

balerno



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

FREE

Blether



Issue no 44
Early Harvest



Smelling the coffee

So, this is it. The next few months present an unprecedented opportunity to shape the future of the churches of Currie and Balerno. There has been much talk and debate over the last three years about the implementation of the Church of Scotland's Radical Action Plan, but this is the point at which it ceases to be an academic discussion and 'Action' is required.

The first questions are who's going to take the action and what might that involve? It is an opportunity that our communities have been anticipating with a mixture of anticipation and dread - but mostly disinterest. Let's deal with the last one first.

The reality is that most people are not directly involved in the regular work and operation of the church. From that point of view, it is something that has always been conveniently there with its buildings and services available when required; it's a bit like a bus service in that nobody wants to have to drive the bus, but they want the service to be available when needed. If the bus service is changed, then people note the impact on life and make their views known - and frequently find out that there was an, often brief, consultation period which they had missed as it had somehow slipped under their radar.

Then there is the 'dread.' For many of those who have been the core church membership of recent decades, the prospect of radical change is unattractive. Regardless of the detail of one's religious belief, church provides a comfort zone; it is a place where regular members feel that they are at home. The church provides a heartening refuge in a world of turmoil and conflict and the prospect of radical change to it represents a threat to the reassurance which it presents.

Finally, we have the 'anticipation' of the people who recognised a certain inevitability of the linkage and union with Currie some time ago. Many of them have perhaps felt that the comfort zone which was enjoyed by others was in danger of becoming a dangerous and deepening rut and have been impatient to start progressing the necessary changes to move towards union.

So, what are the necessary changes? The minimalist option is to simply consider the merging of the governance of the congregations of Currie and Balerno into one Kirk Session, but, while that might be significant for the management of the churches, it is of little relevance to the community who are not generally involved. In some senses, that would be a case of simply rearranging the old furniture at a time when we should perhaps be looking for something more contemporary.

But, what would be contemporary? Would that be having more variety in worship - changing the time of worship - having more modern music - increasing outreach to the community - providing more social support - providing hospitality to the people of the parish?

A lot of time has been spent trying to define the 'mission' of the church, but there can be little doubt that the perceived relevance of any church in its community is largely defined by the impact of its contribution to the community. There will be some significant choices to be made in the near future with questions such as:

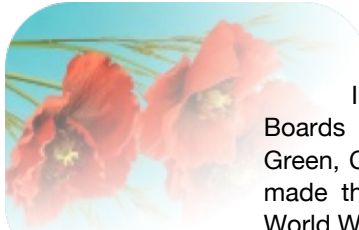
- Do we keep our existing service times?
- Should worship always be led by the minister?
- Can, and if so, should we retain all our existing buildings?
- Are we a church that is prepared to try new ways of doing things?
- What do our communities need from us?
- What is our youth policy?
- What is our strategy for succession planning?

It is evident that the Church of Scotland does not have a clear model regarding how congregations in our position should move forward and so we need to start clarifying our ideas about how our church should make the best use of its resources to maintain a positive role in both the secular and sacred lives of our communities.



A Journey of Remembrance - June 2025

Bill Brown



In Currie Kirk there are Memorial Boards to those from the Juniper Green, Currie and Balerno parishes who made the ultimate sacrifice in the two World Wars.

Bill Wood (Currie Kirk) and Malcolm Fergusson (Balerno Church) had previously carried out valuable research on the Boards but it was felt that more could be done.

Diane Brown and John McCauley thought that rather than just names on a board they could build a pen picture of each casualty. Extensive research was carried out identifying the home addresses of the casualties, their family backgrounds and who had been left behind to mourn their loss. As a result, Memorial Books containing all relevant and available information for each casualty were created and are now available in the Link Building of Currie Kirk.

The War dead from the parishes are commemorated not just in Currie Kirk but are buried or commemorated around the World including France, Belgium, Italy, India, Greece, Tunisia, Germany, Israel, Bangladesh, Singapore China, Holland, Egypt, and the UK including Currie which just confirms the global nature of the conflicts. Of the 80 WW1 casualties only 34 have known graves. The others are commemorated on Memorials, large and small around the world.

To continue the research it was decided to try and visit the final resting places or Memorial sites of our casualties and while it is highly unlikely that we will manage to visit all of them, Diane and I headed to France and the Somme the site of one of the most infamous battles of WW1. The idea was to stand briefly at each grave or Memorial to honour their sacrifice.

Our base for the week was a gite on Nobiscourt Farm, Roisel just outside Peronne. The Somme, notorious in British Army history was one of the main battlegrounds of the first war. There is so much unexploded ordinance from that conflict still buried in the fields, that farm workers are still killed and injured annually having inadvertently disturbed a decaying shell, mortar bomb or grenade. Most farmers mark the locus and call the bomb disposal. At Nobiscourt, earlier this year, Marc Leroy snagged a significant piece of WW1 ordinance breaking his plough but thankfully nothing else. Diane's grandfather served with the Royal Artillery and in 1917 was based near Nobiscourt so may well have been responsible for some of the ordinance uncovered annually at the farm.

In World War 1 more than 50% of casualties have no known grave. Thousands of unidentified casualties are buried with the epitaph 'Known Unto God'. As already mentioned our WW1 casualties are no different with only 34 having a marked grave.

On our first day on the Somme we began our pilgrimage at Thiepval Memorial. At 7.30am on the 1st July, 1916, the Battle of the Somme began. It would arguably be the worst day in the history of the British Army. They suffered 57,000 casualties with almost 20,000 dead on day 1 alone. The battle raged on for over 4 months with casualties buried, blown up and buried again as the two sides fought back and forth over the same ground. By the end, over 70,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers never came home and have no known

grave. Their names, including 9 from our parishes are engraved on the huge Thiepval Memorial to Missing. The Memorial was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and was opened in August, 1932. It reminds me of a building made with Lego bricks. It towers over the battlefield and can be seen for miles.

We identified each name on the respective panels of the huge Memorial and stood in silent contemplation. John Cassidy; George Downie; Joseph Godley; Frederick Lewis; Frank

McCue; Robert Murray; Thomas Shankie; Alexander Smart; Peter Swan. From Thiepval we travelled to Warlincourt Halte Cemetery and stood at the grave of Andrew Fraser.

At Doullens Communal Cemetery, Frank Byrne.

Our final stop on day 1 was the Arras Memorial to honour Robert Davidson; Arthur McGuigan; Peter M. Stuart; Robert Traill; John Williamson.

On day 2 we headed to Bray Military Cemetery where Kenneth D. Thompson is buried and then to Danzig Alley British Cemetery, Mametz for the grave of John Stewart, Royal Engineers. Sapper Stewart is buried side by

side with 8 other Royal Engineers all killed on the same day.

Day 3 saw visits to Tincourt New British Cemetery and Vaulx Hill Cemetery. Tincourt is the resting place of Archibald Moffat amongst almost 2000 graves from WW1. Among them are 136 US soldiers, 151 German soldiers and 58 members of the Chinese Labour Corps. Although not used in the fighting that didn't mean they wouldn't be fired upon by the enemy. Large numbers also died from Cholera and flu outbreaks and poor treatment by their British and French employers.

