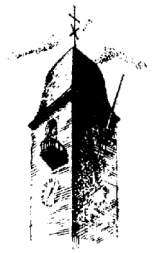


# St Columba's

February / March 2022



# ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



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## Sundays

Please join us for worship at 11 am. Sunday School (from age 4) and Youth Group meet during the morning service but **not every week: please check the website or contact the office** for dates and news of special activities. Children are always welcome to our services: a quiet corner at the rear of the church equipped with soft toys and books is available for children accompanied by an adult. After the service, everyone is welcome at the congregational lunch, served **on the first, third and fifth Sundays** of the month in the lower hall. The two course lunch costs £3.50 and there is no need to book. Tea and coffee are also available.



## Dear Readers,

Foursquare and familiar, our church tower graces this month's cover. But there's more to impressive church buildings than meets the eye: Elizabeth P. Fox looks behind the façade and reports on successful projects and interventions – from tower to basement, planned and unplanned – master-minded by the Fabric Committee over recent months.

What is a church building without its members? Hugh Pym takes the opportunity to capture some memories of member Donald Shaw who celebrated his 100th birthday last year. We join his many friends amongst the congregation in congratulating him on a life full of purpose, faith and joy.

Two of our regular mini-series run again in this edition: David Natzler continues his exploration of the books of the Apocrypha with an article on the two Maccabees, and Betsy Wilkie takes her turn in providing a list of favourite discs for the mythical desert island.

Finally, David Stewart offers a thought-provoking article about his recent visit to Ukraine. It makes for sobering reading and reminds us, as he suggests, that there are many who are deserving of our prayers.

This first issue of 2022 may act as a reminder to renew your magazine subscription if you have not already done so. With very best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year,

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

## The Editorial Team

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## VESTRY LETTER



February/March 2022

Dear Friends,

Planning future events remains a tricky business. Whether you are considering business ventures, work site visits, family holidays, entertainment outings or a straightforward meet-up with a friend, just about everything labours under a shadow of uncertainty, thanks to the latest COVID chapter. Church life is no exception. The frustration of not being able to offer parts of our pre-pandemic life continues. Understandably, people remain cautious about returning to church to worship, or for other activities.

How do we respond, after two years of fluctuating circumstance? Firstly, we offer what we can. We continue to worship, either in-person in the pews, or via the live-stream and telephone dial-in. This is something we can all do. It is something we undertake collectively. Those fortunate to be in the building represent others unseen. But those unseen are also validating and

encouraging those in the building. We are in this together, however varied our circumstances may be. At the recent January evening service for Epiphany, we were only about a dozen in the candlelit sanctuary; but at the same time, thirty households were tuned in via the live stream. That is a source of strength and comfort.

We also plan. We prepare for the season of Lent – the forty days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week. Like last year we will offer a Lent book study/discussion group via zoom. Via the website <https://www.stcolumbas.org.uk/lent-and-easter> we hope to have contributions both from inside and outside St Columba's – a variety of voices to help our journey towards Easter and shed light along the way. We will select and support a small overseas charity for our Lent Appeal. And in time we will enter the poignancy of Holy Week, precursor to the celebrations of Easter.

We also plan further ahead for celebrations in early summer. Firstly, to mark the Queens' Platinum Jubilee with a celebratory morning service, followed by Jubilee lunch and evening Songs of Praise. Then a week later, to mark St Columba's Day on the weekend of 11th & 12th June – hopefully a congregational ceilidh on the Saturday evening, and a Sunday sermon and afternoon talk from Rev Professor Ian Bradley of St Andrews University and expert on St Columba. Holy Communion, congregational lunch and AGM of the Friends of St Columba's all included!

So, you might say the St Columba's response is a mixture; to be steady and faithful in the immediate term, but also to plan – to involve people in what is life-affirming, be it spiritual or social (hopefully both.) At the same time, we are mindful that people continue at various stages and paces, along the pandemic road. All of us probably feel a little frailer than we were. As a colleague reminded me, Jesus' ministry is characterised in the memorable words: "*A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.*" While we long for a change in circumstance that would unshackle us from the uncertainties shaping our lives, maybe we should know this is really a time for gentleness, patience and encouragement of each other – valuing what is there, albeit a bruised reed and a dimly burning wick, and nurturing life through compassion, friendship, prayer and care.

Angus MacLeod

# No rest for the Fabric Committee

Convener Elizabeth P. Fox on fire alarms, floods and flag poles



*Cherry picker in Pont Street*

If anyone thought that lockdown and the furloughing of staff would lead to a break in the work of St Columba's Fabric Committee, that was wishful thinking on his or her part.

