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Dear Friends,

I had hoped, before coming to write this winter letter for Stramash, that there might have been some good news to celebrate. Remarkably – to my enormous pleasure and with impeccable timing! – the announcement has just been made that results from the world’s first effective coronavirus vaccine have shown that it can prevent more than 90% of people from getting Covid. That is an astonishing and hugely encouraging figure. The Pfizer

breakthrough looks like the real deal. Ten further vaccines are in the final stages of testing and many of those now look even more promising. It seems increasingly likely that life will be getting back to some semblance of normality by Easter next year. What a blessing that will be.

I appear to have been using the analogy of WWII D-Day and V-Day quite a bit of late. It comes strongly to mind again in this context. With the newly announced vaccine breakthrough, today marks a clear D-Day in our long struggle. Here is a success of mind-boggling dimensions. Our rejoicing is tempered, however, by at least two realities.

The first is the recollection of the tragic deaths and losses occasioned by Covid, together with the best part of a year of excruciating national lockdown. For all of us, we look back on some of the most difficult months we have ever experienced. For some, the pain has been acute. For others, it became simply intolerable. We feel deeply for those who have lost loved ones.

I confess to having been increasingly shocked that the relentless media obsession with the virus itself has not been matched by a correspondingly lively discussion of the negative consequences of lockdown. This was understandable last March amid the widespread (*and governmental*) panic, when no one knew too much about what was going on. That the increasing understanding of the situation has not led to a mature national discussion of the pros and cons of lockdown versus non-lockdown simply beggars belief.

When I learn that people of the eminence of Professor Sunetra Gupta of Oxford, probably the world’s leading theoretical epidemiologist, have been subjected to abuse for suggesting that the missed trick was to focus our



resources (*including the billions squandered on aborted schemes*) on protecting the elderly and vulnerable, while allowing life for others to continue, I edge towards despair. More lives are going to be lost from lockdown than from Covid. Young lives have been wrecked. Community-serving businesses have been eliminated. Countless folk are out of work. Families have been destroyed. But - can you believe it? - no lockdown impact assessment has been done. Have we collectively lost our reason? Jesus spoke most solemnly about failure to count the cost.

D-Day it may be for us, but a long winter lies ahead, especially for the elderly, vulnerable and isolated. V-Day is coming for sure. Meantime, let’s do all we can to encourage and support those among us who need our help. That’s easily the best contribution we can make over these winter months to the continuing struggle of these in-between times.

The joy of V-Day is coming - soon! The fear of Covid will be a thing of the past. Let’s hope and pray that in our rejoicing the new normality will be better than the old. That we don’t simply revert to the tired consumerist, self-absorbed, materialistic ways of the past.

Allow me, in conclusion, to wonder aloud if Covid will be seen to have taught us that life is short, eternity is long, and that there is a Pearl of great price of eternal value, worth our utmost seeking. It’s name is Jesus Christ.

Angus Morrison
Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison

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Remembrance Day Encounter

This year, our Remembrance Day observances were very low-key. No official Acts of Remembrance were held at our war memorials. Wreaths were, however,

laid at both our parish memorials at Bishopshire and in Milnathort and it was a privilege to be present when this took place. Legislation that permits the conduct of funeral services of thanksgiving for the dead, with twenty people present, indoors and outdoors, but not an open air socially distanced solemn Act of Remembrance, with anyone at all, is to the present writer, at least, quite inexplicable.

One surprise – and happy - encounter on this year’s Remembrance Sunday deserves to be shared with readers. Arriving to pay my respects at the Milnathort War Memorial, I came by chance on a couple, in running kit and dripping wet because of the incessant rain that morning, reverently laying a small cross on the Memorial. We engaged in conversation and their story moved and uplifted me. Kalim and Silke Rehman (*Kalim a serving British army officer, Silke a German, as they took pleasure in telling me*) were at the time engaged in running the circuit of the war memorials around Loch Leven. Here is Kalim’s account of their adventure, kindly emailed to me later:

“Silke and I ran the three memorials from Scotlandwell (*Kinnesswood, Kinross, Milnathort*) and back to

Scotlandwell to show our respect for Remembrance Weekend. Silke, who as you know is German and I wanted to do something. Due to COVID, memorial services and parades were somewhat muted or cancelled this year. Normally, we would have been at a formal service and parade.

The motivation for running the 23 km route came from 7 SCOTS colleagues on the West Coast of Scotland, who decided to pay their respects through personal effort, by running a Remembrance Memorial circuit. It was their example that we followed. The idea and the kudos for delivering on it, is entirely theirs. The rain, cold and muddy conditions added to the solemnity of the event.

We were both delighted to meet you on our chance encounter and hope that we may do so again. The socially distanced Remembrance gathering at the Milnathort memorial was admirable and moving. Thank you.”

Meeting the dedicated and modest Silke and Kalim greatly raised my spirits on what was otherwise a rather gloomy day. In a world crying out for peace and reconciliation, there was something beautifully symbolic and hope-filled in this united British-German endeavour. I conveyed to them the warm gratitude of us all in the parish for their tremendous effort. Well done to them and to 7 SCOTS, whom I had the privilege of joining on exercise when Moderator, for such a

thoughtful initiative at this trying time - typical of the men and women of our armed services. We are deeply grateful and we are proud of them all, past and present.

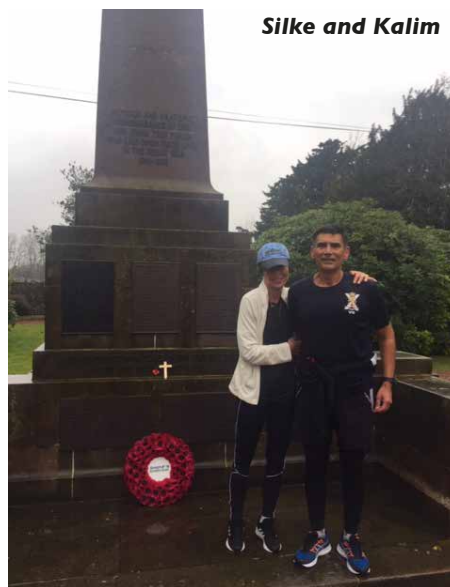
ANGUS MORRISON



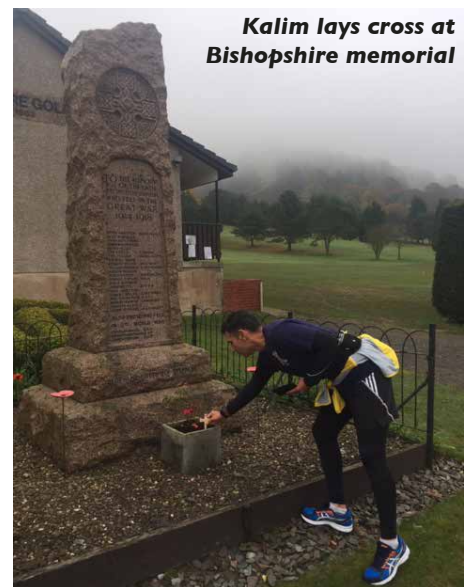
Kalim laying cross at Milnathort memorial



Silke laying cross at Kinross memorial



Silke and Kalim



Kalim lays cross at Bishopshire memorial

KYTHE continues to shine a light for the young people of Kinross-shire...



DYNAMIC CHRISTIAN YOUTH WORK

Throughout lockdown, the KYTHE youth workers, Barry and Gillian, have continued to be available for the young people of Kinross, initially by virtual platforms, but more recently face-to-face in line with recommendations from Youth Link Scotland.