Vaulx Hill is where William Knox is buried. Knox was a member of the Tank Corps. Interestingly he is buried next to Lieutenant Sewel VC also of the Tank Corps. They died on the same day and the citation for Sewel states that he was killed trying to save a wounded member of his crew. It is not too much of a stretch to assume that Knox was that crewman.

While World War 1 history has become something of a passion since my first visit to France and Flanders back in 1999 it is often a battering on the senses so day 4 was a day off.

Part 2 of this article will appear in the October Blether.

The names of several of those mentioned above are remembered not only on the memorial tablet at Balerno Parish Church but also in some of the street names of Balerno in the Kingfisher Park and Ravelrig Heights areas. Some of their own stories are also inscribed on plaques Cassidy Wynd and Somerville Road, installed by CALA at the request of Balerno Community Council. The Community Council also publish a leaflet giving further information. Details on their website.



Information flash!

In response to demand that there should be some access to Sunday worship for those who are unable to attend there has been an overhaul and upgrading of the AV equipment in the church over the last few months. After having experienced some teething problems, this upgrade should now mean that improved recordings of Sunday Services will be regularly accessible on the church website.

Sale of churches - legal rights and moral duties colliding

Recent press interest in disposal of property by the Church of Scotland brings into the spotlight the governance of the Church, the relationship of the Church to its congregations, and the Church's responsibility both for the cultural heritage of the nation and for the development of its communities.

The property of the Church of Scotland is vested in the General Trustees who hold something in the order of 4,000 ecclesiastical buildings and 12,500 acres of land. That total included something over 1300 churches, 200 church halls, and 840 odd manse as of April 2016. It also holds the largest collection of Listed Buildings in Scotland.

For a variety of reasons the Church has found it useful to dispose of some of that property in order both to deliver its radical Action Plan and to live within its means while catering for a shrinking membership.

The current debate shot into the spotlight in a Scotsman article on 13th August entitled '*Church sales row intensifies with communities given weeks to bid*', and it is being continued across the Letters page and in some follow up articles. The row arises from the claim both that communities are being overlooked to the highest bidder, and possibly more importantly that they do not have sufficient notice to be able to organise and mount their own bids. Reports suggest that timetable difficulties have hindered community bids at for example Monimail, Portnahaven and North Farr. Even before the Scotsman article the issue was rumbling around, reaching the Spectator magazine in late 2024.

If that is the case then a consequence is that, potentially, properties which are important to communities whether for historical, religious, social or cultural reasons are lost from public access. Many such buildings may well continue to be a feature of the landscape, but they will no longer be available in the communities which in many cases will have funded their construction and maintenance.

The Church of Scotland itself has said that 'The built religious heritage of the Church is significant in terms of the proportion of significant heritage assets that it represents but also its geographical spread. It is especially significant because these are heritage assets that have been in public use for a very long time, often for centuries. These are buildings that feature in the lives of many of Scotland's' citizens in terms of both religious observance but also life events. These buildings tell the story of the people of Scotland. They often contain features of the highest quality reflecting the creative skills of both past and current craftsmanship. They sit in the heart of communities and increasingly provide the only public space, particularly in rural areas. They are places of community gathering and activity. In addition to regular worship and life events, they offer a space for regular social activities, together with more sensitive uses such as support for drug and alcohol abuse, and practical help such as foodbanks, many of which are set up and run by church volunteers.'

(3 Feb 2025 - submission by General Trustees to the 'Protecting Built Heritage inquiry' UK Parliament Culture Media and Sport Ctte)

A considerable proportion of the Church's heritable property has been accumulated over the centuries. The buildings were primarily built using funds from congregations, the Church of Scotland's own property holdings, donations from parishioners, and historically from the Catholic Church. Rich merchants and landowners funded collegiate churches, endowed new parishes, and made lavish additions like tombs and stained glass, viewing it as a way to demonstrate status and secure their place in heaven. After the Reformation, the Royal Burghs also applied church revenues to maintain and build new ecclesiastical structures, although the



income from existing properties was often insufficient, requiring further funding from merchants and other sources.

The Musselburgh Congregational Church, built in 1801, is said to be the earliest example of a church built in Scotland using only congregational funds, with the local congregation purchasing the land and using materials from the nearby beach. Other churches, like those of the Free Church of

Scotland formed after the 1843 Disruption, also relied on congregational generosity, but for a broader movement rather than a single building.

The result is that a considerable number of the 1360+ Church of Scotland churches - may be fewer now with the commencement of the selling off process - were built with the funding of the community. And those properties are now used far beyond the immediate purposes of their congregations. It may be an exaggeration to suggest that government, national or local, relies on the Church of Scotland to provide community centres, although the Church does operate some community facilities and its buildings are in many cases central to community life.

The Church of Scotland itself holds that 'Built heritage is fundamental to a sense of place. Listed buildings are key landmarks within a community or landscape. The church is often foremost in that identity of local community even to those who are not regular church goers.'

The row over the current sales of Churches and associated property circulates around a number of issues, but certainly the importance of any church both as a building and as a potential centre of that community is an important facet.

Does the Church have to take notice of the row? It would be wise for the Church to take note and consider whether anything may be done. It is unlikely to be sufficient to point simply to the Community Right to Buy, which gives eligible community bodies the first option to purchase land or buildings when they are put up for sale. Communities can register an interest and when they receive Scottish Ministers' consent, they can have a pre-emptive right to buy, ensuring they can secure the property for their community's sustainable development, if it is to be sold.

Community Right to Buy does apparently apply to Church property, but such an approach does suggest something more in the nature of a truly arms length relationship between Church and congregation, or Church and Community. To be effective, the community or congregation would require to start planning early and have structures and processes in place to be able to respond as soon as the For Sale notices go up. Things could be begin to resemble more of an armed camp.

A better approach could be for the Church to consider the opportunities for retaining trust between itself and congregations by revisiting its own current internal rules relating to disposals of property. One might expect the General Assembly to be already turning its collective mind to possible resolutions. Whatever those might be the row itself does not show signs of fizzling out and could well become more highly charged as the impact of church closures extends.

It would seem therefore that resolution will involve some movement probably by both the Church and the General Trustees modifying their policies and relevant legislation on disposals. Any such policy change might be expected to be accompanied by a period of consultation, including with the wider membership of the Church.

WHOSE CHURCH IS IT ANYWAY?

from the Blether team



The sale of church buildings has recently commanded the attention of the national press where it has been reported that that Board of Trustees of the Church of Scotland has been selling off property with what is described as inappropriate speed.

The General Trustees are seeking to divest the Church of Scotland of property which has been deemed surplus to requirements. In some cases, this can be because the property in question is uneconomical for the church to maintain or it can be because there is no longer a viable congregation which can generate the income to sustain the building.

