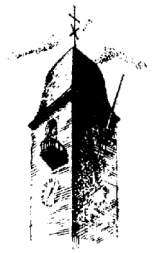


St Columba's

October/November 2020



ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



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Sundays

Please join us for worship at 11 am. The crèche is open from 10.30 am for babies and children up to four years. It can be found in the lower hall. Older children are invited to join the Sunday school classes appropriate to their age. They leave the service with their teachers following the children's talk. For teenagers, the senior study group leave with their teachers following the Bible readings. After the service, we warmly welcome everyone to the congregational lunch in the lower hall. The two-course lunch costs £3.50 and there is no need to book.



Dear Readers,

This edition of the magazine hits the virtual stand on our Harvest Festival Sunday. Normally we would be arriving for the service to find the church beautifully decorated by the Flower Guild, involving much planning, a certain amount of tension and hard work, but also friendly co-operation, drinking of tea, eating of cake and good fellowship. It is difficult not to feel a pang of regret for things as they ought to be.

There is however much to be celebrated. Read Hugh Pym's account of the heroic effort to get the online streaming of our services up and running at very short notice. Rosa Somerville follows up with an account of what it is like to read the lesson in a near empty church. Fellowship has also had to adapt to fulfil the requirements of social distancing: Anne Wilson encourages keen readers to join the virtual book club.

John Dawson writes about his long association with Pitman shorthand and his election to the presidency of the Incorporated Phonographic Society. David Stewart reflects on the remarkable life and work of the late Lord Hutton, St Columba's member and Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland.

We hope you enjoy this edition, and some images from Harvest Festivals past.

With very best wishes,

The Editorial Team

Cover photo: *'All is safely gathered in'*
by Jill Steele

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Copy for future editions should be sent to us at the Church Office, preferably by e-mail

VESTRY LETTER



October/November 2020

Dear Friends,

Two insights this summer from the world of music. Scottish folk musician Lauren MacColl recently recorded her album, *Landskein* on location in Abriachan Hall – a small, crinkly tin-roofed building known for its fine acoustics and ceilidhs, high in the hills above Loch Ness. It was the place MacColl first remembers hearing and being enchanted by the power of unaccompanied fiddle. Speaking about her choice of recording location, she described the building as being *another instrument*, a key part of the musical whole. Last month the director of one of London's concert halls, announcing the restart of concerts open to the public, spoke of a "holy trinity" – *uniting composer, musicians, and live audience*.

These insights remind us of how place and people can come together, and something greater than the sum of its parts occurs. At St Columba's we are incredibly fortunate to have a beautiful building to worship in. Carefully designed to offer its light and

space – it is an *instrument*. Months of lock down and live-streamed services from an empty sanctuary have only enhanced that understanding. Many people, watching from around the country and well beyond, have commented how comforting it was to see the familiar interior, even if they were physically far removed.

Beginning with the Early Service in August and the 11am Morning Worship in September, we have undertaken a cautious reopening of our "instrument" for worship, as well as a restricted restart for our midweek Support Groups, school children and varied organisations. Whether attending in person or joining via the live-stream, I hope each of us can both appreciate the "instrument" that is our sanctuary, and sense its "holy trinity" – musicians (as well as readers and speakers), a live audience (its worshippers) and uniting it all, the "composer" – God. That is who/ what we seek, and that is the purpose of this special place.

Autumn has traditionally been the season for stewardship; time to consider how we offer our time, talents and money towards the life of the church – both locally at St Columba's and nationally and internationally, via the wider Church of Scotland. We are very grateful that so many people contribute in many ways, as they are able – this is what keeps the *instrument tuned*. In this most uncertain of years, that willingness to serve and to give is even more appreciated.

Angus MacLeod



St Columba's goes live online every Sunday and gets a global response

Hugh Pym

With viewers reporting in from Canada, USA, Australia, South Africa, Japan, Turkey, Germany and Italy, the St Columba's live streamed Sunday morning service has established a presence well beyond Pont Street. That's not to forget those logging in from different parts of the UK. For many church members and newcomers who found us online it was a vital link with the church during lockdown and continues to be so.

So how did it all come about given that the church had no video capability before the coronavirus outbreak? There's no rocket science about live-streaming via the internet. Some churches have been doing it for a little while. But you need the right kit and that's not easy with a clock ticking towards a shutdown of many parts of the economy.

Our minister Angus MacLeod spotted the potential problem in early March as virus cases were beginning to escalate. He suggested a live camera facility to cover services if congregation numbers were possibly to be limited. Lucy Llewellyn our church administrator started looking at options. We contacted Richard Jolly, a friend of St Columba's, who runs a TV and webcasting company and has done work for us before. He is based in Northern Ireland but by a stroke of luck he was due to be in London on business in the week beginning Monday March 16th.

