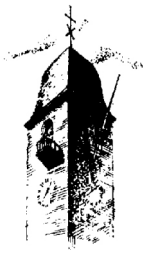


St Columba's

August/September 2021



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.



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

Dear Readers,

2021 is the year of the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of Columba. We all know the story of how he made the perilous journey from Ireland, sailing in a coracle and settling on Iona. Some months ago Rosa Somerville and Jim Blackwood planned a more pedestrian but certainly meaningful celebration of his life: they agreed to mark St Columba's Day on June 9th by each taking a walk, Rosa in London and Jim in Scotland, and making detailed notes on their findings. Enjoy their observations, knowledge and enthusiasms from page 10 onwards.

Liz Fox and all the other General Assembly Commissioners went nowhere, limited once again because of Covid to participating from their own homes. Much ground was covered despite a lack of the atmosphere created by attendance in person. Read a report on page 4.

William Glasson is next up in our Desert Island Discs series and provides himself with a list of delights should he find himself permitted to travel and subsequently shipwrecked. Continuing his series on the Apocrypha, David Natzler looks at the story of Susanna, and the judgement of Daniel.

Whether, or wherever, you travel this summer we hope these glimpses into other people's worlds provide some entertainment, variety, insights and solace over the holiday months.

With best wishes,

The Editorial Team

Cover photo: *Firth of Clyde from Port Glasgow with Burnet Rose,*
by Jim Blackwood

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VESTRY LETTER



August/September 2021

Dear Friends,

Writing for the summer months of the St Columba's church magazine traditionally acknowledges thoughts for school holidays, and anticipates church friends taking time away from London, perhaps journeying to Scotland, or elsewhere. This year, regular patterns remain unsure, with caution continuing and decisions dictated by travel colours - red, amber and green.

While recognizing the disappointment or frustration of not being able to enjoy some of the things we previously took for granted, there are still ways to connect to places that have offered us rest and recreation in the past. Memory, music, old photos and poetry all offer doorways to a space that lifts the spirit. Kenneth Steven's new collection: *Iona: New & Selected Poems* contains a good example, entitled:

"A Lark"

*A handful of lark
twirling and spinning songs
overtures and symphonies
though it has learned no music
in the schools of London or Paris
but is sight-reading instead
the kettledrums of the Atlantic
the white bells of the orchids
the violins of the wind.*

I love the notion of the lark high above the waves, "sight-reading the kettledrums of the Atlantic", enjoying a freedom not learnt in the formal music schools of London or Paris. Space, light, sea and song, creatures and Creation. Poets are often the "re-minders" of the blessings that abound. Whether you are on the move or staying put, surrounded by landscape or urban sprawl, may the months of summer offer you something of beauty, rest and peace.

Remaining at home, or returning to it, please keep an eye out for the Congregational Survey sent out in July. With the pandemic, as a congregation we have had to face new circumstances. Some very positive things have emerged; some things have been particularly hard. Experiences have varied greatly. Pastorally, it feels important to allow church members to reflect on and share a little of their recent experience. So, our Kirk Session have agreed that now is an appropriate moment for conversation, asking your help to discern what is important for our life ahead – how we might faithfully, helpfully, and hopefully, make the next steps along the St Columba's way. To that end, helping us with the survey and the conversation groups in September would be much appreciated.

In the meantime, from the Ministry Team (Angus & William) and all the Staff at St Columba's, have a very happy summer.

Angus MacLeod

Virtually, a General Assembly

Elizabeth P. Fox was one of this year's Commissioners

I was not looking forward to the General Assembly this year. With proposals to cut the number of charges by 40% against a background of falling numbers of Ministers and members and diminishing reserves, and all this to be carried out virtually, with no chance to enjoy the company of fellow Commissioners and particularly the opening worship every morning, I anticipated an unhappy few days.

As is often the case, my fears were not totally realised. The new Moderator, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, proved to be an excellent choice. His conduct of business (after a slightly nervous start) was exemplary and his conduct of worship was inspiring. The Lord High Commissioner, HRH Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, also gave two excellent addresses. The opening and closing of the Assembly were without doubt the highlights of the week.

Even though the Assembly was shorter than usual (five days rather than six, beginning at 1pm instead of 9.30am and no live Conveners' speeches), as to be expected it was exhausting (and I am well used to my daily dose of Zoom/Webex/Teams' meetings). It was not helped by none of the papers having been supplied in printed form, so whilst I had run off some of the most important ones and the List of Commissioners, the need constantly to refer to various Reports online and the need to keep up with the ongoing debates via the Assembly Hub was no easy task. After a very shaky start on the Saturday morning (there was no sound for most of the opening

worship for Commissioners on the Hub) the technology worked well. It was, however, no substitute for being able to see and greet other Commissioners (including former St Columba's members such as Rev David Locke, Rev Peter Johnston and John Kitson) and to get to know the Commissioners one ends up sitting next to in the Assembly Hall. Nor was there the opportunity to congratulate Susan Pym in her role as Vice Convener of the Assembly Business Committee on supervising the voting process and seconding the moving of Deliverances when the relevant Convener was not a Commissioner her or himself.

