



September 2025
Newsletter

Old High St Stephen's Church of Scotland

SUNDAY SERVICES

Following the closure of the Old High Church for Sunday Worship, all Sunday services are now held at St Stephen's Church at 10.30am. Services are recorded and are available via:

OHSS website:

www.oldhighststephens.com

Youtube:

www.youtube.com (type in Old High St Stephens)

OHSS Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/oldhighststephens

Links are also sent to our e-mail list following the service.

To go on our e-mail list, please contact our [Church Administrator](#).

CONTACT US

Church Administrator:

(079 342 85924)

invernesschurch@gmail.com



If you would like us to keep in touch – please send us your up-to-date e-mail and address details

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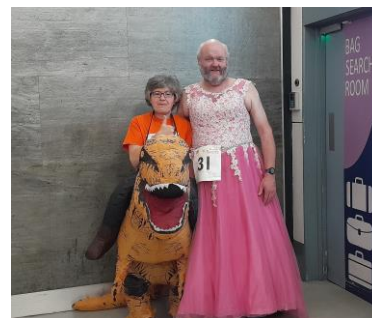
THOUGHTS FROM REV JAMES Some rambling thoughts... And many thanks.

So a wee bit about where I am. Last week I passed my final review which means I'm now officially allowed to apply for any vacant charges which come up. There aren't many vacant pulpits nearby, and it is my intention to stay in the local area but I'm trusting that God has a place out there for me. Loads of people have expressed a concern for my future employment, and while I'm grateful for their concern, I'm aware that the path which brought me into Ministry, and eventually on to Old High St Stephen's, hasn't been straight, but it's been a fun journey. There's something out there. For the moment you're stuck with me. ☺

What I must do is give thanks to all of you for this past year. Normally when a Probationer is doing their final year, they work in a parish with a Minister. The Kirk let me carry on as your locum, with Aileen as the Interim Moderator while being supervised by Ross in Hamilton. This is a very unusual way of doing things, but in the end I'm happy how it worked out. It was good to be able to go visit other congregations and to see how they work. And I am very grateful to my support group through the year for their help, as well as to all of you in the congregation for your ongoing support as I've been off on conferences and other study.

I'm training alongside about 20 other candidates at the moment. May I please ask you to pray for all of them, as they embark on their own journeys. You may encounter some of them in a pulpit near you as they embark on their own ministries. I have a lot of ordinations coming up!

And thanks also to everyone who has supported Susan and I as we raised funds for Maggie's this year. All of you who sponsored us, baked, bought books, came to the quiz night and cheered us along in so many ways was a huge lift, and has done so much to support the local Maggie's centre.



As well as the London Marathon, Susan and I took part in the Runway run at midnight last weekend. Susan was in her dinosaur costume and I dug out the frock I wore for the covid vaccination. And yes, I was beaten by an inflatable dinosaur. With your help we've raised £10,500 so thanks very much for your generosity.



DRAFT BASIS OF UNION AND FORMATION OF

MIDMILLS PARISH The congregations of Old High St Stephen's Church of Scotland, Inverness (SC035073) and Crown Church, Inverness (Church of Scotland) (SC018159) Churches shall be united on 1st January 2026 or from a date to be determined by Presbytery, and that on the following terms and conditions:

1. **Name:** The name of the united charge shall be Midmills Parish Church, Inverness, Church of Scotland (SC018159).
2. **Property and Funds:** The property and funds belonging to or held on behalf of both Inverness Old High St Stephen's and Inverness Crown congregations shall belong to or be held on behalf of the united charge/congregation and any transference necessary shall be duly effected.
3. **Places of worship:** The church at present used and occupied by the congregation of Inverness Crown shall be the place of worship of the united charge. The church at present used by the congregation of Inverness Old High St Stephen's shall be reviewed in **2026** in accordance with the Presbytery Mission Plan. The decision of Presbytery shall be binding on all parties. Following that review, any building not being retained shall be sold, let or otherwise disposed of subject to the titles on which it is held, subject to the approval of the Presbytery and, if necessary, the General Trustees or the General Assembly. The free proceeds of any such sale or let shall: (a) if falling within the scope of the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act 5 2024) , be credited to the benefit of the congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund; or (b) if not falling within the scope of the said Act, be held, and applied for fabric purposes in connection with the properties of the congregation.
4. **Manse:** Upon review by Presbytery, the manse of the congregations of either Inverness Crown or Inverness Old High St Stephen's shall either serve as the manse of the united charge, or else shall be sold to enable another property to be purchased which will then serve as the said manse. The free proceeds of any such sale or let shall: (a) if falling within the scope of the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act 5, 2024), be credited to the benefit of the congregation

