse, recycle

Do you recycle your clothes? Maybe you do. 57% of us take them to a charity shop, so that someone will give them a second chance. Of course not everything donated to charity shops can be sold, in fact 84% of donations end up in landfill anyway - a sobering thought.

In the UK we send 700,000 tonnes of clothing to recycling centres, textile banks, clothes collections and other charities every year - enough to fill 459 Olympic swimming pools. But 41% of people say they are unaware of local recycling facilities.

Maybe you parcel them up to be collected by an organisation that sells textiles by weight, making money for charities. That's ok, but actually much of this ends up on market stalls in Africa, undermining local businesses. Or maybe you just dump clothes in the landfill bin - adding them to the 350,000 tonnes of used (or even unused!) clothes that are still wearable which end up in landfill every year. That's 30% of our unwanted clothes, an estimated £140 million worth!

So what else can we do? Childrens' clothes are very often hardly worn and many schools and other organisations recycle school uniforms in good condition. Good, up-to-date adult clothes can be sold on Ebay and similar platforms.

Next month we'll tell you all about SmartWorks and how they help in this area.

contributed LB

A plague on your houses...

Frogs, lice and flies pale into insignificance when viewing the latest plague to attack man.

Yes, it's even happened in the same place - Egypt - although this time the part of Moses is taken by a Mr Ahmed Rizk (pronounced Risk?) from Egypt's Agricultural Research centre.

We're uncertain as to what sins the Egyptians could have been

guilty of this time, but God has sent heavy rains to parts of South Sinai and southern Egypt and this has washed scorpions from their nests and into the rivers that are flowing through the towns. Our latter-day Moses says that some of these creatures are fat-tailed scorpions (see picture) - some of the deadliest little nippers in the world, which can grow to around 8cms in length and which can kill a human in under an hour from just one bite!



Already three persons are known to have been 'stung to death' - that's a phrase we don't usually hear - and hundreds more people injured.

Large numbers of anti-venom doses are being distributed to hospitals in the area, for so many are the cases that it is feared to be a greater risk than Covid19.

Best advice to anyone who gets bitten is to tightly tie a piece of cloth near the point of the bite to prevent the venom reaching the heart.

Sadly, Mr. Rizk waving his rod in the air doesn't seem to have the same effect as it did for Moses.

Contributed DB

Remembrance 2021- One Hundred Years of Poppies



The first ever annual poppy day occurred on November 11th 1921, marking the third anniversary of Armistice Day in 1918.

If you were passing the Parish Church over the Remembrance period you would not have failed to notice the hundreds of knitted poppies which have carpeted the front garden area, cascading over the railings and down the front of the Church itself. These were

all knitted in 2018 to commemorate and mark 100 years since the ending of the First World War in November 1918, and they have been looked after and brought out each year since the 2018 centenary. We hope they will remain available for years to come and will be a constant reminder of the sacrifices made for us.

The picture on the right was taken on 7th November 2018 at the three day Voices Exhibition held in the Church with events in St Josephs and the Ogston Hall attended by something over 500 people and the Mill Cafe opened for extended hours. You can still read the diaries and recollections which were part of the exhibition if you go to *Voices 2018 – Stories & Memories from over 100 years of conflicts on the Parish Church website*.



<https://www.balernochurch.org.uk/voices-2018-stories-memories-from-over-100-years-of-conflicts/>

CIA on our doorstep

There is a modern hymn which we regularly sing on Remembrance Sunday with a verse which we frequently omit.

What shall we pray for those who know
nothing of war, and cannot show
grief or regret for friend or foe?
God give them peace.

We are fortunate to live in a part of the world where peace has prevailed for the last 70 years and Remembrance Sunday has changed. There was a time within the living memory of the Baby Boomers when the evidence of the possibility of open conflict was just around the corner. For Balerno, just around the corner was RAF Kirknewton.

Most recently it has been used by gliders, model aircraft and private light aircraft, but it probably started off as a grass landing ground before being officially opened in November 1941. It served as a base for a Polish squadron for a brief period, but was largely used as an air ammunition store.