Whilst we were conscious, particularly in the early months of the pandemic, of the impact on the Church's finances because of all services being livestreamed only and outside bodies unable to use our premises, it was decided very early on to take advantage of the Church and Halls being empty to organise the replacement of the fire alarm system.

Quotations had already been obtained and decisions taken as to the contractor we wished to use and with the old system increasingly showing its age, the blessing of the Finance Convener was obtained to go ahead with this planned work. For the company chosen, the task was made so much easier by its staff having free

sounders will also ensure that the hard-of-hearing recognise that they have to leave the building.

We were lucky that our fire alarm company had not furloughed its staff and that it had sufficient Covid-free personnel to carry out the work. Our caretaker Michael Dempsey was also fit and well and could open all the doors to all parts of the building as the work progressed.

Not long after, Michael suggested that he could get on with a number of painting jobs while St Columba's was empty. This seemed too good an opportunity to miss (even for the Finance Convener) and so a programme of works was started.

It has been gratifying that one or two of the returning congregation have noticed the difference and the Committee hopes that for those of you who have not yet attended a service since March 2020, there will be something

additional for you to look forward to on your return. We might even offer a prize to the first person who spots all the new paintwork.

Other works that the Fabric Committee might normally have got on with were postponed, and not just because we were conscious of financial constraints. As some readers may have experienced themselves, there has been a shortage of companies with slots available as they are working flat out building extensions and replacing bathrooms and kitchens.

The Forth Railway Bridge used to take so many years to repaint that, once completed, the work reputedly started all over again. The new St Columba's was officially opened in December 1955, so it is perhaps not surprising that sixty-six years later one or two items have come to the end of their life. This was certainly the case with the hot water boiler which imploded one Saturday in October.

Fortunately, Paul Dempsey was on duty and dealt manfully with the resultant flood (the boiler was situated on the second floor at the Pont Street end of the building).

The water did, however, knock out a certain amount of electrical supply, most notably to the Gallery and the Sanctuary. Our electrician came out on Sunday morning to give us the all-clear for putting the power back on, although as the choir had rehearsed in the Sanctuary accompanied by the piano, they did not return to the Gallery. More importantly, the livestreaming of the service could go ahead as usual.

The drying out took several days and a deal of polishing of floors and stairs was necessary. The

# No rest for the Fabric Committee

Continued

implosion could not have been anticipated and our plumber will be making proposals regarding how we replace the hot water supply to the facilities used by our staff.

Another issue that had been troubling the Fabric Committee was the closers on a number of the large wooden doors in the building, including the ones leading into the Sanctuary. The fact that these doors swung far too easily had also been highlighted in the Audit Access Report. Some initial advice that all the closers would have to be replaced, at very large expense, was to say the least disappointing. A trawl through "Google" by Lucy Llewellyn and Michael Dempsey led to the discovery of a great tradesman, who dismissed the idea of replacing all the closers, recommending instead the replacement of part of the mechanism in the floor, which would necessitate the taking down and then the rehangings of the doors.

The Sanctuary doors have been done, as has the door into the Committee Room/Library. I can recommend watching how slowly the Sanctuary doors now close (both ways), with no risk of anyone being knocked over. The bright new floor plates are the only evidence of the work having been carried out. We are hoping that we shall be able to have other doors dealt with in the same way, when our new find has the time before he retires. Incidentally, do allow the doors to close by themselves – they do not need any help.

The flagpole is not the original one, but during lockdown we had to deal with the finial that had fallen off during the winter storms. For the uninitiated (as I was) the

finial is the metal knob at the end of the flagpole that stops the flag escaping. Finding a flagpole company that was prepared to quote for the work, let alone undertake it, was a formidable task. Eventually, Lucy tracked down a company in Chesterfield that does work on several well-known buildings in London. The months went past with no flag flying from the Tower, but a quotation having been obtained and the Finance Convener sharing my view that "flying the flag" demonstrated our presence, and thus contributed to our mission, the work was commissioned. A cherrypicker had to be organised by the company, together with the necessary licences from the Royal Borough. This also involved Lucy and Michael measuring the exact distance from the end of the flagpole to the pavement (think ball of string and you will not be far wrong). In the event, the actual repair only took minutes – apparently the man hoisted skywards in the cherrypicker "does not like heights".

