



Rejoicing in Faith Through the Ages

Alyth, Blairgowrie, and Coupar Angus

Edited by Andrew Mitchell and Kylie Murray



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Published to commemorate the 175th Anniversary of St Stephen's RC Church, Blairgowrie and the 125th Anniversary of St Luan's RC Church, Alyth

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Frontispiece - Stained Glass Window at St Stephen's, Blairgowrie and the interior of St Luan's, Alyth.

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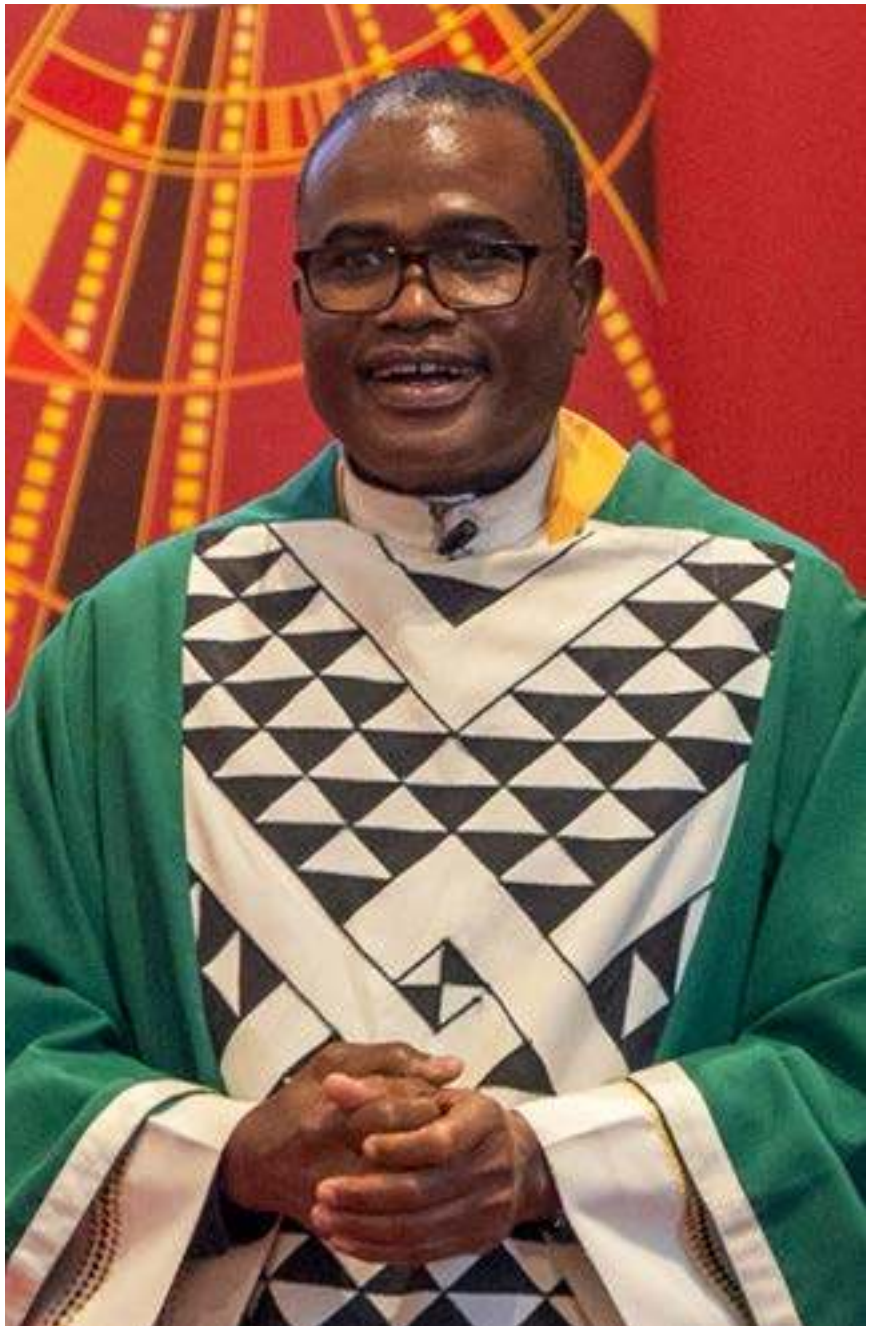
Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

Rejoicing in Faith Through the Ages

From Ancient Foundations to Today's
Parish Communities

Marking the 175th Anniversary
of St Stephen's, Blairgowrie

and the
125th Anniversary
of St Luan's, Alyth



Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

Fr Gregory Umunna Ph.D.

Parish Priest - St Stephen's RC Church Blairgowrie
and St Luan's RC Church Alyth

*Celebrating St Stephen's Blairgowrie 175 years
and St Luan's Alyth 125 years of Catholicism*

A Testament to God's Unflinching Favours and Grace

As we celebrate cumulatively the 300-year milestone, we look back not just at dates on a time line, but at the enduring love of God that has unified St Stephen's Blairgowrie and St Luan's Alyth. For over 300 years, the communities of St Stephen's and St Luan's have stood as sanctuaries - places where generations brought their deepest sorrows and highest joys to the altar. This milestone is proof that while the world changes, God's grace that sustains us remains unshakable.

As we celebrate this legacy, we find hope in the words of *1 Peter 2:5*: 'You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.' Every prayer whispered in our pews and every act of charity in our streets has built a foundation that no storm can move. We are the inheritors of a resilient flame, passed down by ancestors who trusted in Providence through every trial.

Looking forward, our hope is renewed. From the banks of the Erich to the heart of Alyth, we aren't just maintaining buildings; we are nurturing a mission already established yet always new. As we step into the next century, may we carry the same courage as those who came before us, confident that the Holy Spirit continues to breathe new life into our spiritual homes.



Rejoicing in Faith through the ages



To the Parish Priest, Father Gregory
and the Catholic communities of
St Stephen's Blairgowrie and St Luan's Alyth,

I offer sincere congratulations and best wishes
as you celebrate two important anniversaries,
175 years for St Stephen's
and 125 years for St Luan's.

Together with generations who have come before us
we give thanks to God on such a great occasion.
May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire us
as faithful witnesses to Christ's presence
in the world today.

With best wishes and prayers.

Right Reverend Andrew McKenzie

Bishop of Dunkeld

*God's blessings
For the 175th and 125th Anniversaries*

Rt Rev. Stephen Robson

Bishop of Dunkeld, Emeritus

*Congratulations and best wishes
For the 175th and 125th anniversaries*

I wish the Parish Priest and parishioners of St Stephen's and St Luan's all God's blessings for the 175th and 125th anniversaries which are approaching. I was very interested to read in the old Catholic Directories of the origins and significance of these churches in the Diocese of Dunkeld. I share in your hope and prayer for your parishes to go from strength to strength.

The Very Rev. Canon Kevin Golden

Vicar General

*God's blessings for the
175th and 125th anniversaries*

Let us ask St Stephen and St Luan to renew our lives of prayer and love so that we may be worthy of the noble heritage of witness to Christ of our forebears in the Church: men and women who witnessed to the faith in circumstances which were by no means always easy. This is the best way of our saying "Thank you" to them and for them.

Fr Michael Hewlings

Balhary

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Liber

catas

utroq; habitus ma-
silio impioru; & i-
ma peccatoru; non
seque; & in exte;ora

pes q;lenque non seot.

S eo m lege omi uoluntate; & i-
lege ei; meo; abite; me ac noce-

erit tanquam ligam q; plan-
tati; & secus decurs; aqua; i-
q;o p;ra;ca; suu; o; abite man; pes.

Polu; me; n; no; e; pluet; & omnia q;
e; unque; p; a; e; e; p; ro; s; p; ab; u; n; a; m;

Non sic impi; non sic; sed tanq; m
palus q; p; n; e; t; e; n; e; g; a; p; a; c; i; e; c; i; u; e;

Deo non resurgit; impi; i; n; a; o; i; c; i; o; n; e;
que peccatores i; n; s; i; l; i; o; m; i; s; c; o; r; u; m;

Quoniam nouit dominus i; n; a; m;
i; n; s; c; o; r; u; m; & i; c; e; r; i; m; p; i; o; r; u; m; p; i; b; i; t; e;

scē marie de b; i; p; p; e;

Psalteriū glōtū

Fig. 1: 12th-century Coupar Angus owned Psalter, now in the Vatican Library, folio 1r.