Richard quickly worked out what was required and ordered the camera and other pieces of equipment online. By the Wednesday the kit had arrived but Richard's main job for the week was taking up more time than expected. That evening

he finally started on installing the system in the gallery of the church alongside the existing sound desk. The following day, however, rumours of a London lockdown were rumbling. Richard had a ferry to catch back to Northern Ireland on the Friday morning and understandably wanted to avoid getting stuck in the capital. By this time Government guidelines required people to avoid public gatherings if possible. A normal Sunday service was no longer



Liz Fox

Richard worked solidly throughout the Thursday. He called me at about 6pm that evening and said he was lacking two important cables. There was just time for me to get over to Tottenham Court Road and find the right items before the specialist audio and TV shops closed. Richard worked late that night and made an early start to drive to Liverpool for the ferry.

Friday morning, March 20th, saw a hurriedly arranged trial of the camera and the rest of the system with Angus in the pulpit. Lucy in the office downstairs went online but could not see the dry run on

the YouTube channel which had been created by Richard. Nerves began to jangle at the thought of no Sunday service for the wider congregation. A final call was made to Richard to ask for advice before his mobile phone signal died en route to Belfast. His response was that there was no problem with the stream - he had been watching Angus's trial run on his laptop on the ferry an hour out of Liverpool. Let it be noted that the first viewer of the St Columba's live stream was somewhere in the Irish Sea!

That Sunday, March 22nd, saw the first live streamed service. There was no congregation. To put it mildly there were some nervous moments in the half hour before 11am! Continuing glitches with the YouTube channel, which is required to make the stream accessible to viewers, threatened to derail the project. But with not long to go Lucy, monitoring the stream from the office, said we had gone live. Texts from Richard and a few others confirmed they could see the live shot of the sanctuary. Angus walked in and opened up with the words we have all become familiar with: "Good morning and wherever you are welcome to our live-streamed act of worship here at St Columba's in London."

That first Sunday the guidelines allowed a reader and a solo singer for the hymns. Catriona Sutherland-Hawes stepped up to the lectern and James Priest, a member of the choir, sang hymns and an anthem. There were last minute reminders to be socially distanced! Ben Lewis-Smith played the organ. Angus preached and immediately adapted his style to address a near empty church with a virtual congregation.

St Columba's goes live online

Continued



All went well and Lucy could report that around 160 had watched the streamed service.

Then, on Monday March 23rd, came the national lockdown. Having more than two people visible on the stream would not be appropriate. With admirable foresight Ben had got the choir to record enough hymns and anthems to keep us going for a few Sundays. But another obstacle came into sight. How were we going to play in the recorded music during the live streamed service? Suffice to say that at the end of the week Angus was given a crash course by Richard over the phone on how to burn the tracks onto a CD. His recording was spot on and the second Sunday's stream went without a hitch. As well as his organ playing, Ben nipped down from the gallery to do the readings. And so began the Angus and Ben double act which continued for many Sundays.

Behind the scenes another double act was established. Liz Fox took on the role of regular sound and video engineer and Paul Dempsey ensured the stream was uploaded each time onto YouTube. Every service recording remains accessible on our website and they have attracted many more viewings in ensuing weeks. Liz and Paul

are owed a big vote of thanks for their work in the church every Sunday over months of lockdown and continuing. Ben as reader and organist was a key part of it all.

The choir have been recording individual parts at home for hymns and anthems which are then sent in and digitally mastered. It's hard to believe sometimes that the choir were not together to record their pieces. Fiona Gardner has organised a similar exercise for hymns sung by the congregational choir, mastered by Duncan Lang. Well done to Ben, Fiona and all the singers. The live stream would not have been possible without the efforts early on of Richard and Lucy.



They made the plan a reality in a matter of days and with time fast running out. We are all so grateful to Angus that he created a style of worship which worked so well for a scattered congregation. His suggestion to us all to light a candle if possible at home will not be forgotten. His encouragement for us to join the "virtual upper hall coffee conversation", phoning someone from the congregation just after the service, has established a popular tradition.

As the church opens up for 11am Sunday worship, the live stream continues (with its facility for folk to dial in on the phone if they don't have internet access). A range of readers can now be used and volunteers for this are welcome. We are also interested to hear from anyone who would like to join the live stream team – it's easy when you know how! There needs to be a debate about the longer term role of streaming alongside the return of a real rather than virtual congregation. Do respond with any thoughts or opinions you may have.