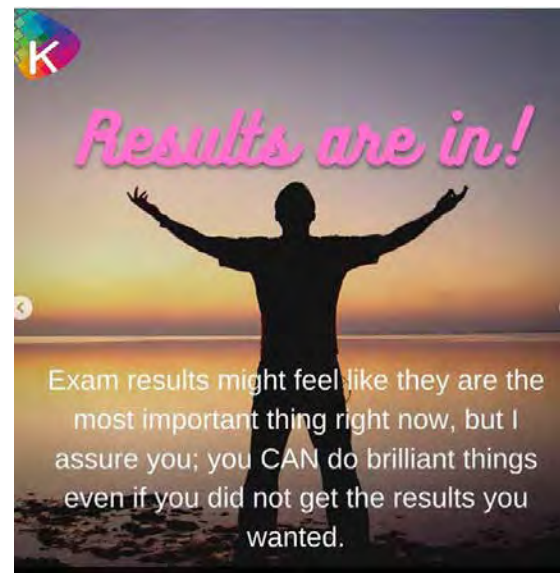
Regular activities at the Hub, situated across the road from Kinross High School and next door to the Health Centre, have restarted (*albeit with limited numbers*) with more planned in the coming weeks, such as the return of Katy-Beth's art workshops every Tuesday from 4-6pm, and the once monthly Saturday evening Altitude event in the KYTHE Hub. For more information, keep an eye on social media, or visit our revamped website www.kythe.org.uk

With all the changes going on, it is important that young people feel supported. As a result, KYTHE have started a weekly blog available through our Instagram page [#kytheemotionworks](https://www.instagram.com/kytheemotionworks).

...and some of these young people shine their light in Kinross, by forming a Climate Care Group.

For their first activity they went litter picking in the wooded area behind the KYTHE Hub and Health Centre. Whilst their numbers were few, the feedback on Facebook has been very encouraging, with offers to help next time. A great example of the young people of Kinross giving back to their community, and we look forward to seeing what their next activity will be.

The KYTHE Team
Kinross-shire Youth Enterprise SCIO
(Scottish Charity No SC045043)
@instakythe @KYTHEbook @tweetKYTHE



Climate Care group litter pick

Portmoak Primary School

We have had a busy return to school following the October holidays. Our P6s and P7s have commenced Bikeability lessons and our two upper stage classes are taking part in virtual Mandarin lessons. We had a Halloween fun day in lieu of our annual Halloween Disco and preparations have begun for a virtual nativity and a virtual pantomime.

Some of our pupils have written contributions for this edition of 'Stramash'. Firstly, two of our Primary 7s describe their Lomond Hill walk day, which took place at the end of last term, and we are very grateful to staff from Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre who planned the trip and accompanied us on the day.

Finally, two of our Primary 4s provide some information about our new rain garden, a project which was first discussed late last year and had to be put on hold due to lockdown. We are absolutely delighted with the finished rain garden and would like to thank Brian D'Arcy (Kinross-shire Raingardens Challenge) for giving up so much of his time to get this up and running, and to Kinnesswood in Bloom for their support too.

PAULA WOODS
Headteacher

The Lomond Hills Walk – by Helena and Skye (Primary 7)

We went on the hills walk because we could not go on our Ardroy



Residential trip due to Covid-19. The walk was part of our John Muir Award that the P6s do every year. Ardroy is a highlight of P6 but, unfortunately, we missed the opportunity to go (*although we did do some activities online*).

We started at Craigmead Car Park and went up a road in single file. Then we went down a path next to a field. We learned a lot about different plants and it was very interesting. We walked through a sheep field down to a reservoir and learned about different fish and the way they live. Next we came to a banking which had a waterfall at the bottom. We kept walking until we came to John Knox Pulpit and we learned about John Knox. We then finished at Glen Vale Car Park where we met the minibus to take us back to school. Not only was this walk healthy and educational, but it was also fun.



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Portmoak's Rain Garden – by Zoe and Brodie (Primary 4)

The first layer of Portmoak Primary School's Rain Garden is filled with big stones. The second layer has smaller stones laid out on it. The third layer is pea gravel, which is as small as a pea. The fourth layer is full of sand and the fifth layer is soil. Finally, the sixth layer is compost. There is a multitude of plants starting to grow and there are bits of bark, lots of leaves, moss and other things.

There are two pipes, one for storm water and a black one that leads to the plants to help them grow. We are planning to put in a mixture of little creatures, for example earthworms, centipedes and woodlice.

The reason we need a rain garden is because it reduces flooding after heavy rain as the water from the gutters and pipes travels slowly through the rain garden instead of going straight to the ground and drains. Rain gardens are also nice to look at, plants can grow peacefully and the minibeasts can have a lovely home in our rain garden.



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When I was minister
at Dunbarney Parish
Church (Bridge of

**Earn), one of my parishioners
always asked with a heavy
sigh every Christmas why
we did not sing her favourite
Carol, "O Holy Night".** Lucy
was born in Belgium and brought
up in the Roman Catholic Church
where "O Holy Night" was a great
favourite. My very lame reply was
to the effect that it was too difficult
for a congregation to sing (*I still believe
it is too difficult for the average
congregation*). However, a more
honest reply would have been to say
that I had never heard it.

However, in more recent years I
have come to know "O Holy Night"
and it has become a great favourite
with me. The words and music
both have their origins in France; a

poem, "Cantique de Noel" by Placide
Cappeau was put to its now familiar
music by Adolphe Adam (*better-
known for opera and ballet scores
such as "Giselle"*.) I believe both the
words and music capture the sheer
wonder, the mystery of Christmas,
and the humble response that is
required from us. I would thoroughly
recommend the renditions of this
lovely carol sung as a duet by Luciano
Pavarotti and Placido Domingo, and/
or by King's College Cambridge
choir. Both can be found on You
Tube. In this period of pandemic,
the lines: "A thrill of hope the weary
world rejoices, For yonder breaks
a new and glorious morn" bring
great encouragement to me in these
gloomy times.

See page 19 for the full hymn and sing
along if you can.

DUNCAN STENHOUSE

God and Coronavirus

God and the Pandemic. A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath
Tom Wright (SPCK, 2020)

Where is God in a Coronavirus World? John C. Lennox (thegoodbookcompany, 2020)

The global Covid-19 pandemic will forever colour the memory of 2020 It has raised questions of many different kinds. The titles of these two small and accessible books (of 76 and 63 pages respectively) highlight what is, for many, one of the most pressing of these. Can Christian faith help us make sense of the current crisis? Written by academics eminent in their different fields, these books are models of clear communication. Both writers make a valuable contribution to measured Christian reflection on the coronavirus crisis, while each is modest enough to recognise the many loose ends that remain.

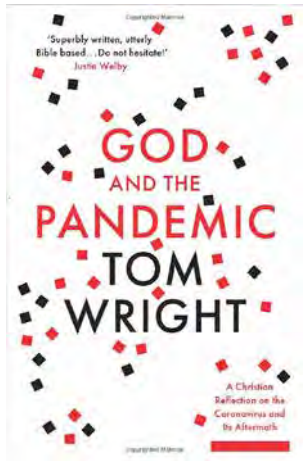
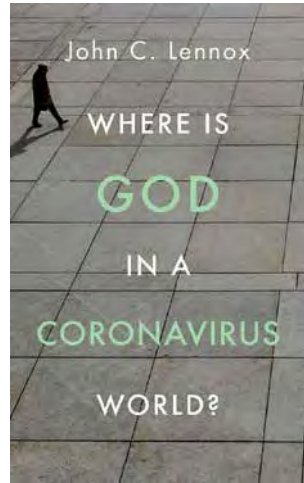
Unsurprisingly, Professor Wright, one of the world's leading biblical scholars, spends much time examining the teaching and examples of Scripture. While frankly sharing the range of emotions he has himself felt during the months of lockdown, he stresses the importance of keeping

our reactions within a biblical limit. He excels at placing the present crisis within the 'big picture' of the Bible's narrative of salvation history, while avoiding the temptation to offer simplistic answers to the questions raised by the pandemic. He rightly rejects the knee-jerk reaction of some conspiracy theorists that the crisis signals the End of the world or represents divine judgement on particular human sins.

Wright's approach is fundamentally pastoral in its aim. Our thinking about God and providence in relation to the pandemic must, he argues, be Jesus-shaped. His reflections are shot through with hope that, even in this dark period, the Great Artist is still at work, not least through the many acts of kindness, compassion, justice and mercy which mediate the healing presence of Jesus himself.