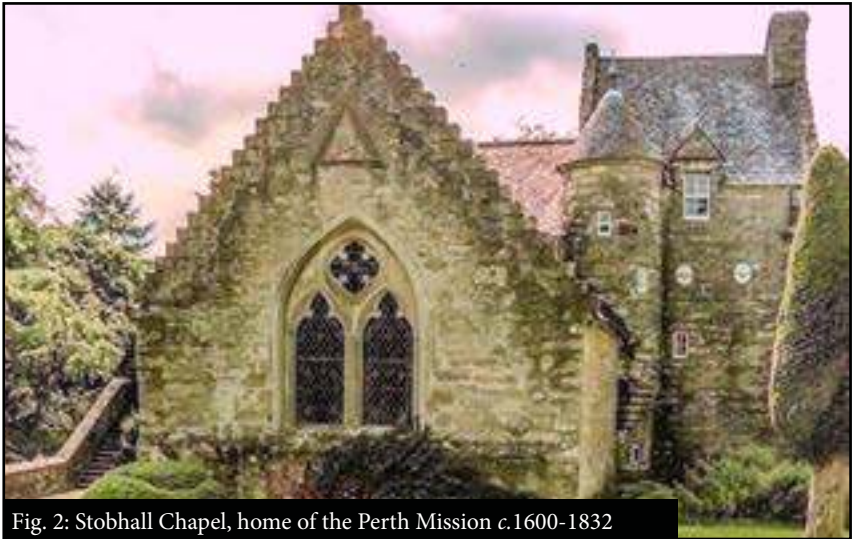
Chapter 1

Tracing Perthshire's Religious Roots

Kylie Murray

The story of Catholic worship across Blairgowrie and eastern Perthshire is a remarkable and fascinating one. Although perceived as absent from Blairgowrie following the Reformation, the Catholic faith was never successfully silenced in Perthshire. During the Penal Times of c.1560–1829 the practice of Catholicism had been repressed and even outlawed. Its survival therefore depended upon a number of Catholic landed families, especially at the estates of Murthly and Stobhall.

Stobhall Castle lies eight miles south of Blairgowrie. It is the ancient seat of the Drummond family from at least the 14th century, where Catholic worship has endured with singular resilience. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries this estate functioned as a vital refuge for Catholic clergy, who celebrated Mass there in private chapels. Their national significance cannot be overstated: they supplied Catholic worship across Scotland, as far afield as Glasgow and Aberdeenshire, places which had no priests of their own at this time. Known as the Perth Mission, this haven formed part of a wider network of Missions sustaining Catholic life across eastern Scotland in particular, as priests travelled far and wide, ministering to scattered congregations.



Meanwhile, Murthly Castle, nine miles south-west of Blairgowrie, likewise became a critical locus of Catholic activity in the later 18th and early 19th centuries. In possession of the Drummond-Stewart family, this estate served not only the immediate household but also Catholics from the surrounding countryside. A resident chaplain ensured continuing pastoral care.

By the time of the Catholic revival in the early 1800s, these estate chapels had become integral to the survival of Perthshire's Catholic worship. Fr James Mackay (1802-84), whose vision resulted in the creation of St Stephen's, relied heavily on these established centres. From Murthly in particular he travelled extensively to celebrate Mass, including in Blairgowrie, where the Mission was only just beginning to emerge.

The foundation of the Blairgowrie Mission in 1837 neither arose in a vacuum, nor introduced Catholicism to a previously abandoned region. Instead, it re-established into the wider community life a faith that had been quietly sustained for generations, enriching the compelling Catholic context of Perthshire, rooted deeply in the Middle Ages, and situating this locale as a place of Scottish and wider European significance in the history of belief and worship.

Celtic Christianity and mainland-European theological practices became inextricably linked to striking effect in northern Perthshire, as surviving evidence makes vividly apparent. From medieval manuscripts to documentary evidence and architectural fragments, we can reconstruct the backdrop from which St Stephen's and St Luan's refreshed and sustained a steadfast Catholicity that continues to thrive and flourish to this very day.

Early Medieval Perthshire was the eastern-most part of the *Gaeltacht*, the Gaelic speaking area on both sides of the Irish Sea, and accordingly the Pictish Church was the dominant sphere of influence. Key monastic centres of Ireland and western Scotland, and some of the nation's leading saints were formative here, namely St Columba (AD 521-97) and St Moluag, or Luan (AD c.520-92).

St Columba arrived on Iona from Ireland to establish his Christian monastery there in 563. In 849 Kenneth MacAlpin, king of the Scots and Picts removed St Columba's relics to Dunkeld from Iona to protect them from Viking raids. He then appointed a Bishop to Dunkeld, and the place of our Diocese at the heart of Scottish church history was secured.

St Luan and Perthshire's Earliest Christian Settlement

More readily recognised as the Patron Saint of Argyll, St Moluag's name in its Latinised form gives us the St Luan for whom our Alyth Church is named. What St Columba had commenced on Iona, St Luan extended and refreshed across Pictland. Together, these Saints were the founding fathers of a flourishing Christian faith, resulting in the network of religious communities in what became the Perthshire we know today.



Fig. 3: Alyth's Pictish Cross Slab provides early medieval material evidence of how Pictish symbolism and Christian belief intersected.

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It is rarely recognised that Alyth has a longer-standing inheritance even than Dunkeld. St Luan (b.c. 520 AD) made his life's work extending Celtic-Christianity across Argyll and northern Scotland. A student of St Brendan in Ireland, he initially settled at Lismore in 562, where his monastery is commemorated: *Lios mor* being Middle Irish for 'great courtyard'. Lismore is home to St Luan's crozier to this day, under private ownership (see Fig. 4, below). More locally, Alyth's landmark Medieval Arches mark the spot of St Luan's original sixth-century church structure. These three beautiful arches stand along the north wall of the High Medieval structure, which looks to have been extended well before c.1500, making it contemporaneous with the late-Medieval graveyard. This structure, and the work of St Luan are the earliest documented evidence of Christian worship and culture in Perthshire.

St Luan's life in the 1510 *Aberdeen Breviary*

Scotland's first national printed prayerbook, the Latin *Aberdeen Breviary* (1510) tells us how St Luan's feast on 25 June was celebrated, and about St Luan himself in a set of nine lessons. Under St Brendan's mentorship, he built churches and altars

from an early age, and encouraged his peers to set sail and evangelise overseas. They left without him, envious of his miraculous abilities. The central lesson of St Luan's feast is the vivid account of the miracle by which he reached Scotland to begin his missionary endeavours:



Fig. 4: St Luan's crozier, carried by the Baron of the Bachuil, in procession to the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

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'A thing happened which is seldom heard of: when he had prayed, the stone upon which Luan had set his feet, quite firmly fixed by nature, divinely carried him across the great breadth of the ocean, faster in motion than the ship, and he arrived before the rest of his companions at the port of the church of Lismore which he desired. And there that stone, which is unlike the rest of the rocks on that island, ceased from motion.'

St Luan became a monk in Old Melrose, and returning to Lismore successfully founded its Christian community. Next, *'by divine power he began to build monasteries and other sacred places for almighty God, in which he placed men for service'*. He then turned *'to the northern regions of Scotland'*, which included Perthshire. On 25 June 592 he died and was buried at Rosemarkie on the Black Isle. Posthumous miracles are attributed to Luan, and one is especially celebrated, in which a thief who stole books from the bishop's house at Rosemarkie was immediately blinded. Upon his penitence, *'he was restored by the saint's merits, giving thanks to God most high and to the holy Bishop Luan.'* A Saint who persevered with building

church, community and faith in Scotland in this way could not be more apposite for Alyth and north Perthshire, and speaks more meaningfully to us on our 125th anniversary than ever.

The Coming of the Cistercians to Coupar Angus Abbey

The 12th century saw the growing influence of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland (1045-93). She had inspired her sons Alexander I (r.1107-24) and David I (r.1124-53) in particular to energise religion in Scotland by introducing Continental reformed monastic orders to challenge, extend and Latinise the practice of worship. Key early foundations include the Augustinians at Scone Abbey (c.1120, founded by Alexander I), the Tironensians of Kelso Abbey (1128, founded by David I), and the elevation of Dunfermline's Benedictine foundation to an Abbey, also in 1128 by David I in honour of his mother who had first established the Benedictines there from Canterbury in the 1070s. These emergent monastic orders became centres of worship, learning and cultural production, principal conduits for the transmission of faith, culture and identity.

The Cistercians constituted an especially significant monastic order for Scotland, beginning with their first foundation at Melrose Abbey (1136). Led by the grand chapter at Cîteaux in France, and a filiation-network of daughter houses across France and England, Rievaulx in Yorkshire gave rise to Melrose, which, in-turn, became mother-house to ten further daughter houses across Scotland. These included Newbattle in Midlothian (1140), Dundrennan in Galloway (1142), Kinloss in Moray (1150), and Coupar Angus (c.1161). By the end of the 1200s the Cistercians' coverage ranged from Galloway's western edge to Moray's north-east coast. The Abbeys all shared information and ideas with each other, and made the voyage regularly to Cîteaux, forming 'one of the most highly developed intelligence-gathering systems of the pre-Modern age, which brought regular communication with the commercial systems of mainland Europe' (Richard Oram, *David I*, 2008, p.161).

