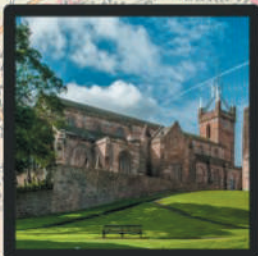
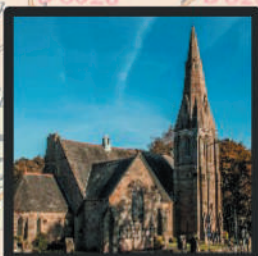


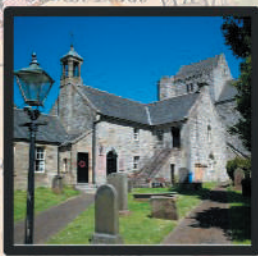
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The Journal of Linlithgow and Avon Valley Parish Church

AUTUMN

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 JOHN 4:12-

2025

Vol 1:2

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Front Cover designed by Gordon Young
Transept Window of St Ninian's Craigmailen Church courtesy of David Johnstone

We are grateful to our printers, jmk, for sponsoring the colour printing of this issue.

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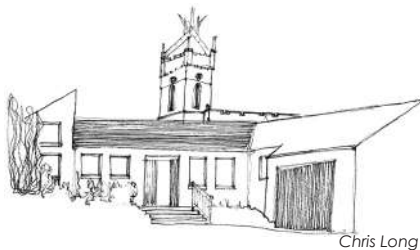
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The views expressed within this magazine by the Editor or any contributor do not necessarily express the views of the Ministers or Kirk Session. Editorial comment and articles do not necessarily contain the official views of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly. Any contributions to the magazine can be submitted to the Editor through the Church Office or to the Editor at myralawson144@btinternet.com

View from the Manse



by Rev Dr Liam Fraser



A good proportion of the couples I marry these days did not meet in the ways that many of our readers met their spouse. Gone are the days of dance halls, church youth groups, and the more traditional ways of meeting your spouse. Today, almost everyone meets on an *app*. If you're wondering what an app is, it is short for 'computer application', and it is on such applications that the young people of today meet each other.

You may be wondering how these work. Well, in addition to some flattering photos, app users upload personal information about themselves that they think is relevant, along with a description about what kind of person they are looking for. You then wade through hundreds of dating profiles, swiping left with your thumb if you don't fancy the person, or right if you do. It can be a depressing experience, but if you're lucky, you could meet the person of your dreams!



We at Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland are doing something similar at the moment. We are putting together a parish - not dating! - profile and uploading it to the world wide web, in the hope that some inspiring minister might bite, and become our new colleague in the Ministry Team.

This is not a straightforward process, however, and not only because of the legal and procedural hoops we have had to jump through. Because it is well known how demanding and difficult ministry can be – even in a good parish like our own – and how unrealistic the expectations of congregations can be.

Two stories illustrate this. The first is a real-life job advert posted by a congregation in the States when looking for a minister. It read:

'We want our minister to be young but mature, someone who challenges us but without causing upset, who loves working with families and young people but devotes his time to the elderly, who is passionate for reaching the unchurched but prioritises the needs of members, who makes at least fifteen pastoral calls a day but answers emails and phone calls immediately.'

You may laugh, but that really is what most congregations expect! The second story isn't much better, however. It's said that a Nominating Committee around 30AD were looking to appoint a new minister. They had fourteen applications, among which were:

John: Says he is a Baptist but definitely doesn't dress like one. Has slept in the outdoors for months on end and stinks to high heaven, eating a disgusting diet of locusts and honey, while shouting abuse at church leaders.

Paul: Bald with a speech impediment, and so much theology we have no idea what he's talking about. He bored one boy so silly he fell out of a window.

Peter: Angry working-class fisherman with faltering faith who had a bust-up with Paul in Antioch. He might also be secretly Jewish.

Jesus: Popular at times, and once grew the Church to 5000. Sadly he managed to offend everyone by telling them the truth, and the church dwindled to twelve people. Seldom stays in one place very long. And, of course, he's single.

Judas: His references are solid. A steady plodder. Conservative. Good connections. Knows how to handle money. We're inviting him to preach this Sunday.

Such are the expectations of congregations, and the demands that are placed upon ministers.

So what do we expect from a new Minister? Well in our parish profile, apart from someone who is reasonably good at preaching and taking services, we want a colleague who is a good team player, who is committed to mission and outreach, and who respects the very broad church we have at Linlithgow and Avon Valley. He/she must be passionate about ministry, be able to discern what God is calling us to do and devoted to reaching every person in our parish. While not quite as bad as the job advert above, even this is a tall order. Because of that, we need you to do two things in the coming weeks. First, to pray that God would send the right person to us for this important moment in the life of our new congregation, and second, like the dating apps of today, we would be given grace to discern who to swipe left to, and who to swipe right to.



