

balerno



Blether

FREE

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



Linked up!

but still lots of questions

Resources and service timings?

May's Newsletter arrived too late to be included in its entirety as part of the June Blether. Most of its elements are included in this issue, however, and amongst the most significant matters addressed was selection of a name for the united charge of Currie and Balerno.

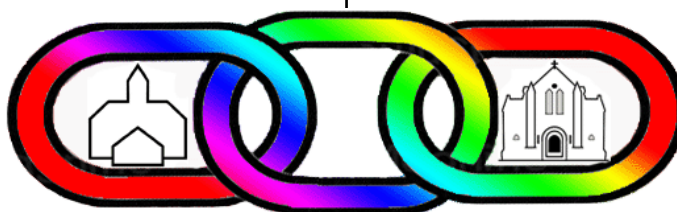
The second of the two votes for selection of a name was on Sunday 24th May, and it was thought that would allow a draft Basis and Plan of Union to be brought to the Joint Kirk Sessions of Currie and Balerno on June 10th before submission to the Presbytery and the Law Department as required. That would pave the way, in due course, for Kirk Session and Congregational Votes on the Union, although no date for that has yet been intimated.

The scheduling of Sunday services is also noted in the Newsletter as an issue to be further considered in June. It notes that at present services are held each Sunday at 9.30am in Balerno and at 11.15am in Currie. This will be reviewed at the Joint Session meeting on 10th June. Suggestions received so far range from the status quo, to joint services each week at another time e.g. 10/10.30am, to worshipping together in each Church on alternate Sundays (or months) during the year or expanding the monthly joint service in some way. The Newsletter invites views and opinions to be given to the Steering Committee by speaking with the Minister, Elders or by contacting the Church Office.

Of course the problem of timing of services is inextricably linked to ministerial resources. One minister cannot be in two places at the same time, and part of the reason for the Presbytery Plan, and all that goes with it, is the need to reduce the ministerial allocation - hence the union and the reduction to one minister for Currie and Balerno. The Presbytery Plan appears to concede that that is insufficient and recommends that the congregations be encouraged to fund a local post.

And so one reaches the question which John Burnside poses; quite apart from what is affordable, what do you actually want this locally funded post holder to do?

And to address that question, one must first consider whether it is necessary to have articulated some vision for the future of the united congregation.



What If . . . ?

Ever since the publication of the first draft of the Presbytery's Mission Plan there has been the suggestion that the future of the 'well resourced' combined congregations of Currie and Balerno should involve the funding of a 'local post that would build on existing community involvement.'

It would be fair to say that a lot of water has passed under the various bridges over the Water of Leith since then and that there are aspects of

this plan which have already been overtaken by events, not least of which is the decline in resources. However, the idea of expanding the ministry team with the appointment of some sort of outreach worker after the completion of the union of the congregations continues to provide a focus for discussion.

Both congregations have had previous experience in the recruitment of additional staff to enhance their ministry team and spread the workload. No doubt there have been lessons learned from this experience regardless of whether the additional member of staff was designated as an outreach worker, a youth worker, a pastoral assistant or an assistant minister. Having a successful ministry 'team' generally requires people who have shared aims and complimentary skills so that they enjoy working together. However, working in a team can present serious challenges to people who have previously been accustomed to working on their own.

In previous experience, it was assumed - quite understandably - that the minister was responsible for the traditional aspects of the ministry to the parish which provided the opportunity for the additional member of staff to pursue more innovative forms of ministry with children and young people. The additional member of the ministry team usually held a part time post, something which tended to make the job less appealing to potential recruits.

So, the challenge is this. When we get to the point of being able to call a new minister, should we be looking for someone who will focus on traditional ministry and have a part timer who looks to innovate or should we be looking for a minister who will seek to innovate and leave the conventional, traditional ministry to a part timer? It is clear from the average age of church membership that traditional styles of church have diminishing appeal to the younger generation. We may not feel brave enough to take quite such a radical step, but if the management of change is confined to the formalities of the union, then its days will be numbered.

John Burnside

An Appeal for Support

Although we may have been able to follow some high-definition images of the escalation of violence in the middle east over the last year. For most of us these are events in a far-away countries of which we know very little. One of the unfortunate consequences of the repeated scenes of conflict which we see almost daily on the news is that we are in danger of being desensitised to the horror and scale of major atrocities. Additionally, many major media outlets choose to tell part of and/or a spun version of the story which suits their political agenda.

However, in our multicultural community, we have neighbours for whom these events are very real as they have serious concern for the welfare of close family and friends. Communication with loved ones in the aftermath of the January protests in Iran was very difficult but to say that the narrative which emerged was distressing would be a huge understatement. Some of that narrative is below:

During the two nights of 8–9 January 2026, widespread peaceful protests across Iran were met with extreme and coordinated violence, in the most brutal and barbaric ways imaginable, and with the help of recruited foreign militia. Citizens had gathered to protest severe economic hardship, endemic corruption and the absence of fundamental freedoms. Reports from credible sources indicate that at least 36,500 innocent defenceless people may have been killed during these two nights. The exact number remains uncertain due to internet blackouts and regime's attempts to suppress information and wipe-out evidence with many human rights organisations fearing that the actual death toll might be significantly higher. Victims included men, women (including pregnant women), young people and children. Numerous testimonies describe the killing of injured protesters seeking medical help in streets, homes, hospitals and ambulances with one official confirming around 70% of those killed had close range gunshot to the head. The bodies, many of them shot in the head from close range with medical aid items still attached, were piled up without any dignity. Reports also describe attacks on medical personnel attempting to treat the wounded. Many families were reportedly forced to pay large sums to retrieve the bodies of their loved ones, as the cost of killing, while others were buried in unmarked graves. At the same time, tens of thousands of additional citizens were reportedly arrested in connection with the protests. There are fears that many of those arrested faces long imprisonment or even execution with credible reports of people executed few days after their arrest. These executions are currently ongoing on a daily basis on a scale larger than those killed during recent 40-day war.