Like those of Wright, the reflections of John Lennox (retired Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University) have a strongly pastoral orientation. An accomplished apologist, Lennox offers an interesting comparison between the contrasting worldviews of Christianity and atheism, as they

bear on the coronavirus. Is the proper solution to catastrophes and natural evil to abandon God and embrace atheism, facing the fact that we inhabit a universe of blind, pitiless indifference? One important question raised by Lennox is that of the source of the concepts of good and bad, which we all possess, within an atheist belief system. Within that system nothing in fact can meaningfully be pronounced 'evil', for reality is only a matter of atoms rearranging themselves.



Most people find that conclusion inadequate and unsatisfying. We instinctively reach for something more. Lennox spells out the difference God makes in a fallen and fractured world and the rich resources the Christian faith, centred on the cross and resurrection of Jesus, offers us all in the current crisis.

In a postscript, he quotes a famous Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'who said that while we may not understand why suffering has come, we can trust the God who suffered for us – the God who "is too wise to err and too good to be unkind"'. I heartily commend both these books as valuable aids in helping us think through and cope with the present world crisis.

ANGUS MORRISON

Falkland and its people 1901-1913
Thomas Playfair and Ross Burgess (The Falkland Society 2020)

For anyone who enjoys visiting Falkland Palace, exploring the streets, wynds and closes of historic Falkland or strolling through the leafy designed landscape of the Falkland Estate, the publications of The Falkland Society are an invaluable source shedding light on this idyllic corner of Fife in the shadow of the Lomond Hills.

Hot off the press, as 2020 draws to a close, is the latest offering from The Falkland Society - a 560-page hardback volume entitled Falkland and its People 1901-1913. Researched by Thomas Playfair and edited by Ross Burgess, this new book draws on a wide range of newspapers, Town Council minutes and Falkland Estate papers to reveal a fascinating insight into all aspects of daily life in Falkland in the Edwardian period. More than

60 illustrations and four maps also provide a visual feast highlighting people, places and events of the time. Between the pages we can visualise the last days of handloom weaving and the growth of linen and floorcloth factories as major employers, alongside the arrival of motor cars, the telephone and piped water, as well as plans for a Falkland Light Railway. In addition to local markets, fairs and sporting activities, great social events are recorded such as celebrations to mark the

Why the Germans Do it Better: Notes from a Grown-Up Country

Author: John Kampfner
Atlantic Books

“.. judge ... book ... cover.” You know the old adage. It applies here. The boldness of the cover rather belies Kampfner’s critique of modern Germany which occasionally seems more set to undermine his title than to support it. Ultimately, however, his objectivity and candour lend all the more authenticity and credibility to his conclusions.

Germany’s historic traumas and challenges are second to none. Kampfner, a German-based British journalist, deftly surveys the turbulent years of her post-war recovery, the generational trauma of the late ‘60s with its demands for war-time accountability, the political revolution and subsequent national reunification of 1989-90, the refugee crisis of 2015 and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020.

The historical account alone makes excellent reading but the emerging characteristics of a country that has not only survived but thrived in the face of such challenges makes this a book that offers timely social and political hope to the often febrile and polarised world of Western democracy. To be succinct, if the following questions interest you at all then you will almost certainly find this an engaging read.

How can a nation distribute power equitably across its regions? Can capitalism be genuinely compatible with social responsibility? Are there structures within which industrial relations can successfully and consistently serve the interests of both management and workers? Is long-term planning viable in a world that favours short-term advantage? Why has Germany’s response to Covid-19 been so much more effective than that of other European countries? How does a nation come to terms with a deeply troubled history without being either paralysed by guilt or falsified by denial?

Kampfner also addresses the more intangible question of mindset. How can Germany enjoy such economic success yet place less importance on commercialism and material acquisition than the UK? (*German shops often close at 6:30 PM on weekdays, take half-days on Saturdays and don’t open at all on Sundays.*) Why does a worker in Britain take five days to produce what a worker in Germany produces in four? How does social media influence public discourse and affect individual politicians? (*Most German politicians avoid having personal social media accounts.*)

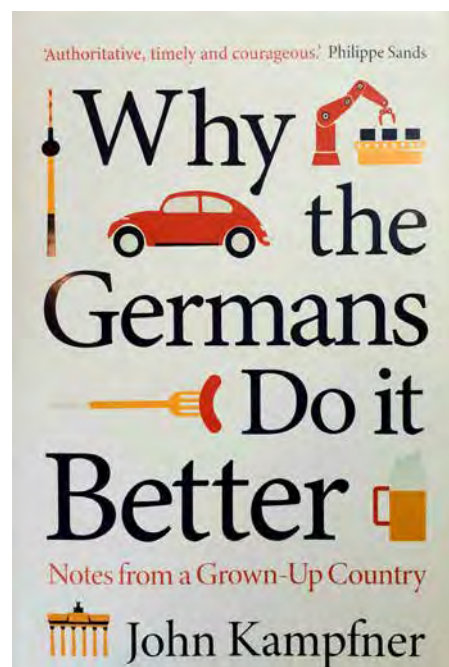
Kampfner is far from alone in admiring modern Germany. He quotes Paul Lever, a former UK ambassador there, as saying, “*To live in today’s Germany... is to experience to the full the virtues of European and Western civilisation.*”

coronation of King Edward VII and the wedding of local laird Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart.

Read also about petty criminal activities that include hen raids, coal stealing, hawking beer, poaching and the stealing of pies from a baker’s shop by youngsters of 14 years and under for which punishment was meted out by administering strokes of the birch as a means of “*keeping them out of mischief.*” Find out about the three-week autumn potato lifting holiday and the threat

posed by the Women’s Suffragette movement in the summer of 1913 when Falkland Palace was closed for fear of vandalism by militants. The approaching war is scarcely mentioned though, apart from a passing reference to recruiting for the Highlands Cyclist Battalion.

Full of fascinating detail, this is a book to dip into in search of local insights prior to great changes that would see so many of the people in the narrative of this community swept away as war engulfed the world.



The book’s final sentence includes the statement, “*Germany... ..knows what happens when countries fail to learn the lessons of history.*” It may come as a surprise to some, but at the heart of Germany’s contemporary strength and civility lies a strong dynamic between the qualities of realism and humility. Without exception, every German with whom Kampfner shared the title of his book as he wrote it, recoiled from its assertion. That may be the most salient lesson of all.

An enlightening and relevant book.
DEREK MORRISON

Falkland and its People 1901-1913

Research by Thomas Playfair
Edited by Ross Burgess
With a Foreword by Marietta Crichton Stuart

Find out how to obtain the book (£20) at www.falklandsociety.org.uk.
DAVID MUNRO

“Out with the Old, In with the New!”

That well-worn adage or instruction is very apposite to the ongoing work of renovation to Orwell Church.

The building contractors have been busy since early September removing from inside the church the old ground-floor pews, the pulpit and the raised dais; and outside have been demolishing and removing the former lean-to north entrance lobby and toilet (*a chilly place on a cold winter's morning!*). All this work is being done in preparation for the significant, new improvements to come in their place.

Unfortunately, as often proves to be the case in the renovation of old buildings such as the church (*which has stood on this site since 1729*), the removal of the raised wooden and carpeted dais on the ground floor revealed not a bare wooden stretch of floor beneath but rather an unexpectedly large void in the floor of the church, which has had to be re-floored, with the provision of suitable supporting joists. It also disclosed unwelcome evidence of extensive wet rot to many of the timber joists supporting the remainder of the wooden floor of the church, all of which has had to be lifted and replaced, in so far as necessary, with new timber.

The demolition and removal of the lean-to north entrance to the church revealed a previously undetected former door opening in the north wall of the church, which has had

to be infilled and the wall stabilised. The timber frame of the window higher-up on that wall was found to be in a poor condition due to wet rot and it has had to be replaced with a new window.

Work on the construction of the new north extension to the church is well underway, with the completed erection of the timber frame, roof trusses and the roof itself, with the intention of making the extension wind and water-tight before the onset of the worst of the winter weather.

