

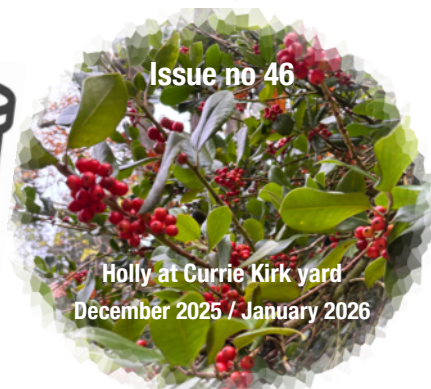
balerno



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

Blether

FREE



Congregations meet to plan for Union

November meeting in Currie important step towards basis for Union

The two congregations, of Currie Kirk and Balerno Parish Church came together on Saturday 1st November under the auspices of Partnership Support Group at the Gibson Craig Hall on Saturday 1st November. This was a 'facilitated conversation' 'taking stock of the past, appraising the present and looking to the future'.

Partnership Support Group, as a title for any enterprise perhaps isn't the most inspiring, although that is what in plain terms it did. It is there to help in the process in which the two congregations navigate towards the end point of establishment of the Union of the two churches, possibly by the end of 2026. This meeting was then a consultative assembly moderated by Rev Roy Henderson, Interim Minister at Currie and Balerno but facilitated by Rev Dr Louise McClements & Rev Sandra Black from the Church of Scotland's Interim Ministry Team. and Rev Moira McDonald from Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian.

The meeting was opened by Roy reading appropriately from Paul's Letter to the Colossians; Paul, the great Communicator. The format involved the 70 or so members present seated around 12 tables being tasked with putting their heads together to consider and if possible answer three questions;

- (1) as things stand now what do we need to pay attention to as we build for the future?
- (2) what are your strengths as congregations?
- (3) what can the congregations do to prepare for a good union?

That Joint meeting was followed by a joint meeting of the two Kirk Sessions on 10th November at which members were invited to consider the outcomes of the 1st November meeting.

There was unanimity that a co-operative approach across the two congregations was essential for the future and that the meeting was evidence that that was possible. a number of comments were made suggesting a need to develop a vision for the future and that trying to develop structures like a Joint Session in advance of some analysis of 'where we were going' might not in the end progress the issues. We reprint on page 3 the piece which we included in the November Blether setting out thoughts on what issues might usefully be considered as discussions proceed.

Amongst the points raised in discussion, on important things for the Congregations to work on was the position of the broader community and the need both to keep them in touch with what was happening and also to carry them with the congregations as they work towards union.

It is clear that both Kirk Sessions recognised that the two communities of Currie and Balerno are important stakeholders in the Churches, for a variety of reasons including that the Church is, for each community a significant provider of facilities on which each community relies.

Both Kirk Sessions will now meet separately to take forward the preparation of the Basis for Union, a document setting out as it states, only in brief form the basis upon which the union might be agreed by both congregations. Once agreed by each Kirk session that basis for Union must be agreed by each congregation, and the Presbytery, before integration can be finalised. That would be followed by the call and subsequent induction of a new Minister. While the timeline for that is uncertain the Blether understands that Spring 2027 remains a target date.

Letters to the editor.

Dear Lesley

The main thing is not to forget the main thing

As the linked congregations of Currie and Balerno meet to share their visions and concerns for the future of the Church of Scotland in our neighbourhood, people understandably look for a pathway which has been well trodden by the experience of others and which might help them to reach their destination. However, that strategy can only work if there is a general agreement about what the destination is and there is always the danger that a pathway may be taken simply because it is well trodden, rather than because it leads in the desired direction.

Twenty years ago, it might have been simpler to reach a consensus about our direction of travel as the membership of the local churches was defying the national trend of declining membership and the demographic profile of the congregations was a better spread than it is today. At that time, plans could be made in the confidence that there was a critical mass of members who could sustain the initiatives of the congregations and that there were enough young families involved to encourage confidence that the existing model of church activity could be sustained into the future.

Sadly, that confidence was misplaced and experience has proved that that traditional model of church activity was not indefinitely sustainable. The world has moved on and so our forward planning needs to acknowledge and respond to our changing social environment.

Part of that changing social environment has been evident in attitudes towards authority. In education, the idea of the omniscient 'sage on the stage' as an instructor has been replaced by the 'guide by the side' who is an enabler. The concept of the minister as the teaching elder perhaps contributed to an expectation that effective ministry requires the adoption of a 'sage on the stage' persona. The architecture of churches with elevated pulpits reinforced that perception – but we live in a world where leadership through management and discussion has become more attractive than leadership by direction.

In our world where there is instant access to all manner of information it is perhaps inevitable that there is a wider range of belief systems – even within faiths! That is something which can too readily sow the seeds of division and conflict and seems to pose some questions. How high does a congregation want to set the bar for membership and involvement? Does it want to

build on points in common or does it want to dwell on differences? In the original Radical Action Plan there was the suggestion that there was scope for greater collaboration with other denominations implying that points in common should be built on.