The Kirk Session of Balerno Parish Church recently received a written request from a local resident seeking support for a proposal to create a symbolic memorial to those innocent civilians whose lives were lost in the suppression of their protest against their authoritarian government.

This community member has been working with our MP and a number of communities to establish a small memorial space in the city of Edinburgh where up to 36,500 flowers can be planted as a living tribute to those innocent people who were brutally killed. His request outlined that the memorial will also include a symbolic statue of heroic firefighter Hamid Mahdavi (who was shot dead while helping the injured demonstrators in the streets of Tehran, despite wearing a white hoodie to signal that he posed no threat to anyone).

This initiative is aimed to reinforce universal values of human dignity, life, freedom, courage and public service.

By creating a space of remembrance in Edinburgh, similar to many just reminders of WWII Holocaust and other similar major atrocities, its proposers hope to honour those innocent men, women and children who lost their lives and to ensure that awareness of this tragedy continues for future generations so that nothing like this will ever happen anywhere in the world.

As part of this effort, a petition has been created to gather community support to be presented to the Edinburgh city council to secure the space. It is accessible online using this link. <https://c.org/xBNMg9WfZD>

Please read and if you feel comfortable, sign it and possibly share it as you see fit. We are not asking for any financial support.



Wandering around the Church

So, who was James Braidwood?



How many times have you looked up to the east window on Balerno Parish Church and asked yourself the question, who was James Braidwood? There it is high up in the rose window, 'in memoriam James Braidwood.

In short James Braidwood helped to establish the Edinburgh Fire Brigade – the first municipal fire service in the world - prior to which, fire-fighting in the capital was undertaken by various fire insurance companies. A serious fire in Niddry Street, in February of that year, and another a few months later opposite the Royal Exchange (today the Edinburgh City Chambers), brought into sharp relief the realisation that the city needed an organised fire service to protect against the risk of fire.

Braidwood was born in Edinburgh on 3rd September 1800, the son of Janet Mitchell and Francis Braidwood, a prosperous cabinet maker, who had married on 16th August 1775 in Leith South parish.

Educated at the Edinburgh High School, he was trained as a surveyor where he gained in-depth knowledge of housing conditions in the city; beneficial in his role within the fire brigade. And aged 24, he was appointed Master of Engines in the fire service.

Having moved to London, in 1830 he wrote what was one of the first textbooks on the science of fire engineering, and in effect created the London Fire Service. He died on 22 June 1861 at Tooley Street while fighting a fire, and his funeral is said to have rivalled that of the Duke of Wellington, and that involved 1.5M people it is said.

But what was his link with Balerno? Well apparently Mr Braidwood had had a deep interest in the construction of the church by which must be meant the 1828 building, now St Joseph's Hall, the current church not having been built until the 1880's, opening in 1884. The window was apparently gifted by James Braidwood's widow to honour his deep interest in the construction of the church.

Beyond that we do not know anything. How was that interest prompted? If you have information about the link between James Braidwood and Balerno Parish Church we would love to hear.

Meanwhile back at the Session

Points of interest from the May meeting of the Balerno Kirk Session

Property

Many will have noticed the scaffolding which was erected at the side of the church at the beginning of the month. This was to address a problem with a leak in the roof which has now been repaired. However, further inspection revealed an identical problem on the opposite side of the building and it is intended that that should be repaired as soon as the contractor can arrange it.

Pastoral Care

Members of the congregation should have been receiving copies of the Pastoral Care Team newsletter which has been produced monthly from February 2026. It is sent to the many members and others that have given consent for us to use their email. The email also contains contact information and encourages folks who would like support to contact the Church office.

The Mill Café

A new freezer has been installed in the Mill Café, along with a replacement for the refrigerated display cabinet. We are grateful for a grant of £600 which was awarded to The Mill by the Pentland Community Chest to help with the cost of the new refrigerated cabinet.

Finance

While reporting that BPC's financial position is satisfactory the treasurer pointed out that Gift Aided donations for the period were some £2,000 less than the same period last year, while at the same time expenses rose by almost £2,500.

The Louise Duncan travel Bursary of £500 from the Mill funds has been given to Leela Kallat, who will be travelling to South Africa with a Raleigh International Expedition at the end of June for

seven weeks. Leela will report back on her travels and the use of the bursary.

The Kirk Session was asked to give consideration to the most appropriate use of the donation of funds which was received following the dissolution of the 'Young at Heart' group.

Energy Saving

The Kirk Session gave their support to a report from the Energy Group outlining the proposed insulation of the Ogston hall and installation of heating controls, which could be paid for with a 75% grant and a 25% loan from the Energy Trust. The energy group were seeking approval from Session to submit their proposal to presbytery and then the General Trustees for approval before applying for the grant/loan in the hope that the work might be scheduled over the summer.

do you have a minute, Lord?



I'm just wondering. I hope that you don't mind me rabbiting on like this. It just occurred to me that some people might regard it as being a bit presumptive or inappropriate to chat to God and it may be that they have a point. The thing is that I am comfortable with the idea that I am chatting with my heavenly father and I am therefore inclined to share with you in the same way as I did with my earthly father with whom I felt I had a good relationship – well most of the time – but I suppose that that relationship had evolved as the years went by.

Maybe it's something to do with role models. I know a few people who were always very deferential to their fathers and called them 'Sir,' but I always thought that that sort of relationship was a hangover from previous generations where children were brought up to be 'seen and not heard,' and that it could undermine relationships by not really allowing them to develop. I hope my grown son now regards me as a friend.

However, I appreciate that while I might regard our relationship as OK, you might not share my view - but it's not easy for me to assess that. I have to say that I am at least trying to avoid asking you for something every time I start off on one of these chats: I also have to try to fight down the urge to complain all the time but that is becoming increasingly difficult in this 21st century. Meanwhile, thank-you for the sense of reassurance which I am getting through the notion that you are there and listening.

contributed



We are excited to bring the praise band back to life in Balerno Parish Church, and we would love you to be part of it. This was once a much loved part of our Sunday services, adding energy, variety, and a real sense of joy to our worship, and now we're ready to build it again.