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Although thought to have been planned during the reign of David I (1124-53), on the advice of his stepson, St Waltheof, Abbot of Melrose (*d.*1159), it was under the patronage of David's grandson Malcolm IV (*r.*1153-65), that Coupar Angus Abbey was formally established and developed into a major centre of monastic life. The royal manor of Coupar Angus had been assigned as the site of the Abbey by 1159, but the Melrose Monks who travelled to Coupar Angus to make their daughter house operational did not arrive until 1161-2. According to the 13th-century *Melrose Chronicle* the Melrose monks were well known to prefer the 'sweetness' (*'dulcedo'*) of their home Abbey to the harsher conditions of Scotland's northern territories. The most recent editor of the Latin *Melrose Chronicle*, Professor Dauvit Broun, describes the monks' reluctance to venture into '*profunda Scotia*', ('*inner Scotland*'), and 'the dark interior of the country north of the Forth' (Dauvit Broun, 'Melrose Abbey and its World', *Melrose Chronicle* Vol I, 2007, p.6). Such northern apprehension may explain why no volunteers emerged from Melrose for the first Abbacy of Coupar Angus until 1164.



Fig 5: Painting of Coupar Angus Abbey by Lord Balmerino (1602).

Yet the six Melrose monks who first ventured to Coupar Angus could not have imagined a more thriving northern centre of theological and intellectual culture which was to flourish in Perthshire for centuries to come. The community of monks remained small, at twenty-eight in the 1520s, and twenty on the Eve of the Reformation, but their impact was substantial. While Melrose may remain the most architecturally complete of Scotland's Cistercian Abbeys, Coupar Angus stands alone with its remarkable manuscript survivals of national and European significance in our understanding of Medieval faith, culture, and the history of ideas.

Vatican Manuscript Treasures from Coupar Angus

Of just twelve surviving books from 12th-century Scotland still in existence anywhere in the world, two are from Coupar Angus, and both made their way to the Vatican Library, where they survive today. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Regin. Lat. 694 is a copy of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* with the *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii* (Bede's Latin *History of the English Church and People*, with the anonymous but widely known Latin *St Patrick's Purgatory*); and MS Pal. Lat. 65 is a mid-12th-century Psalter. Both volumes share the ex-libris, '*Sancte Marie de Cupre*', confirming a Coupar Angus Cistercian provenance, since all Cistercian dedications included Our Lady as principal dedicatee (often accompanied by a second saint: in Coupar Angus' case, St Andrew). Both manuscripts open up intriguing possibilities about Coupar Angus and its place at the intersection of Celtic, Latin and learned culture.

These two manuscripts were certainly *read* at Coupar Angus, but we do not know conclusively whether they were made there. The Psalter's script and colourful decoration are those typically seen in Irish-produced texts, suggesting that this book may have travelled to Perthshire from Ireland. Some scholars group this Psalter with a cluster of 12th-century manuscripts from an Armagh-Down-Bangor nexus, including the *Gospels of Maelbrigte*, (now London, British Library MS Harley 1082: see Fig. 6) and the '*Corpus Missal*,



Fig. 6: *Gospels of Maelbrigte*, now London, British Library MS Harley 1802, f.20r.

now Oxford, Corpus Christi College Library, MS 282. MS Reg. Lat. 694 (the Coupar Angus Bede manuscript) also overlaps with an Irish context, containing as it does the Hiberno-Latin best-selling vision, *St Patrick's Purgatory*. Curiously, however, this manuscript does not share the Irish features of the Psalter: what are we to make of this, and what could it tell us about the wider cultural backdrop of Coupar Angus?

There are multiple routes by which a book could have reached our part of Scotland from a Northern Irish scriptorium. The best documented of these is the series of Scottish journeys undertaken by St Malachy, Bishop of Armagh (*d.* 1148), Bernard of Clairvaux's close associate, responsible for introducing the Cistercians to Ireland, and a contemporary and acquaintance of David I of Scotland. St Malachy made three separate journeys through south west Scotland between 1140 and 1148, en route to Clairvaux and Rome. On his second visit, St Malachy is reputed to have healed Henry, David I's son, from a grave illness: it is possible that the Cistercian foundation at Newbattle in 1140, made jointly by

both David and Henry, was a gesture of gratitude to St Malachy, illuminating a possible nexus by which an Irish book could be transmitted to a Scottish Cistercian house from where it proceeded northwards to Coupar Angus. Most persuasive for both of our Coupar Angus manuscripts, however, is St Malachy's final visit, in 1148, when he was en route to Rome with a group of monks but delayed by storms that sent his ship to Galloway. During his delay, St Malachy was a guest of David I and according to further sources, of various nobles including Robert de Brus, second lord of Annandale (*fl.* 1140). St Malachy asked de Brus' household to spare the life of a robber about to be executed, and although de Brus agreed, he killed the robber anyway, resulting in Malachy placing a curse on de Brus and his descendants. There is a fascinating connection between this event and Coupar Angus Abbey in 1319, when an Abbey charter records King Robert the Bruce ordering a lamp and candles to burn before the altar of St Malachy, seemingly in a gesture of continued penance for and recognition of Malachy's curse. The specified '*altar of St Malachy*' suggests a connection of two centuries' duration between Galloway and Coupar Angus that could shed new light on the reconstruction of a possible route taken by a manuscript Prayerbook produced in Ireland to Perthshire's celebrated Abbey.

Irish Foundations and the Galloway Connection

Yet more suggestive is the Cistercian foundation at Viride Stagnum, or Soulseat, in Galloway, arising from St Malachy's Scottish detour. The Coupar Angus Bede and *St Patrick* manuscript contains a unique continuation of Bede's *History*, absent from other copies of this widely known work. Following Bede's Anglo-Latin text is a record of the succession of Bishops in the 8th-century See of Whithorn, part of Galloway. Both manuscripts therefore have a probable Galloway connection. A further potential explanation for the Galloway and Irish links of both Coupar Angus manuscripts is that they were produced in Soulseat by St Malachy's Irish monks, perhaps with some local recruits: an Irish production on Scottish soil, and taken to Perth by the monks who left that Abbey when it became Premonstratensian in 1161. The timing of this, we must

note, coincides exactly with the earliest foundation of Coupar Angus Abbey.

Coupar Angus Abbey and Bower's *Scotichronicon*

The later Middle Ages yield equally remarkable examples of Coupar Angus' role in preserving and transmitting belief, faith, history and knowledge. The prose-Latin *Scotichronicon* is Medieval Scotland's largest surviving literary work. Begun c.1441 by Walter Bower (d.1449), the St Andrews graduate and Augustinian Abbot of Inchcolm in the Firth of Forth, this work comprised a 16-book 'universal history' of the world from its beginnings down to Bower's lifetime, from a Scottish perspective. Nine full copies of this text survive, and besides Bower's own initial manuscript copy, now preserved in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (MS 171), the most crucial and distinctive of these is that produced by Coupar Angus Abbey from c.1445-80, now in the National Library of Scotland (Advocates' MS 35.1.7).

Despite stating their version to be an abbreviated text, the Cistercians transformed Bower's sixteen books into forty, covering material to c.1480. Other monastic houses including the Perth Carthusians produced copies of the *Scotichronicon*, but none departed as radically as the Coupar Angus work from Bower's working copy, and none added as nationalistic a tenor as those Coupar Angus scribes who included a vision found in no known earlier sources, which went on to inspire a pivotal statement of faith in Scotland's most celebrated and widely read epic, *The Wallace* (1470s).

In discussing the life and history of William Wallace (d.1305), the Coupar Angus *Scotichronicon* inserts a collective dream-vision from the 1290s, experienced by the Guardians of Scotland, in which Wallace receives a sword from St Andrew with which to defend Scotland against England. This inclusion of Scotland's Patron Saint aligns ever more closely with Coupar Angus, which had been dedicated, we will remember, to both St Andrew alongside Our Lady. The addition is inserted as a continuation of the main text,

indicating that to the Perthshire scribes, the vision constituted the legitimate historical record (see Fig. 7):

‘He was thought of as the Guardian of the kingdom. For, on account of their faith, by a remarkable revelation, it was shown to various men who were especially worthy that the most holy Apostle Andrew, the defender and patron of the kingdom of Scotland, had handed a bloodied sword to the said William Wallace, with strict instructions to him to use it on this side and on that for the defence of the kingdom by driving back the English.’

