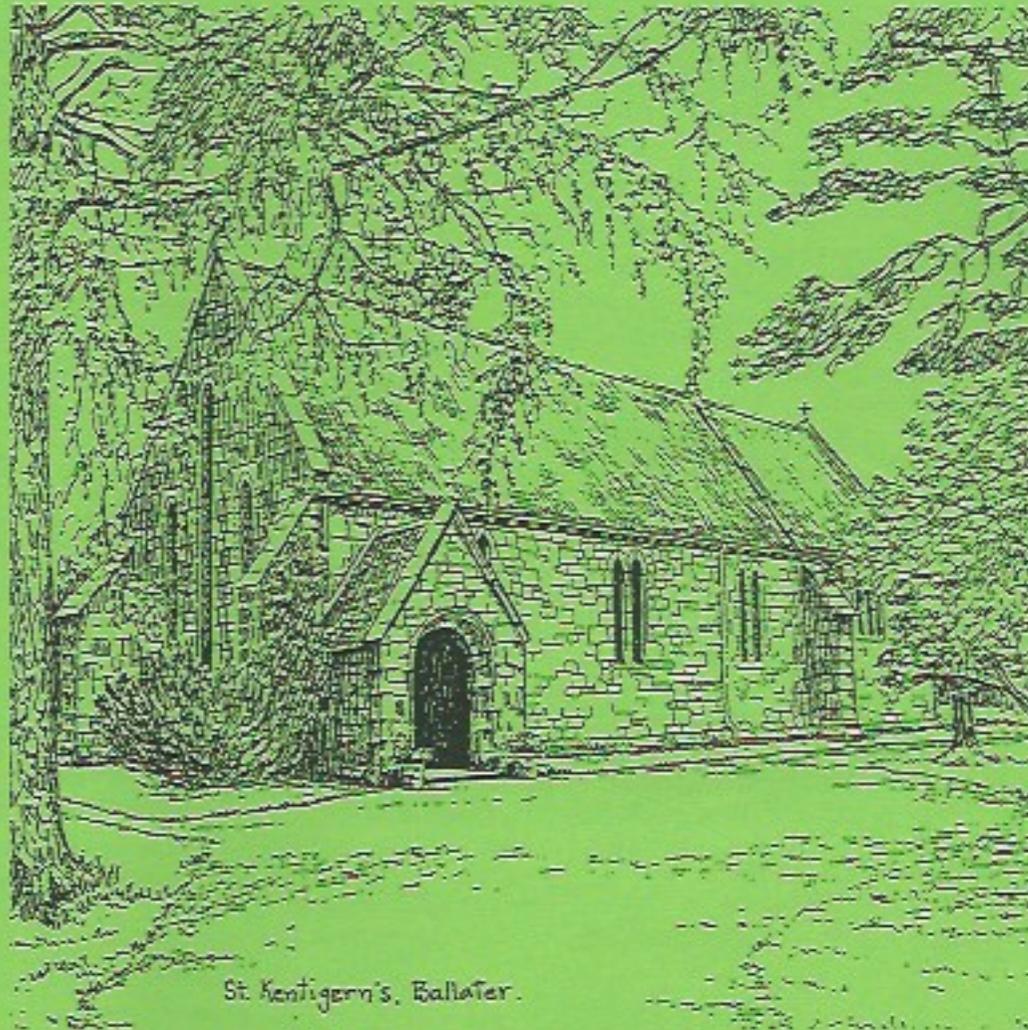


The Deeside Tattler

February and March 2022



St. Kentigern's, Ballater.

St. Kentigern's, Ballater, St. Thomas's, Aboyne
with St. Ninian's, Braemar



Rector: Rev'd Canon Vittoria Hancock
The Rectory, 7 Invercauld Road, Ballater, AB35 5RP
Tel. No. 013397 55919 email: vittoriahancock@gmail.com

Deacon: Rev Jean Souter

Lay Readers: Stuart Yarnell, Tel. No 013397 54018

Hugh Dawson, Tel. No 013398 87054

Note: DAY OFF. Vittoria is taking Friday as her normal day off,
and it would be helpful if we would respect that.

Lent Communion

Tuesday, 10.30am, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th March, 5th and 13th April, St Thomas'

Thursday, 10.30am, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st March, 7th April, St Kentigern's

Dates for Advent

Wednesday 2nd February, 7.30pm, St Thomas' Vestry meeting

Tuesday 8th February, 10.30am, Midweek Communion, St Thomas'

Thursday 24th February, 10.30am, Midweek Communion, St Kentigern's

Saturday 26th February, Diocesan Synod.

Ash Wednesday, Wednesday 2nd March, Service of Holy Communion,
10.30am, St Kentigern's, 6pm, St Thomas'

Thursday 3rd March, 7.30pm, St Kentigern's Vestry meeting

Monday 21st March, 7.30pm, Joint Vestry meeting

Sunday 10th April, Palm Sunday

Sunday 17th April, Easter Sunday

From the Editor: We are having a quieter spell just now, with Christmas past, and a few weeks to go before we start the more serious period of Lent and the joy of Easter. And meantime the sun is shining - long may that last too!