Whether you sing, play an instrument, or simply love music, there's a place for you here. You don't need to be an expert or have years of experience, what matters most is your enthusiasm, your willingness to get involved, and your desire to help create something uplifting for others.

If you enjoy making music and sharing that joy with others, you'll fit right in.

This is a wonderful opportunity to meet new people, grow in confidence, and be part of a supportive and creative group within the church.

If this sounds like something you'd enjoy, or if you'd just like to find out more, we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch with

Don MacLeod (drmmacleod@gmail.com) or
Martin Petty (mpetty712@gmail.com).



OK, so where are we?

A topical question, perhaps, but we hasten to clarify that we are not looking for absolute map co-ordinates, although if you can furnish them we would happily print. Rather we ask which way is up, and is the photograph looking east, west, north or south, or indded up or down.

More engagingly perhaps, what is the hole for, assuming it ever had a purpose? Where does it lead? Again always assuming there isn't simply an impenetrable void beyond.

Or have the Editors finally flipped, and been unable to find something of interest to occupy this area of white space.

Answers on a PC to 'Are you kidding me?' St Josephs Centre, Balerno.

Where do we want to go?

Martin Petty argues the necessity for a vision for the united congregations of Balerno and Currie. To secure a positive long-term future the congregations need to have a target and a programme designed to help achieve it. Only then, he argues, can we go to our members and the wider community and ask for the involvement and commitment needed to make it happen.

The Presbytery Plan which implements the Radical Action Plan requires a union between the Currie and Balerno congregations and reduces the allocation of full time ministers from 2 to 1.

The Plan recognises that Currie and Balerno are distinct communities and states that both churches should remain open for worship. The two congregations are told to consider funding a development worker; that clearly indicates that one minister alone is not enough to meet the needs of the united congregation.

If one minister has to spread their time across two communities, they cannot possibly do as much as their predecessors. When there were two fulltime ministers both congregations believed that they needed more resource.

In general, when two congregations unite, a significant number of members leave and of course any financial contributions they make leave with them.

Both the Currie and the Balerno congregations have had a difficult time in the last 10 years, both have lost members (some have passed away and others have simply left).

Neither congregation has brought in many new members, young or old.

In the past where there has been a major project that needed support, financial or time, members have stepped up and supported it. Loans have often been repaid early.

Both congregations have survived, are financially still in the black area and church attendance has recovered to some extent – Balerno regularly has circa 80.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

To survive as a united congregation supporting both communities there needs to be a change in the way things are done. There needs to be a change in attitude, the congregations need to accept responsibility for leading, for looking ahead, preparing for the future, supporting the two communities and providing a positive active Christian witness. The reality of the change confronting Currie and Balerno, and the accompanying need for leadership from the congregations is that we cannot simply wait for the appointment of a new over-stretched minister. We must work now to shape a vision and a framework for the united congregation. An active church with forward looking plans, knowing where it wants to be, would be attractive to a prospective minister.

To secure a positive long-term future we need to have a target and a programme designed to help us achieve it. Only then can we go to our members and the wider community and ask for the involvement and commitment needed to make it happen. When there is hope and a clear worthwhile target in the past people have stepped up to the plate with time and money.

The first step is to agree to a vision of what we want the future to look like.

A POSSIBLE VISION FOR THE UNITED CONGREGATIONS OF CURRIE AND BALERNO

Our vision for the future might be that in five years' time there will be

Worship in both churches on most Sundays, and that church attendance will have increased.

The two Sunday services will probably be different with one possibly being lay led.

As well as the organ and choir there will be a praise band that regularly contributes to services.

The congregation will employ an Assistant Minister/Community Development Worker who is active across both churches and communities in organising and stimulating the work of the church.

Community use of the halls, and of the churches, will be vigorously and competitively marketed and will continue to increase.

The two campuses will be maintained in good condition, improved where appropriate and will be attractive.

The congregation will be organised and administered in a well understood, sustainable and supportive manner designed to encourage participation and involvement.

There will be a growing number of congregational events, eg dinner discussion, quiz nights, concerts etc.

Events in both campuses will be marketed across the area

Communications within and across the united congregation, and across the community at large will increasingly be co-ordinated and responsive.

To make this happen action is required, some of the items have already been identified and preliminary work carried out; the programme needs to start and be expanded. EG,

- Activate and communicate the proposal for assistance within a Ministerial Team, and secure funding.
- Move ahead with the proposed plan to increase the number of lay members willing and able to lead all or part of a service and aim to have a few lay led services this year.
- *Fellowship activities* - Encourage and arrange more joint events. Recognise that communities flourish when there is a sense of purpose, which comes through shared activities.
- *Communications* - Develop systems to ensure that the congregations, and their communities can be fully engaged and informed, including eg, by Advertising Currie events in Balerno and visa versa. Some of this is happening but it needs to be consistent, rather than *ad hoc*.
- *Logistics* - Consider the administrative and organisational load involved in upcoming change including the necessity to continue two offices in order to maintain a presence across the two communities. And develop a plan for the administration of the united congregation.
- *Revenue optimisation* - Recognise the need for marketing and maximising letting income, by creating a structure in which day to day administration can be more easily delivered.
- *Financial control* - Have an annual budget that looks ahead to the likely income and expenditure including an estimate of the cost of a programme of routine fabric maintenance.

AVAILABLE OPTIONS

In broad terms the practical options available to us in May 2026 are

- (i) to pretend to ourselves that all is well, that all will be well and soldier on much as before



Exploring thin places

We have all at some point looked at a view and felt unable to identify the point where the sea meets the sky despite our knowledge that there is a horizontal line in the distance where that separation exists. We just can't see it. It is a panorama which can have the effect of making one feel rather small, alone and insignificant in the featureless space.