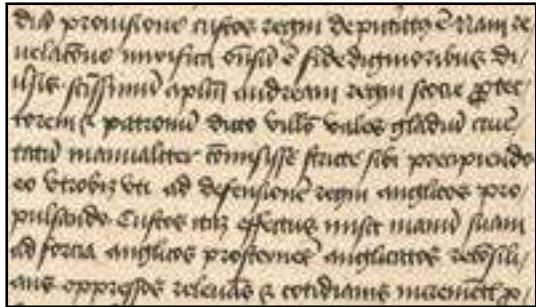


Fig 7: William Wallace and St Andrew: account in the Coupar Angus *Scotichronicon*, now NLS Adv MS 35.1.7.

What should we make of the dream-vision’s absence from the earliest and most authoritative *Scotichronicon* copy, which Bower himself oversaw? Did Bower regard it as unimportant? Given the Cistercian fascination with history, its documentation and preservation, it is much more likely that the account surfaced in Coupar Angus after Bower’s project was completed. Tantalisingly, perhaps the vision is a Perthshire one, entering the written record for the first time at the Abbey? This Coupar Angus addition could attest the singular importance of the episode, regarded as too vital to omit from a supposedly abbreviated text.

Blind Hary’s Older Scots epic poem *The Wallace* made keen and vivid use of the *Scotichronicon*’s St Andrean vision, at a time when national identity was a live issue and fiercely contested. Shortly after Wallace’s appointment as Guardian of Scotland (1297-8), Wallace has a dream-vision which opens with a scene of the hero looking down from a celestial mountain across at the whole of Scotland in flames, ‘*atour fra Ros to Sulway Sand*’ (‘*across from Ross, to Solway Firth*’). Against this urgent and dramatic

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backdrop he is greeted by St Andrew, who, directly following the Coupar Angus account, bestows upon Wallace a sword, and alerts him to his Scottish national mission of defending the kingdom from English attack. There follows in *The Wallace* dream-vision a second meeting, with Our Lady, who tells Wallace he will martyr himself for Scotland. St Andrew's act of bestowing on Wallace a sword and telling him '*Gud sone...this brand thou sall bruk weill*' ('*Good son...this sword you shall break well*'), comments powerfully on Wallace's role, extending the comparison begun by Coupar Angus of Scotland's two celebrated national Guardians, who both represent, embody, and personify Scottish national interests. Their affinity is accentuated further by the Saint's address to Wallace as 'son', implying Wallace's resemblance to Andrew as spiritual father who is national and theological exemplar in equal measure.

This epic-poem, including its Coupar Angus-connected vision of nationhood, sustained a circulation and influence in Scotland second only to the Bible itself. Between 1509 and 1707, Hary's epic had been published in twenty-five printed editions. All but one of the *Wallace*'s manuscripts are lost to us, but the vision of Wallace and St Andrew stands at the structural and conceptual heart of the poem which remained known across Scotland for centuries, and which remains one of the most powerful statements of Scottish nationhood and identity ever produced.

Alongside such monastic centres and networks, parish churches and local chapels served at a localised level the spiritual needs of the wider



Fig. 8: Present day fragments.
Remaining Abbey masonry today.

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population. Although relatively little physical evidence survives from these early structures in the immediate vicinity of Blairgowrie, the continuity of place-names, burial grounds, and local traditions suggests a longstanding pattern of Christian worship deeply embedded in our landscape.

This rich and enduring religious heritage was disrupted and devastated in the 16th century by the events of the Reformation. Monastic institutions including Coupar Angus Abbey resisted for as long as they could, their lands secularised, and the public practice of Catholicism suppressed. By 1622, however, the state of the Abbey was described as ‘*ruinous*’. Yet, as later centuries would show, the Reformation had failed to extinguish our faith. Rather, it survived in diminished and often hidden form, sustained by memory, tradition, and the quiet fidelity of individuals and families who continued the traditions of those founding Celtic Saints and Cistercian Monks before them.

In this context, the nineteenth-century revival of Catholic life in Blairgowrie, culminating in the building of St Stephen’s Church, may be freshly understood *not* as the introduction of something new, but as the restoration of a much older and most profound Christian inheritance. The early missionary activity associated with St Luan, the surviving testaments to religious life at Coupar Angus Abbey, and the later endurance of the faith through Penal Times, taken together, form a continuous thread weaving the dynamic ancient Church of Perthshire through to its vibrant modern expression.

Against this rich backdrop, the Mission in Blairgowrie is principally associated with Fr James Mackay, who became acutely aware, as Priest of the Perth Mission, of the spiritual destitution of Catholics in Blairgowrie and surrounding rural communities and to whom we next turn.

Facing, Fig. 9: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 694 (c.1150-1200): Bede’s *History*, f.1r. Note the ex-libris ‘*Liber Sancte Marie de Cupre*’ written in a 13th-century hand across the top and down the outer margin.

liber s^ce marie

*liber s^ce marie regis regis
et imperatoris hinc p^rimo
et hinc secundo regis regis*

Constitutio regi vol
solito. veda sumit rpi
et p^rimo hystoria gentis anglo
rota ecclesiasticam qm in p^ro ad
dantis. hinc r^ectissimo r^e d^ecedem
n r^e p^ro ad legendum ac
p^rimo hystoria r^ectissimo et nunc ad
miseribendum ac p^rimo et r^e
p^rimo medicandum r^ectissimo.
suntq^{ue} studii tuo sinceram
ampliat. quo non solum au
dientis s^cpture s^c ubi autem
seculari acomodat. uerū cū
notanda ponit. gentis sine die
et. et maxime n^oe gentis utro
illud r^ectum curam uigilant in
p^ro ad. Sicut enim hystoria de
bonis bona r^ectum. adman
dum bonum audient solliciti
instigant. seu mala conuenit
et de p^rimo. in d^e hystoria r^e
p^rimo ac p^rimo audient hinc le
tor. d^ectando q^{ue} n^oe r^ectum ac
p^rimo. r^ectum solent ad p^rimo
da ea que bona ac de digna r^e
n^oe r^ectum ac r^ectum. Quod ip
sua in quocq^{ue} uigilant hystoria
dependens hystoriam memo
riam innotam r^ectum
et r^ectum quib^{us} r^ectum d^ectum

p^rimo auctoritas de general curi
saluti. tam p^rimo d^ectum.
ut autem in hinc quocq^{ue} us r^e
o^{mn}is auctoritas. hinc r^ectum hinc
hystoria r^ectum d^ectum
suntq^{ue} gentis hinc maxime
p^rimo d^ectum breuiter
m^ultare curio. Antea ante
omnes ant^{ea} d^ectum r^ectum
hinc albus abbas r^ectum
m^ulti ac ut p^rimo d^ectum
gestat. qui in ecclesia canonic
cum abone memorio r^ectum
ro archiepo. r^ectum abbas
ut r^ectum r^ectum. ant^{ea} erudi
tissimū r^ectum. d^ectum omnia
que in ip^so canonic r^ectum
p^rimo. ac r^ectum in r^ectum r^ectum
regem. a d^ectum r^ectum gre
gori p^rimo r^ectum. ut moni
ol innotam ut r^ectum. r^ectum
no cognouerit. r^ectum de hinc
q^{ue} memoria digna r^ectum
p^rimo r^ectum lundonensis et
die p^rimo r^ectum. hinc ip^so r^e
r^ectum r^ectum r^ectum r^ectum
m^ulti. Qui uidelicet r^ectum
m^ulti p^rimo r^ectum r^ectum n^o
nullas r^ectum r^ectum p^rimo
et aliam p^rimo r^ectum r^ectum
p^rimo r^ectum r^ectum r^ectum

Imper.



PERTH MISSION –
EARLY 19TH CENTURY...



MASS TODAY
IN BLAIRGOWRIE.
A LONG RIDE, BUT
MY PEOPLE ARE
COUNTING ON ME.

THE HIGHLAND ROADS
ARE RUGGED...



MANY MILES,
MANY SOULS.
GOD'S WORK
GOES ON.

THROUGH WIND AND RAIN,
ACROSS HILL AND GLEN...



FAITH MUST BE
NOURISHED.

AT LAST, BLAIRGOWRIE
COMES INTO VIEW.



MASS WILL BE SAID.
HEARTS WILL BE
STRENGTHENED.



FROM PERTH MISSION TO BLAIRGOWRIE—
A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND DUTY.

Chapter 2

Faith of the Fathers: St Stephen's, Blairgowrie

As we have seen, this part of Perthshire had a rich Christian tradition and so it was far from a blank canvas for the founders of today's parish churches in Blairgowrie, Coupar Angus and Alyth. There follows now a set of biographies of those founders and their successors.

Rev. James Mackay (Parish Priest 1836-50)

Fr James Mackay was born in Nether Clashnore in Glenlivet, on 25 March 1802, and entered the seminary at Aquhorties in 1821. He studied at Scots College, Valladolid and was ordained in 1829. From Spain, he returned home to the Braes of Glenlivet, where he served as a missionary for a few months. He was then stationed in Edinburgh until June 1832, when he was appointed to the Perth Mission to replace Fr John Geddes. Fr Mackay completed the construction of the new Perth church of St John the Baptist, which was opened on 18 November 1832 and dedicated on 16 December. He built the adjoining Presbytery in 1834. By 1835-6 he began regularly visiting Blairgowrie, celebrating Mass once each month for a small and scattered group of the faithful. These early services were held in hired premises: sometimes private rooms, or at times the Town Hall, reflecting both the poverty and the precariousness of Catholic life at that time.