Much of the week was indeed "doom and gloom", with little to comfort or to inspire. Having been told that if we closed down a large number of church buildings and united a large number of congregations within totally revised Presbytery Plans, we would all be able to concentrate on mission, we were then told that we had until 1st January 2026 to get everything in place. I have no doubt that mission will be the last thing on people's minds over the next four and a half years, when for many they will be battling to save their congregation and/or church building. The admission by more than one speaker that when amalgamating congregations "one and one does not equal two" added to the pessimism.

Whether it was just because it was a virtual Assembly I do not know but Commissioners seemed resigned, even docile, with all the proposals being accepted with little fight. It was certainly impossible to gauge the real mood of the Assembly, as we all sat isolated in our homes, so it will ~ Reports (so many went through almost on the nod).

worship for Commissioners on the Hub) the technology worked well. It was, however, no substitute for being able to see and greet other Commissioners (including The Radical Action Plan, accepted by the General Assembly of 2019, has led to the concentration of power in the Church in a very small number of hands. This may lead to greater efficiency, but it is vital that all Trustees and Committees are properly held to account. I cannot say that I thought this happened this year, despite the best intentions of so many.

So what will the changes to the number of charges mean to the Presbytery of England? It is too early to say, as there is still confusion over the number of charges we shall be allowed. Covering the geographical area we do, including two islands, means that it is no easy task to unite charges. One good piece of news is that the General Assembly also agreed a new scheme for calculating the Mission and Ministry contributions ("M & Ms") due from each charge. This should mean more funds that can be spent locally, viz, within each charge, including it seems on locally employed staff.

Finally, one other issue that will be referred to all Presbyteries for decision is a proposal to allow for single sex marriages in church. This proposal would not only apply to Scotland under the relevant civil legislation on marriages, but also to Churches of Scotland in England subject to the relevant English legislation on marriages. It must be stressed that the proposed Church of Scotland Legislation would be permissive. It would not be compulsory on a Minister or Kirk Session to permit such ceremonies in their churches.

Desert Island Discs

And this month's castaway is William Glasson

Where on earth to start – the problem being that I've been drawing up and then changing my eight chosen discs for the past half century. So ... I've compromised by choosing eight Musical Milestones: pieces which have grasped my attention at some stage in my life and not let go.

Let's start at the beginning. One of my father's bequests to me as a child was his old wind-up gramophone which had accompanied him through the trenches in the First World War. With it came a collection of 78 records of Haydn and Mozart quartets played by the Lener Quartet. Strange fare for a child perhaps, but it did the trick and I've loved both composers ever since. Perhaps because of his charmingly affectionate nickname "Papa Haydn", it was he who narrowly got my vote. Accordingly, if I am to finish my time on earth on a desert island, it is with Haydn I shall start. But what? He wrote so *much* – 104 symphonies for a start. Trying to be practical about this, I think one would need the company of the human voice, and two possibilities immediately stand out: *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. Both are steeped in the wonders of God's creation and both show Haydn at the height of his powers. But I think on balance I'll take *The Seasons* because it makes me smile, as well as think.

It must have been a year or two after this that I was given my first "wireless". And surfing the airwaves I came across a string quintet by George Onslow which caught my ear. Well, I'd never heard of him, and nor had my parents, though his music is certainly attractive and worth listening to. But they did have a record of Mendelssohn's string *Octet*. "He wasn't much older than you when he wrote it," suggested my father not entirely truthfully, but pointedly enough to make me want to listen to it. I don't think it was necessarily love at first hearing, but there must have been something about it – its freshness, transparency and ebullience – because I kept on coming back to it

and it still enchants me.

Another octet which has been a very happy companion is Schubert's; and the performance that stands out in memory is of a young ensemble from Paris - the Ensemble Lachrymae, who gave summer concerts in village churches in the southern Ardèche. Lyrical, happy, nostalgic, simple, grand - it is a wonderfully effervescent work; and it was matched with a wonderfully ebullient performance, the young musicians laughing and smiling, and all but getting up and dancing in the scherzo. So why on earth did they call their ensemble "Lachrymae" I wondered. Well, for anyone who's interested, John Dowland points out in his forward to his *Lachrymae or Seaven Teares - a collection of instrumental music of 1604* - that "...neither are teares shed always in sorrow but sometimes in joy and gladnesse". Not a lot of people know that. I didn't for one; but I looked it up out of curiosity. And it's true, of course.