Our final excitement was the burst water main in Pont Street on a June Sunday morning. Water oozing through the paving stones outside the church at 8am soon led to the flooding of the room off the boiler room in our basement. Michael and Paul Dempsey were to the rescue, bailing out water to prevent it reaching the boiler room, a good 15" higher. When Paul left to play his part in the livestreaming of the morning service, Hugh Pym took his place. Thames Water appeared in the afternoon to turn off the main and then the cleaning up/drying out exercise began, as well as the insurance claim (over to Michael

Stevenson and Lucy Llewellyn). The Fabric Committee is "looking forward" to another year, but is enormously grateful to our staff and contractors whose service has been so valuable these past two years.



*Flooding outside the church caused by burst water main...*

*...and Michael bailing out in the basement*



# Donald Shaw - Happy Hundredth

Interviewed by Hugh Pym

Modest and self-effacing as always Donald Shaw needed a little convincing to go ahead with this interview. "I don't think I have got much to say which would interest the readers", he said more than once. We should all be grateful that he eventually agreed to talk about his life and a fascinating range of memories to mark the landmark of reaching his century in the autumn.



*Donald at his 100th birthday celebration*

Donald's first experience of the Church of Scotland was as a boy in Edinburgh. For many years, like his parents, he worshipped at a Congregational church and then an Anglican church. His late wife Dorothy was from the Anglican tradition. They were married for 52 years, what Donald says was his "biggest good fortune". Then in search of a return to Presbyterian worship he joined St Columba's. As well as making new friends in Pont Street, Donald signed up for voluntary work encouraged by Judith Roberts who was running the church's partnerships with local homeless charities. This

included helping at a laundry at Chelsea Methodist church and the night shelters at St Columba's with the Glass Door charity. This work, says Donald, is "one of the finest parts of St Columba's". He says, disarmingly, that he only "retired" at the age of 95 when things got more difficult travelling in by train from his Surrey home. He carried on volunteering with a Sunday lunch team till the pandemic intervened and caused a temporary shutdown of church hospitality. Taking part in a St Columba's pantomime he described as "enormous fun – I saw a whole aspect of church fellowship I didn't know."

Donald was born in Surrey in 1921. His father Russell was a Scot who had trained as an accountant and ran a business in London. He had served in the Royal Navy in World War One and witnessed the first ever raid launched from an aircraft carrier. His mother Marjorie had been brought up in Devon where her father was a doctor. Donald remembers his early years in a Surrey village: "I had wonderful parents and was very fortunate and lucky to spend my childhood at Woldingham." When they first moved to the house, he recalls, there was gas lighting and no electricity.

Donald has always been a sports fan and he remembers being taken by his mother to see an Ashes Test Match at the Oval. He was there to witness the last Test innings played by Jack Hobbs who received three cheers from the Australian fielders including Don Bradman. As an Arsenal supporter he never made it to Highbury to see a game but pored over newspaper coverage of the Gunners' games and can still reel off most of the team from the golden era in the 1930s: "Hulme, Bastin, Hapgood..."

Rugby is clearly Donald's favourite sport. He was at Twickenham to see a famous Scottish victory in the Calcutta Cup in 1938 and vividly recalls the contribution of Wilson Shaw, Scotland's star player on the day. As a schoolboy at Fettes College in Edinburgh rugby was a dominant theme. Pupils were dispatched to Murrayfield to watch internationals – "If you didn't go you would be in trouble." Being part of a 100,000 crowd as a youngster on the standing terraces was "great fun but could be dangerous at times". He has continued attending Murrayfield matches with each of his three children, including a Six Nations game six months short of his 100th birthday with his son Russell and daughter Eleanor (a St Columba's member). Locally he has been a regular on the touchline at Heathfield & Waldron RFC.



*With his late wife Dorothy at his 70th birthday celebration*

Donald's form master at Fettes was, as it happens, a Welsh rugby international Idwal Rees. He was required to teach morning lessons on a Saturday even when he was playing a big game that afternoon. "I have a vivid memory," says

# Donald Shaw - Happy Hundredth

Continued

Donald, "of Idwal Rees running down the stairs in a shabby raincoat and carrying a battered suitcase on his way to Murrayfield. He wasn't allowed off till 11am – these were real amateur times." Fettes, he says, was "very spartan" with the first lesson and chapel before breakfast. But they were generally happy times and he remains "very attached to Fettes". It was on the school's playing fields that he and his school friends witnessed the first air raid of the war in October 1939, a German attack on battleships in the River Forth. They had just finished a game of rugby when a German bomber flew low overhead pursued by an RAF fighter. The enemy aircraft was forced down nearby. So early in the war this was a novelty and Donald remembers it was "very exciting and everyone was rather upbeat about it".