We have a lovely mixture of articles again this time, with some covering the celebrations over the Christmas period, which went on enthusiastically in spite of the Covid restrictions put upon us. And there is a variety of other memories, thoughts and experiences, all well worth reading. Our thanks to all who have contributed, the magazine would not be the same without you. Do keep them coming! **Ed**

Sheila Maxwell Tel 013398 86740 EDITOR and Aboyne contact
Email: sheilamaxwell@btinternet.com

Anne Richardson, Tel 013397 56088 Contact St Kentigern's
Email: richardson716@btinternet.com

From the Rector,
Rev'd Canon Vittoria Hancock



Dear Friends,

'I have come that you may have life - life in all its fullness.' *John 10:10*

I went to the isle of Mull with friends for my post-Christmas break. The cottage we booked is perched on a hill, overlooking the bay and the surrounding countryside. It has a picture window which runs the length of the house. You can watch the shifts and changes of the weather as it heads towards you. It was a week of little things that lit up the world. Golden eagles. Herons aplenty. Snow and hail. Rain. Sunshine. Fog rolling in from the sea. Rainbows. Oyster catchers, mallards, and eider ducks. Great northern divers. Peregrine falcon, buzzard, and hen harriers hunting over the moorland. Northern lights. An otter catching breakfast in the bay. We managed a walk each day, pottered along beaches, watched wildlife, and sat and crafted while watching the weather go past and the tide ebb and flow in the bay. It was mostly a tranquil week.

I did do one nerve-wracking thing. Sketching and drawing. This is not my forte. As my secondary school teacher told me 'you will never be an artist'. I have never spent time on art. On this holiday I decided to have a go. The first obstacle to overcome was – and is - fear. I am not sure what I am afraid of – perhaps it is the memory of that art teacher. But there is a little trepidation in the act of putting pencil to paper. The voice in the back of my mind telling me this is something I can't do. That I am wasting my time and I should stick to something I know I can do. My fear of not being good at something, of being ridiculed, was outweighing the knowledge that this was something I used to enjoy.

I took my courage in my hands, and each day at the cottage, I sketched or drew something. I am still not the world's greatest artist, and never will be. My perspective is a bit skew-wiff, and my proportions are off. The pictures are vaguely identifiable s- if you know the place I have drawn. But I enjoyed it. I have conquered some of the fear.

The echoes of the past can hold us back from exploring what we are able to do. We can restrict ourselves and our lives, following the same paths and the same ways. We are sometimes the ones limiting ourselves. 'oh, I could never do that'; 'That's not me'. It is far easier to stick to the tried and trusted than to risk stretching out and falling flat. That way, there is less chance to make a fool of yourself. This is something we do not just as individuals, but as a church and as a society. We tend to stick to the old and familiar. There is some comfort in that. But there is fear of trying new things, of being different, of going against the flow. We conform and restrict ourselves to the expectations of those around us, and in doing so, the sparks that bring life get quenched.

This is not God's plan for our lives. God made us to live life, and to live it in all its fullness. Through Christ, through faith and trust, and love, and hope, God makes our lives anew. He can do more with them than we could ever hope or expect. As we approach the new season of Lent, let us strive to live the life God calls us to – released from the past, looking to the future – life in all its fullness.

With every blessing,

Vittoria

Lent Group – the Lent group will be meeting on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm from the 8th March. As usual, any materials will also be sent out to interested parties. The theme of the group will be 'Living life in all its fullness'. As yet it is uncertain as to whether this will be held in person at the Rectory or online via Skype or Zoom (or a combination of both!).

Coffee and Climate morning

Carol's coffee morning unfortunately had to be postponed due to the extra Covid restrictions at the time. It will be advertised when it is re-scheduled - hopefully that will not be too long.

The Fogbow



‘**Arise, shine**, for your light has come. Darkness covers the earth but the glory of the Lord rises upon you, see, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears to you’ *Isaiah 60:1-6*

It was the 21st December 2021, the shortest day of the year, and maybe the darkest when the short number of daylight hours was combined with the weather.

I was driving down to Edinburgh early in the morning to drop somebody at the airport. I'd had the idea of doing a hill walk, the Hill of Wirren, on my way back, and had my rucksack and walking boots with me in the car. Although the forecast had seemed quite promising the evening before, as we drove down the A90, there was no sunrise to enjoy, and by the time we got down towards Dundee it had started to rain.

Somewhat against my better judgement, I decided I'd at least drive up Glen Lethnot to the start of the walk to see if things were any better. At least it wasn't raining, and the clouds were not quite such a dark grey, but nonetheless the clouds were covering the hills. Since I was there and the summit was only an hour or so away with straight forward navigation, I decided to do the walk.