So where do we go from here? Well, with a school party to Athens, I think; where we were scheduled to see *La Bohème* - or was it *Il Trovatore*? Anyway, it very soon became clear, even to the least attentive of us, that the music being played was neither of these. It was certainly hugely tuneful...but when the truth was revealed none of us had ever heard of it: *Countess Maritza* by Emmerich Kalman. But it introduced us to the world of Central European operetta and we lapped it up (other than one or two haughty adolescents who thought it "trivial"). For myself, as soon as I got back to England I bought a recording of it from Vienna which wonderfully preserves the pre-war Viennese/ Hungarian style.

Before leaving Greece we stayed a few days on Crete which brings me nicely to my next choice, since it was there that I first became aware of indigenous folk music. The fields around Knossos were separated by stone walls, and against one of them an old shepherd sat tending

his sheep and playing what looked like (and indeed turned out to be) a small bagpipe. If its sound didn't immediately seduce me with its beauty, it did make me aware of another strand of musical life. As children, it's true, we sang Scottish folk songs which my Aunt, a pupil of the pianist Alfred Cortot, had arranged for us; and on Skye in the 1960s, before TV had arrived, I attended a ceilidh the highlight of which was a group of Gaelic songs sung by the local postman; and sung in a voice so natural and a manner so authentic that we felt as though we were at the songs' first hearing.

But would a folk song really stand the test of time? Vaughan Williams said the trouble with folk music was that having once played it through, all you could do was play it again, only louder. Despite this, I've taken the plunge and will take the old folk inspired American hymn *Can the Circle be Unbroken*. Not exactly my kind of worship and a touch simplistic perhaps; but there is something so direct, so heartfelt, so full of trust in God that I find it most moving. Sung by all-comers at one of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's gatherings, it would surely lift one's spirits.

Now back to opera - and Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*; because as well as being light hearted, cruel, funny (not to mention pretty sexist), its wonderful score includes "Soave sia il vento", surely the most heartwarmingly - and heartrendingly - beautiful trio in existence, and as close as one can get to heaven on earth. One can say no more.

Still on opera, I think I would include Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Having tackled his clarinet concertos at school (pretty unsuccessfully) I was nevertheless instantly beguiled by his wonderful ear for original orchestral combinations and his gift for melody. So when the opera was advertised at the old Sadlers Wells theatre in the '60s, along I went – and was bowled over not only by the

Desert Island Discs

Continued

Scots soprano Elizabeth Robson, but by the beauty and freshness of the music, its dramatic intensity, and its breathtaking originality. It's not an easy opera to stage successfully (how do you replicate the shooting of an eagle convincingly on stage) but happily opera houses keep on trying.

I don't know when I fell in love with France, but I suspect in my teens when our parents thought that their children were old enough

to appreciate it. And it's true, I can still feel the glow of pleasure sitting outside a little restaurant near Avignon as a warm dusk fell around us. No rain, no midges, just the smells of cooking wafting out from the kitchen. Sometime later I heard on the BBC – Baker's Dozen probably – an old recording of Lucienne Boyer singing *Parlez-moi d'amour*. Hugely popular in its day, by the time I heard it, it was hardly cutting edge. But I loved it. Her soft, insinuating voice, the delicate

orchestral accompaniment with its sensuous portamento: it took me into another world – a romanticised image of France which has never quite left me. Yes, I'd take this with me.

(I very much wanted to conclude with BBC's *Sailing By* – surely the best possible prequel to a good night's sleep on an unknown desert island – but our editor has said “no dice - you've had your ration.” Ah well.)

Susanna and the Judgement of Daniel

David Natzler looks into another story from the Apocrypha

“A Daniel come to judgement, yea, a Daniel! O wise young judge! How do I honour thee.” Shylock's premature praise for Portia's confirmation of the enforceability of his bond in *The Merchant of Venice* is memorable not least because we know that Gratiano will shortly cast it back in his teeth, when the “wise young judge” goes on to warn Shylock of the penalty if he spills but one drop of blood or takes more or less than exactly a pound. Gratiano also thanks Shylock for teaching him “that word”: presumably “Daniel”. It was evidently new to him. Why Daniel and not, for example, a Solomon, whose judgement would be more familiar to Venetian Jews and Elizabethan theatre audiences alike?

At some point after the fall of Napoleon a Belgian fished a remarkable work of art out of the Meuse upstream from Namur: or so claimed the local antique dealer who eventually sold it on several decades later. The British Museum bought it in 1855. It is now known as the Lothair Crystal, a 10.5 cms wide circular disc of rock crystal with eight engraved scenes of tiny figures. It is dateable from an inscription

to around 850 AD, when Lothair II was on the Imperial throne. Until around the 1790s it was cared for at the Abbey of Waulsort, until the abbey's destruction by revolutionary forces. Hence its watery grave – or hiding place. It came out of the Meuse cracked down the middle, but nobody seeing it today in Bloomsbury will complain.