There is an attractive concept in Celtic Christian tradition of what are called Thin Places. These are places where people feel that they are on the edge of the prosaic reality of our physical world and sense the gravitational pull of another intangible and invisible presence. Some of these places are well known such as Iona, Lindisfarne and Glastonbury, all of which have had clear Christian associations for centuries and have been destinations of pilgrimage as the travellers hope to find a closer relationship with God.

However, the sense of Thin Places may not be an exclusively Christian notion. There are many places which are affecting because of their history and the visitor's awareness of being in the same space as past historic events – only separated from the people involved by an accident of time – and perhaps even

looking at the same unaltered surroundings. Who could not be affected and moved by a visit to a location like Auschwitz or the experience of a trip to the Pyramids and sensing a more immediate connection to people in the past? Do the surroundings actually speak to us or do we simply become focussed to be more empathetic?

It's not just about the stimulation of our imagination. When faced with a difficult choice, we have probably all at some point or another explained the resolution of our dilemma by saying that one of the options simply 'felt right.' This feeling is sometimes referred to as the 'emotional residue' – trying to capture the idea that there are things or places which simply have a 'good vibe' and therefore present us with a more appealing option. However, we may not all get the same resonance from a space and so the idea of Thin Places seems to refer to those locations which give a sense of transcendence to a large number of people and challenges their ability to put their shared experience into words. As Oliver Burkeman commented, 'Explanations aren't merely useless; they threaten to get in the way.'

But should we accept that the only Thin Places are those popular locations which can be identified by a computer search engine? There are occasions in our lives when we experience events or sensations which can take us by surprise and we have what might be described as a Thin experience which leaves us feeling a tension between the logical and the emotional; we know what we felt, but we don't have a rational explanation for it. We know that fairies don't exist – don't we? – but at the other end of the spectrum we can all relate to Hamlet's put-down to his friend when he said, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

John Burnside

Where do we want to go?

contd from p 4

(ii) to make the most of the 'opportunity' that has been thrust upon us.

SOLDIERING ON MUCH AS BEFORE

Both congregations currently function in their communities but with an increasing struggle as people retire or are not able to do what they could in the past.

'Soldiering on' is short term and soon becomes 'Soldier on until we no longer can'. It is not the end yet but ignoring problems seldom means they go away. Soldiering on is likely to lead to a church closure in the near future, a significant loss in members and revenue as well as a loss of christian witness to the communities.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE OPPORTUNITY

Making the most of the opportunity means more work, for all. If we are to accept the challenge then we need to act now, to tell people in the church and the community what we are doing and why. In that way we provide hope for the future and hope is fundamental to positive action.

We are at our best when working towards a target. We have several avenues that could be getting actively developed now, avenues that will demonstrate that there is life and ambition left in the church. While those avenues are being developed other avenues can be explored and new ideas developed.

We know the status quo is a steady decline, not a long-term solution. Sitting on the fence waiting to see if the decline continues is the ostrich option. Apart from anything else it would be completely irresponsible and quite unfair to the next generation.

Martin Petty



GALA WEEK 2026
16 -23 May

**THANK YOU TO THE
GALA COMMITTEE
FOR DELIVERING
ANOTHER GREAT
BALERNO EVENT!**



Fresh Start 24 / 25 April

FreshStart

helping people make a home for themselves

In the community, with the community, for the community, could well be a motto or mission statement for Balerno Parish Church when one looks at its work with Fresh Start.



A highly disciplined and efficient lineup of the outdoor team; minus Malcolm. About to start the van loading process

Photo Richard M Henderson

Fresh Start is an Edinburgh-based charity that works directly with people who are moving on from homelessness, providing essential household goods and social support services to help them start a new chapter in their lives. The charity began in 1999 and operates with a team of 22 staff members and a large volunteer force of over 150 people across Edinburgh. In Balerno the Fresh Start initiative is managed by Susan and Malcolm Ogilvie who took over from the highly successful Sandra and Jack Lyall in late 2025. There are if you like in fact two sub teams. The first handles the in-gathering, sorting and boxing of the goods donated, and that is a considerable task! Fresh Start look for items of use to people starting up in new



The Van Loading process with Fresh Start's Maisie Jack

accommodation, in all probability from a nil starting point. So its Dishes/Cutlery: Pots and Pans, Kitchen Equipment - Can openers, potato peelers, tea towels etc. And then Bedding, Linen, Towels, Curtains. Not forgetting Cleaning items, and then Toiletries. And Small Electricals. The basics really.

Goods arrive at the collection point at the Old Hall, in all shapes and sizes and are initially sorted into fabrics, crockery, household items etc etc. Then those individual items have to be boxed up for transit to Fresh Start's HQ in Newhaven. Boxing up entails first securing a supply of boxes - not easy. And then especially in the case of glass and



Mr Ogilvie demonstrating his Spring (shorts) Collection, and with wagging finger his command of the situation in general and his troops in particular.

Photo Richard M Henderson



Meanwhile the indoor team is an example to us all of commitment and efficiency,with a bit of fun thrown in.

Photo Susan Ogilvie

So here you can see what that looks like. Think of a Transit Van packed to the gunnels. That shifting and packing is for the outdoor team, who according to shift leader and foreman Malcolm Ogilvie, who 'worked like Trojans. Well the photos show



And no, it's not the same box as in the picture above. Is it?

Photo Susan Ogilvie

them relaxing after, or in the midst of, that heavy toil. Then there they are with the boxes and assorted containers piled up on the Church drive, and then back to work again with Fresh Start's Maisie Jack beginning on the loading job. Unkind people ask why there are no photos of the laden van; the photographer had apparently gone off shift by then. But suffice to say that a new record was set in this year's Spring Collection with the box count at 120 boxes and with various miscellaneous standard lamps etc; although the latter proved beyond even the most adept, experienced and skilled of packers!



See how his troops jump to it at his instruction!

Photo Richard M Henderson



Well done both teams! Another splendid effort!

Photo Susan Ogilvie

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Balerno?