The old oil-fired boiler, oil tank and heating pipes are in course of being removed prior to the installation of a new electrical heating system.

Many other improvements to the church will be taking place between now and next March and so, as they say, “*Watch this space*” for more exciting news to come!

RUARY MACLEOD
Convener
Church Improvements
Working Group
(k/a ‘CHIMPS’)

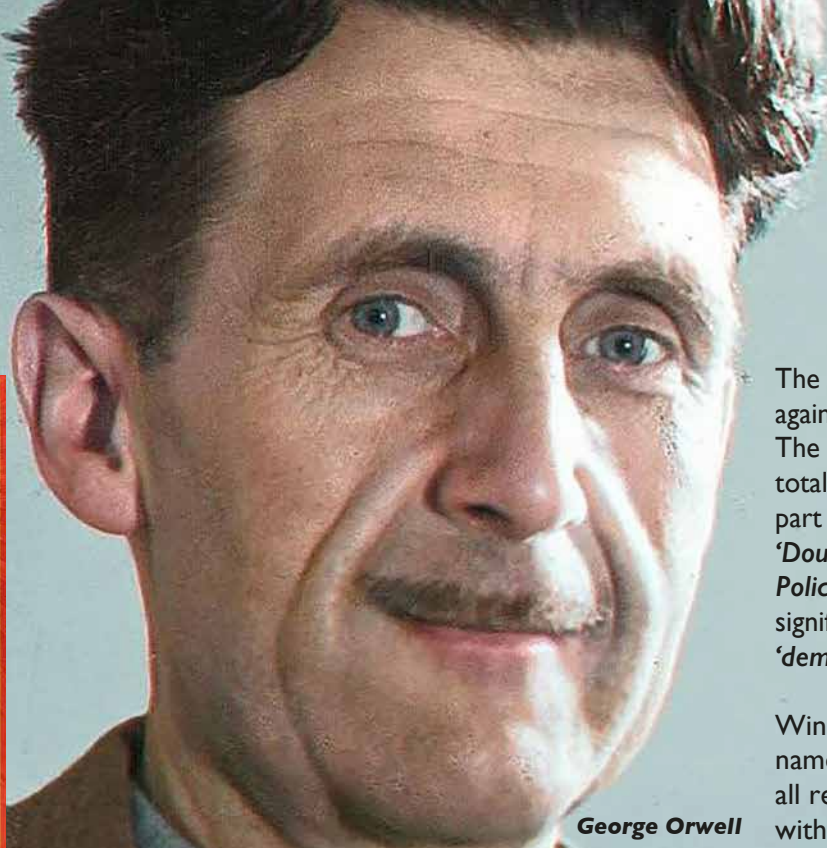
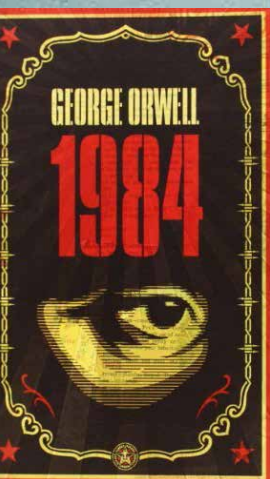
Former door opening (grey brick)



New extension



Void in church floor



George Orwell



Barnhill, Jura

‘1984’ A Wake-Up Call from Jura

Do you remember having to read George Orwell’s novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in school? I confess that my own initial encounter as a teenager with this now iconic work was less than promising. I gave up after half a dozen pages.

Of late, I’ve been dipping in again. After all, the great man’s pen name (*he was born Eric Arthur Blair*) connects him with our parish! And the fact that most of the book, first published in 1949, was written in a remote farmhouse (*‘Barnhill’ or, in Gaelic, ‘Cnoc an t-Sabhail’*) on the Hebridean island of Jura, lends it added interest for a Gael like me. Orwell was by then extremely unwell and he lived on Jura a largely reclusive life, glued to his typewriter. The gales that buffeted his lonely dwelling, night and day, seem to reflect the bleakness of his message. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell’s final book, has come to be recognized universally as a literary masterpiece, described by one critic as ‘probably the definitive novel of the 20th century’.

From the island of Jura, Orwell was intent on issuing a deadly serious warning. He wanted people to understand what could happen to humankind if they failed to notice subtle - and not so subtle - assaults

on their personal freedoms, or gave up on defending the precious human right to have one’s own thoughts and perspectives.

Winston, the main character in the novel, lives in a country where individual thought is banned and only the leader, Big Brother, is allowed to reason and decide. With an overpowering need for reflection and critical thought, Winston rebels. He cuts a lonely figure, since the vast majority of his fellow citizens see no need to question higher political authority. His rebellion ultimately fails.

The bigger picture in which Winston’s story is set is that of the world of ‘1984’, divided between three totalitarian States, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, each ruled by infallible and all-powerful Big Brothers. In each State, individual freedom – most profoundly the freedom to think one’s own thoughts - has been comprehensively eradicated.

From the perspective of 2020, it is striking how much of the language and thought of ‘1984’ resonates more deeply than ever. From the reality TV show *Big Brother* to warnings about surveillance, Orwell’s masterpiece is never far from our consciousness.

The novel is a powerful call to vigilance against totalitarianisms of every kind. The terms Orwell uses to convey totalitarian ideology have become part of our language. ‘*Newspeak*’, ‘*Doublethink*’, ‘*Big Brother*’, ‘*Thought Police*’ also, alarmingly, describe significant aspects of our current ‘*democratic*’ experience.

Winston works for the ironically named Ministry of Truth in which all records are made to conform with Big Brother’s current pronouncements. What is true is what the Party says is true. Have you noticed how ‘*truth*’ is becoming a taboo subject in our culture?

Orwell’s Thought Police could easily be a description of our PC culture warriors who are intent on punishing any who hold a different point of view from that of the faddish, media-promoted identity politics of our time. The recent ill-treatment at their hands of distinguished, thoughtful and liberal (*in the true sense*) public intellectuals like the (*late*) Sir Roger Scruton and Professor Jordan Peterson, has been shameful. University ‘*safe spaces*’ and ‘*the right to be comfortable*’ are a marvellous and acutely embarrassing example of Orwellian ‘*Doublethink*’. And *Newspeak* comes into its own with our currently militant Pronoun Police, who denounce all use of ‘*he*’ or ‘*she*’ as potentially transphobic.

Well, we can’t say that George Orwell didn’t warn us of the danger of the loonies taking over the asylum. ‘*War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength*’. I fear that unless we all wake up to these realities and learn once more how very much we owe to the Judeo-Christian roots of our civilisation, we are doomed to enter a new and potentially terrifying Dark Ages.

ANGUS MORRISON

秋の恵みと福音の種

Lorna's Update

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Aomori prefecture in the far north of Honshu island to see various OMF members and ministries.

When OMF started work in Japan in the early 1950s, they surveyed the country to see where there were the fewest Christians and missionaries. One of those places was Aomori. Since those days, several small churches have been planted but there is much still to be done.

It is an area of spectacular beauty, especially in the spring when the cherry blossoms are blooming and in autumn when the colours are stunning. It is also known for its snow. Aomori city is the snowiest city in the world with around 8 metres of snow a year. This area is particularly famous for apples. Around 50% of the apples grown in Japan come from Aomori. Trees are laden with hundreds of apples, many of them as big as your hand. There are also walnut, persimmon and Japanese pear trees, as well as grapes and various berries. It truly is a fruitful area.

However, it is also an area which is very challenging for the church. There are few Christians and very few churches.

I stayed at one of those OMF churches. It used to be an apple warehouse but the missionary has converted it into a church. They hold a variety of classes as a way to connect with the community and share the good news about Jesus. On Friday evening, 5 young people came for an English café. After eating delicious homemade donuts, and answering some quiz questions in English, they looked at the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well, in John's Gospel. For most of them this was the first time they had ever read the story and they had a good discussion about what it means.

Another church that I visited runs a café to connect with the local community. Most people have never been into a church before and so the café serves as a bridge. People often come into the café looking for someone to talk to and the staff are happy to do that. As part of the café, they have a small Christian bookshop to serve all the Christians and churches in the prefecture.