There are various features which can contribute to the image and therefore the appeal – or lack of appeal – of the 'church' as an organisation to those who are outside it. There can be little doubt that the 'church' would be able to regard itself as a more effective organisation if there were more people inside it. Does that mean that congregations need to compromise their beliefs in order to attract more members? Probably not. There is much written and said about those who share Christian belief but no longer regard the organisation of the 'church' as being relevant or helpful to the living out of their beliefs. That would suggest that 'church' needs to change how it does things so that it can provide a community for all who espouse the Christian faith to whatever degree. In the past, communities were physical and defined by location and space – of which Currie and Balerno are good examples. Now we have online communities as facilitated by social media like WhatsApp and Facebook.

Many of the ties which bound the geographical communities together are in danger of dissolving and planners no longer design communities; they produce housing developments. It will be an enormous challenge for the church to try to nurture the growth of our communities – physical and online – for all who espouse the Christian faith and its values to whatever degree. It will require new skillsets and strategies which we need to explore sooner rather than later.

When Balerno PC made the transition to the Unitary Constitution there was concern that the business of the Kirk Session could become dominated by the discussion of temporal matters at the expense of the spiritual. In the discussions for the planned union, there is a danger that preoccupation with the nuts and bolts of the administration of the church and its structures may be at the expense of consideration of the changing nature of ministry and our fundamental purpose.

Yours sincerely,

John Burnside



Remembrance 2025



Preparation - Balerno - Friday 7 November





Remembrance 2025 was commemorated at the 9.30am service at Balerno on an appropriately dreich and grey morning on Sunday 9th November.

The church was near full to capacity with members of the congregation, visitors and contingents from the 51st Pentland (Balerno) Scouts and also from 2463 Currie and Balerno Squadron, Royal Air Force Air Cadets.

The Garden of Remembrance had once again been set out by Janet McCracken and her team on Friday 7th November using poppies made for the Centenary of the 1918 Armistice.

The congregation at the Remembrance Day service numbered 100 and the service included the names of those listed on Balerno's War Memorials within the Parish Church.

Currie Kirk also remembered at its Remembrance Day service on 9th November. The Remembrance Garden was set out round the War Memorial. A cross for each name on the Memorial Boards within the Kirk. Each cross has the name, rank, unit and date of death of the casualty. Local resident Bill Wood also placed a cross of remembrance for his grandfather.

Boys of the 65th Edinburgh Company Boys' Brigade assisted in attaching poppies to the display at the Gibson Craig Halls and the Company also paraded their colours at the Kirk on Remembrance Sunday with Lieutenant Duncan Cameron playing the pipes.

Wreaths were laid by Currie Kirk, the Scottish Parliament and the local Masonic Lodge. A wreath from Edinburgh Pentlands Parish Church was also laid later that day.



51st Pentland (Balerno) Scouts



**2463 Currie and Balerno Squadron
Royal Air Force Air Cadets**



**65th Edinburgh BB
at Gibson Craig**



Currie War memorial



Believe me when I say, I had a wonderful evening!!!

A comment, overheard after the Supper 'n Songs evening on 1st November at the St Joseph's Hall, that suggests that the Producer, Director and ensembles involved got it right. It was truth to tell an excellent evening, designed for earlier in the year to coincide with VE Day and then VJ Day, but probably in the event best when experienced as it was against the background of the 2025 Remembrance season. The evening itself fell into two parts, the first being supper provided via McKenzie's Catering and the second a concert performance involving Balerno Parish Church's three choral Ensembles, those being the Quintingle ensemble, five voices as you would have guessed, the 16 strong ChurChoir, and the 11 voiced, occasionally a cappella, One Bar Rest collective, whose emerging motto is 'all

'the right notes, increasingly in the right order.'

The programme brought together pieces from the 1930's, through the forties and up to the late forties. So, we had the frivolity of 'light music of the 1930's' to 'the precursors of the Pop music of the '60's, while visiting also some of the iconic music of the Second World War.

The Community Songs of WW2 were brought to life by ChurChoir while the songs of the soldiers came from One Bar Rest. Quintingle were left to provide a broad sweep of the recorded hits of the time starting with 'The Teddy Bears Picnic', recorded first by Henry Hall and his Orchestra in 1932. After a brief 'Lambeth Walk' with ChurChoir, Quintingle reminisced about a famous Nightingale which was heard to sing in Berkeley Square in 1939.

One Bar Rest's contribution which followed focussed largely on the songs the soldiers sang in the Second World War. They echoed the music of Lilli Marlene which ChurChoir first presented with the published lyrics. The words of 'The D-Day Dodgers' remember cruel remarks attributed to Lady Astor, in which - though denied by her - she was said to have castigated 8th army soldiers for having avoided D-day. The song has understandable overtones of bitterness alongside the pride of having accomplished their mission.