Nevertheless, the potential for growth was already evident. Blairgowrie was a town in expansion, its development stimulated in particular by spinning mills established along the River Ericht.

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

This industrial growth brought new families into the area, among them many Catholics, including immigrants from Ireland, whose presence contributed significantly to the gradual strengthening of the mission.

Recognising the need for a permanent base, Fr Mackay secured a feu in what is now Bank Street in 1836. He erected two houses here, adapting the upper floor of one as a temporary chapel. This chapel was solemnly opened and blessed for Divine service on 26 November 1837, an event which we now recognise as the formal establishment of the Catholic Mission in Blairgowrie. The remaining accommodation within the building was let, providing a modest but valuable source of income to support the Mission in its early years. For some time this arrangement continued: Fr Mackay continued his pastoral visits, and in later years, relieved of other duties, he could attend more frequently. However, the burgeoning Catholic population soon required greater provision. Periodic visits could not meet the needs of the rapidly growing congregation, and a resident priest was by now essential for the proper development of the Mission.

The growing Mission combined with the death of the priest at Crieff resulted in Fr Mackay celebrating Mass at St Fillan's in addition to St Stephen's. For the next nine years he remained the only missionary in all of Perthshire, and in person reunited the two Missions that had begun on the Drummond estates back in 1685. He ventured many miles to celebrate Mass, not only at Crieff, but also in Blairgowrie.

Most of the local Catholics were landed gentry, usually converts, who opened house chapels, thus increasing his work. These were at Murthly, Grandtully in Strathhtay, Tullymet and Woodhill in Strathardle. Murthly, the estate of Sir William Drummond-Stewart, was the grandest. He had returned from America, where, in 1840,

WOODHILL in Stratbardle. Perthshire.

OPENING OF A NEW CHAPEL.

On the festival of St. Luke, 18th October last, an interesting ceremony took place at Woodhill, the seat of Charles Trotter, Esq. who, as well as his excellent lady, are recent converts to the Catholic faith. A small but beautiful Chapel, erected by that gentleman near his mansion, was on that day solemnly blessed and opened for Divine service by the Right Rev. Dr. Gillis, Bishop of the District, attended by the Rev. Messrs. Mackay of Murthly, M'Corry of Perth, Carmont of Blairgowrie, Mackay of Dalkeith, and Cumming of Forfar. Much preparation was made for the day of the opening, and many fair hands were employed to do up the linens, the lace, and the flowers which were to decorate the Altar. Several guests, who were visiting at the hospitable house of Woodhill, although not of the faith, vied with the children of the Church in their exertions on the interesting occasion. As the day was beautifully fine, the procession formed in the mansion, and wound its way through the grounds to the Chapel. After the solemn blessing, the Bishop delivered one of those eloquent and thrilling discourses for which he is pre-eminently distinguished, and then celebrated High Mass. The music and organ accompaniments were good, and the large bell pealed forth its notes of joy. It was edifying to observe that both Mr. and Mrs. Trotter received the Holy Communion as a public profession of their faith, while their young son, Master Charles Trotter, acted as train-bearer to the Bishop. Several of the neighbouring Protestant gentry were present, who expressed themselves as highly delighted with what they had seen and heard.

At four o'clock, the procession moved again from Woodhill House, as the Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament was to be given. His Lordship gave an able exposition of the sacred ceremonial, and vindicated the dogma of the Church with regard to the doctrine of the real Presence. His address must have come home to the hearts of not a few present, since certain unmistakable signs were read in several countenances. Altogether, the day was peculiarly happy for the Catholics of Perthshire—happy in having another Altar dedicated to God—happy in having another good family as members of Holy Church, and thrice happy in the fond hope that still better days are in store for the old county, and that the scattered stones of the sanctuary will, year after year, replace the temples that were destroyed at the disastrous change of religion.

Fig. 10: Opening of a private chapel at Woodhill (*Scottish Catholic Directory*, 1856; p.78)

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he had been received into the Catholic Church. Some years later the chapel of St Anthony the Eremite was opened near Murthly Castle. Fr Mackay and Sir William regarded each other very highly and Fr Mackay received a sizeable farm near the castle.

In 1846, seeking an easier way of life, Fr Mackay accepted a post as chaplain at Murthly, from where he also ventured to celebrate Mass at Blairgowrie, until the Mission there received a permanent priest in 1849. On 13 January 1847, the Catholics of Perth presented their pastor, Fr James Mackay, by now Chaplain at Murthly Castle, with an elegant timepiece and purse of sovereigns.

Following Fr John McCorry's address, Fr Mackay replied that, while he was delighted to accept with much gratitude this memento of esteem, but in addition he requested the the contents of the purse be distributed among the poor members of the church. Following this inspirational example of generosity, he retired from active duty in 1863, proceeding to the Cistercian Mount St Bernard's Abbey near Leicester in 1872.

He died there on 19 April, 1884, fortified by the Holy Sacraments, and was buried in the graveyard there (see Fig. 11). He was 83 years old and in the fifty-fifth year of his priesthood. R.I.P.



Fig. 11: Fr Mackay's grave at Abbey Mount St Bernard, Leicestershire.



**Rev. John Carmont
(1850-82)**

Blairgowrie's first resident Catholic Priest since pre-Reformation times, Fr John Carmont was appointed in 1850 and became indelibly associated with the establishment of St Stephen's Church.

John Carmont was born at Terregles, in Kirkcudbrightshire, on 30 April 1824. He entered Blairs

College in 1837 and subsequently pursued his studies in Rome, where he excelled in philosophy and theology. Ordained Priest on 9 May 1847, he was first appointed to Dundee in circumstances that will resonate with our post-pandemic world: he laboured during a period marked by severe outbreaks of typhus and cholera. In these difficult circumstances he displayed both courage and tireless dedication, sharing in the arduous work of ministering to the sick and dying. Just over two years later, he was transferred to Blairgowrie, where a very different but no less demanding task awaited him.

On taking up his duties, Fr Carmont found that the existing chapel, though serviceable in earlier years, was inadequately prepared for the now enlarged congregation. Determined to provide a more fitting place of worship, he resolved to undertake the erection of a permanent church, facing numerous difficulties as he did so. Financial resources were limited, and progress was initially slow. The death of Bishop Andrew Carruthers on 24 May 1852, who had previously supported the Mission, caused further delay. However, under his successor, Bishop James Gillis, renewed impetus was given to the undertaking. With the encouragement of the Bishop and the generous assistance of benefactors, notably Charles Trotter of Woodhill, additional ground adjoining the

original feu was secured, and preparations for building were made.

Construction began shortly after Whitsunday in 1855. The design of the church was entrusted to Edward Welby Pugin (1834-75), the distinguished architect and leading Gothic Revivalist who was prolific in his design and construction of Catholic Churches. He designed three other churches in Scotland; St Mary's Star of the Sea Church, Leith (1854); St Mary and St Finnan, Glenfinnan (1854) and St Mary, Haddington (1856) and over one hundred other Catholic churches in his lifetime.



Fig. 12: Architect of St Stephen's, Edward Welby Pugin

Pugin reversed the original plan of the church, placing the entrance towards John Street rather than Bank Street. Mass was celebrated within the Church before the end of 1855, with the solemn opening taking place on 13 January 1856. His design was in the early Gothic style, emphasising simplicity, dignity and devotional character. The building was executed in local sandstone with ashlar dressings, under the supervision of John Seed, clerk of works, whose skill in the ornamental details of the structure was widely commended.

The progress of the work was remarkably rapid: the church was completed within just eight months of the foundation stone being laid. On Sunday, 13 January 1856, it was solemnly opened and dedicated to Almighty God under the invocation of St Stephen, the first martyr.

The opening ceremonies were recounted as exceptionally solemn, and made a profound impression upon all present. In the early morning, the church was blessed according to the prescribed rites: the walls were sprinkled with holy water, both externally and internally, while the Litany of the Saints and appropriate Psalms

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and prayers were recited. Shortly before 11am, the hour appointed for public worship, a procession was formed, headed by the processional cross and accompanied by acolytes bearing lighted tapers. Advancing to the high altar, the clergy took their places, and Solemn Pontifical Mass began.

