OBITUARIES

THE REVD. ALAN D BIRSS

As Director of Music of Paisley Abbey and working closely with the minister, Revd. Alan D. Birss, I am in an obvious position to comment on and to give thanks for a much-valued friendship and for a most distinctive ministry of some 32 years. Under Alan's leadership, worship in the Abbey gained a strong sense of spiritual integrity and dignity. This was underpinned by a passionate interest in liturgy. In addition he fully realised the importance of how music can best be used to clothe and enhance the beauty of worship, especially in the grandeur of a large ecclesiastical building. Naturally here was a situation which would gladden the heart of any serious-minded musical director. However, pity the poor organist who delivered the wrong Psalm for the day, or even chose an incorrect selection of verses!

In many ways, Alan seemed all set for an academic career. He studied at St. Andrews University from 1971-1975 and gained an MA with honours in English language and literature. Here he was President of the English Critical Society. Moving to New College Edinburgh in 1975 he completed a BD in 1979, winning several prizes including the Cunningham (New College) Prize Fellowship – given to a Church of Scotland student with the best overall performance on the entire course. He was also President of the Divinity Student's Council. With this prize money he went on to study at Duke University, North Carolina, over the summer of 1982.

Alan was licensed by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy in 1978 and ordained by the Presbytery of Dundee in 1979. Following two further years of study at New College he was inducted to St. Peter's, Inverkeithing, in September 1982.

The final move to Paisley Abbey in March 1988 can be seen as the perfect culmination of his ministerial career. Here he was able to fully exploit the life-long love of liturgy which had probably been kindled when, as a child, he received his primary education at the Episcopal Church in Peterhead. All through his career, it seems obvious that circumstances combined to point him in this direction. For instance, he often spoke of his assistantship at Dundee St. Mary's under Dr. 'Bill' McMillan where he was obviously happy with the liturgical arrangements.

Apart from impeccable leadership in the conduct of worship, where shoddiness was something completely unknown to him, he was an excellent organiser of regular meetings and events in the life of the Abbey. Quickly establishing an active youth group along with the unfailing help of Carol, he would also arrange games for the boys choir in the Abbey's Halls after the service of evensong, a service which he loved along with sung Communion. When the choir undertook a German tour in 1981, he took a prominent part in the planning and organising of the travel. It was out of the fund raising for this that the Paisley Abbey Music Society (PAMS) was formed; a committee, which was his brain-child and which still thrives today.

Throughout his ministry, Alan was involved with Scouting and he eventually became Group Scout Leader. He found such joy and fun working with young people.

It did not take Alan long to become a key figure in the cultural and social life of the area; notably Chaplaincies of Paisley Grammar School, the RNR and the Air Training Corps. He was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Renfrewshire in 2015 and was made a Serving brother of the Priory of Scotland of the Order of St. John in 1996. He was Moderator of the Presbytery and a Past President of both the Church Service Society and of the Scottish Church Society. He also enjoyed membership of the Dunkeld Fellowship and was a keen Rotarian.

Throughout his ministry at Paisley Abbey, Alan never lost sight of pastoral expectations and he was wholly committed to his flock at all times. During the Pandemic, he spent much time chatting to members of the congregation on the phone and, along with Carol, successfully organised regular online services.

Although he never boasted a musical background, it was obvious to me that, because of his multi-cultural interests, his knowledge was broad. I did know that he played double bass in the school

orchestra and was sufficiently proficient on the piano to be able to play through hymn tunes. He spent much time choosing hymns – both for the suitability of words for the theme of the day as well as the compatibility of the tunes in which he took a keen interest.

Although he regarded some modern music with suspicion, he readily seemed to recognise the commitment and power of the church music of Sir James MacMillan. He loved the language of the canticles and, since the Benedictus was his favourite, I was pleased and honoured to write a setting for him as a retirement gift.

Alan and Carol moved to Aboyne where they were able to enjoy the peace of such beautiful surroundings. Very sadly, Alan's life was prematurely cut short by his untimely death on 9th December 2022.

Dr. George McPhee

THE REVD. MARION DODD MA BD LRAM

Marion was President of the Church Service Society from 2006-2008. For her Presidential Address in 2008, she explored the issues relating to communicating in words, against a biblical and theological backcloth. The subject was treated in a Trinitarian format and the address was accompanied by a multi-media presentation involving the visual presentation of the Hebrew, Greek and English versions of John 1:1 coupled with a musical setting both composed and performed by herself. It can be read on the Society's website in the Record, vol. 43 (2007-8), p.3.