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It's Been Almost a Year!

by Tom Costley



By the time you read this edition of the magazine, the first anniversary of the creation of the new Parish of Linlithgow and Avon Valley will have come and gone. It seems an appropriate time to review and celebrate what has been achieved in the past 12 months, but also to identify those areas where further action is required.

In the first six months, the focus of the Kirk Session was very much on establishing the structures which would enable the new Parish to operate effectively. A new single charity was created with consolidated financial accounts. A total of 16 Teams is now in place with responsibility for the various activities which are central to the operation of the Parish – under the two categories of Worship, Mission and Outreach on one hand and Enabling on the other:

Linlithgow & Avon Valley Church - Kirk Session

Worship, Mission and Outreach

Ministry			
Worship	Fellowship	Outreach	Pastoral Care
Discipleship	Children & Young People	Social Justice	

Enabling

Finance & Stewardship	Fundraising	Property Maintenance	Health & Safety	HR
Projects	Comms	IT & Data Protection	Wellbeing & Training	Safeguarding

Strategic Planning

The Parish has an extensive property portfolio to maintain – four churches, one of which is A-listed and two of which are B-listed. We also had three manse but have recently sold the St Ninian's Craigmillen manse, and we also have three church halls – one of which being Cross House in Linlithgow which is also an A-listed building. A considerable amount of time and effort has had to be spent during 2025 in establishing the programme of work required to maintain and, in some cases, to develop these buildings to provide enhanced facilities for use by the Parish but also the wider community.

One specific example has been the detailed project planning which had to be undertaken to enable the appropriate equipment to be brought into St Michael's Church to undertake the stonework repairs. The Property Team, under the leadership of Donald Greig, deserves our considerable thanks, both for the time they give but also the skills and experience which they offer to the Parish.

Over the summer months, our focus has been on navigating our way through the Church of Scotland procedures for identifying and recruiting a second, full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament to join the Ministry Team. Finally, in early September, the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian gave its approval to formally start the recruitment process. By the time you read this article, a Nominating Committee will have been formed who will take responsibility for interviewing applicants and identifying, ideally, a sole nominee who will be asked to preach to the congregation. Following that service, a vote will be held as to whether we are in favour of offering the position to this nominee. The timeline for this process is difficult to predict but we would hope to have everything completed during the first few months of 2026.

With the coming together of the four churches within the Parish, we recognised that effective communication would be vitally important. In this context, there has been positive feedback for the regular announcements of the key points from the monthly Kirk Session meetings at each of the worship sites. Also, the monthly newsletter is a valuable channel for updating members about the range of activities and events being held within the Parish. Discussions are ongoing as to whether it would be possible to increase the frequency of these newsletters.

Work has been undertaken on developing a logo for the new Parish and the Kirk Session will be asked to approve the imagery recommended by the Communications Team at its October meeting. All being well, we will be able to launch the new logo in early November. Work is also ongoing on further developing the website for the Parish.

We are blessed by the fact that, contrary to many churches, we continue to attract new people, both to our different services as well as to the activities which we offer. However, to continue to provide the wide range of activities, both to our members and adherents but also to the wider community, we are dependent on many volunteers for their time and skills. To those who do so, a heartfelt thanks from the Kirk Session. If you would like to be more involved in the life and work of the Parish, be that on a regular or occasional basis, we are always looking for new volunteers – I would be delighted to hear from you.

Tom Costley, Session Clerk

sessionclerk@linavonchurch.org.uk

Mobile: 07970099521

Festival of Christmas Trees 2025

by Margaret Johnston

Where has the last year gone? I can't believe we are starting to think about the 2025 Festival of Christmas Trees, which this year will run from 5th-7th December in St Michael's Church. Interest in taking part in this year's event is already exceeding our expectations, and I am sure it will be another fantastic weekend which will see the church full of beautifully decorated Christmas trees.



The theme for this year is 'Christmas through the Ages' and we are asking organisations to decorate their trees based on either a year or period of time. It could be a year that is significant to them, a decade they want to remember, or based on a Christmas from years gone by. We can't wait to see what everyone comes up with.

Last year's event could have been a Hollywood blockbuster with over 3,600 visitors viewing 79 trees decorated based on Christmas Movies. We had everything from Buddy the Elf's Breakfast spaghetti to the Polar Express. LUCS even celebrated their 2020 Christmas movie which was a lockdown special.

We raised a phenomenal £12,439.66 which was divided equally between our three charities, Linlithgow Link, Bethany Christian Trust and River Kids. Charities for this year's event have not yet been chosen.