What transpired was one of the most memorable afternoons that I've ever spent in the hills. As I climbed up the track, it seemed that the cloud was starting to thin out, even with some hints of blue. And then much to my surprise, out of the cloud appeared a white rainbow, well actually it's something called a fogbow, which I've never seen myself before. Just as a rainbow reminds us that the sun is shining somewhere, that is also true for a fogbow. The sun had to be shining to create this special phenomenon.

That drew me on, further up the hill. And as I continued to climb towards the summit, I got clear of the cloud as I climbed out above it, into the brilliant sunshine and blue sky of the shortest day in 2021.

I must have spent around 2 hours on the summit, just enjoying this amazing experience, with the cloud spread below me all around. As I stood in the hard frost and snow on the summit, clouds slowly moved and lapped around the summits, sticking up through them, and eventually the sun turned golden as the sun went below the horizon. It was a true reason to shout out the glories of God in creation!

*from the sermon preached in our churches for Epiphany by **Stephen Goodyear***

Cribs at Aboyne

On several of our Christmas visits to Sion in Switzerland, Warren and I have followed the city crib trail. Different interest or ethnic groups around the city put up a nativity scene in the squares or shop windows, and a trail map is produced culminating in a “live” nativity in the main square - part of the Christmas market, complete with various animals, much to the delight of any children. I have always wanted to recreate a version here in Aboyne, on a smaller scale, but trying to recreate the sense of a complete community sharing in the joy of Christmas.

Thus was born - well Jesus was born, but before that... the idea of a Christmas crib and church decoration, Christingle-making session and coffee morning in December. I wasn't sure how successful it would be. I had 4 nativity scenes to contribute - one Nigerian, one paper, one wooden stencil set and one of PlayMobil along with several Nativity Advent calendars collected over many years.

It turned out to be a splendid affair - we had 20 crib sets donated for the Christmas period from all over the world, ranging from a tiny one which fitted into a matchbox, a hanging crib scene, several wooden ones, our church knitted crib and of course the large crib scene. While people arranged their cribs on windowsills, the flower group added holly, ivy and candle decorations.

Over the course of the morning lots of people arrived, some for the coffee, some families who enjoyed making their Christingles and joining in the chat. Warren had potted up some small Christmas trees from the graveyard, with the idea that children could decorate them - we had baubles, tinsel and tiny lights and decorations. But the stars of that activity were Carol and Andrew, who spent the morning decorating all nine trees, with occasional help from the children.

The whole event was friendly and enjoyable, with a really warm atmosphere. And it was something different, something we had not tried before. I'm not sure if we will ever be able to get an Aboyne Crib Trail going, but this was a good start.

Many thanks to all contributors and participants.

Sue

Some of the Cribs



Kept in a matchbox!



Anne's German crib set

Anne Harper says: My set came from the Christmas market in Nuremberg. All the family had gone over for a weekend to celebrate my 50th birthday, and it was wonderful - lots of lovely stalls with crib sets, Christmas ornaments, gluwain and sausages. The children in the party chose the different bits of this set as an extra present for me. They were particularly pleased to find a bag-pipe-playing peasant, quite a usual member of German sets, so he's part of my set too (*towards the left*).



Vittoria's Olive Wood Nativity Set

Vittoria says: One of the crib sets on display in St Thomas' this year was carved out of olive wood. The set was made in the Holy Land, by a small group of craftspeople. This means each character and each set is unique. It was something I had looked at for a few years, every time the Christmas catalogue came out, but always decided it was an unnecessary expense. When I left the parish of Dolgellau, the folks who had gathered monthly with me for a prayer breakfast at 7am (prayer, followed by breakfast!) wanted to get me a present that would be meaningful, and asked for suggestions. So I suggested the nativity set. I have treasured it since. I love running my fingers over the smooth olive wood, and thinking of the people who carved it. It reminds me of those praying people, of their love and fellowship

ST. KENTIGERN'S CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES



There was so much anticipation in looking forward to the Christmas Services of 2021. We were back to using hymn books and service books, being able to have a coffee after the Sunday Service, preparations were in hand for the Ballater Ecumenical Carols and Nine Lessons to be held in St.K's, Vittoria and myself meeting to sort out the Crib Service for Christmas Eve.

And then bang, wallop, along comes Omicron, (I can't remember him/her being invited). Eventually the advice is given, followed by restrictions once again, and memories of December 2020 come flooding back. Shoulders sag, but then, come on, we coped last December and this isn't as bad, we are not going into lockdown. Right, let's get sorted!

The Ecumenical Service was cancelled on 19th., but the mince pies and mulled wine had already been purchased, well we couldn't waste them! After our 9:30am service we all enjoyed a warm mince pie and mulled wine. Some folk went happily home with mince pies, (couldn't leave them to go out of date) and the unopened bottles of mulled wine have been stashed away for December 2022, but I am not telling you where!!