I also visited a Christian campsite, run by an OMF family. They have a vision to reach the next generation for Jesus, so hold summer and winter camps, as well as a variety of more regular events. Obviously, this year is more difficult because of the coronavirus, as it is for all of the ministries. It was encouraging to meet missionaries and a Japanese pastor persevering in an area where they often see so little fruit, or those who do believe then move away to bigger cities.

Please pray for areas of Japan like Aomori, where there are so few Christians. We long that one day we will see it not only being known for the fruit of apples, but also for the fruit of the Gospel.

LORNA FERGUSON



Church converted from old apple warehouse



Autumn leaves, Japan

Common Grounds Community Cafe Turns Twenty!

Volunteers celebrate with Award Winning Convener Elspeth Caldwell

There's a lot to celebrate at Common Grounds these days, despite Covid 19!

The community cafe that turned TWENTY in September has raised £161,152 to support self help projects, primarily in Africa, as well as other agencies that respond to international emergencies. This great achievement has no doubt been the result of our dedicated team of volunteers, creative committee members and a very appreciative, supportive community. We are also celebrating the recent recognition that has been given to our current Convener Elspeth Caldwell for her leadership and many years of working tirelessly as a volunteer at Common Grounds. Elspeth was named as the latest "Good for Golf" winner, which is the European Golf Tour's way of rewarding everyday heroes of the Covid 19 pandemic. Elspeth also manages to enthusiastically share her time and energy playing and marshalling for golf tournaments in Scotland.

In receiving this award, Elspeth described Common Grounds as "A small charity with a big heart", not only fundraising for projects in Africa but also providing a safe space during this pandemic to welcome folk in the community that long for a cuppa and some company! She mentioned that there was a lady last week who said it might be the last time she speaks to anyone until next week. "For a lot of folk, it's been a lifeline."

As Elspeth is nearing the end of her time as Common Grounds Convener, we thought this was a good opportunity to ask Elspeth to share how her journey with Common Grounds began and what the experience has been for her. She very kindly told us: "My journey began one day when I rewarded myself with a coffee stop/book search at Common Grounds. I then became

a "floater" in the summer holidays, volunteering as and when needed. Enjoying that so much, I became a more regular one, then moved on to becoming the rota co-ordinator for several years. Everyone always gave generously of their time as we only had to close one morning through lack of a volunteer.

My next post was Convener and over the years I have had nothing but excellent support for any of my fundraising ideas and appeals. Common Grounds is indeed a team effort! It was such a surprise to receive the "Good for Golf" Award. However, for every effort I put into Common Grounds, I have gained much more in return. My Mam, a very generous soul, would often say "A giving hand is a getting hand". Over the years I have met inspirational speakers at our project lunches, dedicated volunteers and lovely customers from all walks of life, often with wonderful stories of their own. Above all, I have made many friends, all of us united in what Common Grounds achieves and has to offer, especially valued in these challenging times."

Hopefully, Common Grounds can continue in these challenging times, as we are optimistically planning the following events:

Saturday 28th November
A Christmas Craft Sale of creations by our volunteers

Tuesday 22nd December
A Christmas Coffee Morning and raffle.

In the meantime, please do join us for a cuppa and good company any Tuesday or Saturday morning 10am – 12.30pm in the Guide Hall, Church Street, Milnathort. There's always freshly brewed Fairtrade coffee, home baking and a warm

welcome for you to enjoy. We are following the strict guidelines for cafes to keep you safe. However, if you are unable to join us but wish to donate online to help support the work of Common Grounds our account details are: Sort code 83-23-47, Account Number 00169342. If Elspeth's experience has inspired you to become a much needed volunteer, please email our long acting, dedicated Secretary Linda Freeman with your details at linda.freeman64@btinternet.com

MARG MEADE



Common Grounds Project lunch



Anne Milburn and Peter McEleny



Elspeth Caldwell, Emma Patton and Helen Pearson



Life's ups and downs!

Former British Airways pilot, and current Modern Language teacher at Kilgraston School in Perthshire, John Maxton, describes the diverse nature of his career and the need to be flexible, even when you think your flight-plan is sorted.

Imagine yourself flying along in bright sunshine above an unbroken blanket of soft, fluffy clouds. Heading off on holiday or flying down to Manchester on a business trip? No, you are the captain of the British Aerospace ATP 64-seater, heavy turboprop, having reached the pinnacle of your career in aviation. It's what you have been working towards since childhood; all that model aircraft building and years of painful training have brought you to this point.

You are very happy in your job; in fact you could honestly say that you feel extremely lucky to be one of the few people in life who would probably be in this seat with no pay involved. Are you getting the picture? Well, just imagine that you are actually on your last flight, ever. Your whole life is about to change with serious implications for your own future and those closest to you. This is exactly what happened to me in 2003.

Earlier in my flying career, I had been employed by Bristow Helicopters

in Nigeria from 1995-99 on fixed-wing flying operations in support of Shell oil and gas exploration in the Niger delta. The company had numerous helicopters, but only six fixed-wing aircraft, and it was in these that I flew, carrying out line flying and recurrent training for pilots on de Havilland DHC-6 (Twin Otter) and Dornier 328 aeroplanes. Our operation also provided extra capacity to the locally based airlines.

It was during this time that I contracted cerebral malaria. Frequently, this condition can be fatal and, although I recovered, the condition returned with sufficient severity in 2003 to warrant the Civil Aviation Authority taking away my medical certificate (*which is renewed every six months*). Becoming a co-pilot was a faint possibility, but I decided that a career change was the best option.

A situation, which appears at first glance to be negative, can be 'rebranded' into an unexpectedly positive outcome. Being told that, for medical reasons, I could no longer continue my passion was a crushing moment. Initially, I felt anger and frustration, closely followed by a sense of failure and loss. I quickly became the classic '*fish out of water*', not knowing where or to whom I should turn.



However, such feelings are transient and as the door on my past career closed with a resounding bang, I began to reassess. The pilot in me kicked in. It was time to land on a different runway.

Having previously completed over 11,300 flying hours (*getting on for a year and a quarter in the sky*), I suddenly realised that my airborne hankerings had actually been vanquished, replaced with a deep sense of gratitude for having survived a sometimes dangerous, and certainly exhilarating, 23-year period of flying exploits.

Looking at my school, university and post-graduate qualifications, together with skills and experience gained as a pilot, I realised there was in fact quite a good foundation on which to launch a new career.

My degree was in German and I had been a training captain with two of my former airlines – Loganair and Bristow Helicopters – and I had a diploma in European Marketing and Languages. As a pilot you are at the front of your class, dealing on a



Main image: John Maxton with BA colleagues; Top: John Maxton as language teacher at Kilgraston School



L to R above: Do 328 Aircraft Port Harcourt, Nigeria; Do 328 Training Flight, Kano; DHC-6 Twin Otter Tingwall, Shetland

daily basis with a range of different nationalities and backgrounds and often speaking in myriad languages. Great similarities to being a teacher at a boarding school.

So, with a renewed tailwind, I decided to rekindle my languages background and embark on a one-year teacher training PGCE course at Moray House, University of Edinburgh.

Admittedly, in my late forties, I was the oldest student on the course, but everyone's journey is unique and these are your first steps towards rebuilding your working life. My fellow students were an eclectic, diverse group, all looking for a new direction. Despite years of neglect, I was pleasantly surprised to find my language skills were still up to the task. My unconventional career path 'landed' me in beautiful Perthshire at Kilgraston School, where language learning is still very much in vogue and keenly supported.

There were many correlations to my previous guise; a wonderfully varied group of people, all bringing their own strengths and experiences, set on a clear route forward and coming together under one roof to enjoy their mutual journey. It is a great pleasure to walk the school corridors and hear the huge variety of languages being spoken and marvel at the truly international nature of our community. Changing career actually gave me a new lease of life, allowing recently toppled gyros to reset.