We will once again be joined over the weekend by some fantastic choirs and dance groups, including Linlithgow Ladies Choir, LAMP, Linlithgow Male Rugby Club Choir, Quattro Voci and Highland with Claire – all these always add to the special atmosphere throughout the weekend.



On Saturday 6th December, between 10am and 11am, we will once again host a quiet hour. The lights will be on but there will be no twinkling lights or music, giving those who enjoy peace and calmness a time to enjoy the Festival of Christmas trees as well.



We are lucky that Santa and Mrs Claus will be visiting Cross House again on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th December. You might be able to catch a glimpse of them in the windows of Cross House.

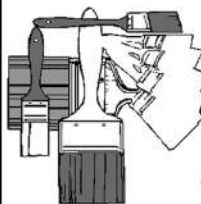
Santa and Mrs Claus will be next to the drop-off point for any gifts that you may like to donate to the Salvation Army Gift Appeal.

All donations of new toys and gifts for babies, children and young people would be warmly welcomed. Please do not wrap your gifts.



We can't wait to welcome you along to the Festival of Christmas trees once again.

Photos courtesy of Martin Brown



Johnny Alves

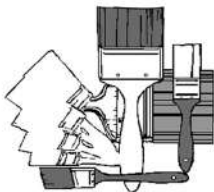
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PARISH REGISTER

BAPTISMS

June

Reuben Burns, Winchburgh

July

Freya Cassidy, Linlithgow

Estelle Loggie, Linlithgow

Fergus Loggie, Linlithgow



June

Elizabeth (Betty) Watson, Linlithgow

Peter Ritchie, Linlithgow

July

Hannah Burns, Armadale

Ena Stobie, Linlithgow

Keith Stirling, Torphichen

Morag Ainslie, Linlithgow

Tom Bretherton, Linlithgow

August

Rhona Bennett, Linlithgow

Alison Barclay, Bo'ness

Rosie Dowie, Linlithgow

Williamina Walker, Linlithgow

Jim Alexander, Linlithgow

Betty Alexander, Linlithgow

Elsie Jackson, Linlithgow

WEDDINGS

June

Kristina Fraser to Nathan Robertson

Meg Wright to Kieran Smith

July

Karla Hardie to Stuart Jack

Sarah Beattie to Alasdair Allan

August

Kayleigh Neade to Peter McWhinnie

Lynne Swan to John Bremner

Caitlin Jamieson to Greig Stewart

September

Catherine Macdonald to Alexander Ward

October

Charlotte Ritchie Laing to Richard Montgomery

FUNERALS

September

Annie McKerrow, Linlithgow

Thomas Bertram, Linlithgow

Janice Morrison, Polmont

Ann Haughie, Linlithgow

Vera Archer, Linlithgow

Mary McKain, Westfield

October

Roberta Hunter, Armadale

Angela Robertson, Torphichen

Evelyn Kidd, Linlithgow

John Lear, Linlithgow

The Very Rev Dr Alan McDonald, Linlithgow



CHRISTMAS SERVICES 2025

**Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland
extends a warm welcome to you and your family to
join us for our Advent and Christmas Services**

St Michael's Services

Sunday 14th December Third Sunday in Advent

10.00am St Michael's at Springfield Carol Service

10.00am Morning Service with Christmas Mystery Play

1.00pm Christmas Mystery Play

Wednesday, 17th December

7.00pm Blue Christmas Service

Sunday, 21st December Fourth Sunday in Advent

10.00am Christmas Family Service

7.00pm Festival of Lessons and Carols

Wednesday, 24th December Christmas Eve

7.00pm Christingle Service

11.00pm Community Carol Singing

11.30pm Joint Christmas Eve Watchnight Service

Thursday, 25th December Christmas Day

11.00am Joint Christmas Morning Family Service

Sunday, 28th December

10.00am Morning Service

Sunday, 4th January 2026

10.00am Epiphany

Torphichen Kirk Services

Saturday, 20th December

7.30pm Carol Evening in St John's Hall (See page 27)

Sunday 21st December Fourth Sunday in Advent

11.15am Service of Lessons & Carols in Torphichen Kirk

Wednesday 24th December Christmas Eve

8.00pm Christmas Eve Service for all ages in

Torphichen Kirk – 'Celebrating Christmas around the world'