We should end with some of the messages received by Angus during these extraordinary recent months: "I must admit to being a bit emotional when I saw the sanctuary and heard your voice. Thank you so much for managing to bring our Church family together so well." "As one of the self-isolators, it was so comforting to be with you and I feel that I have taken part in the worship, albeit remotely." "The light from the rose window on the wall opposite you was just so beautiful and the music was lovely and so fitting. There will be light at the end of the tunnel!"



A view from the lectern

Rosa Somerville

As a reader of the bible lessons, I can't claim to be as exciting as Jonathan Scott playing the organ to an empty Albert Hall, but I guess I can share a feeling or two with him. To read to empty, newly polished pews, shimmering in sunlight, is a novel experience. Rather powerful, very sad; I tried to see in my mind the congregation seated in their usual pews – perhaps a newcomer wondering where to go, the front pews usually a bit sparsely occupied, except on baptismal days when there is continual movement of small children and anxious parents.

For the online service, which has proved to be a resounding success with the congregation worldwide, a new figure has been added since our valiant lockdown reader Ben Lewis-Smith's return to the organ loft. Seated behind the lectern and barely visible, the reader of the day takes part in the service from a privileged position. On my day, I watched the sun illuminate the box of engraved perspex rings created by Gael Robertson for our WW1 exhibition. It was called "Marriage - From this Day Forward". It was somehow magical, and brought back memories of that amazing time last year when St Columba's and other Scottish groups remembered Scots in London during the 1st World War.

Firstly, to the new way of worshipping at 9.30. On entry your name and contact details are checked by one of that Sunday's team, seated behind the newly polished Welcome Desk – thank you Michael Dempsey – the staffing of which is normally one of my responsibilities as Convenor of Fellowship. The desk is not as you remember it, but with a perspex screen and little hole at the bottom, rather like a bank teller's desk. Then you may go downstairs (no food alas) by one stairway, up the other. Everyone must wear



a mask – it is not a competition but we were rather aware of the variety of styles. Clear annunciation is necessary, especially for the harder of hearing. It brought back a reminder of youthful elocution lessons – too easily forgotten as you get into a conversation with friends you haven't spoken to for months.

So then, into the sanctuary – taped off pews, notices about sitting near or far, no hymn books, no bibles, no little yellow envelopes, forgotten gloves, specs etc. But there is enough room for everyone this Sunday. Spaced out, seated with your "bubble", you may contemplate the sanctuary with no flowers. The short early service goes well, but those who have made the journey

have to leave quickly – although only one person in the lift at a time, so a chance for a quick chat. But then, we have to do sound checks for the 11 am streaming. Not even time to go and see if Hammie MacLeod (Olivia's hamster) is enjoying his holiday in the vestry. He has every convenience and is apparently very happy. Sound checks done: all is well. The IT team is small – just Liz Fox in the gallery and Paul Dempsey in the office. There have been some additions to our basic sound system to make it visual.

Just before 11 am the lectern is bathed in sunlight, and its highly gilded surface is fiery. I wonder if I might be unable to see to read. But the glare moves off in time, and

A view from the lectern

Continued

instead of using the usual formal bible, I read from some printed pages. John McMahon, who is the “pulpit supply” as Angus is on holiday, begins the service. We look out onto empty sunlit pews – knowing that a congregation is joining in from their homes all over the world; but virtual reality is still difficult to deal with.

The moment comes to step up and read. Lucky me, a great series of texts. Moses and the burning bush (picked up by John in his sermon) – Nec tamen consumebatur – then a gentle encouragement from St Paul

to support each other; the gospel again underlining the message. I don't fall off the step, and enjoy the sermon – a good old tale of a ministerial application from – wait for it – Moses. I did not know he was a murderer, but as a young man he killed an Egyptian for attacking a Hebrew slave. See Exodus 2: 11-13.

Then, gather up the papers and walk down the aisle. I have walked this long walk so many times with a couple of wine cups and felt the presence of the congregation. Not today.

So home, glad that I have been back; but I did want to be back at a St Columba's buzzing with people, the smell of lunch wafting up through the back stairs; the children in the Sunday School; the coffee team ready to serve – the general community feel I am used to and enjoy.

But I did achieve one thing. I brought the James Black Quiz Shield back with me, and it will hang again in the Upper Hall, newly engraved with the winners of the Quiz 2020 - The Lanark Collective. Hooray!