Storing ammunition is not without its hazards. One notable wartime incident was the rescue of two aircrew from a plane that had crashed into the ammunition dump on take-off. Squadron Leader Peter Guy Ottewill was awarded the George Medal for his bravery in pulling them clear of the burning aircraft.

For a period during WWII, RAF Kirknewton and the adjacent Ritchie Camp were used as a temporary POW Camp for German officers, while they were awaiting transfer to the USA.

From 1952 to 1966, the airfield was leased to the United States Air Force (USAF) and during this time was used by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for mobile communications and intelligence tracking. During this time, it is believed that they serviced the hot-line between Washington and Moscow.

We drive past on the Lang Whang without thinking about the fact that this almost deserted airfield was a significant listening post in the cold war employing over 300 people. Most of the buildings have been demolished and the people have left, but it is a stark illustration of how the threat of war was right on our doorstep.



Contributed JB

For your diary!

Sunday worship has been back to normal in the Church since Sunday 3rd October. While masks should be worn there is no need to book to attend. See page 8 for details.

From 1st December - look out for *Advent Online*, on the Church website.

December 5th - Joint Carol Service with Currie Kirk in Balerno Parish Church.

December 9th - Rotary Club Tree for Life switch on 6.15pm in Church Garden.

Rev Gordon McGillivray in his own words; in an interview with Susan Ogilvie to mark the 70th anniversary of Gordon's ordination as a Church of Scotland Minister

Gordon remembers being told that he attended worship in Colinton Parish Church from the age of 2½. His mother sang in the choir and his father was the organist, having first played at South Leith Parish Church, after the untimely death of the previous organist on the battlefields of the 1st World War.

Church worship has always been part of his life and at the age of 13 he announced that his hope was that he would enter the ministry. He never deviated from that hope and the Second World War made no difference to this plan.

Gordon was allowed to attend university for a year before he was "called up". Nonetheless he did regular field artillery training as a requirement during this time. When finally, the call came, Gordon joined the Artillery Training Regiment, first in the south of England followed by a posting to Skegness.

He was given two weeks embarkation leave and then reported to Woolwich Arsenal where he was kitted out in "tropical" gear. He sailed for India from Southampton via the Clyde, Ireland, the Atlantic to Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. His was the first ship to sail unescorted through the Med, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea via Aden, the Indian Ocean to Bombay (Mumbai). After disembarking his final destination was to Bangalore to a desolate camp called Deolali. (Which gave rise to the term "Doolally" used by soldiers who felt they went mad there!) Where he spent 3 months. Soon after this he was posted to Burma. At this stage the Japanese were in retreat, so he saw little or no combat.

The Artillery Regiment then went on to relieve Rangoon. Gordon was allowed home on leave as Lord Louis Mountbatten decreed that one person from every unit should be allowed home from the "Forgotten Army". During his leave the atomic bombs fell on Japan. Gordon stayed on in Edinburgh, with permission, and completed his course at Edinburgh University.

Gordon had always been keen to visit the United States of America. In his probationary year at St Cuthbert's, in Edinburgh, he was assistant to Dr Adam Burnett. A one year scholarship at New York's Union Theological Seminary became available and he was encouraged by Dr Burnett to attend: - "My dear man you must go".



Waterbeck

The seminary was a combined music school, religious education facility and a ministerial training establishment of renown. Three Scottish boys met three American girls over breakfast one morning with Gordon later inviting Winnie for a game of table tennis. They became firm friends, and Winnie – whose father hailed from Aberdeen and mother from Carnoustie – moved to Scotland to marry Gordon in Colinton Parish Church, with his father playing the organ!

Gordon was first ordained as a minister in Waterbeck, Annandale on 6th November 1951, and he was minister there for 6½ years. The Congregation kept in touch with him, and he was invited to preach on the 60th anniversary of his ordination. He was delighted that Kay Latimer was able to attend the service. His second parish was the High Church in Nairn where he spent 15½ years.