in the Consolidated Fabric Fund; or (b) if not falling within the scope of the said Act, be held and applied for fabric purposes in connection with the properties of the congregation.

5. **Territorial Responsibility:** The bounds to be served by the united congregation shall be those as the Presbytery shall determine. The parish boundaries will incorporate Inverness Crown Church boundaries and some of the Inverness Old High St Stephen's parish, with the addition of the Raigmore and the east side of the northern Longman estate.
6. **Kirk Session:** The elders of both Kirk Sessions shall form with the minister the Kirk Session of the united charge.
7. **Congregational Management:** The temporal affairs of the united congregation shall be administered by the Kirk Session in terms of the Unitary Constitution, the Delegation of Assembly being authorised to issue the appropriate Deed of Constitution to the said congregation.
8. **Ministerial Support:** Following the demission of *The Rev Douglas R Robertson* (currently minister at Inverness Crown) 31st December 2025 and therefore both charges being vacant, the united charge shall proceed to the appointment of a minister in terms of the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act 11, 2025). The minister shall be called on the basis of a seven-year Reviewable Charge in terms of section 9.1.1 of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act 8, 2021).
9. **Power to Adjust:** While the articles and terms shall form the Basis of Union for the two congregations now uniting, the united charge shall be free, like other congregations, to adjust arrangements under the authority of Presbytery as need may arise.

KIRK SESSION MEETING 26 AUGUST At our meeting on Tuesday 26th August the Kirk Session voted to approve the Draft Basis of Union which is attached. This is very good news. It means that we can bring the basis of Union to the Congregation on the 14th September with the support of the Kirk Session behind it. It was mentioned last night that some folks are not clear about the situation going forward and I was asked to provide some sort of clarity, I will try.

Following Rev Douglas Robertson's decision to demit as minister from Crown Church from 31st December 2025, that means as the charge will be vacant, therefore, the Presbytery Plan for the union comes into effect. This doesn't remove the opportunity to vote on the document which details how the united congregation will work, i.e. the Draft Basis of Union. We will vote on this Draft Basis of Union on 14th September after worship.

The presbytery plan identified Crown Church as the place of regular Sunday worship from 1 January 2026. Presbytery, however, noted the suggestions of both Crown and Old High St. Stephen's, that the St Stephen's building could be retained and provide many missional opportunities. This led to the decision by presbytery to change the date of closure of St Stephens from December 2025 to December 2026 to offer the united kirk session and congregation an opportunity to make a case to retain St Stephen's building. They have also now agreed that the Presbytery Buildings officer and Presbytery Finance officer will provide advice and guidance.

Despite Rev Douglas Robertson's demission Church Law still requires a congregational vote on the draft basis of union. A vote of approval will allow the two kirk sessions to begin working towards a good transition almost immediately, making plans for a new future. A vote against the draft Basis of Union, will not prevent the union, presbytery will 'enact' the agreed Presbytery Plan. It will just mean that we might lose the opportunity to pull together in advance in order to 'hit the ground running' in January.

CONGREGATIONAL VOTE As already indicated, the Congregation will have an opportunity to vote for or against the Basis of Union between Old High St Stephen's Church and Inverness Crown on Sunday 14 Sptember on conclusion of the service that day.