After leaving Fettes, Donald moved to London in 1940 to work and sit exams to study dentistry at Guy's Hospital dental school. It was the middle of the Blitz but he passed and secured his place though it was deferred when he joined the RAF in February 1941. Donald is reluctant to talk about his war time service as a pilot. He became a prisoner of war in 1943 at a camp in Pomerania in Eastern Germany.

More than sixty years before appearing in the St Columba's production of "Aladdin", Donald had taken part in plays put on in the POW camp with one of the leading lights being Donald Pleasance, later to be a star of stage and film. In the final days of the war in 1945, the Russians were approaching the POW camp and the German command tried to order the prisoners to march west. The senior Allied officers in the camp, after consulting colleagues, refused and there

was a tense standoff. The German soldiers then left and ten days later the camp had been liberated with the Russian command allowing an airlift organised by the US authorities. Eight thousand POWs were flown home in two days. "We were very fortunate not to be forced to march like some in other camps –when we got back to England we were wonderfully treated", remembers Donald.

Demobbed later in 1945, Donald took up the place at Guy's Hospital he had put on hold. He qualified in 1949 and practised in Hove for many years on his own after the death of the senior partner who had first taken him on. Latterly he worked in the community dental service. Reflecting on his career he said that everything in dentistry had been "revolutionised" since he started with much of what he was first taught outdated. For those who wince at the thought of a trip to the dentist Donald reassuringly notes that local anaesthetic is "very superior" to what it used to be!

Donald and Dorothy retired to Mayfield in Sussex in 1986 and

fully embraced village life. They threw themselves into the local community and were very happy there. Donald supported the Royal British Legion, the Horticultural Society and Mayfield Cricket Club, as well as local rugby. He was the fabric officer for the Anglican church as well as tending the cemetery, and took up upholstery and stitched a very large number of church kneelers! Donald moved to his present home in Surrey in 2010.

Asked about the secret of a long life Donald replies "good genes". His mother lived to 102 and his father till the age of 89. Cycling or walking two and a half miles to work must have helped. Donald has a straightforward principle: "every indulgence in moderation". Donald, we salute you and thank you for giving time to share some of your memories. Congratulations on your 100th birthday and thank you for the friendship and kindness you have shown to so many at St Columba's and the dedicated service you have given to those most in need.



# Sermon

## Sermon preached at St Columba's Pont Street by Rev Angus MacLeod On Friday 24th December 2021 at 11.15 pm (Watchnight Service)

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?'*

*For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.'* Matthew 1:1-2

A tiny poem, familiar to some, by the late American writer, Raymond Carver, entitled "Late Fragment":

*And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.*

*And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.*

Of all the congregations that gather in churches throughout the land, throughout the year, I suspect, the Christmas Eve congregation comes with the deepest sense of yearning; the gathering most likely to include someone, with only half an idea/interest in a Bethlehem birth, who may be wary of religion and its institutions, *and yet*, finds themselves, disbelievingly present. That any of us have made it here this night (in the pews, or watching from afar) suggests we really want to be here. Amid COVID uncertainty, you have elected to come to a house of prayer on the eve of the birthday of Jesus. You might explain it with different reasons – the loyalties of family or the habits of convention; a love of the music, the magic and mystery of candlelight, for some, "the real start of Christmas". For others – an echo of earlier days, simpler times, and loved ones no longer with us. That is good. There should always be a mix of why we gather, never a single assumption of what draws us. After all, the infant we celebrate tonight, would in adult years counsel a hillside crowd: "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*" Matthew 7:7

The gospel story tonight is the tale of spiritual seekers – *wise men*, astrologer-explorers,

very likely from modern-day Iraq; star-gazers, prepared to take a punt on an unknown outcome.

An illumination in the heavens that sets them out on a journey. One that will take a very wrong, and dangerous turn, via Herod's palace intrigue, but eventually find its true destination in the backwaters of Bethlehem. The odyssey of the wise men might be metaphor for our own spiritual journeys.

One such journey was told recently on the radio series, *Soul Music*. Each episode chooses a piece of music, classical or pop. It interlaces the music with accounts from varied voices about how, or why, that particular piece of music has become significant, often attaching itself to key life moments – birth, relationship, crisis or death. A recent episode was devoted to the 1980s hit by Irish rock band, U2 – "*I still haven't found what I'm looking for*". The song is heavily influenced by Americana music and echoes the gospel tradition of call and response. It can be heard as a love song or the search for something less tangible, a cry of yearning for the *something more* to life.