He felt that it was his duty to try and make each and every service the very best that he could make it. The better provided his congregation were – the happier he was.

He then moved to Edinburgh where he was Deputy Clerk of Edinburgh Presbytery and then Deputy Clerk to the General Assembly.

He and Winnie were blessed with 4 children – Jean, Neil, Ann & Donald – with Gordon enjoying visits from his 7 grand-children and 3 great grandchildren.

***Congratulations Gordon, from Balerno Blether,
and from everyone in the Balerno Parish Church
Congregation.***

(Balerno Blether Team are exceedingly grateful to both Gordon and Susan for allowing us to reproduce this interview, which was undertaken specifically to mark 70 years since Gordon was ordained as a minister of the Church of Scotland)



Rev Gordon McGillivray



Rev Gordon McGillivray with past ministers celebrating 150
years of worship at Waterbeck Church

Hello all,

The Mill Cafe would like to thank you all for your ongoing support and custom. With your support we continue to be a happy, thriving, warm and welcoming place to visit.

The Wednesday bridge club returned successfully and it has been lovely having them back.



We hosted a lunch for the Dutch 'Urgenda Foundation'. A total of 52 members who were walking from the Netherlands to the COP 26 conference in Glasgow. We did have a mini panic when their numbers grew from 40 - 52, one day before they were due to arrive!

With the help of our wonderful volunteers this was no problem and

the lunch went very smoothly. They were a lovely group of people and had some very fun characters amongst them. One chap asked me, in very strongly accented and limited English "Where am I, what city?" I had a good giggle and explained he was in Balerno, a small village outside Edinburgh. He gave a good belly laugh and explained "Aaahhhh, they walk.... and I just follow".



They had come to us via the Water of Leith and not seen the other villages they had passed. Their geographical disorientation was cemented when we gathered for a photo and waved goodbye as two cars went round the roundabout, one shot off in the right direction, the other up Deanpark Avenue!. It was very funny waving when we realised they had gone the wrong way. We had a lovely afternoon with them and they did make it to Glasgow.



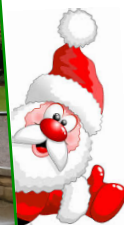
Christmas at the Mill

We are getting into the festive spirit. We will have mince pie and cranberry & orange scones throughout December. We would love to hear of any suggestions for scone flavours if you have any favourites? Frances and I made nearly 400 mini

shortbread for you to enjoy free with a hot drink, they are going fast! We will be thinking up recipes to make us all in the mood for Christmas.

We all at The Mill Cafe wish you all a wonderful Christmas and New Year filled with Love, Friendship and Good Health.

We will close at the end of day (2pm) on Wednesday 22nd December and re-open Thursday 6th January.



On 25th November the children from Jigsaw Nurseries did a collection for the FoodBank and then they brought it to the Mill.

Well done!
And thank you to Dawn and the Jigsaw Nursery children!



Radical Action Plan update

It would be tempting fate to say that the pace of reform in Edinburgh Presbytery is accelerating, but there are several strands of activity on which we will probably see progress towards the end of this year and early in 2022. In January Edinburgh Presbytery and West Lothian Presbytery will join together to form the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian. The practical consequence of this union, however, may not be immediately obvious outside of the Presbytery offices.

It is likely that the Presbytery's Mission Plan the draft of which was apparently sent to the CofS's Faith Nurture Forum, the General Trustees, the Principal Clerk, and the Solicitor of the Church for comment in October, will emerge towards the end of 2021 or in early 2022. There have also apparently already been meetings between Presbytery and Church HQ's Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPIG). The draft plan is scheduled to be back with full Presbytery in December at which stage we would hope that individual churches might have sight of it also.

The suggested schedule involves Presbytery discussing but not agreeing the draft Report in January. Thereafter, 'Kirk Sessions and Congregations will be able to discuss the Plan, then meet in newly formed Mission Clusters (which are part of the proposed Plan and adapted from existing Clusters), engaging with newly appointed Cluster Facilitators who will lead us through the process of discussion.' It is not clear precisely when Presbytery will be invited to approve the Plan but it likely to be in the early spring of 2022.