The ceremony was performed on behalf of Bishop Gillis by the Very Rev. John Macpherson, President of Blairs College. He was assisted by several priests, who fulfilled the various liturgical offices of the Mass, while Fr John Carmont, as pastor of the congregation, took part in the ceremony, rewarded by the completion of his long labours. After the chanting of the Gospel, Bishop William Smith preached an earnest sermon. The Mass proceeded with full solemnity to its conclusion, and in the afternoon Pontifical Vespers were sung with especial splendour, according to eye-witness accounts.

At the close of Vespers, a discourse was delivered on the doctrine of the 'Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist'. The day's ceremonies concluded with the Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, during which the choir sang '*Te Deum*' and '*Tantum Ergo*'. The musical arrangements, under the direction of the Rev. Alexander Reid, were widely praised (*Tablet*, 1856).

For the Catholic community of Blairgowrie, this was indeed, in the words of a contemporary eye-witness, 'a day glorious for religion,' long to be remembered with deep gratitude and joy. It marked not merely the opening of a building, but the visible restoration of Catholic worship in a location from which it had long been absent.

The church itself, as described in the *Catholic Directory for Scotland* of 1857, was both handsome and well-appointed: '*It consisted of a nave with aisles, the Lady Chapel being situated at the head of the left aisle and the sacristy in a corresponding position on the right. The building measured sixty-five feet in length and forty-four feet in width, with a height of forty-two feet six inches. The nave was divided from the aisles by plain moulded stone pillars*

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supporting pointed arches. The open timber ceiling, painted a deep blue, studded with stars, created a striking and devotional effect.

The chancel contained a finely executed stone altar, the front of which was ornamented with three illuminated quatrefoils. To one side were the sedilia and piscina, while the organ loft was placed under an arch at the head of the aisle. A statue of the Blessed Virgin, five feet in height and presented by Mrs Trotter of Woodhill, stood on the left. At the end of the right aisle was an octagonal baptismal font carved from a single block of stone. The stained glass windows depicted, among other subjects, Christ as the Good Shepherd, the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph, and St Stephen, the Patron Saint of the church. The ornamental stonework, including the altar, font, and piscina, was executed under the direction of John Seed, while the stained glass was the work of F. Barnett of Leith.'

By the time of this 1857 description, the church provided accommodation for approximately 400 worshippers and had already become the centre of an active, engaged, and well-organised parish life. Sunday Mass was celebrated at 11am, with services also on Holy Days of Obligation. A Sunday evening school offered catechetical instruction, followed by further teaching in the chapel. Benediction was also regularly given on the first Sunday of each month and on the greater festivals.

Under the long and devoted ministry of Fr Carmont, the parish continued to flourish. The congregation eventually reached 500, and increasing prosperity within the town enabled more effective support of the church by the turn of the 20th century. Fr Carmont also paid close attention to education, establishing St Stephen's Primary School in connection with the church during the 1860s. Indeed, he himself took part in teaching, while also conducting night classes during the winter months. His interest in education extended well beyond the parish, and he served with distinction on the Blairgowrie School Board between 1873 and 1879.

Despite receiving offers of seemingly more prominent appointments, Fr Carmont remained in Blairgowrie, bound by a

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deep attachment to his parishioners and community. This affection was warmly reciprocated, and his long ministry was marked on numerous occasions by formal public expressions of gratitude. However, the physical demands of his work led to a serious illness in 1879, declining health, and in 1882 he retired from active pastoral duties at his own request. His legacy endures and his crucial role in the story of St Stephen's is fondly remembered with thanks.

An especially remarkable event in Fr Carmont's life was his legal action against the Scottish Bishops regarding a financial disagreement. The Mitchell Fund, a bequest made by Captain Thomas Mitchell of Baldovie, who left an estate of the value of over £50,000 to the Catholic Church of Scotland in 1865, was left in trust to the Scottish Bishops collectively, for the care of sick and retired priests. In 1882, Fr Carmont raised an action in the Supreme Court of Scotland against the Scottish Bishops, as he was concerned about potential mismanagement of funds. It was said that for taking this action, Fr Carmont laid himself under the censure of excommunication. However, this was revoked on his appeal to the Vatican. Fr Carmont was ultimately successful in his action, and after a prolonged litigation, the Mitchell bequest was placed on a new basis and in 2026 it is valued at more than £1 million. He remains an inspirational example of speaking truth to power.

Fr Carmont died on 17 April 1906 aged 81 and in the fifty-ninth of his priesthood. His funeral took place in St Stephen's Church, and was attended by clergy and faithful from across the Diocese (see Fig. 13, below). Contemporary accounts recount his patience in suffering, his devotion to his calling, and the esteem in which he was held by all who knew him (*Catholic Directory*, 1907).

While the Fr Carmont's name is most closely associated with the building and development of St Stephen's church, it must not be forgotten that the foundations were first laid by Fr James Mackay. Together, the labours of these two Priests transformed a small and scattered body of the faithful into a stable and enduring parish community.

St Stephen's Church stands today as the enduring expression of that transformation: not only a fine example of 19th-century Gothic Revival architecture, but also a monument to perseverance, faith, and the restoration of Catholic life in Blairgowrie.

In its history, the parish enacts in microcosm the progression of a broader revival of Catholicism in 19th-century Scotland: a revival built upon sacrifice, sustained by devotion, and crowned with enduring success.

After a long illness the Rev. Dr. John Carmont, in his 82nd year, passed away on the 17th inst. at his Blairgowrie residence, faithfully attended by the Rev. Father Malcolm, his chaplain, and fortified by the rites of the Church, of which deceased was so zealous and so distinguished a son. On Thursday afternoon the remains were conveyed in a handsome oak coffin to St. Stephen's Church, Blairgowrie. The sacred edifice was suitably draped in black. The Rev. Robert Carmont, nephew of the deceased, received the *cortège* at the church, the coffin being placed on a catafalque in front of the high altar. The lid was afterwards removed, and the beloved priest, clad in full vestments, was seen for the last time on earth by large crowds of mourners, many of whom were in tears, not the least touching feature being the visit of the little school-children of the mission, who were so devoted to the aged priest. On Friday the funeral took place and was preceded by solemn High Mass of Requiem, sung by Rev. Robert Carmont, assisted by Rev. John Docherty, Dundee, and Rev. John Roche, Dundee, Dean Lavelle acting as Master of Ceremonies. Besides the Bishop of Dunkeld (who gave the Absolutions, and a large number of Catholic clergy, two Protestant clergymen and the Rev. W. T. Davis of the local Episcopal Church attended the obsequies out of respect and love for the departed. Father Carmont again officiated at the interment, which took place in the Blairgowrie Cemetery. Mr. James Carmont, the well-known Glasgow solicitor, another nephew of deceased, was, in addition to Father Robert Carmont, the chief mourner.

Fig. 13: Requiem Mass at St Stephen's for Fr John Carmont (*Dundee Courier*, April 1906).

Rev. Thomas Crumley (1882-90)

During Fr Crumley's time, the congregation purchased the Parish School at the top of John Street from the School Board, which was responsible for all schools in Blairgowrie. It became St Stephen's Roman Catholic School, both primary and secondary.

In 1890 came the formation of St Stephen's Catholic Union, where concerts and amateur dramatic took place. This also included a reading room and lending library for members to enjoy.



St Stephen's Catholic Union.
GRAND CONCERT
AND
PUBLIC LECTURE
IN
ST STEPHEN'S HALL, JOHN STREET,
ON
MONDAY, the 25th October,
At 8 P.M.
The Lecture to be given by the
Rev. J. F. FURLONG, Dundee,
ON THE
NATIONAL MUSIC OF IRELAND,
with Selections.
Reserved Seats, 1s; Front Seats, 6d; Back
Seats, 3d.

In 1883 Fr M. J. McManus was appointed curate, making possible the extension of ministry by conducting worship in Alyth, Newtyle and Woodhill.

Fig. 14: Catholic Union Inaugural Lecture notice (Blairgowrie Advertiser, 16 October 1886).

Canon John Malcolm (1890-1917)

Canon Malcolm breathed new cultural and social life into St Stephen's, as well as updating its buildings. The Presbytery of St Stephen's was built in 1895 at a cost of over £1000 (c.£170,000 in 2026), and a new heating system installed. In 1906 Canon Malcolm led the Church in celebrating its Golden Jubilee. Accordingly, the church was thoroughly painted and redecorated, and an organ was purchased. Half its cost was met through the generosity of Scotland's great philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919), a testament to the growing reputation and presence of St Stephen's as a vibrant church community worthy of support, thanks to Canon Malcolm's endeavours. As Bishop Turner noted in the Catholic Directory (1933):



'Here his name became a household word with all classes, who still treasure and revere his memory, and are ever ready to bear testimony to his edifying life and worth in the social and educational work of the community. The erection of St Stephen's new presbytery and the local mission chapel at Alyth are evidences of his zeal and business capacity. Besides faithfully attending to every branch of mission work, the Canon cultivated and developed the musical

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and dramatic talent among his flock, and St Stephen's Hall, with its operettas, plays and concerts, was a centre of social attraction to the general community, and St Stephen's School was preferred by many to [even] the public schools.'