Sermon

Sermon preached at St Columba's Pont Street by Revd Angus MacLeod On Sunday 9th August 2020 at 11am

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Matthew 14:31-33

In 2017 there was a chaotic finale to the Academy Awards Oscars' ceremony. The prize for Best Picture was announced – "And the winner is, (the musical) *La La Land*. Cast members came forward to joyfully receive acclaim. But, hesitation, then, consternation; suddenly it was announced that *Moonlight* was the winner - "And, no ladies and gentlemen, this is not a joke." Unprecedented. Confusion, Embarrassment. Organiser heads would subsequently roll. But *Moonlight* emerged triumphant.

Moonlight is the story of an African American child growing up in Miami. The principal character, Chiron is played by three actors - child, teenager and young adult. Raised – barely – by a heroin addicted mother, the boy is gay and withdrawn. Poverty and personhood – his road is unremittingly tough. Key to the story is the single relationship where the boy, Chiron, is shown a degree of care and affection. The irony: the one adult figure he can trust, as a child, is Juan, a local drug dealer.

The scene for which the movie is perhaps best remembered takes place away from the grim housing projects, at the beach. Chiron cannot swim, has never been in the sea. Juan encourages him in, and teaches him the rudiments of swimming. The camera follows the pair into the waves. Juan begins by getting the child to lie on his back, one hand under him, one hand gently cradling the boy's head above the water. "Let your head rest in my hands. Relax. I got you. I promise you, I'm not going to let you go."

It is tender, beautiful to watch. Also, unexpected,

confusing our preconceptions about the adult, drug dealing character. Shown attention, Chiron trusts and floats – begins to be a swimmer. As audience, we perceive this moment is more than just a swimming lesson. As the boy lies back, relaxes, buoyant in the up and down motion of the ocean, delighting in the new experience of being in the sea, Juan smiles: "That right there – you're in the middle of the world."

Another sea, another moment, another turning point. The Sea of Galilee, the *Lake of the Harp*, a body of water surrounded by hills, prone to sudden, violent windstorms. Though Matthew is the only author to record Peter's wave walking, all gospel writers share an ancient understanding of the sea as an abode of demonic forces, the place on earth where chaos reigns; to walk upon it, to calm its fury, a true sign.

After a day with the crowds, ending with the feeding of multitudes from the loaves and fishes, Jesus tells the disciples to go on ahead and cross the lake. Jesus himself disperses the crowds and heads for the solitude of the hills that he had postponed throughout the day. Night-time; wind and waves intensify, and the disciples, still far from land, struggle against the turbulent water. Fear overwhelms them – *those in peril on the sea*.

Jesus comes to them on the waters; they do not recognise him. Terrified: "It is a ghost!"

"No" responds their Teacher, "It's me; I got you. Do not be afraid."

Perhaps that should have been enough. But the men in the boat were only human. None more so than Peter: Peter – impetuous, passionate – often saying what others are thinking. "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." We tend to hear this as exemplar of Peter's impetuous, worthy faith – "Jesus, I'll be with you, even in the storm!" Actually, isn't there the echo of an earlier, less noble question: "If you are the Son of God..." The voice of the Tempter

Sermon

continued

in the forty-day wilderness, soon after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan: *"If you are the Son of God, turn the stones to bread, jump into the arms of angels, take the knee, in return for the riches of the world...."* Now Peter: *"Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."*

Jesus says, *"Come,"* and Peter steps boldly (recklessly?) out of the boat. For one luminous moment Peter walks; then realizes what he's doing. Like a skimming stone's fading velocity, stutters and sinks. *"Lord, save me!" "Immediately,"* Jesus reaches out his hand, catches and delivers. *"I got you. I promise you, I'm not going to let you go."*

"Nowhere in the Gospels are we called to prove our faith (or test God's character) by taking pointless risks that threaten our lives. Whether we're talking about respecting the power of the sea during a vicious storm, or heeding expert medical advice during a global pandemic, the same caution applies. Recklessness is not faith. Stupidity is not courage." (Debie Thomas, *Journey with Jesus*)

So, Peter's test fails. Jesus doesn't calm the sea for Peter's convenience. Peter can't manipulate Jesus into Making Faith Easy. But, while the madness of the waves is unabated, the wildness of the sea is no proof of God's absence. Our gospel story is less about Peter's sinking attempts to come to Jesus, more about Jesus coming, always coming, towards the disciples, exactly when they feel overwhelmed and frightened. Of course, they were fearful, just as we are fearful of many things: Covid-19, failing economies, social isolation, political brokenness, ruptured relationships, sick children, grinding jobs, no job, addiction, mental health: tsunamis, real or imagined, that we could name.

To each of our fears, Jesus' words: *"Do not be afraid. It is me. Coming to you. With you. For you. Do not be afraid to let go and let God take*

care of you? I got you. I promise I won't let you go."