We understand that once there is Presbytery agreement of the Plan, including of any proposed changes which have been agreed by the Mission Cluster, Presbytery will return the approved Plan to PMPIG for concurrence, and then for the Faith Nurture Forum to sign off. This is being done for all Presbytery Plans to ensure that there is consistency in planning methodology and practice across the Church of Scotland.

The Mission Clusters and ultimately the Presbytery will (apparently) always be able to amend the Plan, though Presbytery warn that any significant changes will inevitably slow down the process of the Plan being approved. It will also, apparently, be possible for the Plan to be approved in geographical segments.

Presbytery have also said that when the Plan is made public to the Presbytery of Edinburgh, they will be able to share it with West Lothian. The union of the Presbyteries of Edinburgh and West Lothian will also, according to Presbytery, allow discussions along the border area between the two Presbyteries as they currently are, to allow consideration of how Ministry in its broadest sense might be delivered in that area.

More locally, the Water of Leith Cluster Group has started to look at issues of a more closely co-ordinated Vision and Mission so that when the Presbytery does suggest it there will at least have been some thought given to it already.

In summary then; things are moving forward but the pace is slow. The New Year has a habit of speeding things up however, and certainly we can look to signs of greater contact and coordination with our partners along the Upper Water of Leith Valley.

From the Pews to the Mews

a message from the minister

I cannot wait to have a "more than normal" Christmas again. I am sure I am not the only one who shares this joy. But this "more than normal" Season will have its challenges. Covid-19 is still with us, which means we cannot become complacent. The precious family time of last year will be replaced by the usual "busy-ness" that the Festive season brings. But we should not forget what we have learnt during lockdown. Family is more important than gifts or money. Christmas is about Jesus who was born to be a LIGHT to all of us in a dark world.

Christmas is about God who came close to us through Jesus. He is indeed the REASON for the SEASON.

As we light our Advent candles weekly, we must remember that Christ is the Light to our dark world.

I wish you all a merry Christmas full of the hope, love and faith in the Lord.

Andre

December Services

5 December 21 – 9 am Family service in St Joseph's;

5 December 21 – 10 am Joint Carol service with Currie Kirk @ Balerno

12 December 21 – Gift service

19 December 21 – Lessons and Carol service;

24 December 21 – 18:00 Family service

24 December 21 – 23:30 Watchnight service;

25 December 21 – 10 am Christmas service

26 December 21 – 10 am "Out of the Box" service

Do You Have a Minute, Lord?

What should I do, Lord? This 'Saving the planet' stuff all a bit overwhelming; where do you start? It's a BIG problem and a lot of us can't help but feel that the politicians are really just kicking the proverbial can down the road so that someone else will have to take the really hard decisions.

The bible tells me that I should not worry about where things come from and to trust you to provide. The sustainability issue seems to challenge us about where things go to after we've used them and remember that there has to be a limit to what is disposable. It is very convenient for us to be able to blame the politicians, but perhaps we need to remember that our 'governments only exist with the consent of the governed.' The politicians who are in government are the ones that people voted for, but it is deeply frustrating when they seem to get distracted by short term interests.

As Christmas approaches, I am reminded of the carol, *In the Bleak Midwinter* and the final verse which starts with the question, 'What can I give Him, poor as I am?' It continues with, 'If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.' We are all familiar with it, but I'm afraid that it doesn't seem to have any real impact after Christmas Day.

Perhaps it is time to think of what we can do individually to ensure that our gift to your creation should be to acknowledge its complexity and do what we can to look after it rather than just throwing it away without thinking about what we are doing.