By the end of Canon Malcolm's tenure, the Parish was thoroughly self-supporting, free from debt, and supported by many benefactors: a testament to the efforts and devotion of Canon Malcolm.



Fig. 15: Canadian Reed Organ by D.W. Karn & Co. supplied by Larg and Sons, Dundee. It was later converted to electric and the non-speaking pipe façade added.



Fig. 16: Statue of the Madonna with the Child Jesus, St Stephen's.

Rev. Walter Robert Stretch (1917-51)

Fr Stretch was born in Hamilton in 1878 and pursued his priestly studies at Blairs College; St Peter's College in Bearsden; and later at Saint-Sulpice in France. He returned to Scotland before completing his studies due to health issues, and was ordained Priest in Dundee on 26 July 1903 by Bishop MacFarlane.

He devoted his life to pastoral ministry, working in parishes in Dundee, including St Mary's Lochee, before serving for thirty-four years at St Stephen's Church. He was well-known and respected in the parish, overseeing further improvements to the church, including the establishment of a beautiful entrance garden and the introduction of a twelve-figure crib donated in memory of a former organist.

Deeply concerned for the welfare and conduct of the parish youth, he took a particularly active role in their moral guidance. He was appointed a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter in 1937. His vocation with the church is reflected by the fact that he died just one month after retiring, in 1951.



Fig. 17: The entrance garden at St Stephen's was just one of Fr Stretch's many improvements during his 34-year service as Parish Priest.

Rev. Jeremiah O'Donoghue (1951-59)



Fr O'Donoghue was born in Port Magee, County Kerry and ordained to the Priesthood in Waterford in 1922.

The parishioners of St Stephen's were heartened by his appointment as Canon of the Cathedral Chapter. Fr O'Donoghue initiated an ambitious scheme for the most complete renovation and redecoration of St Stephen's Church yet attempted. St Stephen's remains one of only two Scottish churches known

to feature Japanese oakwood, a mark of quality and ambition. He took an active part in public affairs, was popular in the town, and presided over the inaugural meeting of the St Stephen's Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul on 14 October 1951.

In 1956, the *Blairgowrie Advertiser* provided the following colourful report: '*A transformation has been made in the appearance of St Stephen's since Canon O'Donoghue came to Blairgowrie in 1951. The Canon and his congregation have every reason to be well satisfied with what they have accomplished and they deserve the warmest congratulations. From a somewhat dingy building, it has been changed into an elegant place of worship, with new woodwork, an attractive colour scheme, a chancel of rich beauty, and other improvements.*

The whole of the floor has been renewed, and new seating, in Japanese oak, has been provided. The side aisles have been re-roofed. The Altar has been moved away from the east wall and converted



Fig. 18: St Stephen's interior received many significant improvements in the early 1950s.

to a liturgical Altar with circular dome-like Tabernacle. New altar rails have been fitted and the sanctuary floor has been laid in oak parquetry. New Stations of the Cross were supplied by Messrs M. H. Gill & Son, Dublin. The walls were stripped to the stonework and replastered, with steel pins providing the support for the decorated surface. Special leaded glass has been fitted into seven of the windows of the Church. An electric blower has been provided for the organ. Electric light has been introduced into the church, the halls, and the Canon's residence.

Exterior improvements have also been made to the west end of the property, originally a school, and later clubrooms. At St Stephen's there is a commodious hall and on the ground floor there are ample spaces and cloakrooms. Access to the hall is provided by two new stairways. The exterior walls of the house and the east wall of the church have been refaced. John Street has been laid with tarmac and concrete. The water supply and sanitary arrangements have been thoroughly modernised.

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Much improvement work has also been done to the Canon's residence. As far as possible, the work was entrusted to local tradesmen, who can be congratulated on their very fine job.'

The contractors included a number of local trades, making this a genuine parish and community effort. The recorded contractors were—Joiners—Messrs R. Bell & Son; builders—Messrs T. J. & J. Bruce; plumber—Mr T. J. Young; painter—Mr W. Lindsay; slater—Mr James Craigie; plasterer—Mr J. S. Laburn; electrician—Mr W. M. Coupar; glaziers—Messrs Walter Smith & Son, Dundee; organ—Messrs Watt & Son, Glasgow; special flooring—Toffolo Jackson & Co., Ltd., Glasgow.



Fig. 19: New Stations of the Cross, supplied by Messrs M. H. Gill & Son, Dublin, are installed during Fr Donoghue's renovations at St Stephen's.



Rev. Kevin A. Smyth (1959-64)

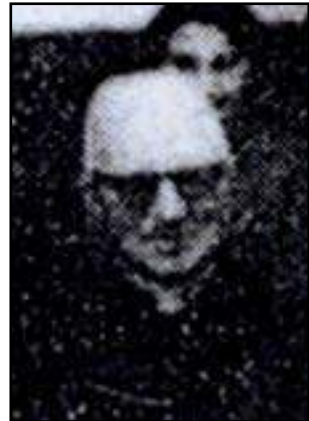
Born in Monaghan, Ulster, and ordained at Carlow in 1942, Fr Smyth arrived in Blairgowrie from Auchterarder. He was also Parish Priest in Alyth and Coupar Angus, overseeing a flock of around 600 people.

He was delighted to celebrate his diamond jubilee in June 2004. Canon Smyth is remembered with deep and lasting affection by parishioners whom he served well, even after his retirement, as a relief Priest. He died in June 2004, in Alyth.

Rev. Patrick McNamara (1964-69)

Hailing from County Clare, Ireland, Fr McNamara was ordained a Trappist Monk (order of the Cistercians) in 1940 at Mount Melleray Abbey. His greatest legacy is overseeing the work on the disused cinema in Coupar Angus, which was transformed into a church in 1965.

Located in such close proximity to the Medieval Abbey discussed earlier (see Chapter 1, above), it is fitting that a Cistercian monk should restore Mass to Coupar Angus in the mid-20th century.



During his service at St Stephen's, Fr McNamara marked the Silver Jubilee of his ordination to the Priesthood. He retired to Dublin and died in 1984.

Rev. Edmund Purcell (1969-77)

Fr Purcell's early education was with the Christian Brothers' School at Clonmel. He studied for the priesthood at St Patrick's College, Thurles, and was ordained on 13 June 1937 for the Archdiocese of Westminster.

He served there until appointed by Bishop Scanlan to St Fillan's, Newport-on-Tay, in the Diocese of Dunkeld. He then served in Dundee, Blairgowrie and Carnoustie, in a career spanning forty years. He died at the age of 80 in December 1991.

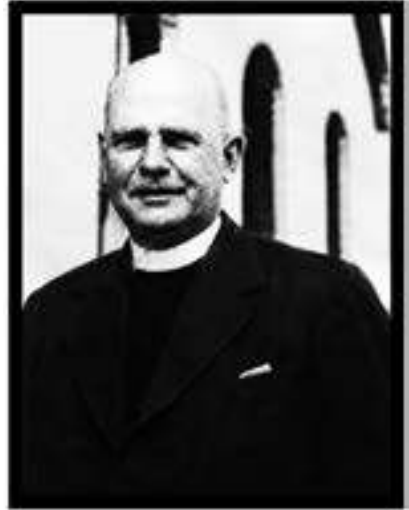


Fig. 20: Statue of the Pieta - St Stephen's, Blairgowrie.

Rev. Mgr Hamish Stuart (1976)

Mgr Stuart was born in Dundee in 1911, and was ordained in 1936 after studying for the Priesthood at Blairs College and the Royal Scots College, Valladolid, Spain.

Mgr Stuart arrived at St Stephen's, after a distinguished career in the Diocese. Having been appointed Vicar General of Dunkeld in 1957, he was the principal diocesan Schools Inspector for two decades, and a Justice of the Peace in Dundee.



Mgr Stuart hoped to serve St Stephen's and the wider Diocese for many more years, but he concluded that the scale of the parish and the priority of catechising the children required the stamina of a younger Priest who could drive and reach his parishioners more readily.

He resigned from all diocesan responsibility in 1976 and came to live in St Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee, until provision could be made for his remaining years. He died on 6 April 1978, in Dundee.

Following this, Fr J. Creegan served as Parish Priest from 1977-81. During this time the interior of the Church was updated: the altar rails were removed and the crucifix above the altar was replaced by one depicting the Risen Christ.

Rev. Patrick McNally (1981-88)

Ordained at St Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee in 1972, Fr McNally has served various churches, including St Stephen's, Blairgowrie.