One of the accompanying stories was from an Irishman. (I cannot do justice to his lilting tones, his humour and honesty.) Raised in rural Fermanagh, growing up on a farm, then attending university, he landed a job on graduation that took him to the USA. He had a busy, enjoyable job in computing, he drove a sports car, had a girlfriend and as he said, enjoyed *a good time*. After a while, things didn't quite satisfy. He chose a new start in Australia; embarking, he thought, permanently.

As it happened, he lived in an area that was served by a Jesuit parish. He started to return to mass, after many years of not going. The priest he described as inspiring, but particularly because he was *at peace with himself*. Sometime later, our narrator attended a weekend retreat at the Jesuit house. On one evening he got an



# Sermon

continued

invitation from his girlfriend to go to a party on the other side of town. He accepted and snuck out. He had a great night. But as he returned later the same night to the Retreat House driving in his car, on a street named River Road, he recalls turning on the radio. The song that came on was *"I still haven't found what I'm looking for"*. To his surprise he found himself weeping uncontrollably – he couldn't fathom why. In time, he saw it as a moment of decision. His journey took a very different path. Eventually, he returned to Ireland and trained for the Jesuit priesthood.

Some years later, on the day of his ordination in Dublin, with all his family gathering for this significant moment, at the start of the service, when all his fellow Jesuit priests processed into the chapel, the choir at his request belted out: *"I still haven't found what I'm looking for"*. I suspect it raised a few eyebrows. But surely it was a good choice – both tracking back to a pivotal moment and acknowledging too, that also on this threshold moment there would be more to discover. For the child born tonight – eternity touching time, God and human, heaven come to earth – is always a mystery; elusive, beckoning us forward a little further. To be a seeker is to be faithful; to be faithful is to be a seeker. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

As the last door of the Advent calendar opens, the first candle of Christmas is lit and its first communion celebrated, by the grace of God, may we gaze through a stable doorway and behold the mystery of love come down at Christmas. Then echo the words: *"I have found what I was looking for - To know ourselves beloved, to feel ourselves beloved on the earth."*

Amen



Rogier van der Weyden, *Journey of the Magi*

# The two Maccabees

by David Natzler

I first encountered the two Books of Maccabees more than twenty years ago, without being aware that they were in the Apocrypha. The staircase leading down from the Lower Waiting Hall in the Palace of Westminster to the catering facilities on the river level is decorated with around twenty panels painted in the 1930s by the then leading authority on English medieval wall painting, Professor Tristram. They are based on the beautiful copies made in 1819 by two skilled water colourists, Charles Stothard and Edward Crocker, of the murals originally painted in the King's Great Chamber in the 1290s. The murals perished in the great fire of 1834.

Many of the mural scenes in the Great Chamber illustrated the Books of Maccabees. Why? Edward I was described in an account of their 1323 visit to London by two Irish friars as "machabeissimi Anglorum regis": the most Maccabean King of the English. What they meant was that Edward was a type of royal chivalric military hero, as modelled by the keynote figure of the two books, Judas Maccabaeus.

One of the sons of a priest who refuses to accept the rule of Antiochus the Syrian, Judas Maccabaeus becomes the leader of the resistance to his rule and wins famous victories before being killed in turn when he refuses to flee. He is succeeded by his brothers and eventually peace breaks out. Judas is of course mainly known to us from Handel's oratorio, which is short on plot but long on memorable moments, mainly 'See The Conqu'ring Hero Comes' and 'O lovely peace'. That it was written to honour the Duke of Cumberland after the Battle of Culloden rather than takes the guilt off the gingerbread for a Scottish audience.

Judas Maccabaeus was honoured as an epitome of military heroism

in the middle ages, as one of the Nine Worthies alongside two other Jewish heroes, David and Joshua, three pagans, Hector and Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, and three Christians, King Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon. They were considered as paragons of chivalry and appear in sculpture, painting and in literature. The final scene of *Love's Labours Lost* where Judas Maccabaeus is represented by the pompous school-teacher Holofernes always makes me both laugh and cry, knowing that the jollity is about to come to an end.

The two Books of Maccabees in the Apocrypha are by and large wearying reading. One story which may be familiar is that of the expulsion of Heliiodorus from the Temple by a rider on a white horse and two angels, memorably shown in one of Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican, the scene being observed by Pope Julius II in a chair held aloft by Raphael himself. The scene symbolises the sacred nature of the temple and its inviolability by those such as Heliiodorus, who was seeking to rob it of the money preserved there for charitable purposes. For obvious reasons, it was a story popular with those upholding the church against the secular power.