It's typical that music was part of that address, as it was such an important part of her life from start to finish. At one stage she even called her cats Crotchet and Quaver! A daughter of the Manse born in 1941, Marion described herself as 'just the wee lassie that sang in a family full of musicians' but went on to become a professional singer with the BBC Singers. It was during that time – and before it, when she worked as a Russian translator at the Foreign Office in London – that Marion became involved at St Columba's Pont Street, and was encouraged by Fraser McLuskey to explore the possibility of ministry in the Church of Scotland. Studies at New College led to an Assistantship with Bill Johnston at Colinton, before she was inducted to Kelso Old and Sprouston in 1989, where she remained until her retirement in 2010.

Not that 'retirement' is quite the right word, as she continued to conduct the Roxburgh Singers and other choirs, and to serve as Interim Moderator, Locum and visiting preacher in churches all over the Borders until not so very long before her death. She also remained an active member of the committee organising the annual Dunkeld Fellowship retreat, which held a special place in her heart. Marion is fondly and widely remembered as a great enabler, enthusiastically and consistently bringing out the best in others whether in music or in worship. She is also remembered – and indeed recorded – for her personal connection to the descant that her organist grandfather once wrote to Crimond. It's included in CH4, which she helped to compile, and it was sung at Westminster Abbey at both the late Queen's wedding in 1947 and funeral in 2022. Those decades, the 1940's and the 2020's, bookend Marion Dodd's own life of service and song, and the descant was sung by the large choir formed for her memorial service in Melrose Parish Church on 27th August 2024, after she had been laid to rest alongside her parents and grandparents at Castlewood Cemetery, Jedburgh.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me:
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling place shall be.

The Revd. Neil Gardner

THE REVD. GORDON JAMIESON

The Reverend Gordon David Jamieson died suddenly on Friday 3rd May, two days after the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination into the Schaw Kirk, Drongan, in the Presbytery of Ayr.

He then served at Elie, Kilconquhar and Colinsburgh, before moving to Dundee: Barnhill St Margaret's. In March 2000, he was appointed as Head of Stewardship, and retired in September 2012. That left him free to work as Locum minister in a number of roles, and as Interim Moderator in a range of charges, across Edinburgh and West Lothian, as well as serving as Depute Clerk in the Presbytery of West Lothian from October 2019. He was Vice- Convener of the Board of Ministry from 1993 to 1995, and, as Convener of that Board, at the General Assembly of 1996, he presented its Report. When he retired Gordon became a member of Livingston Old - his first taste of being an 'ordinary' member of a congregation, as an adult, but not for long, because he soon took on the role of treasurer, among other duties – as he had to be 'extraordinary'.

He was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Edinburgh in June 1973. He studied Arts and Divinity at Edinburgh University, and served as Student Assistant at Tron Moredun, before his first ministry in Ayrshire. He was married to Annette in 1969 in St Andrew's Muirhouse. In office prayers in 121 George Street, his singing voice was to the fore, and this was the case wherever Gordon was in the congregation. He was passionate about good order and on occasion single-minded about doing things in the right way. This was alongside his wry smile, a twinkle in his eye, and a dry sense of humour. He was pastoral and a great encourager and enabler of the staff in the Stewardship Team in the Church Offices, and totally committed to the Church of Scotland and its ministry.

Along with a passion for crime fiction, he liked to travel. He was someone for whom friends and family were important too - our prayers are with his wife, Annette, and their children, Elspeth and Andrew, and their five grandchildren.

Gordon David Jamieson, Minister of the Gospel, 1 March 1949 to 3 May 2024.

The Revd. Angus Mathieson

THE VERY REVD. DR. GILLEASBUIG MACMILLAN

Any tribute to The Very Reverend Gilleasbuig Iain Macmillan would not be complete without mentioning the man, the myth and the ministry.

Gilleasbuig was born on an island, before moving with his parents and brother to another West Highland parish as a youngster. The romanticism and rugged independence of the West Highlands never left him. The place and the people imbued him with a sense of the eternal and his unique way of thinking and expressing himself.

After University in Edinburgh, he was the Assistant to Dr Steele of Linlithgow, from whom he learned how to work with the people and preach in season and out, confirming his high churchman stance on the crafting of the sermon and service. His calling to Portree on the Isle of Skye, for some, the premier Gaelic preaching station in Scotland, despite what the Lewis men might say, gave him a wealth of experience and respect from his people. He remembered the phone numbers of his parishioners by ascribing their three numbers, in those days, to the corresponding hymn number in the Revised Hymnary. For instance, 388 for the Guild, 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'.