News in brief from Balerno Community Council

Proceedings at Balerno Community Council's monthly meeting on 7 May were dominated by debate on preparation of the village's LOCAL PLACE PLAN (LPP) with one issue in particular dominating discussion, that being the possibility of development by St Mungo's Church on their field (main picture on site) opposite Balerno High School on Bridge Road.

Members of the public joined in the debate which was sometimes passionate despite reminders from the chairman that no application for planning permission had yet been submitted to the City of Edinburgh Council by St Mungo's.

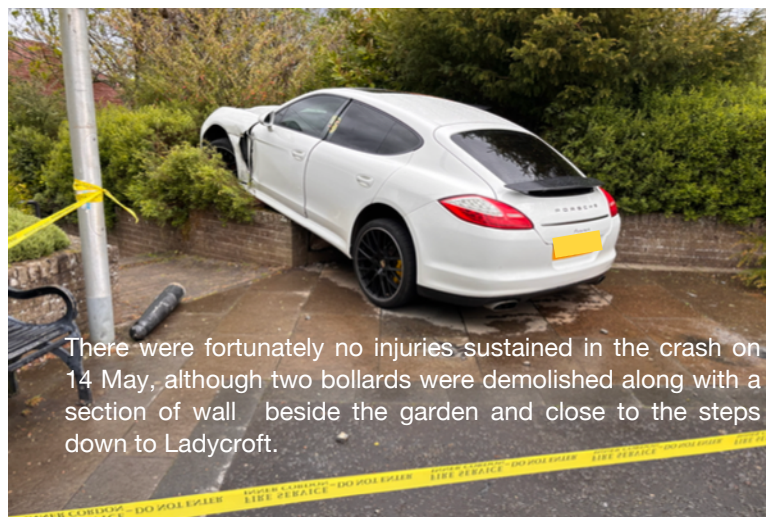
The meeting was advised that a public meeting would be held when the LPP was sufficiently developed to allow for informed exchanges. At present work was being undertaken by a BCC working group to provide an overview of the local place plan. Steps which have already been taken to canvas local opinion were outlined including the circulation of an on-line questionnaire - which had produced over 200 response by end of April - and presence of Community Councillors at the monthly Market. Issues raised so far by local people include the preservation of the Green Belt, public transport, schools, road safety, the future of the nearby quarry, issues surrounding the Main Street, including parking, speeding, and infrastructure. All comments have been logged in a spreadsheet which now contains hundreds of suggestions and that information is currently being collated by the working group, which meets regularly.

Road safety as a matter of concern was amplified by the crash on Main Street on Thursday 14 May on which the Council has written to the City Council. Road safety had already been referred to by local Councillor Graeme Bruce at the May BCC meeting when he noted concerns brought to his attention including the need for double yellow lines on Bridge Road, to prevent parking outside Balerno High School, and the need for a crossing at Bavelaw Road, once again for the safety of school children.

The Council also heard that lawyers representing BCC and Tarmac, who operate the Ravelrig Quarry, are in on-going discussions to conclude a Good Neighbour Agreement in relation to operation of the Quarry.

Balerno Village Trust also updated the Council on progress on refurbishing of the former Police Station, including toilet provision - there will be public access - installation of solar panels, drainage, creation of office space, and provision for an after-school club and for public meetings. A space had been found for a coffee machine.

There were fortunately no injuries sustained in the crash on 14 May, although two bollards were demolished along with a section of wall beside the garden and the steps in Main Street.



There were fortunately no injuries sustained in the crash on 14 May, although two bollards were demolished along with a section of wall beside the garden and close to the steps down to Ladycroft.

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blether

from the Blether team

Some articles in the Blether are attributed, some are not. That doesn't mean that those bearing attributions don't have the support of the team. Far from it. The Blether operates on the basis of collective editorial decisions. The team signs off the published issue.

Some articles however will be more 'important' or 'significant' than others. So for example page one gets special attention from the team, even if that is only 'what on earth are we going to do with page one this month?'

In this issue, however, 'what to do with page one' wasn't really a problem. The search for a name was bound to feature. But just as that task indicates the pace is quickening, so also it raises the question, what should the future look like for that new church? Are we simply looking at 'we've aye done it that way'. So we pose the question 'What if...?' What do we, as part of the future congregation of our new united church really want for that future?

Are we prepared to look seriously at what will be necessary for that new church to have a sustainable future?

And the name is.....

An important stage in the process towards Union is agreeing a name for the new United Congregation.

The first stage was to invite both members of both congregations to submit suggestions which could then be put to the congregations in the form of a long list on which the congregations could then vote to form a short list. The first round of voting took place on Sunday 10th May to create the Short List with a further vote on 24th May to select from that short list. The ballots were to be secret, so ballot papers were distributed to the congregation at the close of Sunday worship on the 10th with strict instructions that a cross/tick etc should be made on that paper before returning it folded - preferably only in two - to the Session Clerks, who would then go into closed session before white smoke would appear at the vestry chimney. It did take a little longer to count the votes.

The long list of candidates is given below; it's in smaller type because that's the only way the Blether can cram in the 25 names.

The result of the first ballot was issued on 19th May along with a firm admonition that if you wanted to vote on the short list then you had to be there for the second ballot on 24th May at which there would be a choice of five names on the shortlist, as follows;

Balerno and Currie Parish Church
Currie and Balerno Kirk
Currie and Balerno Parish Church
Kirk of Currie and Balerno
West Pentlands Church.

If the result of the 24th May ballot is declared before this issue goes to press on Wednesday 26th May then the Blether will endeavour to include that news as a Stop Press item.