Contributed JB

Useful Contact Details

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Choir & Music	Martin Petty; mpetty712@gmail.com	0131 449 4175

Please send letters to the Blether Editor by e-mail to bpc-admin@balernochurch.org.uk or post to the Church Office at 2 Main Street, Balerno

Festivals of Light



'Diwali, a Festival of Lights originating on the Indian subcontinent, is a five-day Festival celebrated by millions of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains across the world. In some parts of the world, it is celebrated at harvest time and also coincides with New Year celebrations; it's a festival combining new beginnings, the spiritual power of good over evil, and the triumph of light over darkness and is mentioned in ancient Sanskrit texts. Homes are cleaned and decorated in advance of the Festival and lit with rows of oil lamps. The word Diwali comes from two Sanskrit words *dipa*, a light, or candle, - something that illuminates or gives knowledge - and *avali*, a row or line, hence the little lamps arranged in rows. The celebrations involve everyone dressing in their best clothes to attend family gatherings, enormous feasts – sweet things are especially important!



In our Western calendar, Diwali is celebrated around early November – the first of the great religious festivals; this year it was on 4th November. Next up in late November and early December is the Jewish festival of Chanukka, (Hanukka), the Festival of Lights or the Feast of Dedication. It celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem which was desecrated during the occupation of Jerusalem by the Greek army. A group of Jews called the Macabees rebuilt it and lit a celebratory lamp, representing the traditional eternal flame which burned continuously as a symbol of God's presence in the Temple, with the last of the precious oil. There was only enough for one night and one day - but miraculously the sacred oil lasted for eight nights and days, leading to the eight nights and days later celebrating the event. We can read in the New Testament (John 10, v22-23) that Jesus walked in Solomon's Porch (part of the Temple) and it was winter time ... so very possibly he was visiting the Holy Temple during the Feast of Dedication, perhaps celebrating the Festival with his family.



Hanukka is traditionally a family celebration centering round the evening ceremony of lighting the menorah, the nine branched candelabra – eight candles for the eight nights and days the lamp burned in the Temple, the ninth to light the others. Prayers are recited and traditional songs are sung and gifts are exchanged.

And in late December comes our own great Christian festival of Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ – the Son of God, a baby born into a family in humble circumstances. Heralded by a star, bringing light to the world at the darkest time of the year, bringing hope and salvation to all of us. And light forms an important part of Christmas, at the darkest time of the year. We light candles – in the Middle Ages, candles began to be used in churches in England to represent the Star of Bethlehem and the coming of Christ. Since the invention of electric light, we have had lights on our Christmas trees, but candles are still an important symbol of Christmas for us. A lit Christmas tree, a candle in the window, symbolise the starguiding the magi in Bethlehem.

CHRISTMAS IN SCOTLAND

The Reformation in Scotland in 1560, splitting from the Roman Catholic Church, discouraged church holidays and festivals, including Christmas, (Often known as Yule, harking back to even older traditions) and an Act of Parliament in 1640 followed by another in 1690 abolished it completely. It was felt that the more extravagant Roman Catholic traditions did not sit well with the more sober interpretation of the scriptures of the Calvinistic tradition. Christmas Day became a working day like any other, and largely remained so well into the 20th Century.

The first repeal came in 1712, after the 1707 Union of the Scottish and English Parliaments, although the Church of Scotland continued to discourage 'unseemly celebrations'.



Christmas Day was declared a Bank Holiday in Scotland in 1871, but did not become a public holiday until 1958 in Scotland, and Boxing Day only in 1974, and Christmas on the whole in Scotland was traditionally observed very quietly. Hogmanay was the main seasonal celebration – though of course without the religious focus of Christmas. It was quite common to attend church on Christmas Day as late as the 1950s and 60s and hear little, if anything, of the Christmas Message of Hope and Salvation that we associate with the story of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Few if any churches were decorated with Christmas trees, candles, or Advent wreaths and Nativity plays were a rarity - Christmas Day as a celebration of the coming of Christ into the world has not always been the joyful time that we associate it with today.

Advent online

a general sense of frustration amongst various members of the congregation, but most notably singers, who felt that Christmas would be depressing without some opportunity for the traditional celebrations through singing and listening.