And then there is the gruesome story of the Maccabean martyrs, seven sons and their mother who were horribly put to death one after another for refusing to give up Jewish orthodox practices and conform to Hellenized norms. Quite some years ago, at the end of an exhilarating two days devoted to seeing all the wonders of Cologne's Romanesque churches, I recall ending up at the Andreaskirche and marvelling at a highly decorated and gilded shrine to the seven Maccabean martyrs: without any very clear idea of who

they were. I vaguely assumed that they were very early Christians who had fallen foul of the royal authorities in Judaea and paid the price.

But no: these were *Jewish* martyrs, brave victims of an attempt at forced assimilation, and subject to persecution such as Christian authorities and communities were guilty of for many centuries afterwards, in Cologne as elsewhere. And yet there they were, honoured in a Dominican church and still commemorated by some Eastern churches on 1 August. There were even early Christian basilicas dedicated to the Maccabean martyrs: by the merest chance we saw reference to one such church this October in Lyon.

So what do we pick out of the two Books of Maccabees? The heroism of Jewish martyrs now ensconced in a church in Cologne? Or the chivalric heroism of Judas Maccabaeus, Handel's Conquering Hero - and still a hero to Zionists, reflected in the number of Israeli football clubs called Maccabi?

My answer came unexpectedly in York Minster in July. In the north transept is a memorial to Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock, who was killed at the Battle of Coronel off the coast of Chile on 1 November 1914, facing the superior firepower of Admiral Graf von Spee's East Asia Squadron. Cradock knew his smaller squadron had little chance of surviving. Somebody put on his memorial the passage from 1 Maccabees 10, where Judas is urged to slip away from confronting a superior enemy: "*God forbid that I should do this thing, to flee away from them. If our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour.*" That is the Maccabean spirit, whether facing religious persecution or military defeat. Would that each of us could be *maccabeissimus*.

# Desert Island Discs

and this month's castaway is Betsy Wilkie

Having been sent to this mythical desert island, and allowed eight records, I spent a while mulling over what I'd want to take there. I then tried to weave a story around them. Music has meant a huge amount to me over the years, and indeed I have grown up with it. In spite of everything, there was always music of all sorts in my childhood home, including "Friday Night is Music Night" and Scottish dance music on the radio, always *Messiah* at Christmas and singing round the piano on Sunday evenings. This selection follows different times through my life.

1. The opening chorus of "The Gentlemen of Japan" from *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan would remind me of my grandfather. He had sung this work with our local Operatic Society and would quote freely and regularly from several of the operas! The vocal scores of the most popular ones were all there so later on, I started trying to play and sing bits of them.

2. "Wiegenlied" (Lullaby - English version) by Brahms would bring back days in our Church junior choir. Some of the other members got cross sometimes as I was usually the one who got to do the solos. (I apparently could sing in tune from quite an early age!) This one was a favourite party piece.

3. "Westering Home" from *Songs of the Isles*. This was a later party piece which I rendered on one memorable occasion - with a band - in a talent contest in our Public Park. The treat of that one was that if you won the afternoon round, you were the guest star at the evening show. Mum was rather taken aback when I rushed in at teatime and said I was singing in the Glen at night and did she want to come! She was unaware of what I'd been up to during the afternoon. Winning was judged by how much applause was recorded. The stars from each day of the week competed at the final Saturday evening concert for the prize. For the record, I did get to the final but did not win. It was

fun trying!

4. Move on several years and I'm now sitting my finals at College. One of the hit tunes of that year (you work it out) was Nat King Cole singing "Ramblin' Rose". It perfectly summed up one particular paper. "Ramble on, ramble on..."

5. Perhaps the rambling worked because in the next year I found myself working as a pre-registration pharmacist, and resident in a hospital. Whenever there is a group of twenty-somethings, including junior doctors, physios, radiographers etc, there is going to be a party so choice 5 comes from that time. Does anyone else remember "Let's Twist Again" with Chubby Checker?

6. Time I had some serious music perhaps. When I came to London, I had the opportunity to attend concerts at Wigmore Hall and the Festival Hall. This rekindled my interest in chamber music and especially Schubert. Choosing anything from Schubert's vast output is really difficult. Should it be a song? There are 600 to choose from. A symphony? Nine of those. Piano music, and the quartets, trios, the magical octet. Finally I decided this choice has to be the String Quintet in C Major D956.