It is a regrettable feature of life in the 21st century that the evolution of the spreadsheet appears to have led to an increase in reliance on metrics as an indicator of performance. How big is the congregation on a Sunday? How much is the congregation's income? Is that really the only yardstick with which to measure the viability of church buildings? In terms of management of church affairs, balance sheets cannot be ignored, but at the same time it would be counter-productive if we were to lose sight of the church's main purpose.

Church buildings are not generally in communities because of some long-term strategic plan by church hierarchy. Most of them exist because the people of the parish wanted them; they gathered the money to build them and then forked out from their own pockets over the years for the repairs and maintenance – frequently, in recent years, with financial support from the church offices.

The buildings which were the product of this enterprise became a gift to the communities which they served. One could go so far as to argue that they were a practical example of the unconditional nature of the love of God. Churches were built in the expectation that people could use them as a base to promote the gospel – from the focal point which they provided to their community.

It makes for very uncomfortable reading to discover that there are communities which would like to be able to retain their church buildings even although the Church of Scotland might find them uneconomical, but it should not be surprising to anyone that there are communities for whom the criteria for the closure of a church building contrasts sharply with those of the General Trustees.

The central point at issue is perhaps the tension between the legal ownership of church buildings and the moral ownership of the local population for whom the church was intended to serve and without whose past efforts there would be no asset for the General Trustees.

The Church of Scotland is by no means the only organisation in the land which is suffering from volunteer fatigue. There are fewer under 60's who find that the traditional ways of the operation of the church fit into their lifestyle. That does not mean that they have no spiritual interest or that they are disinterested in the positive contribution that the resource of a church campus can bring to their community.

If ministry needs to change to keep up with a changing society, perhaps there is a case for the introduction of some innovative and more flexible form of governance whereby neither the church nor the community need lose out. There needs to be some trust placed in the future generations to continue to bring communities together in what has been - and will always be - God's house.

The Church has a moral duty at the least to ensure that communities have a realistic opportunity to retain what they have already paid for. But this ought not to be a process of removing assets from a community at all. Rather it should be one of enhancing communities by encouraging them to build for the future using what are, morally, even if not legally, their own assets.

Balerno Fairtrade Village Group Update - August 2025

With autumn already booking up, some Fairtrade (FT) dates for all our diaries, and some important recent news too.

- 1 At 7.15pm on Monday September 1st Balerno Fairtrade Village Group (BFTVG) and other local Fairtrade (FT) Supporters would love you to be part of a meeting in the Ogston Hall. We're aiming for a hearty re-shape then of how FT runs locally, with you and your new ideas so welcome!
- 2 You know already that our annual FT Morning in Balerno Parish Church Halls still happens in Spring mostly because that's when the ever-popular FT Art Competition best suits Balerno's Schools. Even this far ahead, please reserve Saturday March 7th 2026, and watch out for more details.
- 3 UK-wide, Fairtrade Fortnight has moved, this year to 22 September – 5 October, and Balerno wants to mark that too. Again, local dates mean a slight tweak, so please support the Fairtrade stall at the Farmers' Market on the nearest Saturday, October 11th.
- 4 The reminder to support Fairtrade year-round, by coffeing at the great FT-supporting Mill Café right here at BPC, and buying FT goods whenever we can, comes this time with the following particularly serious and urgent extra plea.

The Church of Scotland's Assembly Trustees and the Council of Palcrafts/Hadeel issued on 25 June 2025 a joint statement, following an earlier decision by the Church to terminate Hadeel's lease of the shop premises at 123 George Street. 25 June's statement welcomed an agreement in principle reached to extend the lease, they hoped allowing 'Palcraft/Hadeel time to identify suitable alternative premises whilst giving the Church an uplift in the rent, albeit still significantly below market rates.'

'The Church has reiterated its commitment to support for Palcraft/Hadeel as part of its longstanding commitment to justice and peace in Palestine, and will offer whatever practical assistance is possible during this phase, as well as longer term financial support through available restricted funds.'

Can Balerno Church Members, FT Supporters and others help at all here, and if so, how best? Many will care greatly about this unenviable situation. Hadeel have of course already been offered a stall at the Balerno 07.03.26 FT Morning. As more locally, shopping at Hadeel whenever we can matters more than ever. So does letting Hadeel know of our support. Are we missing anything else?



do you have a minute, Lord?



Why are we all so competitive? It seems to be human nature to pursue comparatives and superlatives better and best or bigger and biggest. Many of us seem to be reluctant to accept what we have and be content with our lot. I suppose that the human race would still be living in caves without such ambition, but we are getting to the point where our ambition seems to be becoming increasingly dangerous.

There is some ambition which can bring enjoyment and frustration to everyone because it is transparent. The ambition of competitors in athletics or sports is something that we can admire and even wonder at because of the dedication displayed in order to get to a winners' podium.

Then there is the ambition which can be shown in people to seek advancement in their work and which leads to the accumulation of an increasing amount of responsibility and financial reward – but this sort of ambition can often be tainted by the manner in which the ambition becomes evident if people seek to play down the role of their colleagues in order to gain preferment.

And then there is the ambition of those who are in 'public life.' The day when most of the people who went into politics were motivated by a simple ambition to improve the life of the population seems to have gone as we see the proliferation of conflict and aggression both between and within nations because of the personal ambition of political leaders, some of whom seem to think that they are in some way promoting your teaching.

The parable of the talents encourages us to make the most of what we have and to promote the idea that we should have some ambition but perhaps we need some help to think a little more carefully - and honestly - about our motives.

Approaching a bicentenary

Balerno Parish Church dates back as an independent congregation to 1826, so next year will mark a bicentenary; but that's for another issue of the Blether. In 1826 the inhabitants of Balerno decided to set up their own church.

The history of the Church of Scotland in the early 19thC, was, as it had been throughout the 18thC, somewhat tortured with secession, dissension, Burghers and anti-Burghers; you name it, it was there. Balerno is estimated to have had a population of only around 500 in 1750, and by 1841 its population was still only 676, made up of 363 men and 313 women. Balerno lay within Currie Parish, which is reputed to be medieval in origin with the earliest record referring to the 'church at Kinleith', dating back to around 1296. Records of Currie's boundaries show it extended up to Buteland at the western side of modern Balerno.

The leaders of the Church of Scotland were reluctant to upset the *status quo*, however. Establishing a new parish would have offended powerful interests, and the Balerno request was turned down. Remember that the Church of Scotland was heading, wittingly or otherwise at that time, towards the Disruption, a mere seventeen years later in 1843. So the Balerno group turned to the independent Presbyterian church of the United Secession. "Seceder" churches were independent of local patronage, giving the congregation the freedom to select their own minister rather than have one imposed by the local land owner; but it also meant that they had to be self supporting financially. The Balerno group were unlikely to be wealthy being comprised of tenant farmers, labourers, mill workers, tradesmen and shopkeepers. Setting up your own church would have been a massive undertaking for a community of less than 700. Together, however, they managed to build what we now know as St Joseph's, along with the manse which continued as such until the 1990's before being replaced by the current manse. St Joseph's was the name which the building acquired while it was the Roman Catholic Chapel for a hundred plus years from the 1880's. until 2007.