St Ninian's Craigmillen Services

Wednesdays at 1pm up to 24th December

A short service of readings and prayer

Sunday, 30 November First Sunday in Advent

11.00am Morning Service

Sunday, 7 December Second Sunday in Advent

11.00am Morning Service

Sunday, 14 December Third Sunday in Advent

11.00am Morning Service

Sunday, 21 December Fourth Sunday in Advent

11.00am Nativity Service

Wednesday, 24 December Christmas Eve

6.30pm Christingle Service

11pm for 11.30pm Joint Christmas Eve Watchnight Service
in St Michael's

Thursday, 25 December Christmas Day

11.00am Joint Christmas Morning Family Service in St Michael's

Avonbridge Services

Sunday, 30th November

11am First week of Advent & Communion

Sunday, 7th December

10:30am Agape Breakfast & Gift Service

Sunday, 14th December

10am United Service in St Michael's

Friday, 19th December

7pm Community Carols, Candles & Christmas pies

Sunday, 21st December

10am Lessons and Carols led by James White

Wednesday, 24th December

11.30pm Christmas Eve Watchnight Service

Sunday, 28th December

10am Family Service

News from Torphichen Kirk

by Innes Duncan and Sarah Young

At Torphichen, there is a longstanding awareness of the need to respond to both the inequalities and suffering in the world and to the state of the planet itself. This has taken various forms.

As well as contributing to the West Lothian Foodbank, Christian Aid and a Christmas toy appeal, charities which are supported across the parish, there are several other areas in which Torphichen Kirk is involved.



Working with Link to Hope (formerly Link Romania), we have provided Christmas shoeboxes for families and elderly recipients in Moldova (NE), Romania (NE), Bulgaria (N) and the Ukraine (S and W) since 1998. Link works with the poorest and most marginalised through education and social care to bring change and hope. Over the years Torphichen and Westfield Primary Schools, the wider Parish, Linlithgow and Bo'ness Rotary, as well as many individuals, have contributed to this project. In return we have heard from those delivering the shoeboxes and of the wider work of this highly respected and experienced charity with partners in each of these Eastern European countries. We remain a collection point for these boxes across the

Central Belt and host the men who collect from us and then deliver to Eastern Europe. <https://linktohope.co.uk>

Edinburgh Zoo has an animal sponsorship programme and, as part of our Eco Congregation commitment and responsibility, we have been Gold sponsors of the Asiatic Lions since 2001 and Silver sponsors of the Crowned Lemurs since 2023. You can see our name displayed beside their enclosures. This commitment was initiated by the children and young people and developed through annual Zoo trips. Now, as a result of increasing awareness, the entire congregation contributes. <https://rzss.org.uk>



Torphichen and Avonbridge churches are linked through World Mission with Magina Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA Magina). This linkage began with visits both to and from Magina and the establishment of the Light Project.

The vision has been to create a building for worship (for 600 people), with a Health centre and Nursery school for children of families affected by AIDS.



Initially, in partnership with Torphichen Primary school, cards were designed by the children of Torphichen and Magina; these were sold to raise funds that enabled construction materials to be bought.

After 15 years, at the time of writing, the building has been made weather-tight and can be used for regular worship, thanks to the prayers and combined efforts of everyone involved.

There have been many benefits for all partners with the focus being on cooperation, not just provision of aid. It has been sustained because it has involved local control and management with purchases made locally too. Torphichen Primary received funding for an art project, gained their Eco Schools award and other recognition, as well as direct links at times with Kenyan schools, and our churches have had the prayerful support and messages of encouragement from the Magina Congregation as a result of our regular correspondence.

Magina has regularly been chosen as the charity to receive money raised at events, especially those involving the whole Community and young people.

We would very much like to arrange a further visit by folks from Magina or by representatives of our Parish in the near future. <http://pcea.or.ke>

The most recent action is that of supporting Sunflower Scotland, a charity founded by one of our members, which provides aid to Ukraine. He has, along with others, been delivering aid in person, every few weeks, directly to the people who need it, not to intermediaries, in western Ukraine. We get regular harrowing reports of trips to the frontline villages.

The charity speaks directly to Ukrainian frontline doctors, to soldiers, to disabled people, to find out exactly what is needed. They have three priority areas: delivering medical aid to frontline medics and hospitals, rehabilitation of war victims, supporting vulnerable children.

Our support takes the form of money, buying required articles, prayer and personal support of the team. <https://sunflowerscotland.co.uk>

If anyone would like to know more about any of these activities, please get in touch.



Linlithgow and Avon Valley Parish Church: St Ninian's Craigmallen

by Elaine Stewart

The roots of St Ninian's Craigmallen Parish Church can be traced back to the 'Preaching Stone' on Craigmallen Farm when a Sabbath Day's preaching, led by Mr John Hunter, a Probationer, was granted and held on January 14th, 1739. Mr Hunter preached his first sermon from the book of Ezekiel, Chapter 37, verse 26, *'I shall make an everlasting covenant with them to ensure peace and prosperity. I shall greatly increase their numbers, and I shall put my sanctuary in their midst for all time.'* A relative of Mr Hunter is actually an Elder in the current congregation.