The Lothair crystal
(Photo credit: Geni GFDL CC-BY-SA)

The crystal has eight scenes from the story of Susanna, familiar to many from its depiction by Rembrandt and other painters of a young and beautiful woman bathing or about to bathe or drying herself, while being secretly spied upon by

two old men, which can be creepy and unsettling.

The story is also probably familiar. Susanna is the wife of a rich and influential Jew in Babylon, Joakim. They live with servants in a house with a private walled garden, and their house is the centre of communal life. Two of the community's elders are appointed judges, and they discover that each has conceived a passion for Susanna from seeing her at Joakim's house. Conspiring together, they conceal themselves in the garden. Once Susanna has sent away her servants for oil and ointments they threaten her: if she will not lie with them they will testify that she has had a young man with her. She refuses to comply. Next day the community gathers at Joakim's house and hears the elders, who claim that the young man in question escaped as he was too strong for them, and that Susanna has refused to reveal his identity.

Then comes verse 41: “*The assembly believed them, because they were the elders of the people and judges; and they condemned her to death.*”

Susanna and the Judgement of Daniel

Continued

The Lord hears her cries and arouses the holy spirit in a young lad named Daniel, who is inspired to challenge the verdict. He cross-examines the two elders separately, and asks each to identify the type of tree under which the forbidden act of intimacy took place. One says a mastic: the other an evergreen oak. The elders are promptly put to death. End of story.

What are we to make of it? Flippantly, the importance of tree recognition if you are concocting a false allegation. And I do wonder where Joakim, her husband and the father of her children, was in all this: all we learn is that he was pleased that *"nothing shameful was found in her"*.

But I think the real question is, why was the whole community so ready to believe the worst of her. Was it just because the two accusers

were their respected elders and judges? Or was it also because she was beautiful and prosperous and young, married to a prominent man and living a life of luxury? Was there some degree of jealousy or spite in their ready acceptance of her guilt? Does that ring a bell in our days when a celebrity is caught in the spotlights or is prey to allegations which turn out to be baseless?

At the centre of the Lothair crystal is the blameless Susanna after her reprieve, not the bathing scene beloved of later artists: and the inscription in Latin records, "Innocent blood was saved that day".

In the 19th century House of Lords there is a large and numinous oil painting by John Rogers Herbert of the Judgement of Daniel. It hangs in the Peers Robing Room, generally known as the Moses Room, after the earlier large fresco there by Herbert

of Moses with the Tablets of the Law. Daniel is shown as indeed a mere lad. He has responded to divine inspiration, and loudly challenged the verdict and sentence, which must have taken great courage.

So Shakespeare thought of this story when he put words into the mouth of a pious Jew to praise the judgement of the strangely young and beardless judge sent to Venice from Padua. How good it would be if we could emulate Daniel not only in his judgements, and refusal to leap too readily to obvious and convenient conclusions, but also in his readiness to challenge injustice when he saw it. And we don't have to be young to do that...

The Judgement of Daniel, Oil painting by John Rogers Herbert, © Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 3254. www.parliament.uk/art



Sermon

Sermon preached at St Columba's Pont Street on Sunday 20th June 2021 at 11am, 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Job 38:1-11,
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32,
Mark 4:35-41

The opening verse of our opening hymn is a pretty good executive summary of the scripture readings we have heard this morning: *Eternal Father, strong to save/whose arm hath bound the restless wave/who bade the mighty ocean deep/its own appointed limits keep/Oh, hear us when we cry to thee/for those in peril on the sea.* From the boundaries of Creation referenced in Job's 'face-off' with the Almighty: *"Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?"* To storm-tossed disciples on the Sea of Galilee: *"A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped."* And just in case you are a landlubber, the Psalmist conjures the turmoil of those who go down to the sea in ships: *"They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end."*

So, today's scriptures are decidedly tempest-tossed; they also give full expression to how humanity cries out, in the teeth of the gale. From Job's: *"Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this?"* to the anguished cry of the disciples: *"Jesus, do you not care that we are drowning?"* the Hebrew scriptures are full of such questions and accusations.

God, where are you? Why won't you save us? How much longer must we endure? Rouse yourself, Lord! Why have you forsaken us? ("What do we do when God falls asleep?")