Neither our fearfulness nor our faithlessness will alter Christ's course to us upon the waters. In words of Julian of Norwich:

He did not say:

You shall not be tempest-tossed,

you shall not be weary,

you shall not be discomforted.

But He said, you shall not be overcome.

Exhausted, hauled back into the boat, the storm calms to awesome silence; all in the boat, together worship: *"Truly, you are the Son of God."*

"That right there – you're in the middle of the world."

Amen

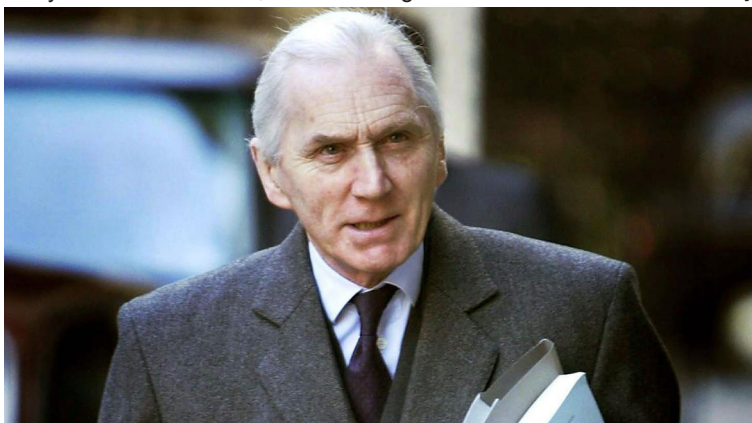


Lord Hutton – Presbyterianism and integrity

David Stewart

Midway through the lockdown period, one Sunday morning Angus reached that point in a 'Zoom service' where those who had just left the 'departure lounge' got an honourable mention. This time, at 89, it included Lord Hutton ('Brian', as it said on his name-badge at the homeless shelter).

Brian Hutton, raised in Belfast, was a quiet, devoted (you might even say quietly devoted) and sincere member of our congregation. He and I had three things in common: where we came from, how we earned our living, and Presbyterianism. We first met when volunteering at the first winter of the West London Churches Homeless Shelter (now Glassdoor) here at St C's. Brian, a traditionalist to his fingertips, would turn up at 6pm on a Sunday evening in collar and tie, a sleeveless sweater atop.



Patently a reserved man, perhaps somewhat shy, this senior figure from 'the establishment' found a way of engaging with a variety of homeless men (as they were primarily) in an empathetic manner. He was equally at home in the kitchen, with shirt sleeves rolled up assisting in the peeling of potatoes to feed – not quite the 'five thousand' but – the designated 36; that he was already in his 9th decade speaks eloquently of his social commitment.

It is surely to the shame of the Daily Wail, that when it picked up on this voluntary service by such an eminent individual, rather than giving it a suitably praiseworthy mention in their diary column, the writer – with all the relish which so

demeans the tabloid press – used it as a stick, suggesting crassly that he was in some way seeking atonement for the 'whitewash' of his Report following his Inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly.

I was fortunate enough to join Brian for lunch a few years ago – a splendid Italian restaurant, his choice, at the World's End part of the Kings Road; he lived walking distance away – and we touched upon this. In passing, I would observe that at that stage he had already undergone facial surgery for cancer, so his eating was confined

to soft foods. This hardship was endured in his characteristic calm and accepting way.

His first wife having herself died from cancer back in 2000, Brian was by now long remarried to a lady who – he reported over the soup course – had a preference for high Anglicanism. The understated manner in which this was shared nevertheless indicated that whilst their lives joined in other ways, Sunday worship was most certainly to be undertaken independently!

On 'Kelly' he made clear that amongst senior judges, including those fairly recently retired, it was an acknowledged convention to accept such an appointment: you didn't necessarily relish such a

substantial commitment at the end of a long and demanding working life, but "it was my turn!"

Perhaps those few words encapsulate his sense of duty. A review of several obituaries is instructive. Much quoted was Peter Osborne in *The Spectator*, 2004: "though he is a dour Presbyterian, there were spectacular acquittals of some very grisly IRA terrorist suspects when he was a judge in the era of the Diplock courts; few people seriously doubt Hutton's fairness or independence." (Diplock courts were the non-jury trials in terrorist cases, brought in to circumvent intimidation of jury members.)

He was a son of the manse, on his mother's side. Self evidently a bright boy, he won scholarships initially to Shrewsbury School (he confessed to feeling rather

like a fish out of his comforting Ulster water), and later to Balliol (supposedly only the very brightest go there – so a few of its graduates tell me....) where, of course, the young Hutton obtained a First.