Whether the pressure to build a church in Balerno stemmed from difficulties in access between the two communities is not clear, although it is unlikely given the distances people were expected to walk to church at the time. The Kirk Road over the Pentlands is named after its historical use by some local farmers and residents in the Logal and Bavelaw valleys to travel across the hills to attend church services in Currie. More likely there was a seceder tendency amongst the Balerno group, and in 1827 the United Original Secession Church was formed through a union of Scottish Seceder groups.

The Disruption came and went and the Church is still here, in Balerno, literally and figuratively at its heart.

The rest as they say is history, and the best place to read that is in Balerno Parish Church 1826-2016 (Maciver and Burt).

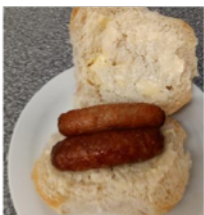
1826 - 2026



**Come and visit The Mill Café at the St Joseph's Centre.
Open Tuesday to Friday,
9.00am to 2.00pm.**

**(and the 2nd Saturday of the month
when the Farmers' Market is on)**

There is something for everyone at the Mill Café. A warm welcome awaits families, walkers, locals – in other words, the whole community. It is bright and spacious and the food is fantastic. You will find good quality coffee, freshly-baked scones, cakes and much more besides. Try it once and we guarantee you'll be back.



Why not try the new items on the menu, a scrumptious roll and sausage and/or a delicious fruit scone with jam and clotted cream?

Every day we have two varieties soup, lovingly made by our Mill volunteers and staff. Or try our baked potatoes, toasted sandwiches or paninis, with a variety of tasty fillings to choose from.

We use Fairtrade products wherever possible.

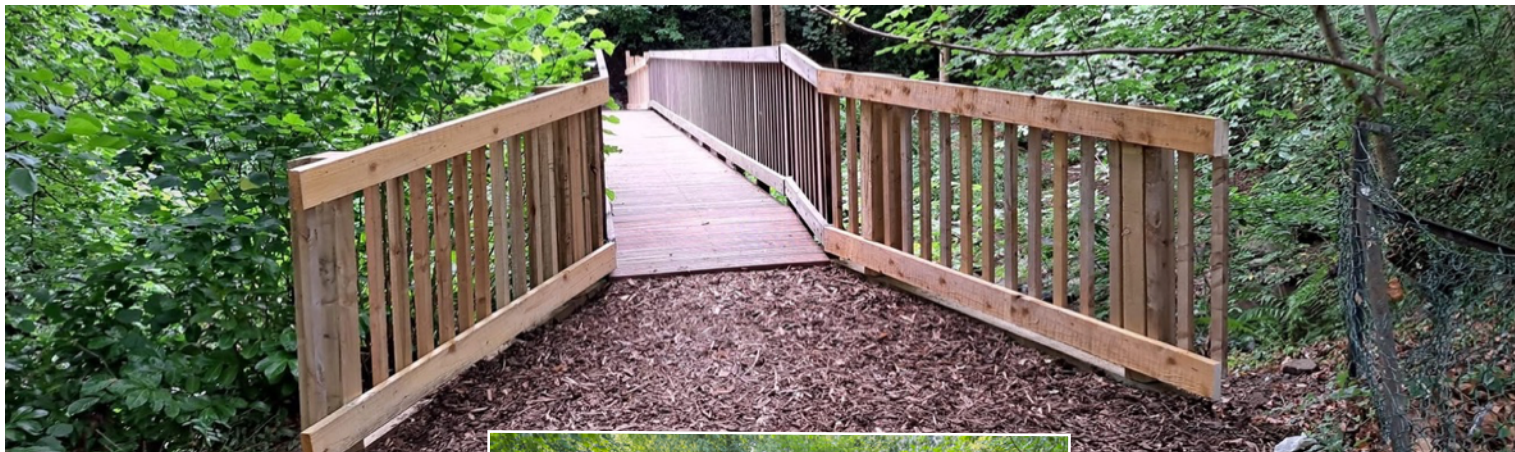
The Mill Café, St Joseph's Centre, 2 Main Street, Balerno EH14 9EH



for a
long
cool
drink!

So what's going on elsewhere in Balerno?

News in brief from Balerno Community Council



Balerno Community Council meets at 7.00pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Community Centre on Main Street. Meetings are all open to the public.

At its August meeting the Council dealt with a range of subjects and heard from local residents on topics including traffic speed volume in the Marchbank area, and a wish to improve the appearance and condition of the roundabout at the entrance to Main Street.

St Mungo's Gateway Project – St Mungo's Church have been a presence in the Balerno area for nearly 170 years, and Rev Ollie Clegg confirmed to Balerno Community Council (BCC) that St Mungo's are considering applying for planning permission to build a church on land bequeathed to them in 1942 opposite Balerno High School.

Ollie told the August meeting of BCC that their Gateway Project was at a concept design stage and that locals may have seen workmen on the site in early August doing tests to determine where best to site the building.

A transport consultant has been engaged to look both at access given that the site has only one entrance and exit, and also at parking issues.

Outline plans include a sanctuary for 400, around five separate rooms and offices for staff and it is proposed that the church should both continue to provide counselling services and should also be able to act as a community hub.

The church building might cover around one-third of the field which would be landscaped.

Ollie added that an average of 220 attend services at the current location in Balerno High School but attendances vary between 180 and 350. Christmas events can draw a bigger congregation and of those attending between 60 and 70 per cent are from the local area and 30 per cent from out-with Balerno.

St Mungo's use a school in Livingston for services there and the intention is to be able to bring both groups together in Balerno under one roof from time to time.

Preliminary planning talks are, he said, underway with City of Edinburgh Council planners and he stressed that the church is fully aware that the site is in a conservation area.

A decision on whether to go ahead with the project is, likely to be taken in the Spring of 2026.

By way of background, St Mungo's Church in Balerno was originally established as a school in the early 19th century and it



later became an Episcopal church, sharing the name with the patron saint of Glasgow. The existing Church was built in 1869 and is a listed building.

Local Place Plan - The Community Council is taking forward plans to develop a Local Place Plan for Balerno. This would set out how the Balerno community sees its future development in the context of Edinburgh Council's CityPlan 2030. The plan preparation will likely

involve the Community Council seeking local opinion including at the monthly Farmers Market.

Christmas lights: Balerno Community Council will, once again, light up Balerno at Christmas with a Christmas Tree in Main Street and hopefully lights around Market Square. The light arrays are being checked and contact is being made with Dean Park Primary School Choir and with the Balerno and District Schools Pipe Band. Dates will be confirmed shortly.

Green Bridge: BCC heard that the Green Bridge project is now almost complete, with only some minor work still to be carried out on the approach ramps. Importantly, the bridge is now open for pedestrians. At this stage no official opening is planned but talks are under way regarding the possible provision of benches and the reinstatement of paths on both the west and the east sides of the burn.