After a short ministry he was called to High: St Giles', the mothership of Presbyterianism, which proved not to be uncontroversial. However, he held to his principles, and he was inducted in May 1973 as a 30-year-old. His long ministry brought many innovations in worship, liturgy and the physical space.

Worship was centred in the crossing with the Communion Table as the focus of the space and the service. The two main services included the Communion at 10am around the table with few words

saying so much, and the uplifting of the people and sacrament to the Godhead, reminding everyone who participated what the chief end of man truly is!

Gilleasbuig liked movement in worship: baptisms meant the Congregation being invited to gather around the font at the West Door, the family of faith together. Gilleasbuig loved a procession for Palm Sunday or Harvest and the Congregation readily participated. In *'St Giles' A Reordering'* an article he wrote in 2021 for *The Record* he reflected on two of the events which led him to this innovation when he wrote:

> Encouragement to move informally and set formal ceremony within community friendship came from a wedding in Corfu, where people milled around the couple, and their parents were nearest to them, and a christening in Lincoln Cathedral, where the congregation in the choir processed to the west end of the nave for baptism, returning to the choir for communion.[1]

It was his habit to prepare his sermons each week on a Saturday morning by rereading the lessons and then going for a 'good walk', before returning to his desk with its outlook to Northumberland Street in the New Town and beginning the task of the day. Each sermon was written out in full, although only the 11.30am sermon script, different from the 10am, made its way to St Giles' for any use which he might need of it. The 10am script was left on his desk. He was clear to his students that it was either full script or no script. 'Do not use notes', was heard by more than one of those whom he taught.

His preaching was provocative and insightful, with the use of language catching the imagination of those there, lasting a lifetime. Subjects such as Christmas and Easter would at one point prove more controversial than he ever thought would be the case, but his insightful reading led him to make his points with a clear logic and integrity founded, as he saw it in the ancient tradition of the Church, while maintaining creativity and imagination. He left the impression of being one of the best-read of people, keeping up with the current recommended novels and nonfiction books.

He had many articles and book reviews published, but the only book which he wrote was entitled *A Workable Belief: Thoughts on the Apostles Creed*. As was his want in worship he talked in the Introduction of the signposts which we are given as Christians to wonder about our relationship with God. He wrote:

It seems to me that the usefulness to Christian people of the Apostles' Creed (and other creeds and other things as well, but the Apostles' Creed is my subject now) is comparable to the usefulness of these big wooden posts to travellers in the snow. We hear faith described as a journey or pilgrimage, Christ as the Way. It is easy to develop the idea and identify signposts, ditches, crossroads, traffic lights. I merely add snow posts to the list. The post is not the road. Neither the post nor the road is the journey. The journey is not the traveller. The various stages or themes of the Creed are not themselves the living of the Christian faith, but indicators of where the journey of faith is likely to be found, though you have to use your head, and sometimes it is not clear which side of the post it is better to take.[2]

While one small offering to the world of insights into one of the foundational documents of the Christian faith, he has left behind a treasure trove to delve into again and again, to ponder about the truths of the Christian faith.

He was a man who loved to debate and engage with the young and the old alike, but sometimes found the young lacking in the required radicalism which he believed theological reflection

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[1] GI Macmillan, from The Church Service Society, The Record, The Reordering of St Giles' – a personal recollection (Volume 56, 2021) page 17

[2] GI Macmillan: A Workable Belief, (Edinburgh, St Andrew's Press, 1993) page 1

required of them. His enquiring mind never dimmed with the turning of the years and was always ready with a question to challenge those who thought they had all the answers.

Too often people could be obsequious in his company. While his intellect was vast, he liked good conversation and company and could not countenance the Uriah Heaps of this world.

He was heard to say that in liturgy he preferred always to reserve the prayer of intercession for himself, after a visiting preacher had delivered the sermon. His reason for this was, quite simply: 'I always like to be able to correct the theology when necessary'.

Following 40 years of faithful ministry, Gilleasbuig retired in September 2013. He continued to make useful contributions to The Church Service Society and maintain many connections, both in Scotland and throughout the world. His ministry shaped and served the people of St Giles' as he ministered to them and enabled their ministry, by his magnificent use of language, thought provoking sermons and powerful pastoral care in times when those whom he worked amongst required his presence.