A copy of the Basis of Union has been made available available to members of the Congregation in the newsletter published on Sunday 31 August together with supporting notes. You may note that Rev Douglas Robertson now plans to demit at the end of the year so the new united congregation will be asked to call a new minister following the union.

The following should be noted:

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| 1 | There will be an opportunity to ask questions prior to the vote. These can be submitted to the Session Clerk prior to the vote. The Presbytery Mission Planning Committee will oversee the vote and a member of that group will chair the meeting. |
| 2 | Only members and adherents on the congregational roll can vote. Voting is in person only and there are no postal or proxy votes. |
| 3 | Each member will be given a copy of the voting slip which asks you to vote for the Basis of Union or against the Basis of Union. Only those members on the congregational role will be permitted to vote. |
| 4 | Members will be given a ballot paper when they come into the Church on Sunday 14 September and will cast their votes at the end of the service. Ballot |

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| | papers will be collected in a sealed box and the Presbytery Representative and Interim Moderator (Mrs Aileen Binner) will be responsible for counting the votes. |
| 5 | The planned date of union is 1 st January 2026 |

MIDMILLS PARISH CHURCH There is no hiding the disquiet surrounding the union of OHSS with Crown Church and there are precious few who can believe the Church of Scotland and our Presbytery, Cleir Eilean I, have come up with a flawless process for achieving a union of two churches. However, we are where we are and the direction of travel is clear. Congregations, especially those sharing close geographical proximity, are expected to unite to assist the Church of Scotland to reduce the number of charges across the country for reasons both of ministry staffing and finance.

Critically, these new united congregations are also being tasked with renewing the Mission of the Church of Scotland to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to build welcoming, transforming communities of faith. It seems to those of us prepared to travel on the path being laid out for us that Midmills Parish Church will be most successful in achieving what we are being asked to do if all of the many talents at both OHSS and Crown come together in the name of our Father and work as one new entity, and not as us and them. The reality of working together so far has been difficult with many feeling that "they don't understand", "we do it better" and so on. Launching a new positive larger body of God's people in our parish, proclaiming our love for our Lord, requires all parties to think afresh and build a Midmills way of doing things.

Midmills Parish Church is in a highly enviable position going forward, with strong personal and financial resources. The talents and dedication of our people need no further comment. The two churches are in good order, visible, well-appointed and available for a wide range of worship and community use. Presbytery's original intention to close and sell the St Stephen's Church building was successfully argued against and time has been given to Midmills Parish Church to argue for its retention for missional purposes. Our aim as Christians must be to build a stronger community of faith in our parish and it seems easy to argue this is best done with maximum activity and visibility. Closing a building, any building, does not project optimism in the cause. At OHSS we have been living through a prolonged period of anxiety and concern about what lies ahead for us as a congregation. This has been tiring and demoralising. Now could surely be the time to find renewal by responding to the opportunities and challenges that are there for us.

"Let us build a house where all are welcome, all are welcome in this place."

Colin Craig, Sandie Craig, Andrew Stevenson, Anna Aalders, Deborah Macrae, Malcolm Macrae, David Martin, Ruth Martin, Margaret Neville and Andy Pyott.

DIARY DATES



ANNUAL LEAVE James will be on holiday from **6-19 September**. Stewart Robertson will conduct our service on Sunday 7 September and Aileen Binner, our Interim Moderator will conduct the service on Sunday 14 September. Anyone requiring the services of a minister during that period should contact their elder or myself. Christine Mackenzie, Session Clerk.

SERVICE AT SOUTHSIDE NURSING HOME there will be a short service in Southside Nursing Home on Sunday **7 September** after our morning service. All welcome to attend. The next service will be held on Sunday 5 October.

RT REV ROSIE FREW VISIT TO ST STEPHEN'S Rt Rev Rosie Frew will be visiting Cleir Eilean I (The Church of Scotland in the Highlands and Hebrides) week commencing Sunday 7 September. During this time she will be making various visits in the area.