The pilot's mantra of "Prior preparation prevents particularly poor performance" is something I still chant to myself every morning. Maintaining good 'flight logs' is as vital in the classroom as it is at the end of a journey, while being vigilant is another crucial skill. Like a captain, a teacher might be looking forward but he or she needs to understand the full horizon. Tiny situations can

erupt very quickly and, for the sake of the whole crew, a captain needs to spot them early and nip any problems firmly, and diplomatically, in the bud.

As with flying an airliner full of passengers, it's a great privilege to be trusted with the responsibility of taking a young person's skill and delivering it safely to exam day.

I greatly appreciate that, while my career has encountered a bit of turbulence, I have had a very pleasant flight and am delighted to have reached this destination. Diverse skillsets can often be applied to a very different direction and I'm extremely pleased to be flying with a new crew.

The Dalai Lama's quote: "Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck" has, for me, always struck a chord.

JOHN MAXTON

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A little up-and-downstairs cottage

As the Michael Bruce Trust launches an appeal to raise funds for essential repairs to the cottage museum and garden in Kinnesswood, Trust Chairman David Munro explores the building where the ‘Gentle Poet of Loch Leven’ was born in March 1746 and where he died in July 1767 at the early age of 21.

One of Kinross-shire’s most noted historic buildings, apart from Loch Leven Castle, is the Michael Bruce Cottage Museum in the heart of old Kinnesswood. Described by Thomas G Snoddy as “*a little up-and-downstairs cottage*,” it is situated on the Loan to the Hill, now known as The Cobbles, with its west-facing gable end looking defiantly out towards Loch Leven and with the Bishop Hill forming a stunning backdrop to the east. It is an inspirational place for a budding poet to be brought up.

When Michael Bruce was born here, the fifth of eight children born to Alexander and Ann Bruce, it was a single-storey cottage housing living quarters and work space for a handloom. We do not know whether this building was built of turf or stone but we do know that about 1700 houses that had been occupied by tenants on short term leases started to become the property of feuars locally referred

to as portioners. This new breed of better-off residents with a permanent home to call their own started to rebuild their houses using local sandstone and limestone.

Family life in a single-storey cottage would have been severely cramped for the Bruces and it is said that within four years of the poet’s birth, his father had enlarged the building with a second storey. What we see today is, more or less, the result of this rebuilding in stone during the mid 18th century. The upper floor, accessed from the rear via a narrow pathway and steps, would have formed the living quarters, complete with two fireplaces, while downstairs provided a much larger space accommodating a handloom.

The roof of the original cottage as well as the new enlarged building would have been thatched with reeds brought up from the shore of Loch Leven. If you look up towards the chimney stack at the western gable end you can see the ‘thackstane’ under which the thatch was tucked until replaced with pantiles in the 1920s.

Skews or coping stones top either side of the gable facing the loch and on one of the skewputts that project outwards at the lower end sits an ornament that originally probably formed the top half of another ornament half-way up the skew.

To keep the building snug and windproof, the doors are typical Scottish double-doors, the upper door featuring an iron rising pin used instead of a door knocker. The windows likewise are all small with six panes.

Alterations, mostly to the interior, were made in the late 1860s when David Marshall and Robert Burns Begg, Junior, acquired the cottage. The building was turned into a museum in 1906, three years after the formation of the Michael Bruce Trust, and in the 1980s the earthen floor in the basement was tanked to make the place damp proof. More recently, Kinnesswood in Bloom and other local volunteers have helped the Trust look after the garden.

Surveys are being carried out to form the basis of essential restoration work to be carried out, leaving both cottage and garden safe and in good shape for the foreseeable future. Like any other house the “*little up-and-downstairs cottage*” needs looking after.



If you would like to support the Michael Bruce Cottage Appeal, please consider becoming a Friend of the Michael Bruce Trust or sending a one-off donation. For further information please contact David Munro. Cheques should be made out to the Michael Bruce Trust and sent to Dr David Munro, Chairman, Michael Bruce Trust, Rose Cottage, The Cobbles, Kinnesswood, Kinross KY13 9HL.

1. The Cottage Museum, birthplace of the poet Michael Bruce.
2. The upper storey of the cottage with thatched roof, 1895.
3. Chimney and 'thackstane' under which reed thatch was tucked.
4. The fireplace in the lower floor with swee and salt box.
5. Basement window facing onto The Cobbles, possibly dating from the original single-storey cottage.
6. Ornament on the gable end skewputt.
7. Ornament half-way up the gable end skew.



A bag of Kilombero rice can change a life!

This year it has been particularly difficult to feel that we are able to make a difference when we are in our own homes for so much of the time and unable to meet up for worship and social events. We can, however, all still make a difference by the choices we make of what we buy.

The 90kg Rice Challenge by JTS, a Scottish based fair trade food importer, is an exciting way that we

can all make a difference to the lives of farmers in Malawi while enjoying delicious rice. Also if you would like to also make even more of a difference, you could buy two 1kg bags and donate one to a foodbank!

90kgs is the amount of Kilombero rice that gives hope to the rice farmers of Northern Malawi and provides them with enough of an income to create sustainable livelihoods and allows them to reinvest in their farms, feed and

clothe their families and send a child to secondary school for a year. It gives them a route to work their way out of poverty with dignity.

If you would like to buy a kilogramme or two of Kilombero rice please email kjarvie@btinternet.com and it can be delivered to you. You can pay by cash, cheque or bank transfer to the Traidcraft account.

Thank you!



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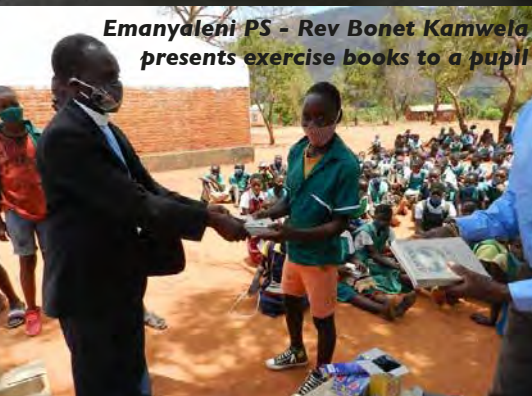
Dean loading boxes of school materials at Mzuzu



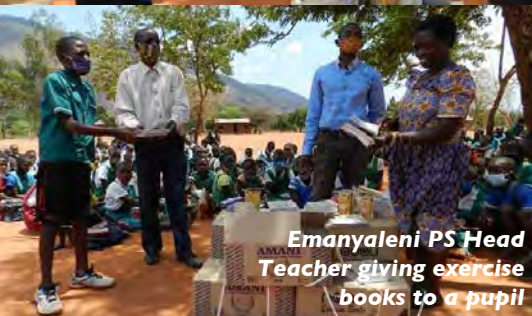
Kacheche PS receives buckets



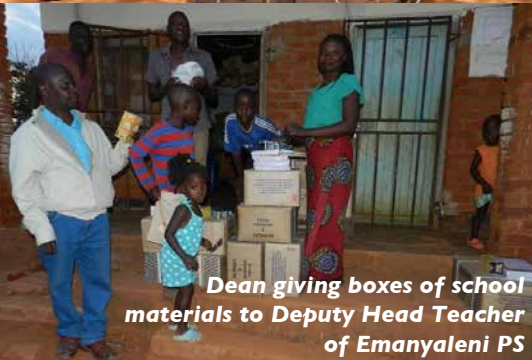
Kacheche PS receives cartons of soap



Emanyaleni PS - Rev Bonet Kamwela presents exercise books to a pupil



Emanyaleni PS Head Teacher giving exercise books to a pupil



Dean giving boxes of school materials to Deputy Head Teacher of Emanyaleni PS

“Now, take a good note of what I’m saying!”

That instruction might now be given regularly by teachers to pupils in all or any of the three Primary Schools of Emanyaleni, Kacheche and Thofu, in Mombwe parish of Northern Malawi, following upon the purchase by Rev Bonet Kamwela, Minister of the Mombwe congregation and distribution among the pupils of those three schools of a large quantity of exercise books, pens and pencils.