Balerno Police Station update: Balerno Village Trust advised the Council on progress towards acquisition of the former police station building from Police Scotland.

Plans to convert the building feature meeting spaces, a workshop and an after-school club have been lodged with the City of Edinburgh Council and details are on planning applications dated July 21, 2025. Changes to the building fabric proposed include maintenance work to the roof, improvements to toilet provision and changes to signage at the building.

Good Neighbour Agreement with Tarmac The Community Council are also in touch with Tarmac, operators of Ravelrig Quarry, about entering into a Good Neighbour Agreement which would involve establishing a Community Liaison Group involving local residents.



I see the church down the road is to call a new minister

Is that a sort of delayed baptism?

No, they don't have a minister at present and so they set up a short list of candidates from which to choose

Surely, whoever they choose must already have a name?

Of course they will

So why does this person need another one?

Stupid! – Calling is simply the term the church uses!

OK, just teasing! Who's going to compile this list then?

The congregation vote for people to go on a Nominating Committee, who interview the candidates, listen to them preaching, until they have a Short List.

Will there be only one person on the short list?

Not necessarily – sometimes three or more

So how will they know which one is being called?

The nominating committee chooses the one they prefer and then recommends them to the congregation

And then what happens?

The congregation takes a vote

Like an election you mean?

Well... yes. Like an election!

But

Don't say it

The Treasurer's Thumb disappointment upon disappointment

'Thumb! Thumb! Where have you got to now?'

'Right here sir, same as ever, end of the arm: I know my place.'

And for that I received The Look. You know what it's like; a focussed frown; a 'why am I surrounded by fools and idiots?' look coupled with acute disappointment, and one senses almost a desire to have a replacement. Time to tread carefully.

Now I know that the thumb on the left hand *sinistro pollice* will be bound to be looked at with suspicion. I mean it's in the name isn't it? Sinister. Life is not fair, for I speak of course as the self-same digit. But disappointment in one's thumb is, or must be - how should I know? - a very disappointing characteristic. Although it is one which I have, again disappointingly, come to expect especially over the past seven or so years since the greenhouse incident. But suddenly it's cold in here and we're not going back there again.

'You know, Thumb' - well no, not until you tell me, muttered *molto, molto tranquillamente* for obvious reasons - 'I have just returned from a most invigorating sojourn in foreign parts', he continues, to my surprise. This is a disarmingly candid revelation from the Treasurer who now gazes wistfully past the seemingly perpetual traffic lights outside his favourite coffee house. 'And the coffee was really pretty well top notch. Indeed Das Mühlencafe, which became my local' - in case I didn't know, even though I'd been there throughout - 'almost achieved the standards of our current location...'

This encomium has clearly exhausted his emotional reserves, and is followed seamlessly by a deep, reflective and almost unendurably painful sigh. Himself does not want of course to be heard to even hint that any other coffee stop could possibly achieve, far less, horror of horrors, surpass the standards to which he is accustomed. And while in some cases it might be, as the old Duke said, a dashed close run thing, it is unlikely ever to happen, given not only the quality of our current location's wide selection of brews (details on FaceBook page) (*no ads please - Ed*), but also... well he did say something at some point about fellowship or maybe it was simply odd fellows or tall ships. Of course I have no view on coffee except that it keeps himself in affable mood and therefore is 'ane guid thing.'

'Yes I know' I respond, 'I was there' - in danger of losing it slightly - 'you know I was there. I can't ph -ys- ic - al - ly be anywhere else.' Now, spelling it out in this way might well have sounded a trifle abrupt, but himself presses on. 'The only blot was when the dog started barking on the train on the way home.' 'No, no sir!' Servility can be useful if trying to recover from a *faux pas*. 'You're mistaken, that's a story from your *alter ego*, you know, Woof, woof!'

'Now look here, Thumb. One of us may be barking mad, but I know it isn't me.'

Fortunately I managed to retreat to pocket before disputing himself's conclusion; definitely to be avoided. It was going to be one of those days.

WOOF Good day to you my faithful followers !

and hello my friends after our summer break – a break during which I was 'walked' to the point of exhaustion, often in temperatures reaching 30 degrees. I was dragged up and down mountains (to everybody else's pleasure) without any consideration for me needing to stop, sniff and leave my mark. What opportunities I did get certainly weren't exciting and likely belonged to animals much bigger than me.

On the return journey, we changed trains at Zurich (do you remember last year when I mentioned about people with gnomes in their gardens? – well this was the place they all originate from) although needless to say, I didn't meet any. A café stop brought refreshments from a friendly waiter who spoke good English and gave me what looked like a sausage roll – I didn't know there was a Greggs in Zurich!

Our train was huge – double decked – a bit like a 44 bus but on rails – we had seats upstairs. Everyone said how comfortable it was – except for yours truly who had to lie on the floor. This train travelled at 320 kms per hour, and I can tell you, I felt decidedly seasick. (Yes, I know you can't be seasick on land) However, I digress, my attention was drawn to a head – similar to mine – peeping out from under a seat further along the carriage. Could this be a classy French doggie – I was certainly 'getting the eye'. My lead was tied around a seat so I was unable to investigate further. My little doggie heart was pounding – could this be a wonderful end to my journey? – would we meet again!

Soon we would be reaching our destination and so emergency measures were called for. I began to bark, much to the annoyance of several other passengers but at least I was taken a short walk into the next carriage. We passed by the other dog – a boy doggie who also barked, causing 'dad' who held my lead to ask the dog's name. Tell me please – why is it that I never get any luck – his name was Eddie who lived in Milton Keynes and was also returning from holiday. It really takes the biscuit (pardon the pun) when the most memorable part of one's holiday was consuming a sausage roll in a station café. Where do I go wrong?

Till the next time, see you soon,



My Journey with Project Trust to Honduras

Georgina Graham is this year's recipient of Balerno Parish Church's Louise Duncan Memorial Travel Bursary.

Commemorating the life and work of former minister, Louise Duncan, the bursary provides £500 to a young adult aged 17 to 25 (inclusive), living in or near Balerno, to help meet the cost of travelling out of Scotland to take part in voluntary work which has aims to benefit disadvantaged communities. Here Georgina tells us about how she will be spending the coming year.

Georgina, who lives locally, left Balerno High School this year and intends taking up an equine science degree. Before doing that, she will be going to Honduras with Project Trust. The bursary award is thus fulfilling its remit by assisting a volunteer to travel outside Scotland to the benefit of people living in less advantaged circumstances.

Georgina tells us more about her experience so far.

I'm really excited to share my journey so far with Project Trust as I'm getting ready to spend 12 months teaching in Honduras. Even before leaving the UK, I've already learned so much through the application, selection, training, and fundraising processes, which have all been amazing.

I heard about Project Trust when there was a presentation at school about it. When I applied in S5, I didn't really know what to expect, I just thought "why not?" and went for it. Selection took place online over two days, with activities like icebreakers, group discussions, doing a 10 minute presentation, and teaching a short lesson. I taught mine on ergonomics using my guitar. It was actually a lot of fun and helped me gain confidence in teaching and working with others.