The church choir had been recording themselves individually, singing hymns at home which were then compiled on a computer for inclusion in online services. Some of these had then been used by Richard Henderson as a soundtrack for sequences of local photographs which took people who were isolating virtually out and about.



It was not a big leap of imagination to adapt this model and produce a series of 25 short videos one of which could be revealed each day through the period of advent last year. A combination of about 60 individuals contributed to the final product either singing carols or reading from Advent material which was published by the Iona Community. It proved to be a success, not just for the participants, but also for many people in the congregation who enjoyed trying to work out whose voices were doing the readings as well as the off-beat and humorous way in which the Iona Community materials approached the narrative of the Christmas story.

story.

It was something which was an unexpected consequence of the pandemic and it was not anticipated that we would be doing it again; but we are. John Burnside has been prevailed upon to organise another series of short videos which will appear on the church website throughout Advent as they did last year. While the format is very similar, the content of the readings is almost completely new material which has been written for the project and which might help you to reflect on the world of the first Christmas. This year, the singing is provided by a variety of choral groups which are all based in the congregation and have been able to get together and sing in the same space. The readings are being done by members of the congregations of Balerno, Currie and Juniper Green who have been happy to join in the project.

Meet the Three Choirs of Advent Online

So who else is involved in **Advent Online**? First of all there are three choral groups. After a year of being unable to sing together because of the pandemic, Balerno Parish Church Choir were very happy to be able to get together again in the autumn and to be leading singing on Sunday mornings. As their Musical Director, Harry Thomson recently left to take up an appointment in the theatrical world the choir is relieved that Martin Petty has been able to resume his role as organist until a longer term replacement can be found. Last year the choir's contributions to Advent online were all recorded at home and so recording together has broken new ground. **The Choir** meets regularly and numbers some 15 singers across the full range bass to soprano,



photo - Richard Henderson

and it is well used to leading the congregation during services.

The five strong and only recently formed **Quintingle** ensemble Quintingle is a small harmony group and comprises 2 sopranos, 1 alto, 1 tenor and 1 bass. A recent collaboration between 5 busy people who find a challenge in getting together on a regular basis, they were persuaded to try to record some tracks for Advent Online. The members all have extensive singing experience in other choirs and on stage and were able to get together for one rehearsal before recording their tracks. The songs were chosen to add variety and enable the inclusion of some more modern music in the Advent Online experience. They perhaps represent a counterbalance to the contributions of One Bar Rest. It is quite possible that they might be persuaded to perform again, but



photo - Craig McBeth

their experience to date is in the recording of a 'Studio' album rather than a live 'gig'.

Finally the 14 man **One Bar Rest**, with musical roots in the Fishermens Friends, sea shanty, folk music tradition was formed about three years ago specifically to see whether the 'pub carol' tradition of Yorkshire could be transplanted to Balerno. Pub carols are just that; carols sung in pubs 'full-throated' and unaccompanied. The idea followed on from Coope Boyes and Simpson's 'Barwell Old Hark' from their Voices at the Door CD.

After you've heard 'Advent Online' you'll be asking for the Advent Online CD..... Write to Santa about that one.



The Church Choir

photo - Richard Henderson



As we head towards the end of our second Covid year (it seems so much longer) the Flower Fairies are ready to decorate the church for the Christmas season.

Those attending church in person may have noticed that the floral decorations are slightly smaller than they used to be. We hope that they are still adding a touch of colour to the building, but we have to accept that lavish displays of increasingly expensive blooms are best kept for special occasions and festivals.

We have never underestimated the pleasure that a small posy can give if we can take it to someone who is either happy or sad to show that the church family has them in their thoughts and prayers. With this in mind, if you know of anyone in the congregation who is in such need please tell the Minister, Kay Coul (the Pastoral Convenor) or your elder and we will try to arrange a delivery.

However, as with all things, there is a cost involved and we hope that the people who have regularly given money for flowers, maybe to mark a significant date, will continue to make a small donation to the fund or maybe new people would like to contribute to this part of church life. Please give any contribution either directly to a member of the flower committee or via the church office.