The purchase of those school materials was made possible through the donation to the Mombwe congregation, at the start of this year, of the sum of £4000 which had been raised by members and friends of Orwell and Portmoak, their twin congregation (*including a substantial donation made at last year’s Harvest Thanksgiving services*).

With the closure of the schools earlier this year by order of the Malawi Government, due to the Covid-19 infection spreading across parts of Malawi (*although,*

fortunately, not as yet to Mombwe), the money donated had been retained in the congregation’s Bank account but immediately the three schools were permitted to reopen in October, Rev Kamwela withdrew the funds from the Bank and purchased the school materials at the neighbouring town of Mzuzu.

He was accompanied on that mission by Mr Dean Phiri, the Headteacher of Kacheche Primary School, who had come to Orwell and Portmoak in the summer of 2018 along with Rev Kamwela and his wife Roselyne,

What’s in a name?

Over this coming festive season, as you dig out of the cupboard some long forgotten vinyl recording to while away a dark winter evening, will you wonder about the story behind the choice of name in the song title?

Here, Dick Crighton muses upon some personal probing into a few once better-known songs, now largely consigned to musical history.

LAURA

Lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by David Raksin. The song was written in 1944 for the film Laura starring

Dana Andrews and Gene Tierney. Raksin always maintained that the haunting theme seemed to write itself when his wife left him. The song has been recorded over 400 times, the best-known versions being, among others, by Carly Simon, Frank Sinatra, Julie London, Woody Herman and Dave Brubeck.

FERNANDO

Fernando is a song made famous by the Swedish group ABBA. It tells the story of two friends, one of whom is Fernando, sharing their memories of a guerrilla war in which they fought together for several years in Mexico. The Spanish language version and the English language version follow their

story, whereas the original Swedish language version is about a man named Fernando who has lost his love and is being consoled by the singer.

ELEANOR RIGBY

Eleanor Rigby was a scullery maid who died in 1939 aged 44. Her headstone is in a Liverpool graveyard. Primarily written in 1966 by Paul McCartney, of Beatles fame, the song did well in the charts, spending four weeks at number one in the UK charts. That the song title was inspired by the name on the headstone is debateable. McCartney claimed that the name “Eleanor” is after the actress Eleanor Bron. As for “Rigby”, he said, he “just liked the name” and “Eleanor Rigby sounded natural.”.



Emanyaleni PS Deputy Head Teacher with buckets and cartons of soap



Maize bags stored at manse



Distribution of maize at the manse

at which time they had visited Portmoak and Milnathort Primary Schools and spoken with some of the pupils.

Both teachers and pupils in Mombwe were highly delighted to receive the new school materials (*as shown in the photos*) and have asked that their gratitude be made known to all those here who contributed to the gift of money.

In more recent weeks, with the continuing threat of infection from Coronavirus, Rev Kamwela expressed an urgent plea for financial help in the purchasing of supplies of buckets and soap for the pupils of the three Primary Schools, to assist with regular handwashing.

He also asked for some money to enable him to purchase bags of maize, for distribution of maize among the poorest people of his parish,

whose own crops of maize had failed through the affects of excessive rainfall and floods, and were consequently at risk of starvation.

These urgent pleas for help have been heeded by friends here, and the photos show the collection and distribution in Mombwe of the requested materials.

If you would like to offer some financial assistance to our twin congregation, to meet their ongoing needs, please contact our Treasurer Linda Stewart (07925 321 932) who will be happy to offer you advice as to the best means of giving, including giving by way of Gift Aid donation. In any event, please remember our friends in Mombwe in your prayers.

Thank you!

RUARY MACLEOD
Twinning Co-ordinator



Distribution of Maize at the manse

BILL BAILEY

Originally titled “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please... Come Home?”, it was published in 1902. Its words and music were written by Hughie Cannon when he was working as a bar pianist in Jackson, Michigan. A regular customer and friend, Willard “Bill” Bailey told Cannon about his marriage during one of “Bill’s” frequent visits to the bar. Hughie Cannon dashed off the song, much to his friend’s delight. Bill’s wife Sarah was not greatly impressed. Willard and Sarah Bailey later divorced; he died in 1954, and she died in 1976 aged about 102. There’s a moral in there somewhere!

DONALD

“Donald, Where’s Your Troosers?” was written by Andy Stewart with music by Neil Grant. It was released in 1960 and reached number 37 in the UK charts, and in 1989 when it was re-released it climbed to number 4. Quite an achievement for lyrics that were written in just ten minutes. Andy was well known to Scottish television audiences for his frequent appearances on BBC Scotland’s ‘White Heather Club’ and for singing his own composition “A Scottish Soldier”. He died in 1994 aged 59.

RUDOLPH

“Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was written by songwriter John Marks. Rudolph first appeared in a story by Robert May in 1939. In North America the reindeer are known as caribou, but singing “Rudolph the red-nosed caribou” just wouldn’t be the same, would it? Edinburgh professors Gerald Lincoln and David Baird commented that Rudolph cannot be a male because only female reindeer keep their antlers all winter. The males shed their antlers soon after the rut and before mid-December. But why let a fact spoil a good story?

DICK CRIGHTON

The Dream of a Lifetime

From childhood I have been fascinated by flight. Whether that has any bearing on the fact that today one of our children is an RAF pilot and another has thoughts in that direction, I am not sure. The sight of an aircraft cockpit still gives me a thrill.

For a period of years, I flew regularly between Stornoway and Edinburgh to fulfil duties as a Kirk Council Convener. Our own John Maxton was probably in the pilot's seat on more than one of these occasions. The cabin crew became friends. On one occasion, the seats on board had been overbooked and (*'since we know you and you have a friendly face!'*) I was asked if I minded terribly sitting in the jump seat between the pilots for the journey south. I didn't require much time to think about it. Pilots are enthusiastic about their job and the two in the cockpit that day cheerfully answered every question put to them and kindly explained what was going on at each stage. It was a memorable experience.

An even more memorable flying experience was a shared family birthday present this year. For me it represented the fulfilment of a lifetime's dream. Having made countless model aircraft as a boy (many of them suspended from my bedroom ceiling), it was biplanes that gave me most pleasure – Sopwith Camels, SE5 A's and the like. I often wondered what it would be like to fly in a biplane's open cockpit.

Thanks to the father of a friend of one of our family, the opportunity to find this out came a few weeks ago. William is the proud owner, and experienced pilot, of a two seat, open cockpit Tiger Moth biplane, inherited

from his father in law. In 1996 it won the Heron Trophy as the best owner restored aircraft. Intended as a military and civil trainer, the RAF had about 1,000 De Havilland Tiger Moths at the start of World War II. This particular aircraft was built under licence in Australia in August 1942 and served originally as a primary trainer with the Royal Australian Air Force. Although later extensively restored, its engine remains the original.

On the chosen day, the calm and clear conditions were ideal for flying. My wife Marion, brother Derek and I rendezvoused with William and his daughter Sophie at Perth Airport, where the Tiger Moth is kept. Several layers of clothing had been advised and it soon enough became clear why. A detailed briefing and demonstration of the method of entering and leaving the cockpit was given, including instructions on how to uncouple the harness should we be unfortunate enough to find ourselves upside down in a Perthshire ditch.

And so it was time to fly. Sporting flying helmet, goggles and flying gloves, I never felt more like my boyhood hero, Biggles, in my life. It was slightly strange to be sitting in the forward cockpit with the unseen pilot in control behind me. I couldn't see him but I trusted he was there and knew what he was doing! Faith is rather like that, of course. And what a thrill it was as we taxied out, received clearance and with a roar were airborne, having made use of only a few feet of the runway.



It's hard to convey the joy of the healthy sound of the engine in your ears and the rushing wind in your face. Cameras need to be held in a vice-like grip or off they go! I had hoped that we might fly down to the parish – even drop a water bomb on a neighbour or two! – but our route had been pre-planned. The views of the city of Perth were wonderfully clear, as were those of the breathtakingly beautiful Perthshire countryside. For a time, we followed the course of the River Tay. Among other landmarks, Scone Palace stood out in its magnificence.