The Guinea Pigs Anthem, inspired by Fred Karno's Army of WW1, was written by one of Archibald McIndoe's burns unit

patients, Edward 'Blackie' Blacksell, and recalls the infancy of plastic surgery with deep black humour. Sung to Samuel Wesley's Aurelia, better known possibly for 'The Church's One Foundation', this contribution marked One Bar Rest's entry into the strange world of four-part harmony; watch this space.

The dark humour of the barrack room or the officer's mess was also apparent in 'Bring Back My Bomber to Me', while 'Bless 'Em All', which became a signature patriotic song, also seems a more straightforward resignation to the constraints of army life.

In their second spot Quintingle moved into the jazz mode with 'As Time Goes By', written in 1931 but made famous in Casablanca in 1942. That jazz theme was pursued in Quintingle's piece which closed the show. "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" which, as a jump blues number, marked a step towards post war rock 'n roll and exemplifies the way in which the WW2 changed popular music.

This was an evening when it was impossible to sit quietly and spectate. This was music with which everyone was familiar and so there was plenty of opportunity for the audience to join in. Servicemen in the war had no training for singing and so it is reasonable to assume that the performances of One Bar Rest and the company were quite authentic.

A Roadmap Towards the Union

It is not our habit to repeat articles, but on this occasion, we make an exception. Regular readers will recognise the 'roadmap' towards union which was provided by Chat GPT in response to an enquiry by a member of the editorial team.

A report on the meeting with the Partnership Support Group, which took place on the 1st of November, is on our front page and represents the first step towards union; but there is a long way to go. This guidance appeared very shortly before that meeting and so it is being republished because it reflects some of the points made at that meeting and was commented upon favourably by members of both congregations.

The problem with Artificial Intelligence like Chat GPT is that it can only regurgitate the information which other people put into it and it uses their vocabulary which means that a list like this can appear to be quite daunting. However, it represents the voice of lots of experience and should be a helpful checklist of things which need to be discussed and resolved in the coming months.

Preparing for a union between two church congregations can be a significant and impactful process. Here's a structured approach to addressing key issues, then, along with a suggested order for consideration.

1. Spiritual Vision and Mission Alignment

Discussion: Assess the core beliefs, values, and mission statements of both congregations to identify common ground and differences.

Action: Facilitate joint prayer and discussions to create a unified vision that reflects both congregations' identities.

2. Leadership Structure

Discussion: Evaluate the leadership styles of both churches, including clergy and lay leaders.

Action: Decide on a new leadership structure and how roles will be filled, ensuring representation from both congregations.

3. Congregational Communication

Discussion: Establish clear, transparent communication strategies to keep all members informed throughout the process.

Action: Use newsletters, meetings, and social platforms for updates, feedback, and questions.

4. Cultural Integration

Discussion: Identify cultural differences, worship styles, and traditions between the congregations.

Action: Plan for blended worship experiences to create a sense of belonging for all members.

5. Financial Considerations

Discussion: Review the financial health of both congregations, including assets, debts, budgets, and giving patterns.

Action: Develop a unified budget and explore shared resources, such as facilities and programs.

6. Property and Assets

Discussion: Address ownership and use of church properties and assets.

Action: Determine how properties will be used or shared, and handle legal considerations regarding assets.

7. Membership Engagement

Discussion: Engage members from both congregations

to gauge their feelings and concerns about the union.

Action: Offer forums for dialogue, and potentially surveys to capture feedback.

8. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Discussion: Anticipate areas of potential conflict and establish methods for resolving disputes.

Action: Create a conflict resolution plan that emphasizes open communication and mutual respect.

9. Integration of Ministries

Discussion: Evaluate existing ministries and programs in both churches to identify overlaps and gaps.

Action: Decide which ministries will continue, merge, or be newly formed to serve the combined congregation.

10. Legal and Governance Issues

Discussion: Clarify any legal requirements for the union, including permits, bylaws, and denominational oversight.

Action: Consult with legal advisors and denominational representatives to ensure compliance with all regulations.

11. Celebration and Transition Planning

Discussion: Consider how to officially celebrate the union and provide a smooth transition for all members.

Action: Organize services and events that mark the new beginning, fostering community cohesion.

12. Ongoing Evaluation and Feedback

Discussion: Recognize that the union process is ongoing, and it will require adjustment and reevaluation over time.

Action: Establish a system for continuous feedback and regular assessments of how the union is progressing.

Addressing these issues in a thoughtful, systematic way will help ensure a successful union between congregations. Each step involves careful consideration, open dialogue, and mutual respect, setting a strong foundation for a new, unified church community.

So what's going on elsewhere in Balerno?

News in brief from Balerno Community Council

Winter brings new challenges to any community, and if as in our case most of the village is situated more than 165 metres above sea level (with Harlaw Reservoir at about 270 metres) then the risks of snow and ice are higher than they are for most of the City. Last winter there were several days when there was significant snow cover across Balerno, with days when it was very difficult for people to get around. The Community Council has therefore had discussions with City Council officials about ways in which the risks of dislocation can be mitigated.