The Times described him as having an early reputation as "a fiercely ambitious workaholic". I only knew the older man, but whilst a strong work ethic is in no way alien to Presbyterians, one would cast a small doubt as to whether early success equated to ambition, as opposed to natural progress. In his early 40s, in 1973, he became high-profile for the first time representing British soldiers at the original 'Bloody Sunday' Inquiry. By 1988, he was Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. In 1996, the RUC

Lord Hutton – Presbyterianism and integrity

continued

discovered his name was on an IRA 'death list'.

This would have been unsurprising to Brian. He had already been forced – at 48 hours notice – to move his family from mid-County Down to Edinburgh, such was the threat level pertaining to judicial figures, and those closest to them, in the bad old days of the mid-80s. *The Times* goes on to call him: “a deeply religious man with a gaunt face, who would pray on his knees before bedtime” – such an assertion rather begs the question: how do they know? That said, given the life-and-death pressures he endured for an extended period, the comfort provided by faith is completely understandable.

Lady Lowry, herself a QC, married to Brian's predecessor as the LCJ of Northern Ireland, once said: “I think both he and my husband were philosophical about the threats. Robbie used to say that police guards were only there to shoot the man who shot him. Brian will have taken a similar view.”

A commemorative event took place at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast in early September. A senior local barrister noted: “What you have to remember is that these were beleaguered men working under terrible pressure. They simply got used to driving round in armour plated cars and having policemen greet them when they came home at night.” (If a personal observation may be permitted, too many presently in positions of authority are at best unaware of – at worst deliberately myopic about – the intensity of that period in the province).

His appointment to chair the Kelly enquiry was welcomed by many in the public sphere. A London-based Ulster barrister was quoted at the time: “Hutton has a steely determination and

conscientiousness that few other judges can match....a reputation for being very much his own man, who will do what he thinks is right, come hell or high water.”

The mainstream media dutifully reported such remarks in advance. Many commentators were complimentary about his handling of the hearings as they progressed, describing him as “even-handed and exemplary, razor-sharp on detail and intolerant of evasiveness”; but after presenting his conclusions, a discordant tune was played.

Instead of providing ammunition for attacks upon government, Lord Hutton directed his fire primarily at the BBC. As a result, an unpleasant amount of ordure was propelled in his direction. *The Guardian*, having described him as “chosen by a panicking Blair government” characterised the 740-page report as a “masterpiece of circumlocution”, using his typically painstaking and forensic assessment of the term ‘sexed-up’ as a favoured illustration of this assertion.

If it hurt – and it would be a tough individual who did not feel some level of affront to his professional reputation – it was not allowed to show, at least in my occasional presence.

At the recent tribute event, Lord Carswell – his successor as LC J – said pointedly: “His integrity was such that he would be outraged at any attempt to influence him.” Lord Kerr, a Roman Catholic from the Lurgan area, who followed in the post, and now sits on the Supreme Court, described him as: “scrupulously fair-minded, a man of unswerving integrity, possessed of great courage and steadfastness. He led the judiciary in Northern Ireland during a period of great peril, and did so with the utmost fearlessness.”

That, surely, is a tribute any family would be proud to hear in relation to one of their number. His own pride extended to his daughter Louise not only following him to the bar, but developing her own thriving practice around the area of banking and fraud (the relevance of integrity, again).

We can leave the final lines with Lady Lowry and Lord Kerr (the one sometimes pictured with bicycle clips around his suit trousers as he pedals to Westminster). Making clear there was another side to the austere public persona, including an enjoyment in relating anecdotes – which on occasion would see him already laughing en route to the punchline – they said, respectively: “Brian was a kind man, with real joie de vivre,” and “The essence of Brian's character was a terrific sense of humour and endless tolerance.”

Some of the early attendees at the homeless shelter will have benefitted from those qualities, perhaps including a few such tales from a notable life – well lived.



From Stevenston High to the Presidency of the Incorporated Phonographic Society

John Dawson

I first started to learn shorthand at Stevenston High just after my 14th birthday in 1967. I can remember I wanted to get an office job and I was the first boy at the school ever to learn shorthand although I was inspired to do well after going to the Barrfields Pavilion in Largs to see Johnny Beattie on my birthday and one of the songs that night was "Do What You Do, Do Well" and this has stuck in my mind and it was a message to me to do well in shorthand and other commercial subject and this I have done. In 1969 I was awarded the Dux Prize in Commercial Subjects at Stevenston High and the following year I was awarded the Mr Dawes' Prize in Commerce at Ardrossan Academy. This meant that I had beaten all the other boys and girls in Shorthand, Economics and Accounting. After coming to London to work at HM Treasury in 1985 I attended the Scottish country dancing at St Columba's and there I met a man who was Librarian at the Ministry of Defence and he told me about the IPS (Incorporated Phonographic Society). I went along to a few meetings of the IPS at the Bishopsgate Institute to see what it was like and I decided to apply to join. I applied to be a Member but instead I was accepted as a Fellow of the IPS because of my outstanding ability in the field of shorthand.