And so to the Crib Service. Monday 20th saw Vittoria, Anne Harper, Andrew, Katherine, Sue and Warren, and myself on Zoom in our respective homes recording the story of The Promise. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and if you didn't view it on Christmas Eve on YouTube, it should still be available.

Then came Christmas Day itself. The Church was beautifully decorated, the candles on the windowsills cast a warm glow, the lights on the Christmas Tree twinkled, the Christmas Candle was lit - all was well.

The carols were joyously sung, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, In the Bleak Mid-Winter, and of course O Come All Ye Faithful as the final carol.

But there was another carol, a favourite of mine and of another member of the Congregation, Little Donkey. I had given out bells to the children who were in Church, and to some of the 'grown-up children' and we shook them vigorously during the chorus, "Ring out those bells tonight, Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Follow that star tonight, Bethlehem, Bethlehem".

As we travel through 2022 let us pray that 'our road is not dusty and that our load is not heavy', and may we continue to 'ring out those bells and to follow that star'.

Anne Richardson.

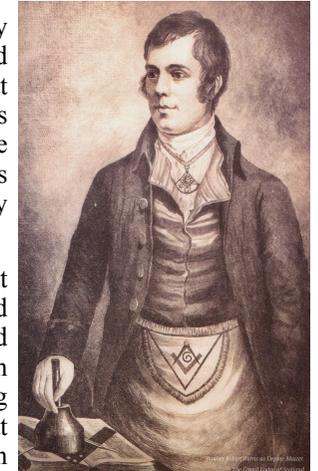
Let's have a party - - - - -

Correction: The following typo appeared in our last bulletin: 'Lunch will be gin at 12:15.' Please correct to read '12 noon.'

Auld Lang Syne

Shortly before midnight on the 31st. December every year, tens if not hundreds of millions of people all around the world, of every colour, creed and background that you can think of, link arms and sing Robert Burns immortal song with great gusto. Yet I don't suppose more than a few tens of thousands will know that Robert Burns was a Freemason, and he wrote the song to be sung by Freemasons in their Lodges!

Burns is well known for his rebellious streak, he didn't like the then strongly Calvinistic attitude of the Kirk, and needed to express his humanistic views which he did through his poetry. On 4th July 1781 he was initiated an Entered Apprentice in Lodge St.David, Tarbolton, rising to become Master Mason in October that year. It was at these meetings that the song was sung, the Brethren linking arms in brotherly affection as they did so.



Struggling to make ends meet, Burns had made up his mind to go to Jamaica in 1786, and was on the verge of departure when he was dissuaded from doing so by his Brethren. His early efforts at making a living from his writings were not successful, but in July that year his Kilmarnock edition of poems was published by a brother Freemason, and 350 brethren of St.John's Lodge, Kilmarnock, subscribed to a copy. In February 1787 Burns was made Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning No.2, Edinburgh, which still survives as the world's oldest working Masonic lodge.

The Masonic ideals of brotherly love, relief and truth can be found in his poem "A Man's a Man for a' that", which was sung at the formal opening of the new Scottish Parliament no less. It is marvellous that these ideals have been unwittingly adopted by so many worldwide, helped no doubt by social media. Is it too much to hope that this Enlightenment might one day fulfil our lives all the time, instead of just a few minutes before midnight once a year?

Marcus Humphrey

Christmas Trees

There were lovely Christmas trees on offer at St Thomas's this year. Since some overlarge pine trees were taken down a few years ago, a mass of babies have appeared, drawn by the extra light. And some of them are now big enough to make beautiful live Christmas trees.

Not many were taken this year, perhaps people did not know about it in time. Those of us who did were treated to a lovely fresh tree, chosen by oneself, and carefully cut down by Warren, who was organising it - who else?! They went up to about 6 feet this year, will have another year's growth for next year. And they have the most gorgeous strong pine scent! (Donations for St Thomas's) Do think about it next year.

Sheila Maxwell



BASS

NOTES

Four-letter words



I was recently preparing a piece of short fiction for an MA assignment (yes, I'm still enjoying that), when I found myself using the word 'buff' in the following sentence: '... it was a very small book, which had lost its cover slip, and, shorn of this, was buff coloured and lightly dimpled to the touch.' I would have included a picture of the very book at the head of

this article, but you wouldn't be able to see that it is buff. I have it placed on the desk in front of me for inspiration.

Even as I typed those words, the thought crossed my mind that somewhere I had heard the word 'buff' being used by a younger female person in a totally different context. In case I had made a terrible and suggestive mistake, I referred to an on-line dictionary and, sure enough, discovered that the word 'buff' has acquired a very specific and different meaning from the ones I was taught at school.