The City has replaced some of its mini gritter tractors and anticipates that breakdowns will therefore be reduced. Cameras have also been installed at the City's weather monitoring stations, and this will make it easier to keep an eye on developing problems. The Community Council has raised with the City the possibility of more assistance for self help by locating salt supplies locally and possibly some light equipment.

As we have reported in previous issues of the Blether the Community Council is preparing a Local Place Plan for Balerno, which, when agreed, the City Council will be bound to have regard to in preparing its own planning documents, in particular CityPlan 2040. The Community Council hopes that it

will be able to consult the community on the issues from December onwards.

The Council also met with the City Council during October to discuss concerns about the imposition of a Fireworks Control Zone within Balerno, and suggested that if the City had approached the Council instead of simply zoning an area then it would probably have been possible for the issue to be addressed without the need to threaten residents with prison. In the event there seems to have been little firework activity locally whether inside or outside of the FCZ.

The Council is acutely aware of problems in car parking in Balerno and is considering options for discouraging parking in particular in Main Street where of course parking is not permitted at any time for cars except those covered by a blue badge.

The Council has also made arrangements for the switch on of the Main Street Christmas Lights including the Christmas Tree which this year is sponsored by Balerno Childrens Gala. The switch on will be on 4th December at about 6.30pm, immediately following on from the switch on the Rotary's Tree for Life.

At last, One Bar Rest to sing in a pub!

How did that happen then?

One Bar Rest gets to sing in a pub, and how on earth did that happen then?

Well, the story starts in 2016 or more particularly in January 2017 when the idea for One Bar Rest was run past the Kirk session under the guise of Pub Carols. The intention was to form an a capella group specifically to do Pub Carols in the tradition continued in South Yorkshire

and Derbyshire and exemplified in compilations like 'Voices at the Door' by Coope, Boyes and Simpson, and Maddy Prior with SteelEye Span. One Bar Rest developed from that idea and gave its first performances in November 2018 in both Balerno and Currie with a collation of 'Trenches' songs and readings for the Centenary of the WW1 Armistice.

Since then it has provided regular entertainment in Balerno Parish Church and the Bowling Club. During Covid, OBR even managed to assemble virtual performances for Burns Suppers and also Advent Online. But still not, after seven years, still not in the pub! You can't really claim to be a pub carols group if you have not performed in the pub.

So, 2025 marks a milestone for OBR, because One Bar Rest and Friends will be in the Grey Horse on Tuesday 16th December, and hopefully will be joined by some of the Blether's readers and other members of the community to sing carols and to raise funds for CRY. **Cardiac Risk in the Young** is a charity which aims to prevent young sudden cardiac deaths through awareness, screening and research, and supporting affected families. It is chosen as the recipient charity for this event in memory of Christopher Cowe, a Balerno lad who died unexpectedly in January 2020, aged just 15, from an undiagnosed heart condition. OBR hope this Christmas evening can help reduce the incidence of such tragic events.



Christmas Carols
at the
Grey Horse
with
One Bar Rest & Friends
Tuesday 16th December 7.00pm

in aid of **Cardiac Risk in the Young**

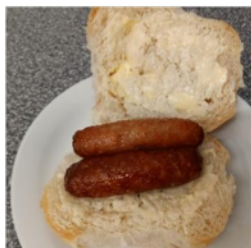




**Come and visit The Mill Café at
the St Joseph's Centre.
Open Tuesday to Friday,
9.00am to 2.00pm.**

**(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 of 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.

**The Mill Café is having a Christmas Holiday too!
It will close on Monday 22nd December
and reopen on 6th January 2026**

We use Fairtrade products wherever possible.

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



The Mill Gallery right here in Balerno and located within the welcoming atmosphere of the Mill Café in the St Joseph's Centre has a selection of paintings and art works for viewing and for sale.

Operated in association with the Pentland Art Club the Gallery has been open for almost seven years with a selection of works of art which is renewed every month. Balerno Parish Church receives a small commission on sales. Over the years more than 700 pieces of artwork have been displayed. It's hard to believe! But it's part of the reason why the Mill is such a popular rendezvous. Great atmosphere, great fare and a great place to find that really special present.

The church greatly appreciates the association with the members of the Art Club and knows many visitors to The Mill Café are equally appreciative and frankly amazed at how lucky we are to have so many talented people in and around Balerno.

We'll see you soon at the Mill Café and Gallery!

The Balerno Blether Reader Survey 2025



This is Issue 46 of the Balerno Blether, or at least we think it is somewhere around that number.

Started in February 2021, to our shame we have never actually sought our readers' views formally about what they, that's you, think of the Blether.

We are correcting that failing with this issue because you'll find a survey sheet packed along with it. It's a two page A4 sheet which shouldn't take long to complete, and we would really appreciate if you could let us have your thoughts about how we're doing and maybe more importantly how you'd like to see the Blether developing particularly as the union with Currie Kirk is coming up fast.

Communications are really important and your views on the future, both of 'comms' as some might like to call it and on lots of other things are going to be very valuable.

You can submit your response either by and popping it into the Church office, OR you can complete it on line and in that case you can find the Survey on the website.