With controls in each cockpit, the trusting captain kindly permitted the novice to *'have a go'*. It was such fun feeling the plane respond to every movement of the joystick.

Too soon it was time to return to terra firma. Landing was another great experience and I was amazed by the pinpoint accuracy with which that was accomplished. It was great to know that the pilot was someone of enormous flying experience and skill.

William's Tiger Moth is a 'magnificent flying machine' of real beauty. You may have seen it featured in the BBC 2 series 'Scotland from the Sky', presented by James Crawford. To be aloft in it was an incredible and unforgettable privilege, a lifetime's dream fulfilled. And it reminded me that on life's great flight, to know that we have at the controls in every situation a Pilot of total competence and care, is the most important matter of all.

ANGUS MORRISON



O Holy Night

O holy night the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth,
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Chorus

*Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born,
O night, O holy night, O night divine!*

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming;
With glowing hearts by his cradle we stand;
So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials to be our Friend.

Chorus

*He knows our needs. To our weakness no stranger!
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bow!
Behold your King! Before Him bend!*

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love, and his gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy, in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his Holy name

Chorus

*Christ is the Lord, then ever! Ever praise we!
His power and glory, evermore proclaim!
His power and glory, evermore proclaim.*

Words: Placide Cappeau Music: Adolphe Adam



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Audition Day

A short story
by Russell Auld

'It's a bit out of your league isn't it?'
A typical Alec greeting, always trying to put me down.

'Not really, I love musicals and this is one of my favourites. I know I'm going to enjoy it.' Alec Roberts was an experienced professional actor but the big parts had often eluded him. He was good but there were so many others who were known to be better. What was I talking about, I wasn't in the big league either. But I wasn't going to let that supercilious idiot put me off.

The drabness of the waiting room in the old tenement didn't help my mood. *'I've been here for over an hour,'* said one man, as he took another look at the audition pieces. No one wanted to reveal their desired role but everyone either had their head in a script or was staring out of the window. It was a small room. Every chair was occupied except one. Just my luck that it was the one next to Alec. *'I must be in with a shout,'* he said as he looked at me with that smug grin that I'd known for so long. We had been rivals since we'd met at acting school. The acting coaches usually preferred me but somehow he always managed to get under my skin. This sometimes meant that I gave a below par audition which resulted in some roles being given to him. Well not today, I thought as I sat down.

'And why's that?' I asked.
'I'm too good to be rejected.'
'Have you done any musicals?'
'Yeah, loads.'
'Leading parts?'
'Well, no. I've been in the chorus but I've lots of experience. I don't suppose you've been in any musicals.'
'No, but I've been in several plays and there are plenty directors who've liked my singing voice.'

We were at it again, the verbal rallies, each of us trying to better the other. It was like two schoolboys arguing over their prize conkers. I realised that if this continued I would lose my focus and my performance would suffer. Some of the other auditionees were staring at us. *'Sorry,'* I whispered as I fumbled in my jacket for my audition pieces. I felt embarrassed and annoyed that I'd been drawn into an argument with him. Calm down and get control of yourself. I touched my forehead. Perspiration. I could hear my heart thumping. Calm down! Calm down!

I looked out of the window and as I did so a gradual feeling of peace came over me. There was no stunning panorama, no unusual activity, but I sat transfixed. On the window sill were two sparrows and one was attempting to feed the other some breadcrumbs which had been left there. I was fascinated. Soon my thoughts began to drift to later when I would be joining Lorna for dinner at The Archway. We'd been married for two years and outings like this were rarities as

work opportunities had been scarce for both of us. I thought about how we'd met at drama school and of how we'd shared sandwiches during those too short lunch breaks.

I was just beginning to feel more relaxed when the waiting room door opened and the receptionist who had registered my attendance, hurried towards me. *'Are you Jack Paton?'* she said. *'It's your wife, there's been an accident.'* I jumped up. *'What happened? Is she alright?'* Lorna had dropped me off at the audition venue and had intended to drive to the local supermarket, but the receptionist explained that a speeding motorist had collided with her car at the nearby crossroads. *'Both drivers were taken to hospital a few minutes ago,'* *'Which hospital? How do I get there?'* *'Sit down Mr. Paton,'* the receptionist whispered before she left to make me a cup of tea. *'It's alright Jack, I'll take you, my car's just outside.'* I looked to see who this good Samaritan was and to my amazement I discovered that it was Alec.

'Oh, thank you,' I mumbled. *'That's very kind of you.'* The receptionist returned with the tea. *'Thanks, but we'll need to be going,'* Alec said as he rushed me out of the building.

He bundled me into his car and we were soon on our way. The roads were congested and I could hear Alec mumbling under his

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breath.

'Come on, come on,' he said as the traffic slowed to a crawl. I glanced over at him but he sensed my anxiety.

'Don't worry,' he said. *'We'll get there. Just leave it to me.'*

The car was moving again but I had no idea where we were. Alec had found a route which he claimed would take us to the hospital 'in no time.' I thought it best not to argue since he seemed very confident about this. I tried to phone the hospital.

'Damn, no signal.' 'It's ok,' said Alec, *'we're only a few minutes from the hospital.'*

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Alec Roberts, this kind, considerate, caring man who was doing everything he could to help me, was he the same man who had been a continual source of irritation to me at auditions for longer than I could remember?

He parked the car at the entrance to the A and E Department. I turned towards him. *'Go! I'll park the car and wait for you inside.'* I hesitated. He looked at me as I stared at him. *'Take as long as you need.'* I opened my mouth but no words came out. I raised my hand in a feeble wave of thanks as I closed the car door but I don't think he noticed as he drove away in search of a parking bay.

Once inside the hospital reception area, I was soon informed that someone would be with me *'shortly,'* and to *'take a seat meantime.'* I looked around the room.

Almost every chair was occupied. *'There's one here,'* shouted a voice. And in the corner of the room I saw a woman waving to me. She pointed to the vacant chair by her side. I sat down next to her and thought again about Lorna and her accident. But my thoughts were soon interrupted by a small boy running around after a paper aeroplane which he had just thrown into the waiting people. He was pulled from the wreckage by his mother who gave him a very vocal dressing down resulting in many tears and much howling.

'It's pandemonium in here.'

The woman next to me looked at me as she continued. *'I've been here for ages. I heard someone say there's been a road accident. That'll keep us waiting even longer.'*

'That's why I'm here. It's my wife who...'

'Oh I'm sorry. Are you alright?'

I'd almost cried but I took a quick breath. *'Yes. Thanks. Just anxious and worried.'*

'Of course.'

We sat quietly with our own thoughts. The room was gradually emptying of people. The boy, minus his aeroplane, had left with his mother. There was a stillness which had been absent before. The clock on the wall above the reception desk slowly ticked on. I was staring at it when a doctor appeared at my side. *'Mr. Paton?'*

'Yes.'

'Your wife's been in a road accident. She's sustained some injuries.'

'Nothing too serious, but we'll need to do a few tests before we can

release her.'

'What sort of injuries?'

'She's had a bump on the head. I don't think it's too bad but we'll need to examine it.' She has two broken ribs and a few bruises in that area but nothing internal.'

I groaned.

'From what I've heard the cars are in a far worse condition than the drivers. I suggest that you grab some coffee at the cafeteria and come back in half an hour.'

I did what he suggested but when I reached the cafeteria, I found Alec waiting for me. He insisted on buying me coffee and I told him about Lorna.

'That sounds positive. You'll be hoping she'll be able to get home tonight.'

'Yes. I should know soon.'

'I can take you home whenever. I'm in no hurry.'

'I don't want to burden you any more. You've done such a lot to help me.'

'No problem, Jack.'

I looked at him. *'There's one thing I don't understand. Why are you doing this?'*

'You were in a spot. You needed help.'

'And I'm very grateful, but why are you being so kind and supportive?'

'I've always rated you Jack. You've always been a better actor and a better person than me. The only way I could hope to get ahead of you was to undermine you. Quite simply, I wish I was more like you.'

I sat motionless. He saw the dazed expression on my face.

'Come on,' he said, *'let's find out if she can come home.'*

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