A church was built in 1742 but the congregation split in 1747 resulting in one group worshipping in different places before building a church in 1772 between Avon Place and the High Street in Linlithgow (West Church). The other group continued to worship at Craigmallen Farm; however they too moved to Linlithgow in 1806 and in the following year built the East Church, which was situated above the Railway Station.

The breach was eventually healed in 1820 when they became one denomination again, but the congregations in Linlithgow maintained their separate identity. The church at Avon Place/High Street (West Church) was replaced in 1834 (by the building which later came to be known as Craigmallen Church). In 1847, by a further act of Union, the East and West congregations became part of the United Presbyterian Church.

Meanwhile, in 1843, following the Disruption within the Church of Scotland, more than a third of its ministers broke away to form the Free Church. Thus a Free Church congregation came to exist in Linlithgow.

In September 1844 a church was opened which was situated at the junction of Falkirk Road and Bathgate Road and stood until 1971, when it was demolished.

In 1872, the above Free Church congregation decided to build a new church. Ground was feued from the late Thomas Chalmers of Longcroft and building commenced in 1873 – the feu charter was dated 14th March 1874: the exact date of completion is uncertain, but a Communion Service was held in 1875 in what was then known as the High United Free Church.

In 1900, the United Presbyterian and Free Churches united to become the United Free Church of Scotland, resulting in there being three UF Churches in Linlithgow – the East; the West; and the High (the current building). On 1st March, 1917, the East and West Churches united and became Craigmallen United Free Church. When the United Free Church rejoined the Church of Scotland in 1929, the then two congregations became St. Ninian's Parish Church (formerly High United Free) and Craigmallen Parish Church.

The churches remained as such until 2nd June 1954, when they became the united congregation of St Ninian's Craigmallen. On 2nd June 2014, the Church celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Union and prepared a time capsule to be opened in 2074, containing a number of items and a letter. The 70th anniversary was celebrated in 2024, which was also 150



years since the Church was built. The current building has changed over the years – the Transept was added in 1900 and the Pulpit, which was originally in the centre of the Chancel Arch with a hall behind, was moved to its present position in 1957.

The Church has beautiful stained-glass windows, some plaques each of which tell a story, and a War Memorial in memory of the men of the congregation who gave their lives for our freedom in the Great War, 1914 -1918.

The most recent change resulted in a Union on 1 November 2024 with Avonbridge, St Michael's Linlithgow, and Torphichen Kirk, all now known as Linlithgow and Avon Valley Parish Church, continuing a journey that only God knows how it will continue, and it is in Him that together we put our trust.



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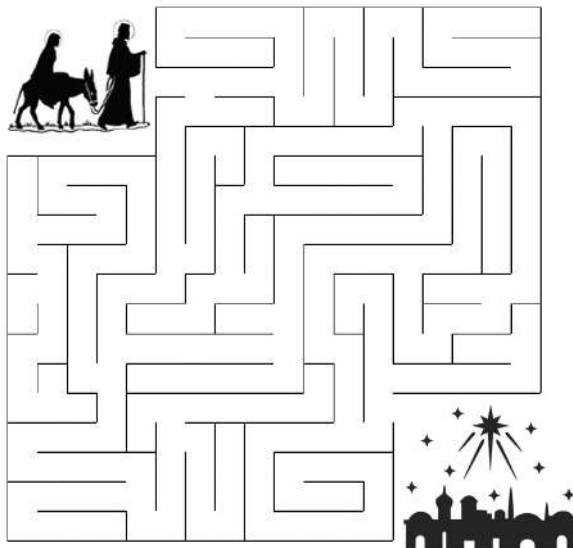
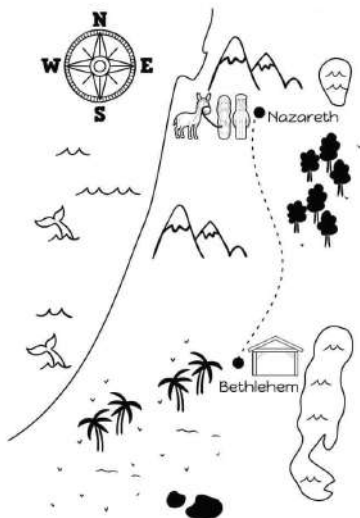
When a new baby is going to be born, Mums and Dads often get ready by collecting things like those in the list below. Can you find them all in the word square? Words may run in straight lines any direction.