We give thanks for a man who achieved much throughout a distinguished ministry, exercised with the characteristics of his highland reserve and forebears. At his funeral in St Giles' in January 2024 the poem by Norman McCaig, '*Praise of a Man'* was read. It appeared to those present that it encapsulated Gilleasbuig's essence and character. The final stanza concludes:

The beneficent lights dim
but don't vanish. The razory edges
dull, but still cut. He's gone: but you can see
his tracks still, in the snow of the world.[3]

The Revd. Dr. Karen Katrina Campbell

THE REVD. T. STEWART McGREGOR

I first came to know Stewart in 1964 when he was Minister of Kildrum Parish in Cumbernauld and I was returning from a year in the United States. Licensed but not yet ordained, I was drafted into St Mungo's parish in the new town where the recently appointed minister had just died and new residents were pouring into the town each week. I spent three months there and Stewart, besides building up his own congregation to over 1000 members was, as Interim Moderator at St Mungo's, constantly available for advice and support.

The late 1960s was a time of great expansion in the universities. In Edinburgh, James Blackie had been appointed to the Chair of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology with Alastair Campbell as Lecturer. In 1970/71 Murray Leishman was appointed Chaplain to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Stewart to the Royal Infirmary and myself to the Western General. All the first year students were required to take a week long Easter vacation hospitals

conference in connection with Alastair's courses. One former student, now retired, writes 'The week-long hospitals course was out of this world- initially mesmerising and illuminating but in the long term providing a solid base for hospital visiting which spanned almost forty years'. Stewart had a profound influence upon the students who later came on placements and who worked under his supervision.

Stewart held this post for the remainder of his ministry, a period of nearly 30 years and then in his retirement was locum in various parishes. He seemed to work all the hours that God gave him and the number of people who attended the Service of Thanksgiving in St Giles for his life and ministry is testimony to the influence for good he had on so many people.

[3] from T*he Many Days: Selected Poems of Norman MacCaig* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010)

He was a member of the Iona Community and that continued to have an enduring influence upon his life and ministry.

When he was 17, a Waldensian pastor spoke at his Youth Fellowship and from then on Stewart had a life-long connection and love for the Waldensian church visiting Torre Pellice first as a hitchhiking student and then many times with his family. In 2000, he did a three-month locumship in the English speaking Waldensian congregation in Turin.

He was also the first Chair of the Edinburgh Community Health Council. This cannot have been an easy job but the very fact that he could hold both this position and the chaplaincy at the Royal Infirmary at the same time is testimony to his capacity for strong and trusting human relationships.

The Revd. Dr. David Lyall

JAMES CHARLES STEWART

James Charles Stewart was born and brought up in Bearsden, Glasgow, along with his younger brother George, who sadly predeceased him by a year or so. Their father, James Cathcart Stewart, was a clever man, and a notable accountant, rising to become President of the Society of Chartered Accountants and travelling the world giving lectures on accountancy during his term of office. Jim was very fond and proud of his father and would often mention him, alongside his mother, who provided a wonderful home and was a devoted Christian woman.

Jim attended Bearden North Church where the minister, W. G. D. MacLennan, played a part in Jim's development. Following success at school, Jim headed for St Andrew's, and though his parents had doubts about Jim's choice of destination, he was very happy there, retaining a love for St Andrew's and a strong affinity for the University.

Jim served his probationary assistantship at St John's Kirk, Perth, with Bill Smellie. This was a formative time for him in his young ministry, learning much, and loving the liturgical shape and pattern of worship at St John's, something that was to characterise his own ministry and service to the Church. James always gave the impression that he should have liked nothing better than if he had been able to stay on as an Assistant following his probation at St John's but instead his call took him to the quite different setting of Drumchapel, back in his hometown of Glasgow.

He spent some years there, and he enjoyed it, even if at times it could be very challenging for someone who had grown up in a somewhat more genteel atmosphere. Break-ins at the manse were far too common, but it did not diminish people, or the community around him in Jim's eyes. He was deeply committed to his local community of Drumchapel. This commitment to parish ministry in its truest sense, ran through Jim's life and ministry.

The call of God was to bring Jim next to the East Church of St Nicolas, Aberdeen, and then to the Kirk as a whole. Jim loved Aberdeen's Mither Kirk. He lived and breathed that church, and for many of us, that place will always be synonymous with him. Again, he was a parish minister in the best traditions of the Church of Scotland, committed pastorally to his parishioners and the wider city and its civic life. Being minister of the Mither Kirk brought specific responsibilities: presiding over prayers at the beginning of the High Court when in Aberdeen, Chaplain to Robert Gordons College, which he loved, and serving as the city's minister at innumerable civic occasions.
I think his favourite occasion was when Mikheil Gorbachev was granted the freedom of the City, and Jim, as usual had to travel alongside those granted this honour in a carriage up Union Street to the Music Hall. Despite the odd glamourous occasion there were no doubt many other less illustrious occasions, but Jim took his responsibility extremely seriously in ministering to the civic realm, the Trades of Aberdeen, and the City Council in particular, representing as he did not only himself and congregation, but the national Church itself.