Soon after, I was assigned a mentor who is a returned volunteer who has been so supportive and understanding. Later, I travelled to the Isle of Coll for in-person training. The ferry ride was beautiful (we even saw dolphins!) and training was packed with lessons on teaching techniques,



safeguarding, cultural awareness, and health. It also gave me the chance to meet my project partner Sarah, as well as the rest of the Honduras group, who are all lovely. We all share the mindset that this experience is what we make of it, and we're determined to get the most out of it.

I'll be based in Yamaranguila, a small, welcoming town in the mountainous west of Honduras, teaching mostly English (as well as some maths and other subjects) to primary-aged children at a Christian school where most pupils are on scholarships. The community values teachers highly, and we've been encouraged to get involved as much as possible. I'm even hoping to set up a little dance class for the children! The town is cooler than other parts of

Honduras because of the altitude, which is higher above sea level than the top of Ben Nevis!

The thing Project Trust made clear is that this isn't about "saving the world", it's a mutual experience. The community benefits from what we bring, but we also grow and learn so much in return, becoming more resilient, confident, and understanding of other cultures.

The next step now is saying goodbye, which will be the hardest part, but I'm ready to make the most of this incredible opportunity.

I'll be sharing updates while I'm away on Instagram at @georgina.in.honduras, and you can also follow @projecttrust for more.

**For Georgina's full report see Church Website
Hard copies available in the Mill**

Project Trust website for more general information (no login required) <https://projecttrust.org.uk/>



Barre Fusion

Barre with a twist!

Elements of Ballet & Yoga. Cardio Bursts! Strength Work

Bring a mat & water 1-2kg hand weights (if you prefer your own)

£7 per class First Class Free

Fridays @ 9:15am in the Ogston Hall, Balerno Parish Church

Drop in or Pre-book your space at www.bookwhen.com/heidimacdonaldfitness

Heidi: (m) 07982205111 (e) heidimacdonaldfitness@gmail.com

Barre Fusion is a low impact strength workout that enhances your muscle tone, posture, flexibility and confidence in a class that blends ballet and dance.

Why not give it a go!

The PALM cafe

The PALM cafe is held on the last Tuesday of the month (except July) from 3.00-4.30pm in the St Joseph's Centre, Balerno. The cafe is for people living with dementia and their carers. We serve the communities of Currie, Balerno and Juniper Green.

The cafe provides a place to relax and enjoy companionship share information and take part in activities including music, reminiscence and craft.

For more information please contact palmcafebalerno@gmail.com or telephone **07711046014**

(please leave a message and we will get back to you).



Theology on tap

What is it? Well first off it looks like a good reason for visiting somewhere other than the church campus to engage in discussion, debate and what have you in the relaxed atmosphere of a hostelry. And that's really all it is.

The truth is it can be whatever you want it to be, but if we are 'looking for a refreshing way to engage your parishioners and reach out to young adults' as it says on some websites then at the least it's an idea worth looking at. Again as the websites say 'Theology on Tap offers a unique opportunity to bring faith, fellowship, and fun together in a relaxed and inviting atmosphere. Take advantage of venues that youth in the parish already love — such as a local bar or pub, a favorite beach, or the best coffee shop in town — to invite them to join you in talking about their faith and how they live it in our modern world.'

'Why wait?' runs the website blurb, 'Give your parishioners the chance to partake in authentic conversations, build meaningful relationships, and experience the joy of community with Theology on Tap.'

Actually it sounds very like One Bar Rest but don't tell anyone.....



Look out for One Bar Rest and Friends November extravaganza - as at August 14th still waiting a naming ceremony - come on lads! your public wants to now now! Further details in the October issue!

What did you just say?

Sometimes you may hear something and you might think 'did I pick that up right?' Of course it can go with hearing impairment but also possibly with a certain inattention. But for whatever reason you may say to yourself; 'Did he really say that?' Sometimes it might be something you wish you'd heard and sometimes it may be just the opposite.

So if you heard a voice say

Whoever drinks Beer he is quick to sleep

Whoever sleeps long does not sin

Whoever does not sin enters heaven.

So let us drink beer.

you might think what was that? But if you then heard or thought you'd heard it and in addition heard the same voice say 'according to Martin Luther' you might think 'what? No way. No no that can't be right, or if you're from the west, 'get away!' And, yes indeed, you'd be right or at least half right since there is no real evidence that Martin Luther did say 'Whoever drinks beer is quick to sleep etc etc'. He is recorded as having done so the reference isn't traceable further back than 2007; so a big pinch of salt required on that one.

But there is apparently some evidence that Martin Luther did like beer which is hardly surprising since drinking Adam's Wine in the Middle Ages wouldn't improve your health. There is some basis for attributing another beer related statement to Luther;

'It is better to think about church in the ale-house than to think about the ale-house in church.'

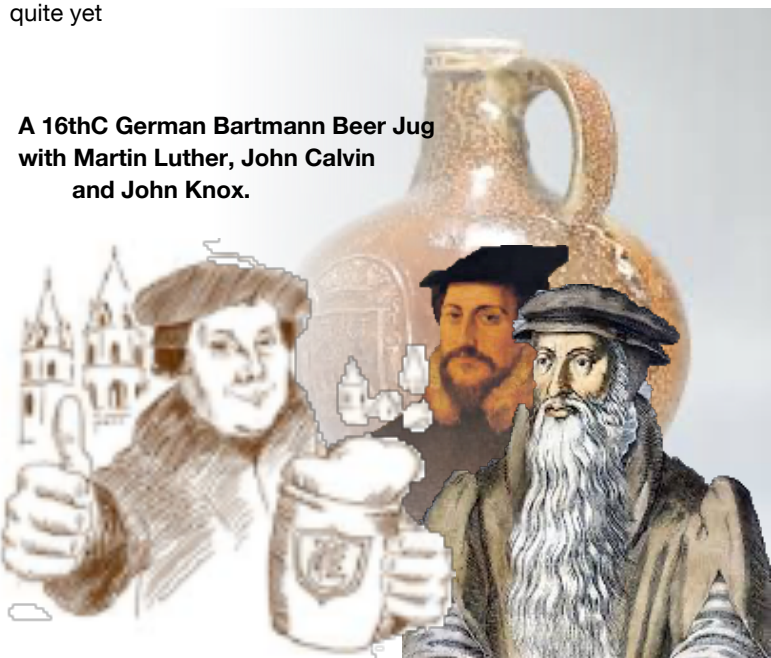
And it wasn't a question.

So we may not know much about Luther's views on beer although he was reputed to have a full Stein by his side when embarking on a sermon.

John Calvin on the other hand was quite enthusiastic about alcohol; well about wine anyway. He wrote, apparently, 'It is permissible to use wine not only for necessity, but also to make us merry.'

Not only did his yearly salary in Geneva include several barrels of wine, the City recognized the large number of guests he would be expected to entertain; so he was given "the substantial annual salary of 500 florins, together with twelve measures of wheat and two bossets (perhaps 250 gallons) of wine."