We know that Christmas is a busy time for everyone, but we think it's really important that we get this right.

A Church Magazine is important for connecting the Church as an entity both with its congregation and with the local community, sharing news, and promoting events. It serves as a vital communication tool for both internal church life and external outreach, especially to those who may not be online, and it may also be the only Christian contact some people ever have.

If we want to know how the Blether is doing we need to know both who our readers are and also whether it is giving them what they need and want. And that comes from the Diocese of Winchester; they've been around since AD660 so they probably know a thing or two!

So, The Blether Team are really looking forward to hearing from you with your thoughts about the Blether!

Picture of the month

This month we expose the secrets of installation of the Poppy Fall



Jesus, My Boy!

The Treasurer' Thumb *looking (more than a bit) round the bend*

Great day today, Thumb!

'It is indeed Sir!' Pause. 'But d'you know why, Thumb?.....and also slightly poignant, don't you think?'

'Oh indeed so sir. Very poignant, indeed sir, very very poignant.' For which I receive a slightly sideways look from himself. Mind you I've been getting a few of those from himself of late; can't think why.

'Well y'see, Thumb, if you're interested, I'm sort of retiring.'

'Indeed so, sir.'

'So things'll be a bit different for us, won't they.'

'Will they?'

'Well they're bound to be, aren't they?'

'Fraid you've lost me now sir.'

'C'mon Thumb don't be dumb; ha ha. joke? I'm moving on so you'll have to move on too, won't you. You'll no longer be the Treasurer's Thumb will you?'

'Well yes and no sir. I'll still be Ye Thumb of Ye Retired Treasurer. But d'you mean your giving me notice, sir?'

'Well in a manner of speaking,..... yes, Thumb, I suppose I am.'

'But I'm afraid to say, you can't actually get rid of me, sir; it's not possible.... without major disturbance to your good self.' 'What d'you mean, without major disturbance.'

'Well, sir, much though I would appreciate my freedom; and it's been a long time coming - after all the last serfs in Scotland were freed in 1799 - I'm not sure it would mean very much would it?'

'How so? Valuable thing, freedom, Thumb, What what.'

'Well I know sir, but thee and me are, despite your best endeavours, still doomed to eternal toil like Sisyphus, bound together literally by ties of flesh and blood!'

'Bit theatrical that,Thumb, it's not as if we won't see each other from time to time, Christmas, Easter, sort of thing, perhaps even wandering the mountain paths in July?'

'I'll be there sir.'

'Haven't invited you yet have I, eh? Ha ha!'

Doesn't really work that way, sir. We're sort of a bit like 'til death us do part. Our connection means you can't really be rid of me, although I know you wouldn't want to be anyway. Happy Christmas Sir.....

There follows a slightly stunned silence. a slight growl of realisation, and then slightly mellower, 'Happy Christmas, Thumb.'

WOOF

And once again a very good day to all of you, my ever faithful followers !

Well, the noisy season is over with 'bangs and whooshes' from fireworks rather subdued on a damp, wet evening. No reports of any of the chaps being frightened. For me, it was a question of burying my head in the cushion on my bed.

On the work front, I'm afraid the poor weather seems to be keeping the seagulls away and so the butcher is less persuaded to keep me in titbits.

But now, of course, with Christmas approaching, matters should improve - there are always so many visitors to the house- never see most of them during the year - who are lax on the house rules about feeding me at the table. "Oh, go on, it is Christmas" they say and being the gentleman that I am it would be most impolite to refuse their generosity. Last year I had a craving for turkey and given that whoever had carved the bird had made quite a mess of doing so, there were offcuts galore which seemed to find their way to me. Here's hoping for a repeat performance this year.

Then there's the question of my presents. With the people at home, it's a simple matter of selecting the items I wish to replace and leaving them out in the back garden to get wet and dirty. Yes, you've got it, new ones always appear wrapped in glossy paper. At this point I should mention that I prefer bones stuffed full of marrow - I'm well past rubber balls with bells inside. So, if you were wondering what I'd like, something edible (and buryable) is always a safe bet. I'd offer to reciprocate but we dogs aren't trusted with money.

Other than that, nothing else happens at this time - most of us will have eaten too much and prefer to sleep it off. And if it were, perchance, to snow? I do not like trampling through drifts and having wet legs right up to my stomach. This year we've had a 'wood burner' fire installed and trust me; I shan't stray far from it until the better weather arrives.

So, as we shan't meet again until the new year, I'll wish all my faithful followers (no traitors!) a very happy Christmas, and if you have a doggie at home and would like to introduce him or her to me, just send me the details (via the editor) - its good to have some new friends.



do you have a minute, Lord?



I'm sorry Lord, but I don't like the Christmas season.

I like the idea behind it – celebrating the birth of the Baby in the manger but the supermarkets and stores bombard us earlier and earlier each year with advertising for all sorts of Christmas gifts which we cannot afford accompanied by the soundtrack of 'Here it is, Merry Christmas' in the middle of November! The children would love to have any of the toys that are advertised and I would love to have a new television or a sofa but we will be lucky just to have a good meal on Christmas Day.