In the meantime the Long List offered on the 10th May Ballot paper was as follows

The long list,

Currie and Balerno Kirk,	Balerno and Currie Kirk,
Kirk of Currie and Balerno,	Kirk of Balerno and Currie
Currie and Balerno Church,	Balerno and Currie Church
Currie and Balerno Parish Church,	Balerno and Currie Parish Church
Currie and Balerno United Church,	
SW Edinburgh Foothills of Pentlands Church,	
West Pentlands Church,	Upper Water of Leith & Pentland Hills Church,
Edinburgh Upper Water of Leith Church,	West Water of Leith Church,
West Water of Leith Family Church,	Upper Water of Leith Pathway Church,
Upper Water of Leith Church,	Upper Water of Leith Kirk,
Upper Water of Leith Parish Church	
The Lord's Community in the Northern Reach of the Water of Leith Church,	
The Valley Church of Currie and Balerno,	
The Valley Kirk of Currie and Balerno,	The Kirk of Lymphoy,
SW Edinburgh Pastures New Church,	Living Waters Parish Church.

The (former) Treasurer's Thumb Minestrone moments

Being rudely awakened from deep slumber is not unusual for me, humble serf that I am. But I immediately know that today will be a day of incalculable peril. It's Minestrone Wednesday. Himself pinny clad will create his culinary masterpiece; listed as the premier dish of the day at ye Mill Cafe.

Preparation of this Chef's Choice Soup - served with seeded bread of course - involves fine chopping and crushing of vegetables and garlic along with the grating of parmesan. To all of these processes I am conscripted and must be exposed to dire risk. Now let's be clear, the Health and Safety at Work Act extends to protection of thumbs, lower case. Not to Thumbs as individuals. As 'The Thumb' I have no rights and only an armoured gauntlet would mitigate my anxiety at the prospect of being involved almost literally at the sharp end.

I do know, of course, that Chef's Minestrone is amongst the Princes of Soup. And at £3.00 it certainly is a favourite, and one of that very select group of Mill Cafe soups to carry the imprimatur of a named Chef. But again, I digress; a sign of age, I know, which not unnaturally I share with himself; and so back to anxiety at the thought of all that chopping, grating and crushing even though it be for the preparation of such a fine soup.

You see I have the recurring vision of the blade of the 'coltello da cucina' as it whistles through the air, while I grip the target carrot or what have you... What am I to do? I can't insist that I'm a vegetarian, since it is vegetables, I am called upon to assist to dispatch. I've tried to persuade himself to change hands but I know that would make things even worse.

Mind you, perhaps recognition is what I'm actually after. Maybe It's time himself shared the credit. Yes, that's it of course, and I shall insist. There should be something on the blackboard Menu, like; 'Preparation of this soup would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance, outstanding skill, exceptional courage and absolute commitment of the Thumb.'

'Talking to yourself again Thumb?'

'No! I'm addressing the world seeking justice and recognition for Thumbs!. I demand recognition on the blackboard!'

'Ye what?! Don't be daft, lad. Just pick up that garlic and I'll get me grater!'



I hear that the Church of Scotland is losing members and money what is it doing about it?

Yes the Church of Scotland has a great many buildings, some large and many in places where they are no longer being used effectively. You ask what the church is doing about it . . . well . . it has initiated a nationwide radical plan to reduce the number of churches and the full-time ministers

Sounds painful, but your congregation is active . . . this won't affect you – will it?

You're right our church is active and in fact we are part of the 20% of congregations that are able to help fund the wider work of the church as well as ourselves.

So in a business sense you are helping to keep others afloat - they will be leaving you alone then rather than risk losing more?

Not that simple, all congregations are involved in the plan, and we are to be united with the church in the neighbouring community.

Are they struggling and needing your help?

No, like us they are active and part of the same 20%.

So will uniting mean you will get more members and be able to help fund more of the wider work of the church?

You'd like to think so but bringing two or more congregations together usually means that some members opt out and the collection is smaller.

So there must be some other benefit – will this help you to do more in your community or reach more people to tell them about Jesus . . . or?

We're not being told to sell off the buildings so they can continue to be used by church and community but instead of having two ministers we will have one and he/she will have to split their time over two communities and congregations.

So that's a NO then – the plan is to reduce the number of members and sources of income – this is a plan for the future?

My brain hurts or as Yogi might have said 'My head is hard of thinking'. Can we talk about something more understandable. . . the weather, football

reprinted from March 2026 issue

WOOF!

You're really going to find it hard to believe this – Alfie, Billy and yours truly were securing our normal patch in the park when, from behind a bush appeared another dog dressed like someone out of a wild west movie – fancy leggings (leather I think) with tassels on either side. He really was the 'bees -knees. Alfie thought he looked stupid and wanted to chase him into the lake to see what he would look like wet through but thought better of it.

Apparently, he'd come all the way from somewhere called Texas – his owners had decided to open a division of their American company in Scotland, and he'd clearly been left to find his own way around. He kept saying how small everything was compared with his home State. Needless to say, he was hopelessly lost and at a distinct disadvantage – in other words he was 'ripe' for making a fool out of.

Ensuring that caution was our watchword – i.e. Not showing him all the good things we Scots boys had created over the years – we set about leading him a merry dance around the park, through spiky bushes, large patches of mud, seeing if he could jump across the river which fed the lake etc etc – you know the sort of thing

By the time we'd called a halt to the fun (for us) he looked awful and most certainly in need of a bath. His leggings were almost in tatters- goodness knows what his owners would say.

We left him thinking he'd been the hero (and showed us how easy all the rough and tumble had been) and tried to direct him home. The three of us had a quick splash in the lake to make us more respectable and trudged home wondering what additional mischief we could arrange when we next meet him. I'm on 'butchers' duty' tomorrow so will try to get some well-earned sleep.

Y'all come back now!

'til next time!

woof! woof!



Notes from Roy

At the recent Currie and Balerno joint service, I found myself musing on the turbulent and unruly times that we are living in.

Such turbulence and unruliness being a mark of human life both 'then and now'.

Then, the place where Jesus walked was an occupied nation with a 'god-emperor' in control – would you call that place Palestine or Judea?

Now, we are aware of vexed debates about whether the contemporary state of Israel is a democracy or an ethnostate?

Today there are heated arguments about names. Judea and Samaria or Occupied Territories? If you say one thing are you antisemitic, or witnessing for justice?