Towards the end of 1872 a group of enthusiastic Pitman shorthand writers formed a society in Tachbrook Street, Pimlico, London which they called the Phonetic Shorthand Writers Association. This was the forerunner of the much larger body of shorthand writers known as the Incorporated Phonographic Society. Among the members of the Society were Gen Sir John St George, KCB, an enthusiastic Pitman shorthand writer and the Rev W J Ball, BA, an ardent phonographic propagandist. The IPS has a quarterly Journal that is free to members and other people can buy copies of the Journal. The IPS for

many years has had a wide range of social activities including rambles, dinners, a Christmas Lunch, visits to concerts and places of historic and literary interest. The IPS has different categories of membership including members (MIPS), fellows (FIPS) and licentiates (LIPS) and members, fellows and licentiates are entitled to put the appropriate letters after their names.

When I first started to learn shorthand I never imagined that I would ever meet a member of the Pitman family or become President of the Incorporated Phonographic Society (www.the-ips.org.uk) but I have now met and become friends with many members of the Pitman family including two patrons, the late Margaret Pitman-Miller and her nephew, the current Patron, Damian Pitman.

For more than 10 years I have worked for Conservative MPs including Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East and Sir Oliver Letwin, who was MP for West Dorset for 23 years but stood down at the last General Election. I am now working as Senior Caseworker for Nickie Aiken, MP for the Cities of London and Westminster. Nicola Blackman, the wife of Bob and Office Manager, informed me that one of the main reasons why I got my job with the MP was because of my shorthand ability and I have used this extensively throughout my career working for MPs and elsewhere.

The demand for an excellent Pitman shorthand writer in Parliament today is as great as it was during the 1940s and 1950s. For example, Patrick Kinna was Winston Churchill's secretary during the war and he accompanied Churchill to important meetings including in the USA and Russia. Patrick was a very good shorthand writer like myself.

Also, Jane Portal, Justin Welby's mother, is a Pitman shorthand writer

and she was Personal Secretary to Sir Winston Churchill after Patrick Kinna and worked with Churchill from December 1949 until April 1955. I can recall that when I lived in Paris my friend Justin Welby told me that when Winston Churchill went to meet the Queen upon her return from Africa after learning about her father's death, his mother Jane Portal accompanied Churchill in the car and during the drive to the airport Jane took dictation from him in Pitman's shorthand. This warmed me to Mrs Welby and helped to solidify my friendship



with Justin, his wife Caroline and other members of the Welby family. Justin is now of course Archbishop of Canterbury and I have very many happy memories of when I attended his wedding at Holy Trinity Brompton in December 1979.

I have used shorthand whilst working with many organisations including the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO in Paris, the World Intellectual Property Organisation and the World Health Organisation in Geneva as well as whilst working with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and with British Gas in the UK.

One of the highlights of the year for me is attending the IPS Christmas Lunch which for many years has been held at the Civil Service Club and is attended by the Patron and members and friends from many parts of the UK and elsewhere. The AGM is also held at the Civil

From Stevenston High to the Presidency of the Incorporated Phonographic Society

continued

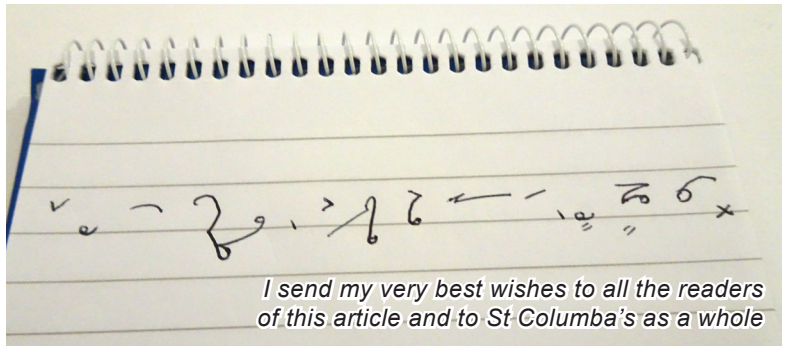
Service Club.