7. A real life-changing event for me was joining the Philharmonia Chorus. The amount of music I sang for the next 30 or so years was quite amazing. It took me to so many places and trying to pick out a single choice is difficult. I was asked from time to time what my favourite work was and the answer often was whatever we were singing at the time. Haydn *Creation*, Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*, Rachmaninov *Vespers* were all very special.

After some thought I've chosen the second symphony of Mahler ("Resurrection"). It's one of only two occasions when I sang with the legendary conductor, Otto Klemperer. The other performance

was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, but somehow I could manage on the island without that, exciting though it is. Mahler however used to reduce the sopranos to tears in the last bars. The huge sound of the orchestra around us and the emotion of the ending was just too much.

8. After that one, I'd really need something gentle and peaceful to go to sleep on my island. My last choice therefore is the "Evening Prayer" from the opera *Hansel and Gretel* by Humperdinck. The children are lost in the wood but settle to sleep lulled by this lovely prayer, and watched over by the angels. Pure magic!

Now comes the really difficult bit - only one of the records. I think it has to be Schubert. Listening to this wonderful music it's hard to believe Schubert composed it only a couple of months or so before he died in 1828.

Which book would I want? What could I read many times without getting bored with it? *The Wind in the Willows*.

And a luxury? Please can I have my duvet!

If you ask me to pick my desert island choices another time I'm pretty sure you'd get a different list. There is just so much music out there and don't we need it right now.



# Ukraine – November 2021

## David Stewart shares impressions from a thought-provoking visit

In late 2020, a friend and former Cardiff neighbour – who fancies himself as a chorister (which Welshmen don't...) – contacted me suggesting a short trip to Kiev the following May, primarily to visit the site of the nearby Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The excellent drama starring Jared Harris (son of Richard, from Co Limerick) and a Ben Fogle documentary had heightened interest.

May came and went, and obviously international travel was not possible, so we postponed to early October. Next the would-be singer started a new University job in that window, and decided he could not be away then. No problem, thought I, we will roll it over to the following May – shorts and t-shirt time.... Despite my protests about the weather conditions and short days in late November, I lost a 2-1 vote.

Temperatures around zero were challenging, but not prohibitively so. In fact as was suggested, they brought their own atmospherics. I have returned with a positive impression of both place and people, along with their long and distinguished culture (art, music, poetry, design all have deep roots). Strong on faith as well: readers will be aware of the Orthodox and Catholic traditions. There are churches aplenty – some large, many beautiful. My experiences are largely restricted to Kiev, the largely westernised capital of some three million people, which has an educated and willing young workforce (and a serious traffic problem!).

The shiny new motorway from Borispol airport knocks spots off anything you will see in this country. One also noticed a large number of petrol stations,

explained later by a local in the context of the large number of cars on the roads! There is a burgeoning IT sector. An American of Indian descent with whom we socialised was on an outsourcing project – the time zones are better for businesses in the USA than is India, the main supplier presently. English is spoken widely. Bearing in mind a lot of Ukrainians also speak Russian, their language skills are impressive.

Between booking and flying, Ukraine Air moved our departure times back significantly, meaning we lost an initial half-day in Kiev, arriving after darkness. Suitable consolation was the hotel identifying a Georgian restaurant a short stroll away – the location being helpful, because our third member has Parkinson's. One unanticipated consequence was that whilst two of us wore heavy winter coats, such is the effect

of Greg's medication on his body temperature, a light jacket sufficed for him at all times!

If you have not experienced Georgian catering, do not delay. It is up there with the best I have sampled.

Seemingly London already has some 20 restaurants offering this fare, and I plan to check out a few sooner rather than later. Their wines are impressive as well. On enquiring the next day about Ukrainian cuisine, the smiling response from a tour guide was: "we all eat Georgian!".

Our first morning took in a triangle of churches: St Sophia's Cathedral, St Michael's golden-domed Monastery, and the smaller St Andrews. The short walk to the last named passed the British Embassy (a small unit of uniformed guards outside), but alas there was no Scottish reference on the information boards at the church.

St Michael's brought two surprises. Paramilitary police were used in December 2013 to break up a major anti-government protest nearby. A priest, Ivan Sydor, rang its bells constantly from 1am to 5 am "urging people to go to the main (Independence) square in the capital and support the protesters". Later, in February 2014, the Monastery became a refuge and field hospital – people being scared of arrest at government hospitals.