In Job's world framework, there is the understanding that those who lead a good life and are obedient to God's commands will be rewarded with good fortune. Alternatively, when tragedy strikes, in some way they deserve it. Job knows that he has not sinned – *still* he suffers. *"Where's the justice in that?"* he cries out for a courtroom to question the Divine. *"Let the Almighty answer me!"*

Then, as we read, God responds – responds as a poet. Not with analysis, not with final answers, but instead, with awe-inducing questions of God's own: *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements - surely you know! On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"* Our reading included only the first eleven verses – four chapters-worth follow – describing the works of creation, from oceans to constellations and the hidden lives of animals. Job asks courtroom; God replies, cosmos. Professor Catherine Heymans, first female Astronomer Royal for Scotland, authority on universe's dark matter: *"We don't understand what makes up 95% of our universe. I mean that's an epic fail as far as science is concerned."*

Job is given a cosmic vision from the divine, of the divine. *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you."* (Job 42:5) Job's questions are never answered directly. Instead, there is a shift in understanding; acknowledging the place of chaos in the cosmos, yet concluding the world still rests on a secure foundation. Hard, or desperate, questions fired at God, often amid pain or fear, are not contained to the older scriptures – the gospel too.

After a long day with the crowds on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus decides to cross over *to the other side*. The geography is significant; the Eastern shore is gentile territory. Jesus is breaking new ground – potentially hostile. He is disturbing the status quo. That is when the storm arises. Its suddenness or its ferocity is exceptional. Men whose livelihood is to ply their trade upon the waters are thrown into disarray. In one corner – fearful disciples hanging on for dear life screaming for help; in the other, the Teacher, asleep on a cushion. *"Don't you care that we are perishing?"*

Former Moderator, Very Rev Dr John Chalmers is known to many of you at St Columba's.

Sermon

continued

Beyond the church he might be known as the father of JJ Chalmers who featured in last year's *Strictly Come Dancing*. Ten years ago last month, while serving as a Royal Marine in Afghanistan, JJ was blown up by an IED in Helmand province. Ten years on, his father John spoke about what followed. The worst nightmare plunged him and his wife Liz into the darkest place. John was on a personal high after successfully completing his first General Assembly in Edinburgh as the Kirk's Principal Clerk on Friday the 27th of May 2011 when his world spun on its axis and turned upside down.

The horrific experience changed his perspective on his Christian faith and life. *"There is an expectation that one should sense a presence of God that would comfort, calm you and hold you, but for us it was just silence. Friends and colleagues from the Church came to the front door and they did not know what to say but they knew how to drink a cup of tea and sit with us. When I look back, I think that was the presence of God with us in flesh and blood – people who were courageous enough to come and see us when there are no easy words. We were really in the darkest place where you could be, it was the worst nightmare I have ever lived through and a mother's worst nightmare as well.*

That of course was not the end of either John and Liz's story, or of JJ's. They all bear witness to remarkable things that have followed. But it is worth remembering that is how it started – *"it was wreckage in the first few weeks."* The storm was awful. And in it there were no easy answers, no short cuts out. At best they could endure. Significantly, they remember simple acts of neighbourliness – inadequate as those neighbours must have felt. What was important, what is remembered; a willingness of some to place themselves in proximity to suffering – even when there were no words or explanations that would do.

In the gospel fragment, yes Jesus awakes, and yes, with a word of command he stills the storm.

(A capability that marks out the Messiah.) But is that the story's real point? Early in the pandemic there was understandably the rallying cry for unity: *"We're all in the same boat."* Actually, time has shown, we may have been *in the same storm*, but we are most certainly not all in *the same boat*. Experiences have varied greatly, from inconvenient to catastrophic. Poorer communities, minority ethnic communities and those living with disabilities have been afflicted disproportionately and cry out for the healing of these inequalities.

By contrast, in the Sea of Galilee's gospel storm, Jesus is in the same storm and the same boat. He rests in their midst, tossed as they are tossed, soaked as they are soaked, endangered, as they are endangered. Though the disciples cannot grasp it, there is no point in the night when God is absent or even distant. Conclusion: Jesus as present in the furies as in the peace that follows. Of course, we want God to calm the wind and seas. We want things under control. We assume, like the disciples, that the miracle is in Jesus calming the storm.

But this storm-calming power isn't the kind of power Jesus came to demonstrate. It is the kind of power Jesus came in order to give up.

Jesus' rebuke to the disciples is a reminder that discipleship is not an easy option or necessarily a comfortable road. It is a reminder that sometimes, discipleship is the call to trust and endure; to find inner calm through faith. And when those around us are living through such a moment, it is a reminder that our presence, steady friendship, listening ear, practical help, continuing prayer, may be the things someone needs to help them hold on till the storm passes.