There is a carol that I used to like – Love came down at Christmas, or something – but it seems that Christmas now is all about making money or spending it. Love seems to be measured in money. The kids get excited at school about Christmas with nativity plays and carols with their friends, but when they come home, it brings them back to the harsh realities of life in the modern world when they realise that we can't afford to have an exciting Christmas.

It's difficult to be reassured by the story of the nativity when it gets lost amongst all the noise of Christmas promotions. When I think about it, I feel that I have something in common with Mary – giving birth in a stable. Lord, please help me to find some reassurance from the Baby in the manger and give me the strength that I need so that next Christmas might be better.

Contributed

So what happened next?!

It's your chance to write the ending!



It all started at Roma Termini, or more particularly at the departures board. Now, Roma has 32 platforms, and it was 9.15 in the morning; and our train was going to Napoli at 9.26. Panic not, for I know what I am doing.

I scanned the Board and saw Napoli 9.25 and 9.40. Logically, at least in my head, it must be the 9.25.

Our seats were perfect and we settled down to a splendid two hour journey. Or so we thought.

After a few minutes and as Rome disappeared behind us - as a gentleman I was of course sitting back to travel direction - I saw the *controllore dei biglietti* approaching down the carriage.

'Buongiorno e non è una giornata meravigliosa!', I greet her expansively.

'Buongiorno signore,' she smiled, and then after a moment's hesitation, 'However I'm afraid the day is not as wonderful as you might wish. You cannot travel on these tickets and you must leave the train immediately, while I notify the Railway Police.'

'Leave the train!!! But we're travelling at 150mph!!!!!!'

'No, you must get off now!!!!'

So; what happened next? Did the dreaded Railway Police arrive? Did our modern day Richard Hannay and his travelling companion jump together from the train, cheating injury or worse to escape the pursuing carabinieri? Were they in fact pursued from the Toe the length of the Peninsula? Or did they spend a night or more in a dank Puglian prison?

You must tell us what happened next! And there might be a wee cup of the Mill's Finest Italian Blend for the most imaginative tale. Reply to the editor before the 16th December 2025!

This is the final Blether of 2025. The next official issue will be the February 2026 Blether. It may be that there is a Christmas Special designed to capture the run up to Christmas that would be unuseable in a February issue.

A Christmas Special has to be a bit more frothy than the monthly issue, But that doesn't mean that the serious issues go away at Christmas; they are still there and we mustn't forget them.

'Do You have a minute Lord' reminds us that we live in challenging times, nationally, internationally and locally. The debates about the union will continue, well into the New Year hopefully constructively and ultimately successfully, but they will be challenging.

There must be flexibility and preparedness to compromise, because an outcome that does not reflect a common desire cannot be a basis for a life together.

There will certainly be disappointments and frustrations although we hope there will also be moments of celebration and a genuinely agreed outcome. The key to this process, we believe, will be honest and transparent communication.

Merry Christmas from the Blether Team!

Balerno Fairtrade Village Group December 2025

Looking out over Balerno's early snow, when better to plan not only all our Christmas Fairtrade/Fair Trade (FT) food shopping, but to start our FT gift shopping, from the One World Shop, Hadeel, and/or Transform Trade? That way, our fellow communities around the world can get fair prices for their products and their work, while our friends and families enjoy their presents: soundly based, lovely FT craftwork and foods.

And when better to start that new 2026 diary? Book up now the first Saturday in March, for a real village landmark, now into its third decade: a great Fairtrade Morning in Balerno Parish Church Halls. Look out for lots more about that in February's 'Blether'.

Meanwhile, let's be sure to cheer on BFTVG's FT Tea-themed tree in another local favourite, December 13's Christmas Tree Festival. Let it inspire us all to 'Brew It Fair!' too. Then why not finish the day, after the Brass Band Concert, warming up our neighbours with some of the delicious FT wine readily available in many of our very local shops?

All our best for a very happy Christmas, and big thanks again for all your support,

Balerno Fairtrade Village Group



Notes from Roy

Today is November 18th and shortly I'll be meeting people to plan their child's baptism. One day soon, a young life will be enfolded publicly in the life-giving story of Jesus. Jesus who was born, died and raised up for us: Come Christmas we will celebrate the birth of Jesus, the "most precious Word of Life", "God with Us". The Christening is set to take place on Sunday 23rd of November in Balerno Parish Church. That Sunday is the festival of the Reign of Christ, the last Sunday of the Christian year before we turn once more to Advent, a season of preparation, anticipation and delayed celebration. For us in the northern hemisphere, this takes place as the days shorten, the nights lengthen and the cold and dark are with us. When the dark is deepest, we will mark the birth of the Light of the World.

When we are puzzled, perplexed or seeking guidance, we might say something such as: "I am in the dark, enlighten me". Any of us may be 'in the dark' at some point or other. So may churches, communities, peoples. The Bible itself begins with everything in a state of chaos and darkness, as the Spirit of God broods over it bringing divine order. In due course God says, "Let there be light".