C	R	A	D	L	E	Y	S	C	B	Y
H	W	A	D	B	R	D	L	L	L	M
A	T	I	N	E	I	R	P	O	A	M
N	G	A	S	B	O	B	U	T	N	U
G	A	R	B	T	O	C	S	H	K	D
I	U	N	I	T	A	D	H	E	E	S
N	M	N	T	R	A	M	C	S	T	N
G	O	L	S	G	E	A	H	R	S	T
M	E	E	S	T	A	R	A	B	L	O
A	A	E	N	A	P	P	I	E	S	Y
T	R	E	S	I	L	I	R	E	T	S

bath	bib
blankets	bottle
car seat	clothes
changing mat	cradle
dummy	monitor
nappies	nursery
pram	pushchair
steriliser	toys

The left over letters spell out what Mary and Joseph had ready when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

It was a long way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Help Mary and Joseph find their way through the maze.



BRUCE JAMIESON'S LOCAL HISTORY PRESENTATIONS 2025 ALL START AT 7-00PM AND ARE BROADCAST ON ZOOM.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26: 'LINLITHGOW AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION'. A fully illustrated review of the life and times of a Scottish burgh in the mid 16th century, exploring the impact of the Protestant challenge to the Catholic Church featuring martyrdom, mayhem and murder.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30: 'LOOKING AFTER LINLITHGOW'S POOR'. An examination of the treatment of the poor in and around Linlithgow, including the role of the Kirk, the old Poor Law, the creation of the Poorhouse and more recent assistance given to those in need.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21: 'LINLITHGOW'S ENTREPRENEURIAL EMIGRANTS'. Over 100 illustrations tracing the lives of some eight individuals and their families who left Linlithgow for a new life in America and Australia – their trials and tribulations and, in some cases, ultimate success.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11: 'TRAVELS WITH MY TEACHER'. A review of over 30 years of Educational Excursions with students of Linlithgow Academy. Visit fascinating, historical sites across Europe, Asia and the USA. Follow the students as they explored historical sites. Enjoy their reactions and antics. Smile with some of the real local characters and what they got up to. Not to be missed – a one-off experience!

For more information please contact Bruce on bruceajamieson@yahoo.com

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Development of a Logo Identity for Linlithgow and Avon Valley Parish Church

by Gregor Preston

The Communication group was tasked to commission and develop a logo for our new Parish of Linlithgow and Avon Valley. After reviewing tenders, we chose CGH Creative, Linlithgow as our preferred designer. Our clear brief delivered effective descriptions of what was and was not required within the project. We envisaged an exciting logo for the new parish – with keywords crystallised by who we are, what we do, and what we aim to convey both to members and to everyone in our communities: Worship, Support, Opportunity, Community, Variety. Before starting work, CGH researched all churches, focusing on location, architectural details and use of stained glass.

CGH then jotted sketched rough ideas for a potential logo. After several weeks, they moved to a computer to produce a range of logo designs – exploring imagery, typography and colour, in readiness for a first presentation of a range of design options. After removing some creative routes, we had clear ideas on what options were favoured yet needed further development. CGH then refined the designs for a further presentation, including how the logo can be applied to a range of simple but impactful items including signage, stationery and name badges. At this point local illustrator Evonne Summers joined the CGH team, producing high quality digital illustrations.

Two concepts – 'Avon Bridge' and 'Four Churches' – became preferred solutions. Both were challenging to deliver and required further research, including a review of logos of venues including St Giles' Cathedral, the Vatican and St Paul's Cathedral – with Evonne again refining the illustration elements. The finished logo design was presented to Session for final acceptance, after which CGH produced a set of master logo formats to allow its reproduction in various ways.

The bridge portrays connection, support, and unity; each arch or span of the bridge subtly alludes to each church supporting the whole structure. It shows that, while each church has its individual identity, we now work in unison. The river symbolises life, spiritual renewal, and passage of time. Its calm flow reflects peace, grace, and the continuous journey of faith. It also suggests that this union is natural and life-giving, just as a river nourishes land around it. Green fields evoke growth, fertility, and abundance, representing spiritual fruitfulness and opportunities for ministry and outreach. Clear skies suggest hope, joy, and new beginnings.

In short, our new logo represents a sense of belonging to something enduring and beautiful.



**LINLITHGOW AND
AVON VALLEY**
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland: Property Team

by Donald Greig

The Property Team looks after the day-to-day maintenance of the parish's 14 properties – including 4 churches, 4 church halls, 3 manses and 2 flats. Just to make things more interesting, several of these buildings are listed, which adds a whole new layer of complexity on top!

The team helps make sure properties are safe, with all kinds of tests carried out, many of these annually – gas certification, appliance testing, fire safety, security and access management to name a few.

That's not all the team does though. We're working hard this year to progress some essential upgrades across all our sites.