There it was in grey and white on my computer screen:

Buff – *Adjective* (of a person or their body) in good physical shape with well-developed muscles. (Originally North

American)

An example of usage was given – 'the driver was a buff blond, named March'

It was then that I remembered the context in which I had heard the young lady use the word. I will spare her blushes and maintain her anonymity, but she was referring to a male colleague at the time. I thought hard about my own recollection of this male colleague, then checked my writing again to make sure that there could be no hint of *double entendre* in the way I had used it. I could see none, but you can't be too careful. This was an assignment, after all, and you don't want tutors laughing for the wrong reasons when they have power over two other four-letter words – 'pass' and 'fail'. On the other hand, they probably get too few laughs when marking assignments, and might appreciate a bit of a titter from time to time.

Anyway, the whole episode got me thinking about the rather wonderful way in which the English language works, when you can have a short four-letter word like 'buff' mean so many different things. To me, these are some of the longer standing meanings of the word:

Buff (adjective) – a beige colour, as used in my sentence

Buff (noun) – an expert or enthusiast, as in 'she's a computer buff'

Buff (verb) – to polish

Buff (noun) – a pad used for polishing

Buff (noun? adjective?) – he liked to swim in the buff (i.e. naked)

Then there's the phrase 'steady the **buffs**' where the word has military connections rooted deep in history.

And now, I suppose, there is *Buff (adj)* – fanciable, with well-developed muscles.

I am sure the bright, well-informed readers of the *Tattler* knew much of this already and will be able to think of other, perhaps many other, meanings for the word. I am not implying, by the way, that readers of this magazine are 'buffers' - don't let me get started on six-letter derivatives as well.

It is easy to imagine that English is fixed in stone. It is not, of course. As long as our meaning is clear, we should relax and enjoy the multi-faceted, ever-changing beauty of our language.

Eric Sinclair



"Don't worry, I'm not getting Covid - I didn't realise the sign meant a low door..."



Readings for February and March 2022

6th February Epiphany 5 Candlemas	Malachi 3:1-4 Hebrews 2:14-18 Luke 2:22-40	Hilary Mutch	Rider Family
13th February Epiphany 6	Jeremiah 17:5-10 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 Luke 6:17-26	Margaret Jaffrey	Meg White
20th February Epiphany 7	Genesis 45:3-11, 15 1 Cor. 15:35-38, 42-50 Luke 6:27-38c	Sabine Muir	Anne Harper
27th February Epiphany 8	Exodus 34:29-35 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 Luke 9:28-36	Anne Richardson	Carol Simmons
2nd March ASH WEDNESDAY	Joel 2:1 -2, 12-17 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6.10 Matthew 6:1-6,16-21		
6th March Lent 1	Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Romans 10:8b-13 Luke 4:1-13	Marcus Humphrey	Irene Legge
13th March Lent 2	Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 Philippians 3:17 – 4:1 Luke 13:31-35	Stanley Ewen	Warren Burgess
20th March Lent 3	Isaiah 55:1-9 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Luke 13:1-9	Carole Nicoll	Marie Wilde
27th March Lent 4	Joshua 5:9-12 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32	Sabrina Humphrey	Isabel Wilson

Services:

There will be services of Holy Communion at 10.30am at St Kentigern's and at 6.00pm at St Thomas's

CHURCH SERVICES AT BALLATER AND ABOYNE

	<u>St. Kentigern's, 9.30am</u>	<u>St. Thomas's, 11.15am</u>
1st Sunday	Morning Worship	Morning Worship
2nd Sunday	Holy Communion 1982	Holy Communion 1982
3rd Sunday	Holy Communion 1982	Holy Communion 1970
4th Sunday	Holy Communion 1970	Family Communion
5th Sunday	Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer (Matins)

Sunday Club St. Kentigern's,

Ballater

Children are welcome to attend any Sunday Service, and families are invited to use the materials in the Hall if so required.

The **St Kentigern's Sunday Club** normally meets on the **third Sunday of every month at 9.30am** in the Church Hall. The children are brought back into Church to join their families during the Offertory Hymn.

These Services will be advertised when they have been resumed.
Anne R.

Young Church at St. Thomas's

Children are welcome at all the services at St Thomas's. The children's corner contains books, colouring and toys for small children, so do make use of them.

Morning Worship at St. Thomas's *(on the first Sunday of the month)*

This is normally a non-Communion Service, not specifically for children, but they are of course especially welcome.

Next Services will be:

6th February: Epiphany

6th March Into the Wilderness

The Chapel of St Ninian, Mar Lodge, Braemar

Services are restricted meantime, the next ones will be advertised in due course

He Prayeth Well

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast,
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Youth Corner

Candlemas



Candlemas, on 2nd February, is a special Holy Day, which really marks the end of the whole Christmas story. (See Luke ch2 v22-35) We have the wonderful birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, we have the story of the shepherds, then of the wise men coming from the east to worship Jesus. Perhaps the last bit seems less exciting to us, but is so important. It was the Jewish law and custom for a baby boy to be brought to Jerusalem forty days after his birth, to be presented to God at the temple there, with the parents offering a present to God of doves or pigeons. This seems strange to us, but was quite usual to Jews long ago.