As perhaps you might have expected John Knox's legacy on beer and wine is somewhat more austere. What he actually may have thought this writer cannot say. And BBC Verify hasn't ventured into that debate quite yet



**A 16thC German Bartmann Beer Jug
with Martin Luther, John Calvin
and John Knox.**

Conversations with a Silicon Chip

This is a new and occasional column in which the Blether looks into the future, through not a crystal ball but a silicon chip. The column may only get one outing, who knows? This month however we asked *ChatGPT* to write a paper for us on 'Reversing Diminishing Church Attendance in Local Communities'. That was all it was asked to do, and you might think there could be time for a round of golf or even a short ZZZ in front of the television - old speak there. But no; before the glass could be lifted from the table, because yes it was one of those evenings, the machine had come out with the piece below along, if you please, with what may have been seen as helpful questions whether we wanted it to be altered to be either (1) more formal and academic or (2) more practical and persuasive. We left it as it first emerged.

Reversing Diminishing Church Attendance in Local Communities

In recent decades, many local communities have witnessed a steady decline in church attendance. While this trend reflects broader social changes, it also presents an opportunity for churches to reimagine how they engage with people. Reversing this decline requires a combination of authenticity, relevance, and community-centered initiatives.

First, churches must prioritize authentic relationships. Many people leave organized religion not because of a loss of faith, but because they feel disconnected from church structures. By fostering smaller groups, mentoring programs, and open conversations, churches can create spaces where individuals feel genuinely valued and heard.

Second, relevance is key. A church that addresses only spiritual matters without acknowledging the practical challenges of modern life risks alienating its congregation. Offering programs on financial literacy, mental health, family support, and community service demonstrates that faith is not separate from daily life but deeply integrated with it. Sermons and teachings that connect biblical principles to contemporary

issues can help people see the church as a source of guidance for both spiritual and practical living.

Third, community outreach should be central. Churches thrive when they serve beyond their walls. Organizing food drives, volunteer initiatives, and partnerships with local schools or charities can make the church indispensable to the community. When people see the church actively contributing to social good, they are more likely to engage with it.

Finally, embracing technology can extend the church's reach. Livestreaming services, maintaining active social media platforms, and offering online prayer or discussion groups can re-engage younger generations who are often more digitally connected.

In conclusion, reversing diminishing church attendance requires more than attracting people to pews; it demands building a church that is authentic, relevant, and outward-facing. By embodying faith in action, local churches can once again become vibrant centres of community life.

KW and ChatGPT

Kirk Session miscellany - August 2025

Here are some of the details from the various reports considered by the Kirk Session at its August meeting.

The Energy Committee follows up on energy use and cost savings in the use of electricity and gas across the church campus. Readers will be aware that recently the lighting in the St Joseph's Centre has been changed to LED bulbs. The Energy Saving Trust (EST) provided £7703.79 in the form of a grant of £5,777.84 and a loan of £1,925.95 repaid with a first payment of £25.95 followed by a further 95 monthly payments of £20.00. VAT on the cost is reclaimable. The Committee is also investigating Solar Panels and Insulation of the Ogston Hall as other areas for savings detailed in the Business Energy Survey. Work is continuing to identify sources of funding, and in that connection to recruit someone from within the congregation with experience of finding and securing grant funding.

The Mill Operating Unit (MOU). The Mill Cafe is a well used and hugely appreciated feature of the Church's operations in the community. It contributes an agreed sum from its profits to support the Church recognising also its use of church resources which are essential for its operation.

The MOU reported in August that, in part due to an exceptional week in in July The Mill was able to donate £1500 to the church as well as its regular £250 monthly donations.

MOU also reported on a continuing problem with discolouring of water from one outlet in Joseph's Centre but that work by Scottish Water during July might be leading to the running issue being resolved. MOU also said that the Mill continues to look for volunteers.

Fabric Committee, as the name implies, looks after the fabric of the buildings across the church campus. Over the past month or so fabric repairs have been minor, including for example broken

door handles and some french window repairs at the manse.

On the more visible pending jobs the Committee reported that it was disappointing to observe return of vegetation to part of the Church roof area which might require attention. It also anticipated a start to work to address damp in the roof space of St Joseph's in the near future. The repair to the broken stained glass window on the front of the church would be completed in October, and is covered by insurance.

Fellowship Committee reported that two events are currently planned: the first is the Jazz Party with Sterling Crisis (Sunday 12 October 2025), and the second (still in early planning) will be a Supper and Song event featuring One Bar Rest, Quintingle and the church choir. The supper will follow the format of a two-course meal provided by the caterers, Mackenzies. The date for this is Saturday 1 November 2025. the report referred also to the Mill Gallery. Sales of paintings from the Gallery produce a commission for the Church; twenty works have been sold over the past year, producing an income for Fellowship and the Church. Kirk Session were also advised at the meeting on 20 August that in all probability there would be a Christmas Tree Festival again this year on Saturday 13 December, organised by the Balerno Children's Gala Committee with a Brass Band Concert in the evening; these also coincide with the Christmas Farmers Market.

Under the heading of Mission and Outreach the Kirk Session were also reminded that the Blether's strapline is 'for the Church and the Community' signifying an intent to be part of the wider conversation between the Church and the community of Balerno. As well as being available on-line and in hard copy at the Mill Cafe, copies of the Blether are also made available through Balerno and Currie Libraries, and via Currie Kirk.



On Being a Temporary Shepherd

It is now about two months since the service of Introduction and Linkage. In that time I have been trying to get to know people and build rapport and am grateful for the warm welcome at both Balerno and Currie. It has been quite a transition, moving from Parish Ministry, five years in Alexandria, twenty years in Glasgow's west end and Woodside area then over a decade in Pollokshaws.

The model of Parish Ministry I grew up with was often about the 'long game', taking time to get to know the people and story of a parish. Interim Ministry is a shorter-term business. As your 'temporary shepherd' my role over the next wee while is to help you take stock of things, asking how we got here and then to turn towards a changed future.

In his book "Temporary Shepherds" Roger Nicholson quotes a letter to a United Reformed Church congregation:

"If our only vision of the future of our church harks back to a golden era in our past, then we are doing ourselves no favours in trying to plan for the future. The reality is those days will not return."

The kind of ministry that formed and shaped my practice and assumptions as a parish minister came from a more settled time. These are unsettled times, unsettling times. In Romans 12.2, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"

Warren Schulz defines them like this:

Change: The inevitable movement of life's forces

Transition: The process by which we must deal with the inevitable changes of life (the interim)

Transformation: The new shape that occurs after transition, toward which change is aimed.

Biblically we could liken those three to:

Egypt, then Exodus/wilderness leading towards entry to the Promised Land

or the Passion story...

Death, three days, and resurrection.

In the meantime, I have enjoyed informal gatherings of the office bearers of Balerno and Currie churches, a Kirk session meeting at Currie (July 21st) and Balerno (20th August). The next steps to continue conversations with people and to organise a 'Visioning Day' with office bearers and a colleagues from the Interim and Transition Ministry Team and Presbytery – more of which will be forthcoming soon.