Avonbridge: You may be aware that we've encountered some issues with electrical circuits in the sanctuary at Avonbridge. These are largely age-related, and we're exploring options for how to resolve this – it's not a straightforward task as we have to think about all kinds of things, from how we heat the building more efficiently to the best way to make sure we don't lose it all again through the windows.

St Michael's: Just think about how much you might need to spend on your house if it was 600 years old, add a bunch of zeros and you'd be pretty close to assessing the scale of challenge of maintaining a building like the church.

It's further complicated by the fact that we own only a few feet of ground around the building so simple tasks like installing a new drain involve West Lothian Council, Historic Environment Scotland and an archaeologist in case we inadvertently dig up some ancient artefacts.

In October, we had to find a way of fitting the machine in the image in through the south door of the church to complete a stone survey and descaling work.

There really is never a dull moment – ever!



St Ninian's Craigmalen: If you've driven past the West Port in Linlithgow recently you may have noticed the lovely new wall at Longcroft Hall – the transformation from a pile of rubble to the beautiful wall happened like magic – but expensive magic!

We also had to do some work at Longcroft Hall earlier this year to rebuild a collapsed drain which was causing problems, but, at this moment in time, apart from routine maintenance, we don't have any more renovation plans for St Ninian's Craigmalen this year. Hopefully this will still be the case when you're reading this!

Torphichen: Torphichen Kirk itself is relatively 'young' at around 270 years old but it's attached to the Preceptory dating back to the 12th century, bringing with it a fresh set of challenges, such as rainwater from the older building splashing with some force on to the roof of the Kirk whenever it rains. This means work to the roof of the Kirk, which has a knock-on effect on other areas of the building, such as the church bell and bell tower, which needs repaired, but is hampered by the condition of the adjacent roof. A capital project is underway to examine the options available here.

St John's Hall has recently been refurbished and is an excellent resource available to the local community to use, and the nearby manse is undergoing extensive renovations in preparation for the arrival of a new minister in 2026.

The Property Team

We have a wonderful team of skilled volunteers, who all give very generously of their time to keep all our buildings safe and comfortable to use. They go above and beyond, every day, identifying issues, engaging contractors and getting quotes for work, and then chaperoning the contractors while they are onsite, inspecting the finished job before we submit the invoice to our Finance Team for payment.

We rely heavily on our SharePoint site to help us keep track of our spending against budget, ensure that our maintenance schedules stay on track, and to record progress against all our various projects. We meet on the first Tuesday of every month at Cross House.

We have Property Coordinators across our sites in Avonbridge, **Martin Georgeson**, in Torphichen, **Jo Hirst** and in St Ninian's Craigmalen, **Bert Laing** where **Ricki Steedman** is taking over the reins to let Bert retire after many years. **Phill Ratcliffe** is our parish Health and Safety Officer supported by **Alastair Young**, with **Jim Rae** taking the lead on heating, **David Robertson** on Security and **Jim Gilmour** leading on some of our larger projects. **Andrew Povey-Richards** and **Ken Duerden** complete the team, helping us with their professional expertise. We also rely on **Jeff Christie** and **Ivan Coyle** to check our many electrical appliances annually to keep them safe to use.

We're blessed with being able to rely on an even wider pool of volunteers who are always willing to help us out when we start to sink. But we're always in need of more help, so if you're breathing, you can help us!



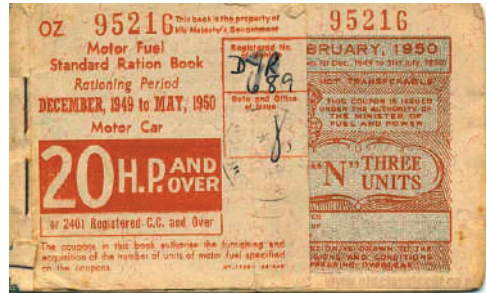
Yesterday Revisited



by Iain Harrison

Background to 1950

In the UK in 1950 rationing of motor fuel finally came to an end after 13 years. In a General Election Labour held on to power but their majority was reduced to a slender 5 seats. With a definite Scottish flavour, the Stone of Scone (otherwise known as the Stone of Destiny) was removed from Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day by four Scottish students sparking a nationwide search that finally ended in April 1951 when the stone was left in Arbroath Abbey. The stone was returned to London and remained there until 1996 when it finally returned to Scotland.



Further afield in 1950, India became a republic and sadly the Korean War started with China and Russia supporting the North and the USA and its allies supporting the south. As we know the country remains divided 75 years later.

But what was happening in the Churches that make up Linlithgow and Avon Valley and in particular what was happening in Torphichen Kirk.