But Jesus was not a normal baby, he was the Messiah who came to save us all. And waiting at the Temple was a very holy old man called Simeon, who believed he would not die until he saw the Messiah. When he saw Mary and Joseph coming along with Jesus, he amazingly recognised that this was the long-awaited Messiah. As you see in the picture, he took Jesus in his arms, and blessed God. Then he spoke the words we call the 'Nunc Dimittis' and use in some of our services. He says he can now die in peace, he has seen God's salvation in the baby Jesus. And importantly, he says God has brought a light, both to show himself to people who were not Jews, and to bring glory to the Jews themselves.

Jesus later called himself 'the Light of the world', who would reveal God to people. And so we use candles as a symbol of light, lighting them in church on this Candlemas day. and blessing them for use in church during the year. We are also invited to bring candles from home to be blessed. Light is such an important image that helps us to understand more about what Jesus means to us.



Lights and Candles remind us of God's special gift to us - Jesus!

There is a well-known hymn about Light, which we call 'Shine, Jesus, shine'.

If you know it, you may like to sing it:

Lord, the Light of the world is shining,
In the midst of the darkness shining,
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me, Jesus shine on me'



We know it!!!'

Braemar Guide Sheiling

We were delighted to reach our Christmas 2021 target of £200,000 - and since then have raised another £3000. Our overall target is £400,000 for funds, and we hope to add to this with donations in kind for equipment etc.



This is my colleague on the team - Enid, who was with me on a stall at the Braemar Christmas market, selling her jewellery, rainbows and gift bags. My contribution to the crafts were the tiny Father Christmas decorations hanging on the silver tree!

Our recycling fundraiser is going extremely well - we are still collecting stamps, foreign currency, watches, phones, cameras, any old/new jewellery, printer cartridges, old/new books. Several people have donated other items,



which we have managed to sell to raise even more funds. If you have had a clear out over the festive period, please contact us. So far the recycling and auction items have raised over £1500 which is a great result.

We continue to apply for grants and try to think up new and fun ways to raise money. Later in the year, the team are participating in the Kiltwalk to raise funds - more about that in the next Tattler.

If you would like to know more about the project, check out our website - www.braemarsheiling.org.uk or speak/contact me

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed items for sale/recycling, for money donations or helped in any way.

Sue Burgess 013398 86019 braemarsheiling@gmail.com

The wonders of Nature - more about Crows

Crows are everywhere around here, pitch black and not particularly interesting to look at. Yet I find myself fascinated, largely the way they flock together, separating, coming together again, constant movement. I can see them from my bedroom window, often feasting together in the field as you come into Aboyne.

The other day, I saw one had moved apart and was feeding on the roadside verge - not a usual sight. As I watched, several cars came past on the other side of the road. Not a sign of having noticed, the crow carried on feeding. Then one came on the nearside, just a foot or two from the crow - and did it notice? No, not an extra movement, it just went on feeding! Funny, a lot of birds get easily frightened, and would have flown off immediately. But it seems that the crows are made of sterner stuff!

Sheila Maxwell

Local knowledge in Lockdown



When my wife and sister were small children here during the War they had a jigsaw of the British Isles, and became so adept they would race to complete it. In all the years since, my wife has never regarded anywhere else as home. She knows this village, her refuge, as only a five year old roaming freely would, who had been torn from her family and birthplace in War.

So to the present and self- isolation.

At these times you learn things about your friends you never even suspected. In this case the devotion of a couple we know well to jigsaws. They are serious players and have now provided us with three, the first of Ballater - from an aerial photograph. I suggested to my wife this would not delay her very long.

Now, allowing for exaggeration, our friends create an impression that, working together, they would complete a 1000 piece jigsaw by breakfast, before moving on to a real 3000 piece challenge. In short my wife was on her mettle. As practice, she had completed a National Trust Crathes Castle jigsaw in short order. Now for Ballater.

In theory the procedure is straightforward. First sort out the frame, then work on features - houses, streets, caravan park, river etc. Where problems arise are in the dark-coloured areas that have no distinguishing features whatever. My wife is nothing if not resolute and once engaged stuck at it, obsessively.

Of course jigsaws need space and in no time the kitchen table was covered. I require little from life, but food and a space to eat it is important to me. A corner did remain but I found conversation at breakfast faltered as my wife's gaze strayed continually towards the shapes yet to find their place. We are close and I did make suggestions from time to time but as a mere incomer these were usually dismissed out of hand. Rebuffed, I retreated to chip away at the accumulated debris of years in the loft which is the major task facing us.

My wife did labour under a handicap of knowing the village as it was in the war years, because there have been extensive housing developments since - to which she is not reconciled.