We are on a journey, you and I, living in the interim. Let's see what happens next.

NB - Rev. Roy Henderson will be available on a Wednesday in the Shepherd Room from 12:30-13:30

Kirk Session meeting - August 2025

The first formal meeting of the Balerno Kirk Session with our new Interim Minister was on 20 August. There had been an informal 'getting to know you' meeting on 30th June, shortly after the Service of Linkage and introduction of Rev Roy Henderson as Interim Minister of Balerno linked with Currie on 19th June.

The August meeting was attended by 21 Elders and our two Session Clerks. The draft agenda had been circulated in advance along with various reports including those relating to recent works to the fabric of the Church and Halls.

The principal business of the meeting arose from the Moderator's report in which he addressed progress towards the union with Currie. Before that however he advised the Session that he was arranging to be available for meetings with members of the congregation who might wish to see him, and that to that end he would be at the Shepherd Room every Wednesday between 12.30pm and 1.30pm for meetings. He was making similar arrangements for Currie.

Roy told the meeting he was getting used to working in Currie and Balerno and was very grateful to everyone who had helped to make him welcome and to settle in. It would take a little time to

get used to dealing with two congregations, two Sessions etc etc., but it would all work out he was sure.

He is working within a Partnership Liaison Group which includes office bearers from both Currie and Balerno along with Presbytery and another Interim Minister. The aim of the Group is primarily to assist the Churches to define his objectives over the two year appointment, and this part should be concluded over the next six to eight weeks. It would also be looking at a variety of issues arising in co-ordination between Currie and Balerno. A significant issue amongst those that had arisen in a question posed earlier at the Session meeting as to timings of services, and the outcome was that the current arrangements should continue at least over September. Other points reported as having been discussed at the Partnership Liaison Group had included exchanges of views on the implications of the Presbytery Plan, timings for Kirk Session meetings, how to get people together, and importantly communication between the Churches and outwards into the two communities.

Kirk Session also considered the regular reports it receives from church Committees and groups and some further detail is given on page 8, opposite, of the September Blether,

Calendar announcements & chit chat

Unless otherwise notified Sunday worship is at 9.30am every Sunday at Balerno Parish Church

Unless otherwise notified below services are held on each Sunday of every month

September 2025 Services

During September Sunday morning services at Balerno will be at 9.30am at Balerno Parish Church. Morning service at Currie is at 11.15am

21st September Joint Service in Balerno at 9.30am

October services

5th October Harvest Service at 9.30am
(please bring non perishable items for the foodbank)

19th October Joint Service in Currie at 11.15am

September 2025 Events

1 Sept - Balerno Fairtrade Village Group Ogston Hall at 7.15pm - all welcome

2 Sept - Come and help with gardening in the Church Campus; 10.00am

5 Sept - Games afternoon - Gibson Craig Hall, Currie 2.00 to 4.00pm;

26 September - 'Soiree d'arrivee' to mark Roy's arrival in Balerno

12 October - Jazz Party - St Joseph's Hall - 7.30pm to 10.30pm
tickets from Church Office or romwebsite via eventbrite.

NB Rev. Roy Henderson will be available each Wednesday in the Shepherd Room from 12:30-13:30.

Picture of the month

an occasional series of pictures of local places which we invite you to identify, the incentive and reward being a wonderful cup of the Mill Cafe's finest beverage.



Clue -
*It has been
concealed for at
least forty years!*

So where is it?
What did it connect?

It looks blocked. Is it
and if so why? And
by whom?

Answers to Church
office by 15th
September.

Usual free cup of
coffee for first correct
answer!

Useful Numbers

Interim Minister Rev Roy Henderson
rhenderson@churchofscotland.org.uk

0131 - 449 - 3830

Church Administrator (Church Office)
Pam McKeon 449 7245

bpc-admin@balernochurch.org.uk

Session Clerks -

Kay Coull 449 6151 or 07415 506947

Elaine McCulloch 449 5876

balerno.sessionclerk@gmail.com

Treasurer:

David Booth 449 3516

bpc-treasurer@balernochurch.org.uk

Roll Keeper;

Pam McKeon 449 2541

Fabric Ctte:

Dilys Conway 449 7245

dilysconway@blueyonder.co.uk

Pastoral Care Co-ordinator:

Kay Coull 449 6151

coullkay@hotmail.com

Mill Café:

Lynsey Inglis

themillatstjosephs@gmail.com

Balerno Blether:

Lesley Burt 449 4314

lesley.burt70@gmail.com

copy date for

October



is

Friday 12th

September

Please try to
ensure that all
copy is with the
editors by **noon**
on

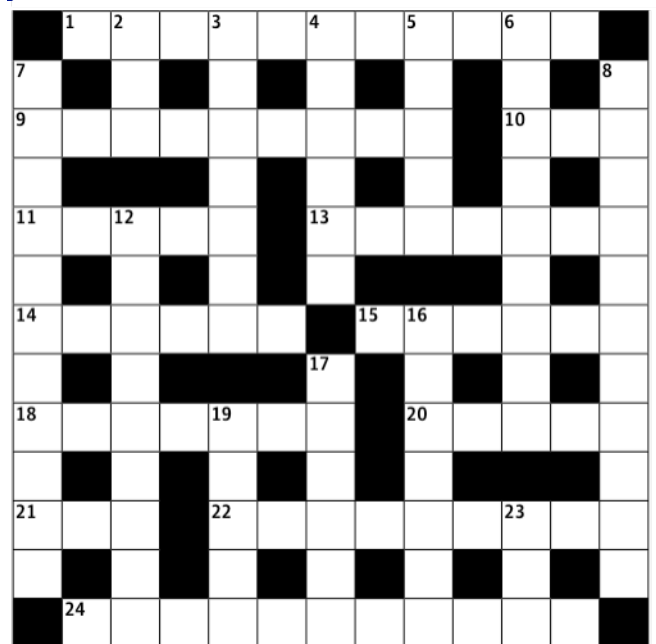
12th September

We're really sorry
but we can't
guarantee to look
at copy received
after that time.

Crossword corner
July /August answer



Crossword Corner September 2025



Across

Down

1 Something has upset my plans! (5,4,2)

9 Deep-rooted (9)

10 Legume (3)

11 Phase – platform (5)

13 Frighten (7)

14 Fall asleep (3,3)

15 Ace rig (anag) – less frank (6)

18 Landlocked South American country (7)

20 Collection of maps (5)

21 Public vehicle (3)

22 Tomato (4,5)

24 Very tough (4,2,5)

2 Swine – keep for oneself (3)

3 Thief (slang) (3,4)

4 Organ of taste (6)

5 French sculptor, d. 1917 (5)

6 Unbiased (9)

7 Miscellaneous items (4,3,4)

8 Uninvited guest (11)

12 Region of southern Spain (9)

16 US state (7)

17 Painting – sails (6)

19 Well-founded (5)

23 Chum (3)