An afternoon tea is being arranged in St Stephen's Church Hall, Inverness on **Monday 8 September from 2.30pm to 4.00pm**. This is open to anyone who wishes to meet the Moderator.

Rosie will be accompanied by her husband Dave and Rev Janet MacKellar, Moderator of the Presbytery. Some limited parking will be available on Mayfield Road. Christine Mackenzie, Session Clerk

REV MURIEL PEARSON, OUR MISSIONARY PARTNER, based in Tiberias, Israel, will be holding an evening meeting in St Stephen's Church on **Wednesday 10 September from 7-9pm** entitled 'Holding the Space'. This meeting is open to everyone.

As well as speaking about her own work, she will be taking part in a Question & Answer session about the current situation in Israel Palestine, using short film clips to introduce some of Christian Aid's partner working for justice and peace, and answering questions you might have about the history of Israel Palestine, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem and the appalling crisis in Gaza. The evening, about an hour and a half long, including refreshments, will end with a prayer and reflection for peace with justice.

If you are perplexed by the news, at a loss about what to do, or just interested in hearing first hand perceptions, you will be most welcome.

BEE CRAFTY 10 SEPTEMBER 2025



FRIENDS OF CAMERON HOUSE AFTERNOON TEA



This joint event is to raise funds for Cameron House, the CrossReach home for dementia sufferers. Donations of home baking, produce and crafts for the Craft Stall can be handed in to Crown Church from 10a.m on Saturday 20 September. Please give this event your support. Val Cantlay.

MEMORABLE MELODIES 26 SEPTEMBER



SWEATY CHURCH 27 SEPTEMBER The next Sweaty church will be on Saturday 27th September with the usual fun, games and food. The theme is The Tower of Babel so the Giant Jenga will be out! The venue still has to be decided and more information will follow. Deborah Macrae



Join us for the **Harvest Whodunit Buffet night**, an evening filled with fun, laughter and a little mystery! **Saturday 25 October** in the church hall at 7pm. More information in the next newsletter. Joan Darcy

FUNERALS/DEATHS

29 July 2025 Ethel Porter, Aultnaskiach Avenue

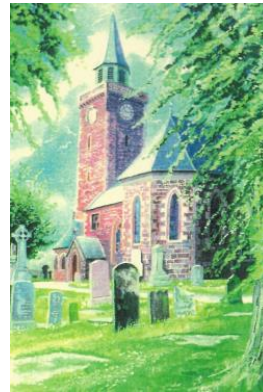
1 Aug 2025 Harry Blair, Leys Park

Norma Peattie, Oakwood Court

AV TEAM We were sorry that Finlay Hamilton who has been with us for some time and was one of the AV Team responsible for recording the service each week has now left us. Happily for Finlay he is off to Stirling University. James presented him with a card and Amazon Voucher on behalf of the congregation. We wish him well in his studies. Christine Mackenzie, Session Clerk

KODAK INK CARTRIDGES I have ink cartridges for a Kodak Printer which are no longer required. 1 xBlack Ink

Cartridge - 30 and 1 x Colour Ink Cartridge - 30CL. If anyone would like them or know of anybody who could use them please let me know. Pauline Johnston
Email: pauline@paulinejohnston.plus.com (01463) 241484



OLD HIGH CHURCH - A TALE OF TRANSITION During the time the Old High was for sale I was approached by a group who were learning film-making through Eden Court. They had an idea of a film including using the Old High Church and I was happy to let them do this. I have attached the link to the film - it's about 7 minutes long and it starts in a cafe in Fortrose and then

moves to Church Street and the Old High Church. When they completed their filming they told me it took over 200 takes before they were satisfied with the result. I don't know if it will be part of the Eden Court Film Festival, but as I have been given a link thought you might like to watch the film. It's food for thought and it was good that they wanted to use the Church. I do hope you enjoy watching the film. Christine MacKenzie, Session Clerk.

[Old High Church](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPGZuGk4-5w)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPGZuGk4-5w>

OLD HIGH CHURCH ALMOST LOST See article by Inverness Local History Forum Newsletter - Inverness Remembered on pp 6 and 7.