I have to tread very carefully here. In particular because of an incident some years ago when we were driving up from the South to my home town in Lancashire. There had been changes since I left in 1953 including construction of a motorway into Yorkshire, which the road engineers, having no sense of history, had failed to make one way - West to East. The Wars of the Roses was still a memory when I was a lad.

It was winter, we were very late, and it was a foul night when we came upon a motorway near home for the first time. Relying on my unerring sense of direction I pressed confidently on. Now my wife has never been a back seat driver but on this occasion she enquired, cautiously, if I was sure of our heading. On receiving an affectionate and reassuring reply she relapsed into silence. However, a short time later she raised the question again. A firm response was called for. I pointed out, forcefully, that I had spent the first 18 years of my life in the area, for at least 10 of

which walking and cycling everywhere. I knew every road, path, moorland, hill, clough (valley), and ginnel (passage way), and needed no instruction from her as to exactly where we were.

Chastened, she remained silent - until we both saw, through the driving rain, a sign indicating we were approaching the outskirts of Manchester. Manchester is 30 miles south of where we were supposed to be.

Understandably my wife has never forgotten and refers often to my 'man and boy' speech. Furthermore she never hesitates now to offer an opinion on our direction when mobile - in or out of Lancashire.

She did complete the Ballater jigsaw. It took over a week. We do not know how long our friends took; they admit it was harder than they anticipated and it would be a minor triumph if we find out they never finished it.

Roger Searle

A Winter's Day

Stark branches against the evening sky
Upright, still they form a pattern
Up above, a satellite shines
Alone before the stars appear.



This is winter, a time of quiet,
Darkness longer than light.
Bulbs huddle in their pots
Silently, slowly, producing shoots.

Birds squabble over seed,
Others scrabble in flower beds.
Feathery grasses blow in the wind,
Late flowers bravely bloom.

One dark winter's morning
a thump on the doormat
Seed catalogues, full of promise.
Perfect flowers and vegetables stare out,
A ray of colour brightens the day,
A future promise of things to come

Irene Legge

The Strathdon Sparklers



The Strathdon Sparklers. Eileen is middle row left, beside the man with the McEwan's Strong Ale bottle

Looking through some of old photographs this one popped up and I wondered if anyone had ever heard of the Strathdon Sparklers? They were a bunch of lovely people who got together to do some entertaining before television put in an appearance in the Strathdon area in 1955. Donald S. Erskine, who was at the time, the Factor of the Candacraig Estate and later moved away to work for The National Trust, persuaded about twenty people young and old to put on a Variety Concert in the large Lonach Hall. We practised together in the

Strathdon School all winter, we had a marvellous pianist, Mrs. Philip with singers, musicians, accordions, harmonica, saw player, as well as comedy items, short sketches, duets and mimes.

It was decided that **8p.m.** prompt was starting time with no reserved seats, (first come best served) with room for school children at the front. Someone wrote an opening chorus for us to the tune of The Dashing White Sergeant and just before the curtain went up, we lit our Sparklers. The children were all excited and the hall was packed tight. (My sister who had just come home on the last bus had to stand at the back for the whole performance) All the glen had come out to see what the local folk could do. It truly was a magical evening.

Our Sparklers lit. Every year we had a new programme, sometimes adapted to a Burns Night. One such night was at Glenbuchat when we had haggis with lit sparklers in it, that was the year of the Sputnik. Donald Erskine was a superb compère and often came up with some super ideas like the one in the photo, the Black and White Minstrels, there was no black prejudice mentioned in those days.

This photo of the whole cast was taken in Tarland hall after it had been rebuilt by the McRobert Trust, the first time

STRATHDON SPARKLERS	
PRODUCER	H. SIMON.
COMPERE	D. S. ERSKINE.
PIANIST	MRS R. J. PHILIP.
PROGRAMME	
1. OPENING CHORUS—"There's No Business Like Show Business."	Strathdon Sparklers.
2. ACCORDION SELECTIONS	Arthur McAllan.
3. DUET	Elma McBain and Charles Cowe.
4. "HOBO DICK" —	Robert Cheyne, Donald Erskine, Colin Niven, Ivan Reid and Ian Shand.
5. "MRS RODGERS TAKES A JOB" ...	Lizbeth Macdonald, Elsie McGregor, Gladys McNicol, Isobel Morrison, Eileen Simon.

Programme from 1957

we had a proper dressing room which we needed with all the dressing up that went on. Two of the cast, Robert Cheyne and Charles Cowe used to do a duet, Bob being dressed up at a woman, singing "Oh Sarah, Oh 'Eney, oh ho, oh ho. " It was hilarious and every time they performed it, they got the biggest applause. (Tommy Handley made it famous in the 1940s).