Football is only a game ...

but who can agree about a VAR penalty decision?

Eurovision is colourful fun ...

but who can agree which countries should be represented?

This is a free country ...

but who can agree if a public march is a stand against injustice or a hate march?

This is democracy ...

but who can agree if a government should keep a prime minister for the duration of its term and then let the voters decide?

Jesus is Lord ...

but who can agree if the USA's recent 'Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee Of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving' is a sign of Gospel revival or an expression of 'White Christian Nationalism'?

... and that's the easy stuff ...

who can agree, what to do with the union of your two congregations and parishes Currie and Balerno?

Besides, we all live with our own inner emotional turbulence and unruliness of heart and mind and soul.

Turbulence and unruliness... in other words being human and making our way together sometimes harmoniously and sometimes not so much.

In the seventeenth century, another turbulent time, the French

philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal, wrote:

"What a Chimera is man!

What a novelty, a monster, a chaos, a contradiction, a prodigy!

Judge of all things, an imbecile worm;

depository of truth, and sewer of error and doubt; the glory and refuse of the universe."

The Gospel of John claims that in Jesus of Nazareth, God's Eternal Word 'became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1.14 NRSV)

The Word became flesh. The eternal pitched a tent, set up shop among us in actual human flesh – in the thick of it, turbulent unruly 1st century Roman occupied Judea.

God's eternal Word in the flesh, knowing at first hand everything that Pascal described.

Jesus' whole life was a perpetual cross and resurrection ... he embraced it all and remained his Father's beloved Son, embodying God's grace and truth.

The earliest Christian confession of faith was 'Jesus is Lord'.

So William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1881-1944) could state, in times unruly and turbulent, that:

"While we deliberate, he reigns;

when we decide, he reigns;

when we decide foolishly, he reigns;

when we serve him in humble loyalty, he reigns;

when we serve him self-assertively, he reigns;

when we rebel and seek to withhold our service, he reigns

- the Alpha and the Omega,

which is, and which was,

and which is to come, the Almighty."



Balerno Fairtrade Village Group



Congratulations to Balerno Guild on their participation at the first National Quiz of The Church of Scotland Guild!

The very first Guild National Quiz, the Conveners Challenge, was held in the North Church, Perth on Friday the 22nd of May,

Balerno Parish Church Guild represented the Lothians and returned a highly commendable score resulting in being placed a fantastic 4th out of 11 teams participating.

So, many congratulations and well done to Avril Cameron, Lorna Turnbull, Morag Lyall and Trudy Allan for doing Balerno Guild and Balwerno Parish Church proud.

Kay Coull, National Convener of the Church of Scotland Guild



Roof repairs

The two words guaranteed to cast a chill over any Church Treasurer, are of course, Roof Repairs. They are a critically common and recurring feature of the life of any church, especially if built before 1900.

As of 2026, it is estimated that thousands of churches in the UK alone require urgent roof repairs, making it a major and ongoing issue for heritage management.

In late January 2026, the UK Government announced the closure of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which had allowed VAT to be reclaimed on repairs to listed places of worship, at the end of March 2026.

This announcement was apparently, according to the Church of Scotland, unexpected, and, as the Church says, it 'will impact current projects as well as ending a scheme which has been vital over many years, and without it will add further burdens on the future.'

Leaving aside the suddenness of the withdrawal of the scheme, a replacement scheme for Scotland is still apparently not yet in place, despite the introduction of the Places of Worship Renewal Fund (PWRF) for England. Such a discrepancy is worthy of remark.

For Balerno the matter is of immediate relevance given that roof and building repairs are needed for both the church and also St Josephs.

Balerno Parish Church received some £8K from the General Trustees towards repairs on the west side of the church front and other essential repairs, which together will cost @£32K. Reasons offered for the Trustees declining a grant on the remaining £24K were at the least opaque.

Further roof work on the church roof on the east side of the front has now also been identified as essential, and a further approach to the General Trustees is being made.

Repairs to St Joseph's would not have been eligible for grant under the Listed Places of Worship scheme given that, somewhat surprisingly St Joseph's Centre is not a listed building notwithstanding that it was the original Balerno Parish Church, built in 1828 and one of Balerno's oldest buildings.

Richard M Henderson



Archive moment



Once upon a time Balerno Parish Church ran a photo competition; yes the clue is in the picture, 2017. In association with the Balerno Village Trust In fact they did it twice, the first time being in 2015.

To advertise it a series of posters of local businesses, characters and worthies was prepared each holding up the event poster. It was pretty successful although the Blether doesn't record the statistics because the Blether only started in 2021. But we do have the organiser's press comment of March 2015;

Speaking in advance of the presentation of prizes on 15 March, Ian Gidney whose brainchild the competition was, said at the time, 'We're really bowled over by the

number and quality of entries and the general interest shown in the event. We had close to 90 entries and that's a great response to a new event. The judges complimented all the entrants on their work, and it's quite obvious from the pictures in the display that Balerno Photo 2015 has attracted a very high level of talent, both in terms of technical quality and imaginative input. We would have liked to have shown many, many more but unfortunately space doesn't allow for that'.

How about BalernoPhoto2026 then perhaps to mark the bicentenary of the foundation of our church in, we think, September 1826,

Something to celebrate perhaps isn't it?

Richard M Henderson

Wind and Watertight

Ian Gidney tells us about Roof Repairs

Midlothian Roofing Services Ltd our roofing contractors have completed work on St Joseph's and the Church roofs.

Wise Property Care had identified high moisture levels within the roof space of St Joseph's due to poor air circulation and ventilation and recommended the installation of ventilation tiles. 40 tiles in total have

been set in place on either sides of the roof – unobtrusive as can be observed in the attached photographs and hardly seen from the road.

Over a period of time we have been experiencing water ingress through the Church roof noticeable on the wall of the staircase leading to the gallery. An £8000 Grant has been received from the Church of Scotland General Trustees to cover repair costs - in addition to



renewing old and leaking leadwork, rotten timbers were found and replaced when part of the roof was opened up.