In August I was unanimously elected by the Council of the IPS as President of the society. I have made many friends throughout the world through the society and visited members in New Zealand, Wales and other parts of the world. The IPS is the oldest society of shorthand writers in the world and we have amongst our members not only people who are shorthand writers but academics and others who are interested in shorthand and speed writing. Some people join the society purely to get the quarterly Journal and we have readers in countries all over the world.

I never imagined 53 years ago that I would ever be elected to be President of the Incorporated Phonographic Society and I thank

God for giving me my shorthand ability. I possess several copies of the Bible written in Pitman's shorthand that I use in church and take with me on holiday. I have also received birthday presents of books written in Pitman's shorthand, for example "A Christmas Carol" and "Three Men in a Boat". I am also

particularly thrilled when several of my Pitman shorthand writing friends send me Christmas cards and they write personal greetings to me in shorthand and I also have the pleasure of writing Christmas cards to my friends using my shorthand skills.



A 'virtual' book club

Anne Wilson

Few good things have come out of Covid 19 and the lockdown but there has been one plus for me – the suggestion from Suzanne Williams to start a St Columba's Book Club via Zoom, from the comfort of our sofas and no worries about producing delicious food.

Suzanne contacted Lucy who emailed some people she thought might be interested and we started on 11 May with Suzanne's suggestion of 'Picnic at Hanging Rock' by Joan Lindsay, a sinister tale set in Mrs Appleyard's College for Young Ladies near Melbourne. I had seen the original 1975 film and the remake in 2018 but reading the book was much more exciting. I won't give away the plot in case some of you don't know the story. Suffice to say the mystery has never been resolved.

We followed that with 'The Salt Path' by Raynor Winn, a *Sunday Times* bestseller, a true story of triumph over adversity describing a walk along the 630-mile South West Coastal Path, from Somerset

to Dorset, an inspirational story conveying the human capacity for endurance.

Our third book, 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' by Reni Eddo-Lodge, proved to be more controversial and very topical in view of the fallout from events in America. This book has been over 40 weeks on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list and it provoked a lively discussion.

Our book for September was 'Mill on the Floss' by George Eliot, or Mary Ann Evans to whom it is to be credited in a new edition, to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Bailey Women's Prize for Literature. I am not sure I totally agree with this as George Eliot herself said once that she was: 'resolute in preserving my incognito, having observed that a nom de plume secures all the advantages without the disagreeables of reputation.' I read 'Mill on the Floss' so long ago that rereading it was like reading it for the first time! I enjoyed, if that

is the correct word, the trials and tribulations of the Tulliver family. At the beginning of the lockdown I read 'Middlemarch', whose heroine, Dorothea Brooke, was said to have much in common with her creator. The 19th Century produced such a rich seam of women authors – Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontes and George Eliot herself. To me their books are just as enjoyable today as they ever were.

We intend carrying on as long as there is a group who want to continue. But we would love to have new members. It is a great opportunity to catch up with friends we haven't been able to meet since March. If you are interested please give your email address to Lucy in the Office. She will add you to the list and a day or two before the meeting she will send out the Meeting ID and Password. We will let Lucy know the date of future meetings so she can add them to the Intimations.

Hope you can join us.

Baptisms • Marriages • Deaths

BAPTISMS

"Suffer the little children to come unto me"

6th September

Maximillian Bruno Conci, London, SW18

DEATHS

"Blessed are they that die in the Lord"

11th June

Margo Milne, Borehamwood, WD6

8th September

Gillian Agnew (known as Jill), Salisbury, SP3

8th September

Christine Birnie, Croydon, CR0



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For information,
please contact the Church Office

St Columba's Church Office, Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD

Church Diary: 4th October to 29th November 2020

While complying with Governmental Guidelines for Places of Worship we hope to continue offering worship at 11am on Sunday mornings.

Worshippers may attend in person, or join via the live-stream.

Music from 10.50am. Service 11am-12noon.

For up-to-date information about worship contact the office (020 7584 2321) or <https://www.stcolumbas.org.uk/live-stream>

For details about health and safety precautions, mask wearing etc. please visit <https://www.stcolumbas.org.uk/worship-during-covid>

Our Remembrance service is on Sunday 8th November at 10.45am



Prayer

*O God,
from whom to be turned
is to fall,
to whom to be turned
is to rise,
and with whom to stand
is to abide forever;
grant us
in all our duties
your help,
in all our perplexities
your guidance,
in all our dangers
your protection
and in all our sorrows
your peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
AMEN*

Prayer of St. Augustine [354 – 430]

If undelivered please return to sender:
St Columba's Church of Scotland
Pont Street
London SW1X 0BD