As we sang: *"Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know his voice..."* As we will sing: *We have an anchor that keeps the soul/steadfast and sure while the billows roll/fastened to the Rock which cannot move/grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Amen

St Columba's Day 2021

Cardoons in Camberwell: Rosa Somerville takes a walk in London

The weather was rather unresolved, but at least dry. I went to Ruskin Park which is a short walk from my home over the top of the hill, with a fabulous view of Westminster. John Ruskin's family home was nearby, and the park was formed from the grounds of another large house. Stables and a pergola remain as reminders. Greeted with a flash of jays and a nervous blackbird, I pass my favourite trees, like the silver maple now in full leaf, down to the pond to check on the waterfowl. Today the vigilant Canada geese pair proudly mind eight gangly goslings. Three mallard males are all that stay around, as the geese are so dominant – but a couple of coots have raised a brood of grey, fluffy, squeaky cootlets. Their nests make me laugh as they are heaps of sticks and rubbish, but they keep pecking and preening to get it all the more comfortable. Few butterflies – just one speckled, one small blue and a small white.

Then I have a look at the semi-tamed garden on the old bowling

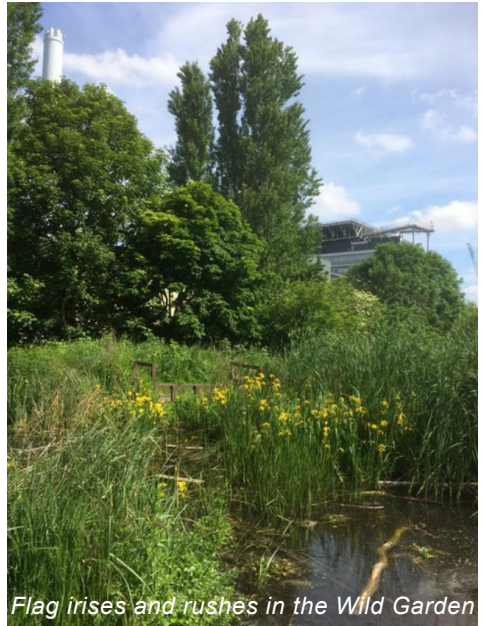


Canada geese and goslings

green – cardoons coming up, their massive, sharp silvery foliage impressive; they will burst into a thistle-like head with a punky purple haircut which the bees and shimmering green beetles love. Cardoons, which are members of the artichoke family, are often confused with thistles, but these leaves could be sat upon with no problem. A quick glance at another favourite tree, the tulip shaped *Zelkova serrata*. Being of Japanese extraction they never need pruning – the envy of us all in lockdown.

As I walk, I get mobbed by plump squirrels who think I am one of those old ladies with peanuts in my pocket. No such luck; but they hang about ever hopeful.

I pass the no-mow meadow, once pierced with snowdrops, then bluebells; now the Queen Anne's Lace is skeletal, and the grass is thigh high. Next, I drop down to the Wild Garden – well not that wild, as it is next to the busy railway line from Denmark Hill, and backed by the King's College Hospital buildings including a huge chimney and a helipad. Here I find dragonflies, a lonely moorhen surrounded by flag irises, and rushes. The small ponds are disappearing under a kind of wild veronica – nicknamed (thanks Jim) "bungabrook". The apple, plum, malus and cherry trees are forming fruit. One has some mistletoe taking advantage of a handy trunk. There are foxgloves too. Apparently, the bumble bees start with the lowest



Flag irises and rushes in the Wild Garden

flowers and work their way to the top, thus pollinating the plant.

Here birds are few and far between – maybe too near the railway – but elsewhere I heard a jolly blackbird, freed from the obligations of parental feeding and now able to concentrate his energy on a fabulous outpouring of song. I found a pair near the old stables with some teenage young. There were blue and great tits squeaking for food as their parents explored crevices in the dilapidated stables. A pigeon whisked into a hole in the trunk of a nearby tree – convenient nest no doubt. I would be cheating if I said I heard or saw the little goldcrest colony that are here. I have seen them several times, but not alas on this day. They are such darlings, and I wonder how many people notice them. My son and I heard them first, then saw them – tiny and flitty. No good using binoculars.

I am going to finish my day in our local community gardens. Called after Doctor Lettsom, a physician,

St Columba's Day 2021

Continued

philanthropist and botanist, who lived in a large house and estate on whose ground our house was subsequently built, these gardens, are a local haven for wildlife – mostly squirrels, but one sees the odd blackbird, magpie, robin, dunnock, wren and of course chatters of parakeets. It also provides a place for us all to relax and play – or take a short cut to the bus stop. There is a forest school which gives city kids from the local primary school on Dog Kennel Hill an opportunity to learn about nature. There is a little circle of log seats, and a lady comes with a carload of stuff to educate and entertain. Wild garlic and bluebells were this year's additions to the planting. The local cats may have to hold their noses.