The Gypsy Camp



Eileen in her Pierette costume, taken at her home

We had an electrician in the cast as well as a joiner, so they helped with lights and scenery with my dad, Hector Simon, who used to check out the halls before taking the bookings. This programme is only one of our performances in Banchory Town Hall so the cast is a bit different from the Tarland one. The fun and laughter we had was unforgettable all those years ago and at our wedding reception Barrie and I were given a wonderful surprise when the Strathdon Sparklers appeared singing our signature tune and doing their individual acts in between dances, entertaining all our Wedding guests.



Eileen as mad conductor Kaul Kale

The last photo is me as Kaul Kale, mad conductor of The Donvale Dopey Droners, with a music stand (which I still have). I used to ask the audience, did they want a flat tune or sharp one, bending it whichever way they had said! The ladies of the Strathdon Sparklers had different instruments, combs, drums, kazoos, penny whistle and the piano. Mrs. Philip would play a tune, like the Blue Danube. and they all joined in. We had a guest artist, Lillie Leek, who came on with a huge suitcase, then after a lot of fuss produced a wolf whistle!

When I was a little girl, I always wanted to be an opera singer, but my Mum said I had to be fat and forty, well I reached forty and got fat, but alas no opera singer. The fun we had with the Strathdon Sparklers gave me the opportunity to perform on stage and enjoy it.

Eileen A. Davies

Note - Anyone who has heard Eileen in action will readily believe the enormous fun both she and her audiences will have had! Ed

A Second Home

My 8 year old godson Mark, was born with a hole in his heart, and was due to have a second operation at Great Ormond Street hospital to repair this. I very much wanted to pray for him, but as I mostly only prayed in church on Sundays, I wanted to find out more about how I could pray at other times. So I decided to write to my husband's second cousin, Chris, who is a nun in an Anglican Contemplative Community called the Sisters of the Love of God at Fairacres in Oxford. I asked Chris if the community would pray for Mark, and would she tell me a bit more about prayer.

That was the beginning, about 45 years ago. Mark's operation was successful and he's now a consultant cardiologist. My association with the Sisters of the Love of God continues.



The welcoming Door

I first stayed with the Community in their guest house for one night, to meet Chris and to talk to two other sisters. Apart from these conversations much of the time was spent in silence. Silent meals, silence in chapel except when it was time for one of the 5 or 6 daily offices or the Eucharist, silence after Compline at 8.30pm until the next day. There was time for reading, walking and trying to pray more and to start to become accustomed to the silent waiting on God. It was strange, but I knew I wanted to stay with the sisters again to learn and experience more of their life. First for a weekend and gradually for two or three weeks a year. They are a monastic community who, drawn by God's love, have come together to make the total gift of themselves for the sake of the world. Their work is prayer, together and alone, and flowing from this is



The Chapel

hospitality, study and hearts open to the world in its beauty and goodness as well as its suffering and confusion.

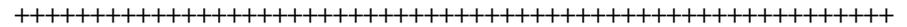
At home, God nudged me (or pushed me) to continue to explore my faith and to deepen prayer in my own life as a wife, mother, colleague and friend. This wasn't always easy, but faith and prayer became much more important to me, I tried to go on retreat each year, and eventually I started to help to lead retreats,

and to accompany people on their own journey of faith. All the time, I continued my links with SLG and tried to spend more time in silence and prayer. As the years went on I felt drawn to have a closer association with the Community, so after much thought and consultation with the sisters, I began to follow the way to become an Oblate sister, which takes several years.

Oblate sisters have a rule of life based on the one the Community has, but adapted to their own circumstances. Briefly, when we make our promises during the Eucharist in the Community chapel, our desire is to seek to live for God, in and through Christ, and to seek to do his will primarily by prayer for each other and for the needs of the world. I need God's help and the prayers of others to try to be faithful to these promises.

I haven't been able to stay with the Community for over 2 years due to Covid restrictions and because the extensive building works that have been done to the Convent means they can't have visitors at the moment. When I do stay with them, as I go through the front door it is like coming home. I feel accepted and welcomed, and for a short time I can share in the life of the Sisters; a life where God is given priority and the daily timetable is built round times of worship and prayer, with practical chores and responsibilities being fitted in. I couldn't live permanently in Community, and I am very happy with my husband and family in Aboyne, but the times when I can join the Sisters at Fairacres are times of hope, joy, challenge and promise, and a sense that this is God's calling.

Carol Simmons



Decoration and Christingles at St Thomas's

There was a great gathering at St Thomas's on Saturday morning, 11th December. The church was being decorated, including an enormous Christmas Tree, the cribs were being arranged, and importantly, Christingles were being made, with the help of the children present.

Below, the picture shows Sue with Archie, Tilley and Teddie, making the Christingles. And Carol shows the way that prayer and action go together as she decorates numerous small Christmas trees, along with Andrew.



Coffee and mince pies were provided, and the whole was a busy, friendly and active group of people - with such wonderful results for everyone to enjoy!

Sheila Maxwell