Elders

The Kirk Session meeting on 18th January was held to count the congregational votes to compile a list of prospective candidates for eldership, after which it was agreed that the Moderator interview certain nominees and at a later meeting report on progress. Sadly, there is nothing in later minutes to say how successful this was, but the assumption must be that it was successful.

Membership

At the meeting held on 7th May 1950, the Moderator submitted the names of candidates who had offered themselves for membership of the Church. There were 17 names in total, mostly Torphichen residents but interestingly there were 4 people from Linlithgow and 1 from Bathgate.

A further influx of new members was minuted in the meeting held on 19th November with 8 women and 2 men joining the congregation.

Church Repairs

In the June meeting the Moderator reported on progress and repairs to Church buildings. As a result the Kirk Session agreed to move the Sunday services on

18th and 25th June to the Church Hall to allow for the cleaning and painting of the Church interior. In addition, it was agreed that, if necessary, the use of a room at the school be procured for Sunday School services,

Antique Candlesticks

Also at the June meeting, the Moderator advised that he had received a very generous gift of two antique candlesticks from Colonel H M Cadell, The Grange, Linlithgow. A condition was involved with the gift, namely that the Academy Scout Movement (Rover Scouts) would have the use of them for any special event, such as the installation of new members. The Kirk Session agreed to this condition.

Bathgate Communications

Members discussed the question of having a representative at the meetings of the Presbytery in Bathgate. The response must have been fairly lukewarm or mixed, as they 'ultimately' agreed to carry this forward for further discussion at the next meeting. The word 'ultimately' suggests that a lengthy discussion took place. Again I cannot see from the 1950 minutes what the eventual outcome was.

The Clerk advised that a communication had been received from the Presbytery of Bathgate about an appeal for financial support for the Livingston Station Church Hall. Session agreed that the Clerk pass this to the Finance Board, with the request that it might be discussed by the board and reported back later.

Annual Meeting and Finances

At the December meeting, which appears to have been held on 24th December, it was agreed that 23rd February be accepted as the official date for the annual meeting of the congregation. The Treasurer reported that the balance in the Session Fund available for distribution by resolution of the Kirk Session amounted to £8/14/5 - or £8.72 for our younger readers. The Kirk Session resolved that this sum, equivalent to £381.85 in today's money, be transferred to the General Account and instructed the Treasurer accordingly.

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Mission: What Does It Mean to You?

by Heather Stephens

Back in August, I attended my first Candidates Gathering in St Andrews, a weekend for those beginning their journey into ministry. The theme was 'mission,' and it stirred up more questions than answers. What does mission mean to you? What kind of mission are you called to? And why does such a small word, just seven letters, feel so overwhelmingly large?

Is 'mission' something we fear in the Church? Perhaps we associate it with pressure, planning, or public speaking. But what I learned that weekend is this: **mission isn't a big word at all.** It's something we live every day when we walk with Jesus.

Mission happens in the quiet moments. When we smile from the heart at a stranger. When we offer a warm bowl of soup to someone in need. When we open a food bank or simply listen with compassion. Yes, some acts take more time than others, but all are missional when they're rooted in love.

In Luke 14, Jesus reminds us to invite those who cannot repay us, the poor, the crippled, the blind. That's the essence of mission: reaching beyond our church walls to those who haven't yet encountered God's grace. Of course, we must care for our congregations, but our calling is also to those outside, those who may never step through our doors.

At the end of the weekend, we were asked to share our 'take-home' thought. For me, it was a vision of a cherry blossom tree standing in the centre of a village. Its soft pink petals offered warmth. Its trunk was strong, rooted deep in the earth. Its branches swayed gently, inviting people in. And when the petals fell, they drifted into gardens, down streets, through letterboxes, seen everywhere.

That tree is the Church. Grounded in faith. Open in spirit. Scattering God's love far and wide, even to those who don't accept the invitation.



By the time you read this, the blossoms will have fallen. But as winter settles in, let's reflect on how we'll feed the cherry blossom trees of our Churches, preparing them for a new season of mission in Linlithgow and Avon Valley.

Because mission isn't just a moment. It's a movement. And it begins with love.

Kirk Session Contacts

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Christmas Events

Festival of Christmas Trees

Friday, 5th and Saturday, 6th December – 10am to 7pm

Sunday, 7th December – 12 noon to 7pm in St Michael's Church.

Mystery Play

Sunday, 14th December during the 10am Morning Service and at 1pm in St Michael's Church.

Torphichen

Saturday, 20th December – Carol Evening (with cakes) in St John's Hall at 7.30pm. (Musicians 7.00)

The music is by an ad hoc orchestra, with players from beginners to professionals. It is not a performance, more a participatory event. If anyone would like to come and play, please contact Innes Duncan (01506 652169 or innesduncan57@hotmail.com) so that music is available for your instrument.



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