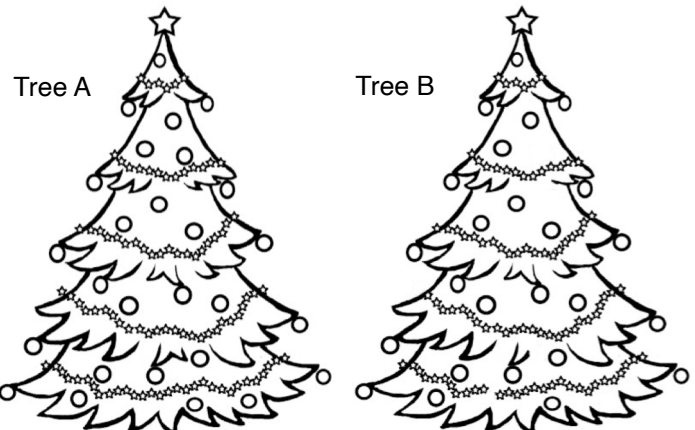
Happy Christmas from

Wendy and the Flower Fairies

Puzzle Column

Here's a couple of teasers.

First - Can you spot six differences between these two pictures?

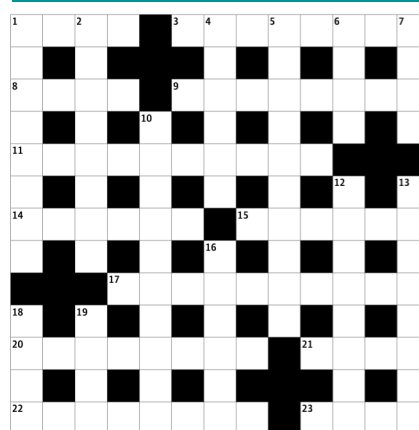


And Second - Can you beat the Blether Team and answer all these questions correctly?

1. How many doors are on an advent calendar?
2. How many reindeer does Santa have?
3. Where does Santa live?
4. What guided the 3 wise men to visit baby Jesus in Bethlehem?
5. Who says Ho! Ho! Ho!?
6. When is Christmas celebrated?
7. Who's in the manger in a Nativity play?
8. How many dwarves are there in the story and pantomime?
9. What's the place where Santa lives called in a shopping centre?
10. What's the day after Christmas Day called?
11. What's in a mince pie?
12. Which round green vegetable is part of Christmas Dinner?
13. Which vegetables do reindeers like?
14. Name three ingredients that go into trifle



Crossword Corner



November answers

I	N	D	E	F	A	T	I	G	A	B	L	E
O	A	L	C	D	A	E						
S	C	U	T	C	H	I	R	R	U	P	S	
T	U	O	N	E	S							
J	U	M	P	T	H	E	G	U	N			
R	O											
U	N	C	U	R	L							
E	N											
S	E	A										
C	H	E	R	U	B	I	C					
O	G	R										
R	E	M	O	T	E							
C	O	N	T	R	O	L						

Please tell us if you like the Crossword

Down

- 1 Most remote (8)
- 2 Old hat (8)
- 4 Proverbs (6)
- 5 Baggy trousers – slap on a ton (anag) (10)
- 6 Quiet time (4)
- 7 Former Archbishop of Cape Town (4)
- 10 Commiserate (10)
- 12 Addictive substance in tobacco (8)
- 13 Unfinished business (5,3)
- 16 Heroin, for instance (6)
- 18 Shoo! (4)
- 19 True __, film starring John Wayne (1969) and Jeff Bridges (2010) (4)

Across

- 1 Complete failure (4)
- 3 Tract (8)
- 8 Learning by mechanical repetition (4)
- 9 This is thrown down as a challenge (8)
- 11 This is Spinal Tap's kind of music (5,5)
- 14 Drowsy – dwarf (6)
- 15 Food fish, like a small tuna (6)
- 17 Awesome (10)
- 20 Leading Roman Catholic bishop (8)
- 21 Explosive device (4)
- 22 Ragged (8)
- 23 Action (4)

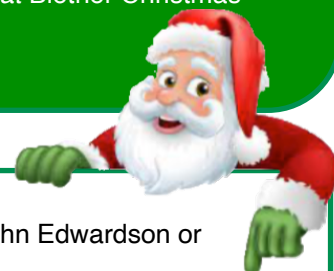


The Great Balerno Blether Christmas Brain Teaser!