"Let there be light". Advent is the time of waiting for the light. The time set aside for us to train ourselves in the radical discipline of patience. To await the coming of the "Let there be light" moment.

In God Welcomes All*, there is an Advent hymn by Brian Wren:

*"Joyful is the dark,
holy, hidden God,
rolling cloud of night beyond all naming:
Majesty in darkness,
Energy in love,
Word-in-flesh, the mystery proclaiming."*

As People of the Way, we travel roads that take us through darkness and light, sunset and sunrise. There will be moments of

waiting in the dark, just as there will also be "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" moments. Each in due time.

I hope that through the Advent season, the waiting time, we might rediscover depth and sustenance in our Advent faith,

*"Joyful is the dark,
depth of love divine,
roaring, looming thundercloud of glory,
holy, haunting beauty,
living, loving God.
Hallelujah! Sing and tell the story!"*

or, as this prayer says:

*You keep us waiting.
You, the God of all time,
want us to wait
for the right time in which to discover
who we are, where we must go,
who will be with us, and what we must do.
So thank you ... for the waiting time.***

Isn't Advent the cradle, in which the Christmas celebration, when it comes, makes deepest sense?

*Sing! Sing all earth!
Sing! Sing all earth! Eternal praises sing,
To our Redeemer,
To our Redeemer and our heavenly King!
Shepherds arise, be not afraid;
With hasty steps repair
To David's city: see the maid
With her blest Infant there.*



A tribute to **Mac Robertson**



Robert MacLeod Robertson was always Mac to all who knew him. Born in Liverpool on 25th May 1935, a son of the manse, Mac had been a Balerno resident since 1970, and a member and elder at Balerno Parish Church since 1974. He and Ann lived at 44 Cockburn Crescent throughout their time here.

Ann passed away in December of 2023, and Mac was in Camilla Nursing Home until he died on 8th November 2025. He was aged 90 and a half years.

Before retiring from work Mac had been with Thomson Publishing managing the circulation of magazines including Family Circle and Living. Latterly he moved to work with the Church of Scotland's Board of World Mission and Unity, now part of the Faith Impact Forum, a job which he enjoyed, regarding it as the best possible.

Very much a family man he and Ann had two children, Alison and Angus, and the family loved nothing more than being together, holidaying all together with grandchildren, especially on Islay.

Mac was described in the eulogy at his funeral service on 19 November as, kind, generous and chivalrous and there are few words would could be more apt to describe the man and his life. He was the perfect gentleman, and now much missed by all whose lives he touched.

the
**Broxburn & Livingston
Brass Band**

the
Concert
for
Christmas

Saturday 13 December 2025
at 7.30pm
at Balerno Parish Church
tickets £10 (u-16 £5)
on sale via Church Office

BALERNO PARISH CHURCH
A MINISTRY OF BELIEF, BELONG, GROW AND SERVE

Wee snippets of news

After a herculean effort, a run of 5 years, Sandra and Jack Lyall have rightly taken a step back from their excellent organisation of Balerno Parish Church's Freshstart collection.

The Freshstart team is delighted that a collection will take place in Spring 2026.

Watch this space for a date!

Meantime make sure to visit the Freshstart tree at the annual Balerno Christmas Tree Festival on 13th December - see you there!

And while you're at the Christs Tree Festival, there'll also be a decorated Tree from the Balerno Fairtrade Village Group.



Balerno Village Gardeners,
hard at work planning for 2026,
or maybe just having a wee break at the Mill.
Either way the Blether says 'thank you' for all you do for our community



Palm Cafe

Last
Tuesday of
each month
at St
Joseph's;
3.00 to
4.30pm.

'A space
for people
with
dementia
and their
carers'



...Brrrrrrr...

Winter's here now!

**It's definitely time for
a wee treat (or two)
at the Mill Cafe!**

Christmas at the Carols Grey Horse

**Tuesday 16th December
7.00pm**



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

December 2025 / January 2026 Services

December services

- 7th December: - **9.30am Gift Service Balerno** (Bring something for the foodbank)
- 11.15am Service in Currie
- 14th December - **9.30am Service of Lessons and Carols in Balerno**
11.15am - Service of lessons and carols (Currie)
- 21st December - **NO SERVICE IN BALERNO**
11.15am - Joint service in Currie (Nativity Service)
- 24th December - **6.00pm - Christmas Eve Family Service Balerno**
6.30pm - Christmas Eve Family Service, Gibson Craig Hall
11.30pm - Watchnight Service Balerno
11.30pm - Watchnight Service Currie
- 25th December - Christmas day
11.15am - Joint Service Currie (No service in Balerno)
- 28th December - 9.30am - Service in Balerno
11.15am - Service in Currie

January services

During January Sunday morning services
will be at **9.30am at Balerno Parish Church**, and at Currie is at 11.15am