OTHER NEWS

CROSSREACH - HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS RESIDENTIAL RECOVERY CENTRE, INVERNESS The Highlands and Islands Residential Recovery Centre extends Beechwood's addition recovery support across the North of Scotland from Moray to the Western Isles, as well as Orkney and Shetland. Please pray for:

those affected by substance use may God show them new ways to manage problems which led them to use
the families and friends who visit may God bring comfort when most needed

Thanks to those who have helped in creating the new recovery centre, may it provide the necessary support to those who visit.

CHRISTIAN AID 80TH ANNIVERSARY THANKSGIVING SERVICE You're invited to a special service of thanksgiving to mark 80 years of Christian Aid, at **Inverness Cathedral** on **Sunday 21 September at 3pm.**

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

BREAKING NEWS

Looking for Volunteers

HIGHLAND BLINDCRAFT

SENSORY SERVICES

Join us!

Highland BlindCraft Sensory Services, a charity based in Inverness who support people with visual impairments throughout Highland and the Western Isles, are looking for people interested in volunteering as readers for a talking newspapers service we are hoping to launch soon.

For more details call 01463 210558 or email volunteer.coordinator@highlandsensory.org.uk



BURMA STAR ASSOCIATION



This photograph (HCA/D1327/9/2) from our Highland Counties, Burma Star Association collection features Bill Souter DFC & Bar (4th from left centre row) and fellow pilots beside Bill's Thunderbolt in Burma, 1945. William (Bill) M. Souter was working as a quantity surveyor before the outbreak of WWII. He trained as an RAF pilot and was posted to the Far East in support of the Burma campaign. At the time of the 50th commemoration of VJ Day in August 1995, he addressed the congregation of the Old High Church, Inverness with recollections of his wartime service. As the 80th anniversary of VJ Day approaches, some of his words are reproduced here: "When the Japanese invaded Burma in December 1941, our air defence consisted of only 41 front-line aircraft... in the late summer of 1942, the sole aerial defence of India against the Japanese...rested on the shoulders of a little band of Commonwealth pilots, flying Mohawk fighters, including my No.5 Squadron...In May 1943 we flew our last operation on Mohawks...By October we had converted on to Hurricanes and moved forward to Imphal Valley in

December...The Battles of Imphal and Kohima, in 1944, on the very borders of India, were fought under siege conditions. Attacked and surrounded by three Japanese Army Divisions, the Imphal Valley, with its vital air-strips, and Kohima, had to be held at all costs. Failure to do so would surrender not just the one and only road to Burma into India across the Chin and Naga hills, but would also give the Japanese a secure air base for their conquest of India...While General Bill Slim's army held on to its positions (on the ground) ... Spitfires and Hurricanes of 221 Fighter Group defended the Valley from Japanese aircraft and attacked enemy positions and lines of supply..."

In March 1944, Bill was promoted to Flight-Commander and in October, No.5 Squadron converted to American Thunderbolts. By the end of the War, Bill had been overseas for almost four years. "During that time, I flew a total of 252 sorties - 52 on Mohawks, 78 on Hurricanes and 122 on Thunderbolts. My total flying hours, all on single-engine aircraft, amounted to 1335 hours... When I look back at my time in the RAF... my deepest feeling is one of gratitude for my survival and that of others, but also a great sadness for the untimely deaths of eleven of my fellow pilots in the squadron, and all the other service men and women, who gave their lives in the cause of world peace." After the War, Bill founded the firm of Souter and Jaffrey in Inverness and enjoyed a "...very happy, active, post-war life..." which involved rugby, curling, the Old High Church and his wife Frances. Bill was a highly respected elder of the Old High, Treasurer and friend to so many. It was a privilege to have known both Bill and Frances. Christine MacKenzie, Session Clerk.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I believe churches are meant for praising God, but so are 2am car rides, showers, coffee shops, the gym, and conversations with friends and strangers.