Christmas is now within touching distance. You're sitting down quietly beside the fire. All the cards have been written, posted and delivered. The presents have been bought and wrapped. The letter to you know who lies on the mantelpiece, and it's still only early December. How are we going to fill our time between now and the Big Day, we ask ourselves?

Never mind; the Blether is here to help you while away the hours of idleness with The *Great* Blether Christmas Brain Teaser Quiz, and lots more besides.

Read on!



- 1 On which day and in which year was Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor?
- 2 Who invented the electric Christmas tree lights in 1882? (a) Edward Johnson, (b) John Edwardson or (c) Rev Johnsburn House?
- 3 What is the opening line to the famous Christmas song 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town'?
- 4 Which of the following did not feature on the list: a) Myrrh, b) Silver, c) Gold
- 5 On what day of the week does Advent commence?
- 6 Stars, needle, plate (flat), dendrite, column, lacy, and capped column are the six main types of what?
- 7 Sir Henry Cole is credited with introducing the world to which popular Christmas tradition in 1843?
- 8 Which two countries are first to celebrate New Year?
- 9 In the 12 Days of Christmas song, what are the lords doing?
- 10 On which saint is the legend of Santa Claus based?
- 11 Excluding the white candle sometimes placed in the centre, how many candles are traditionally placed on an Advent wreath?
- 12 What Christmas product incorporates a silver strip which features a compound called silver fulminate?
- 13 Which Christmas movie was based on a popular children's book written by Chris Van Allsburg in 1985?
- 14 In Scotland the celebration of Christmas was suppressed between 1640 and when? Was it 1666, 1686, 1706, 1746, or 1926?
- 15 Christmas Day was not a public holiday in Scotland until when; was it 1746, 1815, 1832, 1900, 1921, 1958, 1975 or 2000?
- 16 Stonehaven hosts one of Scotland's most spectacular New Year displays. Is it Haggis Hurling, the Loons Dook, Cutty Sarking, Fireball Swinging, the Mearns Bash or the Dunnottar Dive?
- 17 The Kirkwall Ba' is a silver sphere competed for annually on The Feast of St Stephen? True or false?
- 18 Redding is simply reading in the Doric tongue. True or false?
- 19 The Burning of the Clavie is a ceremony to mark the defeat of John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscout Dundee, by covenanting guerrillas at the battle of Drumclog in 1679. True or False?
- 20 The Loony Dook, marked annually on New Years Day at South Queensferry, commemorates a mythical bird reputedly seen only on New Year's Day on the Firth of Forth. True or False?
- 21 Balerno's soon to be rebuilt Green Bridge over the Bavelaw Burn at Malleny was originally a military installation? True or false?
- 22 A Bourach is a Scottish expression meaning (a) a speciality Scotch broth made with whisky (1 part whisky to 3 parts broth), (b) a breed of sheep similar to a Herdwick, (c) a muddle or disorganised mess, (d) a brain-teaser or (d) a refined 18thC dance based on the bouree.
- 23 Who composed the Lieutenant Kijé orchestral suite, for the 1934 film of the same name? Was it (a) Prokoviev, (b) Tchaikovsky, (c) Borodin, (d) Abramsky or (e) Khachaturian?
- 24 Which 1946 film, starring James Stewart and Donna Read, was based on Philip Van Doren Stern's 'The Greatest Gift'?
- 25 In which state in the US was Santa Claus banned in 2016?

Answers to quizzes in next issue!

Happy Christmas to all our readers!