*St Michael's Monastery: victims of conflict*

Moreover, on its perimeter walls are displayed photographs of fallen troops and volunteers from the fighting along the eastern border with Russia, primarily the Donbass region. It was sobering to learn that, as its absence from our television screens and newspapers might infer, this

# Ukraine - November 2021

Continued

conflict did not start and end back in 2014, but is ongoing. 'Vlad the bad', having since marched into Crimea (à la the Sudetenland in 1938) now has stationed some 100,000 troops, plus sophisticated weaponry and armour close by; I shudder to think how the story may have moved on by the time these words are read – certainly a military invasion is anticipated, perhaps with the objective of going all the way to the Dnieper river (which is the Thames of Kiev).

Reportedly, 'Irish' Joe Biden recently told the young Ukrainian President Zelensky that they were on their own. My visit to the large military museum in Kiev was instructive. These people have been suffering from hardships imposed by outside interference, largely from the East, for some 200 years now. They deserve better, much better. Patriotic volunteers supplement the regular army in trying to defend the Russian border incursions (of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 notoriety). A couple of memorable stories: Vasyl Slipak, a singer at the Paris Opera, came home to assist. He was killed in 2015. A Red Army veteran of the Second World War referenced the grandsons of his fellow soldiers back then having his own grandson in their rifle sights: "this has happened because of Putin". His grandson was later killed.

What of Chernobyl and Pripjat, the latter being the abandoned model city built close to the nuclear plant. There were four reactors: the plan was to have 12 and make it the biggest 'powerhouse' in the world. The brightest and best were encouraged to travel from



*Fellow traveller Greg at a newly built but abandoned funfair in Pripjat* across the Soviet Union and make it a centre of excellence. Average age of the population was 26. The strongest impression was of consequences from how the Soviet system operated. Managers were reluctant to tell the truth, due to a fear of being scapegoated. When the authorities, particularly in Moscow but also locally, learned the scale of the dangers posed, it was initially described as an accident. This was April 26th, yet May Day parades were allowed to go ahead a mere five days later, notwithstanding the obvious risks. In the way of these things, people saw through the lies when senior functionaries did not appear on viewing platforms.

And so, this rotten system imploded from within. It wasn't popular governance, but was reluctantly tolerated on the understanding that basic competence formed part of it. After that illusion was gone, little remained.

Within three and a half years the Berlin Wall came down, and the Soviet Union fell apart shortly thereafter. Ukrainian people tend to be proud, engaging, interested, attractive and hard-working. Their future could, and hopefully will, be bright but patience is needed. EU membership is a strong objective. Corruption, sadly, is endemic in their society. Of course, whilst this is useful for those 'holding the folding', it is the lower echelons who suffer most.

Supposedly, on our trip around the nuclear plant, we were exposed to the equivalent amount of radiation as would be experienced on a one-hour average short-haul flight. Some 2,000 workers are still employed in the immediate area, on a 14-day rotation. A group of elderly people who were compulsorily removed back in 1986 have returned to their subsistence homesteads and are quietly content. The Ukrainian peasant is of tough stock; remember them please, along with their fellow country people, in your prayers.



*The author in front of Reactor 4 and the memorial statue*

# Baptisms • Marriages • Deaths

## BAPTISMS

*“Suffer the little children to come unto me”*

- 5<sup>th</sup> December                      Evelyn May Sanderson Chan, London W6  
James Gardner Lamb-Finlay, London SW19  
Maisie Elizabeth Lyburn, London, SW18
- 9<sup>th</sup> January                              James Horatio Somerled Coleman, London, W1G

## DEATHS

*“Blessed are they that die in the Lord”*

- 16<sup>th</sup> October                      Gwen Craig, Wallingford

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

# Church Diary:

## 6<sup>th</sup> February to 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

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

<b>6<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service &amp; Baptisms</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>6<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>5.00pm</b>	<b>Evening Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>13<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>20<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>27<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>6<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service &amp; Baptisms</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
	<b>5.00pm</b>	<b>Evening Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>13<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>20<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>27<sup>th</sup> March</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> April</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service &amp; Baptisms</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
	<b>5.00pm</b>	<b>Evening Service</b>

# Prayer

Today,  
we are still the people walking.  
We are still people in the dark,  
and the darkness looms large around us,  
beset as we are by fear,  
anxiety,  
brutality,  
violence,  
loss -  
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.

We are - we could be - people of your light.  
So, we pray for the light of your glorious presence  
as we wait for your appearing;  
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace  
as we exhaust our coping capacity;  
we pray for your gift of newness that  
will override our weariness;  
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust  
in your good rule.

That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact  
your rule through the demands of this day.  
We submit our day to you and to your rule,  
with deep joy and high hope.

Walter Brueggemann (b. 1933)

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