The two roofers who carried out the works were blessed with warm dry weather over the seven days at the end of April it took to complete the job.

Photos are available detailing the preparatory

work on the Church roof including addressing the rotten timbers and the completed job – neat and tidy leadwork creating new watergates and mouldings around the stonework profiles.

The opportunity was also taken to remove and seal up the area on the roof where there was an accumulation of weeds that created an unwanted roof garden during the summer months.

Out and About in the Union



Many thanks to the Currie Team for all their hard work organising a very enjoyable trip for Currie and Balerno Guilds around Fife and Pitlochry and culminating in a splendid evening meal at Kinross Golf Club !

The Good Book Group



Following a meeting of those who showed an interest in setting up a Good Book Group, it was decided to give everyone two opportunities to meet together, informally, to explore the Bible and our Christian faith.

The Good Book Groups will therefore meet on a Monday morning from 11-12 noon in the Shepherd Room at Balerno Parish Church and from 7-8pm on a Tuesday evening in the lounge at the Gibson Craig Hall. Having two groups, will give people a choice of time/day to meet in any one week.

The groups will commence weekly from the 8th and 9th of June, 2026, and we will start by studying the book of Esther.

Please think about coming along to one of these groups. All are welcome.

A Fund Raising Event in aid of The Guild Project
In St Joseph Centre
on Wednesday 24th June 2026 at 7.30pm



Traybakes, Home Bakes,
Refreshments & Music
ALL WELCOME
Suggested donation £5



It's your community cafe!
The Mill
go on! go on! go on!
pop in for a cuppa today!

Photo Richard M Henderson



composite
Picture of the month

*una zuppa magnifica
preparata apposta per te*

Photo Richard M Henderson

Calendar announcements & chit chat

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

June 2026 Services

31 May	9.30am	Balerno Parish Church
	11.15am	Currie Kirk
7 June	9.30am	Balerno Parish Church (Communion)
	11.15am	Currie Kirk
	3.00pm	Balerno Parish Church (Communion)
14 June	9.30am	Balerno Parish Church
	11.15am	Currie Kirk
21 June	10.00am	Joint Service at Currie Kirk
28 June	9.30am	Balerno Parish Church
	11.15am	Currie Kirk

June 2026 Events

2 June	7.30pm	St Joseph Hall	Balerno Kirk Session
8 June	11.00am	Shepherd Room	Good Book Group
9 June	7.00pm	Gibson Craig Hall	Good Book Group
10 June	7.30pm	St Joseph Hall	Joint Kirk Session
11 June	7.30pm	Balerno High School	Pentland Singers (Summer Concert)
21 June	10am - 3pm	Malleny Garden	Plant Fayre and Open Day

When did you last write a letter to the Editor?

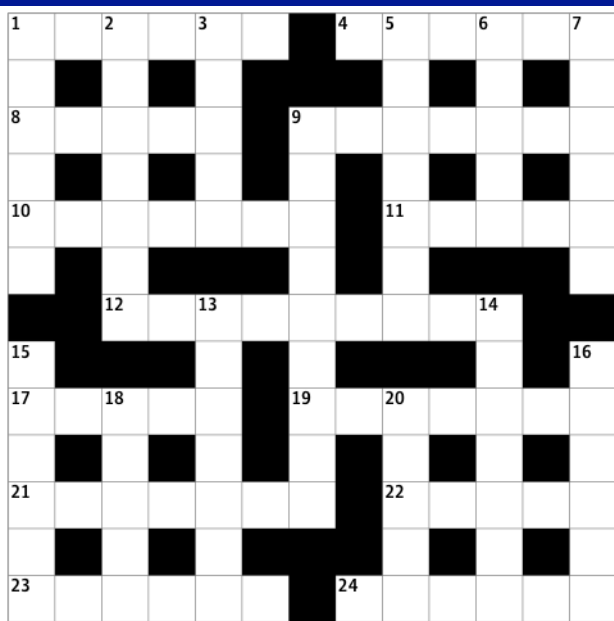
We do, actually, actively
welcome letters to the
Editor!

Keeping in touch!

If you would like to receive emails from the Church please complete a consent form available from the Church office. This includes people who have previously been receiving emails.

Keep updated! Fill in a form! Many thanks !!

Crossword Corner - June puzzle



Across

Down

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Underpass (6) | 1 Methodology (6) |
| 4 Calculating device (6) | 2 Studious (7) |
| 8 Merchandise – ancestry (5) | 3 Joint (5) |
| 9 Art of paper folding (7) | 5 Highway robber (7) |
| 10 Distinguished (7) | 6 Chew noisily (5) |
| 11 Fruit (5) | 7 Instep (anag) (6) |
| 12 Impetuous (3-6) | 9 There and then (2,3,4) |
| 17 Sweetheart (5) | 13 Dog – reservist (7) |
| 19 Hardwood flooring (7) | 14 Resolute (7) |
| 21 Find guilty (7) | 15 Thinly cut (6) |
| 22 Very pale (5) | 16 Doesn't (anag) – drunk (6) |
| 23 Chaste (6) | 18 Spite (5) |
| 24 Remained (6) | 20 Retaliate (5) |

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'*

Crossword corner May answers



The long-range forecast for Balerno in June 2026, according to Google on 22 May, shows mild, typical Scottish summer weather with daily highs ranging from 13C to 20C (56F to 69F), and over night lows generally settling between 6C and 12C (45F to 54F). Expect a mix of sunny intervals, occasional overcast days and around 11 to 15 days of light rain or showers.

COPY DATES

for July/August Blether

Final date for receipt of copy for the Summer Blether is **Friday 12th June**. Please ensure that copy - (in word or pdf format please) - is in the hands of Editors by 12 June. Publication of the Summer 2026 issue will be on **Friday 26 June**.

It may not be possible to include copy submitted after 17 May in the June issue.

Please submit e-copy to the Editor in time to be considered for publication.

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