Jim was able and had a good intellect which seasoned his preaching. Conducting Sunday worship was the highlight of his week, and he enjoyed doing so whether in the West Church of St Nicholas, or next door in the East Church (which was actually his favourite – he loved the stained glass windows), or in the Drum Aisle.

He was committed to the rhythm of prayer in the heart of the life of the city, on Sunday but also through the week, with prayers every day in the chapel. In all the current endless talk of mission, Jim understood more than most the importance of worship, and of being a worshipping presence as being of first importance. In truth, a form of mission and the foundation of any other form of mission.

Many students passed under James' watchful eye and all of us learned about liturgy from Jim. Jim took a keen interest in candidates for the ministry and their education, concerned to make sure all candidates received a breadth of the church at large. He served on the Presbytery of Aberdeen's Education for the Ministry committee for many years.

A number of candidates for the ministry lodged over the years with Jim at Gray Street. It provided good lodgings for us, and company for him in a big old and rather chilly manse. Nearly all who lodged with Jim, remained good friends with him, although the transition to calling him Jim, instead of Mr Stewart was not an easy one!

Jim could be very frugal, and what little central heating there, was seldom on. I myself, often slept with a beanie on in the winter. The cold didn't seem to bother Jim. He loved nothing better than a conversation in the passing (about an hour's passing mind) and he loved a debate on matters of theology or social ethics. Jim was extremely well read in theology, history, and politics, and seldom did he not have an autobiography on the go. When he did have a break from work, he would usually take off to his cottage at Rothienorman, or an occasional trip to Glasgow to see George, Anne and his family.

Despite having been in Aberdeen for most of his years in ministry and being deeply committed to his adopted city, his contribution to the wider church in Scotland and beyond was considerable. James was Secretary of the Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee in the late Seventies early Eighties, and a member of the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain. He was also Vice Convener of the Panel on Doctrine during the time of its work on marriage and its then controversial report to the General Assembly of 1994.

He was a long-time member of this Church Service Society, a body which encouraged both the study of worship and the creation of new forms, and James served as its President from 1997-99. In 1999 he became editor of the 'Record', this Society's journal, and in the run up to its 150th anniversary in 2015 he published three thoroughly researched articles on the history of the Society from its founding to the present day.

As a scholar Jim was meticulous, and very widely read. Noting a pattern in the Society's journal by which every quarter of a century a 'course of reading in liturgics for the ordinary interested member of the Society and for students' was included, on cue in 2004 he continued the pattern, citing no fewer than 84 titles. Although he claims to have consulted colleagues, it is likely that he knew every one personally, probably because they were on his own shelves.

Jim was an independent thinker, moderate certainly, but one who believed in the Church always being reformed. Jim's was a gentle eloquence, based on an independence of thought which did not parrot the party line nor the denominational consensus.

James' Presidential Address for this Society was entitled: 'Scripture: Salt Cellar or Pepper-pot for Liturgy.' In it he contrasted the views of Cranmer (where Scripture was distilled into liturgy - the salt) and Knox (where 'amplified quotation' was scattered round undissolved like grains of pepper). With Jim's customary elegance he critically analysed two of the services in the then recently published Common Order, unafraid of those in the audience who wrote and compiled it, but carrying his points with wit and elegance.

In editing, he would mull over the contents till the very last minute and on one occasion missed a year altogether! But again, his wit and elegance came to his rescue as he crafted an apology in the editorial in such a way that he was indulgently forgiven, no more said.

Jim was often running at things at the last minute. I personally remember his relief in 1996 when he bought his first electronic typewriter. It offered more speed for prayers to be typed out for Sunday worship.

Jim was blessed with a number of good friends throughout his life, from University days right through all times of his life and ministry. And also many ministerial friends and colleagues, not least from the membership of this great Society. Jim, was a good friend to many of us. He was kind, thoughtful, compassionate and understanding. To those who didn't know him well he could appear austere, dour even. On the contrary, Jim had a cheeky sense of humour, loved poking fun at friends, and could receive some teasing in return in good faith.

James Stewart's contribution to the life of the Church of Scotland, and particularly his passion for liturgy and worship cannot be overstated. His friendship was valued by all of us fortunate enough to call him our friend. Finally, most of all he was glad to have been able to serve as a Minister of the Gospel, in the national church he loved.

The Revd. Scott Rennie