Don't let building confine your faith because we will never change the world by just going to church, we need to be the church

Old High Church Almost Lost



The Old High has been in the news recently after the successful bid by the Old High Inverness SCIO to purchase the building from the Church of Scotland, saving it for the community as an events and heritage centre.

But 97 years ago, the church was almost lost to Inverness when a fire broke out during the service on Sunday 9 December 1928.

What follows is the account from the *People's Journal* on the following Saturday.

A somewhat alarming thrill was experienced by worshippers in the Inverness High Church shortly after service had begun in the morning, when it became apparent to them that a fire had broken out in the building. Fortunately, however, the greatest calm was preserved, and the flames were ultimately got under control.

The congregation, which numbered several hundred, were all seated, and the minister, Rev. Donald Macleod MC, had just entered the pulpit, when smoke commenced to appear in the north-east end of the gallery.

The preacher, not knowing the fears which assailed those in the area affected by the smoke, commenced the service, but had only got the length of reading the latest messages with regard to the health of the King* when he noticed a stir in the congregation.

Immediately he saw smoke emanating from one of the heating ventilators in the wall, Mr Macleod's fears were aroused,

Continued on page 2

* In November 1928 King George V fell seriously ill with septicaemia from which he spent over two years in recovery.



Talks & Events 2025

STOP PRESS: The Spectrum Centre has closed for business, so our September Talk has been postponed. We intend to reschedule it at a later date. As soon as we source a new venue we will announce it on our website, on our Facebook page, and by email to our members.

Old High Church Almost Lost



People's Journal 15.12.1928



and accordingly he announced the National Anthem. This was sung with great fervour by the congregation, and despite the adverse effect the smoke had on their nerves, they preserved the utmost calm while the minister proclaimed the banns of marriage.

By this time, however, events had taken a turn for the worse. The gallery and the area of the church were clouded in smoke, and some of the congregation seated near the east wall felt the heat becoming well-nigh unbearable.

Meanwhile several office-bearers had made valiant attempts to locate the cause of the smoke, but to no great purpose, and Mr Macleod, thinking on the safety of his congregation, announced that they had better terminate the service to ascertain what had happened.

The congregation, accordingly, made their way outside, finding difficulty in descending the last stairway, where the smoke was very thick. All got safely out, however, and by this time the fire brigade had arrived on the scene.

Owing to the fumes and the dense clouds of smoke, the firemen were greatly handicapped in their efforts to locate the seat of the outbreak. They found that the woodwork above the heating apparatus under the east stairway was ablaze, and that the flames had spread along the timber underneath the gallery.


Outside the church quite a crowd had gathered, along with the interested members of the congregation, and as the smoke forced its way

through the slates on the roof of the church it gave the onlookers the impression that the fire was more serious than at first anticipated. Considerable alarm was caused through this happening, and the congregation of the Gaelic Church [now Leakey's bookshop], which adjoins the High Church, also terminated their service in the fear that the blaze might spread to their building. Members gave valuable assistance to the firemen, and soon the flames were got under control.

What a change the interior of the church underwent in a short time! The floor was floating in water, and in parts had been cut up, as was also the stairway. The stair ceiling was smashed, and the ignited woodwork was hacked down.

The cause of the fire is unknown, but it is supposed that the heating system — a very antiquated one of the hot air type — was responsible for the outbreak. The air passed through a chamber which was heated by two furnaces, and it is presumed that the chamber must have become overheated, thus igniting the woodwork.

The High Church* is the senior charge in the town, and is of great historical interest. The main part dates from 1770, but the tower and spire belong to an earlier building, and may have formed part of the Parish Church of St Mary, which was probably erected in the thirteenth century. Fortunately, the fire did not touch the tower and spire.

An estimation of the damage done by the fire is difficult to assess, but it is understood that some £400 will be required to put the church in order again [about £7,500 today]. 

* By the early 1900s the church was simply known as the High Church of Inverness. The introduction of 'Old' into its title arose from the Union in 1929 of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, necessary because both had a High Church.