SE5 sculpture

Lockdown has certainly made us value our local areas, and

Camberwell has quite a few green spaces with interesting trees and nature to explore. We even have outdoor sculpture on the way to the station. I am not sure whether this

counts as wildlife, but I would like to include a picture of our one-legged local as it makes me laugh every time I pass it. Art lives among nature in SE5 – I am so lucky to live here.

Fourth of July 2021



A red-letter day not only in the United States but also here at St Columba's where our coffee teams were able to return to the tradition of offering hospitality after the morning service.

St Columba's Day 2021

Raindrops in the flower-bell: Jim Blackwood takes a walk in Scotland

*"The scattered drops are
falling fast and thin,
Some in the pool,
some in the flower-bell."*

Henry Thoreau's poem "The Summer Rain" captures perfectly my St Columba's Day walk. A wet one! We'd had a good spell of fine weather here in Lochwinnoch and I had been planning a walk up into the Renfrewshire Heights, exploring the hills and ancient woodland glen above the village. I knew I'd hear cuckoos there and that the sward would be peppered with purple Mountain Pansies, yellow Tormentil and creamy white Bedstraws. I'd almost certainly encounter a hare or two and be serenaded by skylarks and meadow pipits. There would be the melancholic cry of buzzards, maybe even a Hen Harrier. Fruitful natural history subjects to write about, I thought. But the forecast for 9th June was showery. I concluded that venturing up into the hills was not such a good idea. Should I cheat? The prediction was fine weather for the following day. Nobody would know if my St Columba's Day walk was actually the next day, the wrong day. Would it really matter? I swiftly rejected that perfidious plot. How could I live with myself telling such a fib, in the context of the Church magazine! Carpe diem! I opted to embrace the rain, but closer to the village, not up in the hills. I noted with no small tinge of envy that it was dry and sunny down south. Rosa and I had planned months before to go on synchronous walks on St Columba's Day and write about them, a London walk and a Scottish walk, for the church magazine.

I had decided to do some botanical recording on the walk, to submit to the vice County Recorder. My revised route was on the edge of the village,

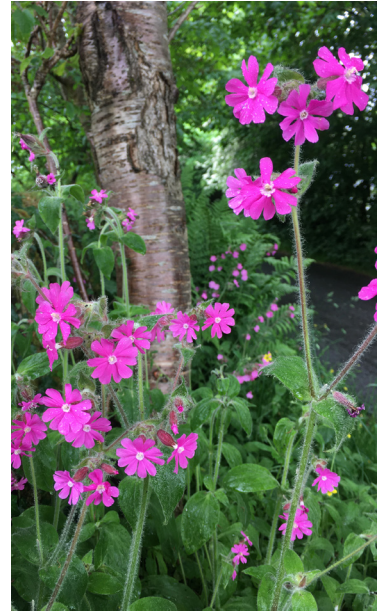
close to home should the weather turn foul. I would record in a monad, a one-kilometre square on the map. In a sense the walk wouldn't begin properly until I reached that monad. It's an arbitrary, artificial recording method, imperfect in many ways. But that's how it's done. These days you can use a handy smartphone app which quite accurately plots your grid reference. I knew the monad boundary was just after the golf club. It was dry when I set off about 8.30am. I switched on the app and plotted metre by metre until I reached the starting point.



Garpel Burn

I stood facing into the monad and started recording as many different wild plants as I could see, before taking a further step. A big fat raindrop plopped on the page of my notebook. I was in a single track road with a dry-stane dyke on the golf course edge on the right and the wooded Garpel Burn on the left. The birds were singing their hearts out. "Cow Parsley, Meadow Buttercup, Common Nettle, Hogweed, Bush Vetch, Red Campion, Ivy." My ink

smudged under another raindrop, but it wasn't anorak-hood-up-time yet. "Common Whitlowgrass, Cocksfoot, Dog Rose, Ash and Hawthorn." I often have to remind myself to note the trees. They're strangely easy to miss. "Sticky Wullie" – you may know it as Cleavers or Goosegrass. It's the plant that clings to your clothes in an effort to distribute its seeds. Children jokingly stick it on each others' backs. "Dog's Mercury, Wavy Bittercress, Bramble" – and that's when I took my first step forward.



Red Campion, Silene dioica

I headed to a muddy path leading to the burnside. "Pink Purslane, Wood Sedge, Male Fern, Polypody, Greater Woodrush, Wych Elm." You know you're in a wetter habitat when there's "Marsh Marigold, Hemlock Water Dropwort, Himalayan Balsam, Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage and Yellow Iris". I enjoyed many boyhood days here catching minnows and building dams. My Uncle Tom showed me how to guddle for trout in this very burn. I never did

St Columba's Day 2021

continued

master the art. His touch seemed magical, and many a broon troot from here graced my grandfather's breakfast plate. "Rough Meadow Grass, Broad Leaved Dock, Wild Garlic, Raspberry, Ground Elder, Rosebay Willowherb, Herb Robert, Angelica, Creeping Buttercup, Herb Bennet." Nothing rare yet. Nothing unexpected. But lots of wildflowers, nonchalantly being beautiful. Hemlock Water Dropwort is one of Britain's most poisonous native plants. I've read about rare occurrences of people mistaking it for Wild Celery with dire consequences.