December 2025 / January 2026 Events

- 2nd December:** Currie Guild at Gibson Craig Halls 10:00 The Scottish Prison Service
Speaker: Rev Sheena Orr
- 3rd December:** Balerno Guild at Ogston Hall 19:30 Christmas Flowers with Shelagh Anderson.
- 4th December:** Dean Park Primary School Christmas Extravaganza
- 4th December:** A warm invitation to any elderly members of the community who would like to join us for music, singing and afternoon tea. .
13.45
- 4th December:** **Lighting of Church Christmas Tree** 18:00 with Pipe Band & Santa switching on lights at 18:15; Rotary Tree of Life is supporting the Doddy Weir Foundation (MND)
- 4th December:** Switching on of Christmas Tree lights in Mains Street Balerno from 18.30 with Dean Park Primary School Choir plus Balerno and District Schools Pipe Band
- 6th December:** Currie Kirk Christmas Fayre 13:00-16:00 Gibson Craig Hall
- 7th December - **Gift Service** (gifts for foodbank please)
- 10th December - **Kirk Session** meeting
- 13th December:** **Christmas Tree Festival** Ogston hall from 09:00-13:00.
- 13th December - **Farmers Market** (9.00 to 1.00) with **Carol Singing** (about 10.00)
- 13th December:** Quiet Day in Currie Kirk 10.00 am—2.00 pm Remembrance at 12 noon lasting about 30/45 minutes. All are welcome.
- 13th December:** Broxburn & Livingston **Brass Band Concert Balerno** Church 19:30
Tickets £10 Under 16 £5 available from the Church office
- 16th December - Pub Carols in the 'Grey Horse with One Bar Rest and Friends - Free entry; donations in aid of Cardiac Risk in the Young.

NB - Mil Cafe is closed for Christmas after Friday 19 December, but will reopen on Tuesday January 6th

Useful Numbers

Interim Minister Rev Roy Henderson
0131 449 3830
rhenderson@churchofscotland.org.uk

Church administrator (Curch office)
Pam McKeon 0131 449 7245
bpc-admin@balernochurch.org.uk

Session Clerks

Kay Coull 0131 449 6151
07415506947
Elaine McCulloch 0131 449 5876
balerno.sessionclerks@gmail.com

Treasurer

David Booth 0131 449 3516
bpc-treasurer@balernochurch.org.uk

Roll Keeper

Pam McKeon 0131 449 2541
pammckeon@bt.com

Fabric Committee

Dilys Conway 0131 449 7245
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Pastoral Care Co-ordinator

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Mill Cafe

Lynsey Inglis 0131 449 7245
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Balerno Blether

Lesley Burt 0131 449 4314
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copy date for

February

2026



is

Friday 16th

January

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

16th January

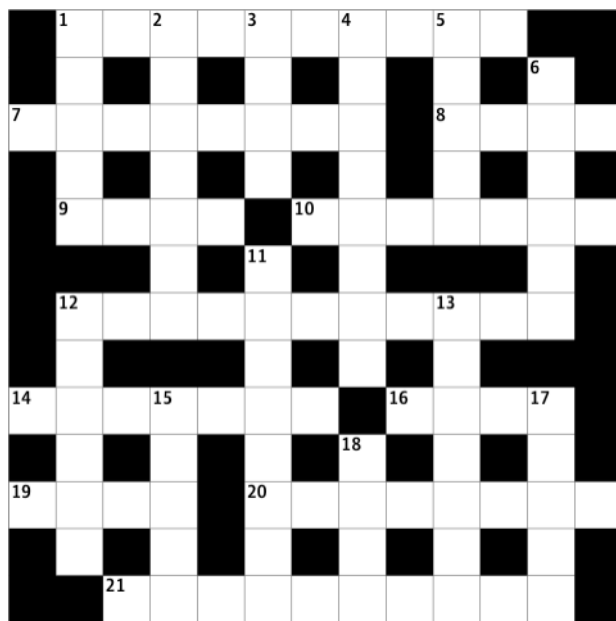
We're really sorry but we can't guarantee to look at copy received after that time.

TOP PRIORITY!

Crossword corner November answer

T	U	R	N	O	F	P	H	R	A	S	E
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I	L	O	A								
L	I	E	O	F	T	H	E				

Crossword Corner December 2025



Across

- 1 Consecutive (informal) (4-2-4)
- 7 Biscuit made with ground almonds (8)
- 8 (Long) period of time (4)
- 9 Old stringed instrument (4)
- 10 Argument (7)
- 12 Stooze to a comedian (8,3)
- 14 Dishevelled (7)
- 16 Panic (4)
- 19 Band of delinquents (4)
- 20 Garment (8)
- 21 In a hopeless position (2,3,5)

Down

- 1 Rowdy scuffle (5)
- 2 Mat for decanter or glasses (7)
- 3 Ancient city in Asia Minor (4)
- 4 Tea party (slang) (8)
- 5 Involuntary and painful contraction of a muscle (5)
- 6 Site of rebellious tea party (6)
- 11 Send off (mail) (8)
- 12 Ice cream with toppings (6)
- 13 Cissy (7)
- 15 Encourage (3,2)
- 17 European capital (5)
- 18 Period of time (4)