Pyrenean Valerian's typical cruciform inflorescence, Valeriana pyrenaica

The burn was low, with exposed pebbles. May had been a dry month. Its gentle babble complemented the birdsong. "Alder, Common Valerian, Pussy Willow, Lesser Periwinkle, Marsh Ragwort." The young inflorescences of both Common and Pyrenean Valerian distinctly form a cross. It makes

you think. A chiffchaff sang as I made my way back to the road and headed to the handsome old stone bridge where there is a gap in the dyke into the beech woods. "Sweet Vernal Grass, Yellow Rattle, Tufted Hair-grass, Russian Comfrey, Nipplewort."



Yellow Rattle, Rhinanthus minor with raindrops

Sweet Vernal Grass tastes of vanilla. It's the grass that gives hay that classic sweet smell. You can't not love a flower called Nipplewort. Its buds look like little nipples, and so by the doctrine of signatures our forebears deemed that it must be of medicinal value to alleviate complaints like mastitis. The suffix "wort" indicates that a plant is beneficial. There's Woundwort, Lungwort, Spleenwort, Liverwort and even Pilewort.

I passed through the gap in the dyke into the woodland. "Sanicle, Lady Fern, Enchanter's Nightshade, Honeysuckle." The rain got suddenly heavier. "Oak, Holly, Broad Buckler



Sweet Woodruff, Galium odoratum

Fern, Wild Cherry." There was a rhythm to the sound of the rain, a cheerful pattern. It was as if it were making music by pattering on the leaves of the trees above me, and splashing directly into the burn, a watery percussion. The burn was enjoying the rain, merrily wending its stony, mossy way down frothy cascades and through calm pools. The birds were still singing. A Dipper flew upstream. Amongst all this water and rain, it's surprising how dry it can be under trees. Now and then a colossal drip fell from the beech canopy onto my glasses. I didn't mind. I was glad I was out in the rain. "Bluebell, Wild Strawberry, Sweet Woodruff, Wood Melick."

I was home by 10.30am with a hundred and sixteen species in my soggy notebook. It stayed dry for the rest of the day.

*"Drip drip the trees for all the country round,
And richness rare distills from every bough."*

Baptisms • Marriages • Deaths

BAPTISMS

“Suffer the little children to come unto me”

11th July 2021

Ella Darbyshire, Crystal Palace, SW19

DEATHS

“Blessed are they that die in the Lord”

26th May 2021

Gwendoline Lee, Twickenham, TW1

2nd July 2021

Bonnie Patterson, Sutton, SM1

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For information,
please contact the Church Office

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

Church Diary: 1st August to 3rd October 2021

At the time of publishing, we are live streaming via our website www.stcolumbas.org.uk/livestream. Please keep in touch with the Church Office or website to check if services can be attended in person.

1st August	11.00am	Morning Service Very Revd John Christie
8th August	11.00am	Morning Service & Baptisms Revd Angus MacLeod
15th August	11.00am	Morning Service Revd William McLaren
22nd August	11.00am	Morning Service Revd Angus MacLeod
29th August	11.00am	Morning Service Revd William McLaren
5th September	11.00am	Morning Service Revd Nigel Robb
12th September	11.00am	Baptisms and Back to Church Sunday Revd Angus MacLeod
19th September	11.00am	Morning Service Revd William McLaren
26th September	11.00am	Holy Communion Revd Angus MacLeod
3rd October	11.00am	Harvest Festival & Baptisms Revd William McLaren

Prayer

A Prayer for Awareness

*May our worship find glimpses
of the Holy God,
of Christ the sender of the Spirit,
and Spirit,
in the unexpected places.*

*If we gather in a beautiful church building
because it is easier to pray here,
may we know that presence in our homes,
or as the Comforter at a hospital bedside.*

*If we close our eyes
because it is easier to imagine holiness,
may we be reminded of that presence,
in the colours of sunrise or the rainbow.*

*When we use religious language,
of adoration and confession
and supplication and intercession
because we think that is more understandable,
may we be aware of the presence,
while listening to the blackbird's song at dawn
and squeak of the bat in the evening.*

*All our worship is in the presence,
of the Holy God,
Sender of the Spirit,
and Spirit,
despite our habit
of muffling and messing it.*

Justprayer.org

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