Mgr Pat reflects, *'I was appointed Parish Priest of St Stephen's, Blairgowrie in 1982, following three years as Chaplain to Perth Prison and Friarton Young Offenders Institution, also in Perth.*

It was my first appointment in charge of a Parish, and I found it quite challenging at the beginning with three Churches (St Mary's Coupar Angus, St Stephen's Blairgowrie and St Luan's Alyth), and three Masses on Sunday morning: 9.30am in St Mary's, 11am in St Stephen's and 12.30pm in St Luan's. It meant that often I had nothing to eat until mid-afternoon, when I returned to the Chapel House. The territory covered by St Stephen's was very extensive: I reckoned around 400 square miles in total, which meant a lot of driving, occasionally in difficult conditions during the winter.

The parishioners were a great support and I soon settled into a fulfilling, if sometimes hectic, daily routine. I visited the Primary School regularly and built up a good relationship with the school staff. On one occasion I travelled with the Head Teacher to York with the P7 class, where we enjoyed visits to the Jorvik Viking Centre, and

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the Railway Museum, among other things. I also coached the boys' football team and, in the winter when conditions allowed, I took our youth group skiing at Glenshee. We had some very rewarding Parish Renewal Weekends over the years at St Stephen's, productive Parish Council Sessions, and some very enjoyable Social Evenings in the Church Hall.

Because of the long days, and often intense daily routine, I began to feel the strain and requested the Bishop for a sabbatical in 1988. I had met a Mill Hill Missionary, Fr Mike Freyne, who visited friends in the Parish when on holiday from Brazil. He invited me to join him in his Parish, in Parati, for a year, but the Bishop did not agree to this arrangement. I was able to go for six weeks, however, and enjoyed every moment of my time there. When I returned from Brazil, the Bishop sent me to the Liturgy Institute in Carlow, Ireland, to study Liturgy. It was an enjoyable experience and, after nine months, I returned to the Diocese where I was appointed Parish Priest of Our Lady of Sorrows, Fintry, Dundee.

I take this opportunity to thank all those at St Stephen's, St Mary's and St Luan's who made my stay a very pleasant and fulfilling experience. I congratulate you on the 175th Anniversary of St Stephen's, and the 125th Anniversary of St Luan's. I look forward to joining you at St Stephen's on Friday 26 June.

Mgr McNally is now serving the parish of St Columba's, Cupar. He recently celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Priestly Ordination: a remarkable milestone.



**Rev. Hugh Sreenan
(1988-2005)**

Fr Sreenan was born in Dundee and served with the Royal Corps of Signals for three years. Upon returning to his studies, he attended the Scots College in Valladolid, Spain. He was ordained in 1962 in St Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee and installed as Canon there in 1995.

He was appointed the Diocesan Director for the Permanent Diaconate and in 2002 celebrated forty years in the Priesthood. A keen fisherman, he joined the Blairgowrie, Rattray and District Angling Association, and following his formal retirement from St Stephen's, he continued to supply parishes around the Diocese until his death in April 2016.



Canon Ian Mullen (2005-10)

Born 16 March 1954 in Dundee, Canon Mullen attended the Scots College at Valladolid in Spain, and was ordained on 8 July 1978 in St Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee. On becoming Parish Priest of St Stephen's, Blairgowrie in 2005 he also served St Mary's, Coupar Angus and St Luan's in Alyth. He was Diocesan Vocations Director and a Religious Education Adviser at Diocesan level.

In May 2008, he was made a member of the Cathedral Chapter of Canons and retired soon after due to ill health. He died on 26 September 2011 aged just 57.



Rev. James Walls (2010-13)

Fr Walls was born in Dundee and ordained in 2005. He was appointed Parish Priest at St Stephen's Blairgowrie, St Luan's Alyth, and St Mary's Coupar Angus, from 2010-13.

Following his arrival, a great many renovations were carried out, mostly to the downstairs hall and the large hall upstairs, which now has a kitchen. Thinking proactively about access, he installed a stairlift so parishioners could more easily participate in meetings, get-

togethers, and the life of the parish in general.

The new St Stephen's Primary School was opened under Fr Jim's tenure at St Stephen's. Pupils, staff, parents, and parishioners gathered for the dedication of the school at Blairgowrie Community Campus on Wednesday 22 September 2010.

The school was dedicated once again to the parish's Patron Saint during a Mass celebrated by Mgr Ken McCaffrey, Vicar General of the Dunkeld Diocese, on behalf of the Bishop of Dunkeld. Fr Jim Walls, assisted him in this as the school's chaplain, alongside Mgr Charles Hendry, of St John's, Perth, who had also conducted the first Mass in the new school, and Fr Tobias Okoro, of St Bride's at Pitlochry.

Rev. Gregory Umunna (2013-present)



Born in Eziama-Ubulu, South East Nigeria, in 1968, Fr Umunna was ordained on 23 August 1997.

When Fr Umunna arrived at St Stephen's he consulted and undertook a survey of the weaknesses of the building and initiated a massive restoration programme to make the Church wind and water-tight, improve safety, and stop the

building from falling into further disrepair.

Initially attributing structural problems to limited dry rot, the rising damp and water ingress identified in numerous areas of the building were more serious than anticipated. Repair and renovation work was to be far more complex and extensive than first realised, with the projected costs of repairs now amounting to tens of thousands of pounds.

Applying to Heritage Lottery funding to undertake '*essential and urgent*' repair work on the listed building. The appointed contractors, James F. Stephen, Architects, advised that intensive investigation would be necessary to assess the full depth and range of necessary repair work.

As the restoration works came to completion, Fr Gregory wrote: *'I salute the courage of parishioners who took up this challenge, volunteered selflessly and generously gave countless hours to this restoration work. I also wish to thank countless others who took up many initiatives, raised funds and made donations towards this project. Permit me to thank Mrs Evelyn Hood for her generous professional services to us in the area of an audio-visual presentation of the restoration of St Stephen's, and Ian Kirkwood for his*

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

professional photographs and designs. Deserving of an outstanding mention are the members of the Fabric Committee: Jim Graham, Alan Scott, Mike Coyle and Marion Duffy. My sincere special thanks go to them for their collaboration, tenacity, selfless commitment and dedication, from the commencement of this Church restoration work, to its completion.

I further wish to acknowledge and express our warmest gratitude to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Environment Scotland for assisting us with substantial funding to embark on the project. Gratitude goes also to the Garfield Weston Foundation, All Churches Trust, Scotland Churches Trust, Jimmy Cairncross Trust, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, The Baird Trust, Dalrymple Donaldson Fund and the Diocese of Dunkeld for their generosity and support. Thanks to your support, this major restoration project will help assure the future of St Stephen's for many generations to come.'

The restoration of St Stephen's has led to an influx of new families from the Philippines and Eastern Europe, significantly the Polish, Ukrainian and Czech communities, as well as Latin Americans, and those of African origin. With this significant growth of the parish, a Parish Diversity Day is now celebrated yearly to give



Fig. 21: Restoration work underway on the roof of St Stephen's.



Fig. 22: From top left: St Stephen's exterior. Statue of St Theresa of the Child Jesus. 5th Station of the Cross. St Stephen, Patron Saint of stone masons. Altar front, depicting the Lamb of God, the Body and Blood of Christ, and a Pelican as ancient symbol of Eucharistic Love.



Fig. 23: Our Lady's Altar in St Stephen's, Blairgowrie.



Fig. 24: From top: the Holy Oils: Oil of the Sick; Oil of the Catechumens and Holy Christm oil. Parishioners and Altar Servers at St Stephen's. Sunday worship at St Stephen's.

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thanks for the various talents and rich cultural diversity within our parish community. Drawing from this wealth of nationalities and cultural backgrounds, the parish now has a dedicated team of over twenty altar servers. In 2022, with the support of Fr Gregory and the parishioners, these boys and girls made a pilgrimage to St Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Preparing for the celebrations marking the 175th anniversary of the opening of St Stephen's and the 125th anniversary of the opening of St Luan's, Fr Umunna said:

'By recognising divine faithfulness, anniversaries like ours provide an opportunity to recount God's grace and provision, thanking Him for surviving the challenges and enduring obstacles. They also pay tribute to the founders and pioneers who acted on a vision, by honouring their spiritual heritage, fostering a sense of identity and continuity in faith.'

These celebrations also urge congregations to move from mere nostalgia to a renewed affirmation and dedication, re-engaging with their mission to serve neighbours and share the Gospel. Religiously, these anniversaries foster unity among members, celebrating shared faith, fostering fellowship, and passing the story of God's work to the next generation (Psalm 145:4). Ultimately, they serve to bridge the past with a hopeful future, strengthening the congregation to continue its journey.

Gracious and Loving God, we thank You for the 300-year journey of faith that has led us to this joyful day. We give thanks for the 'living stones'—the men, women, boys and girls of St Stephen's and St Luan's who kept the light of the Gospel burning through centuries of challenge and change.

We thank You for the priests who have served us, the teachers who have guided our children, and the families who made these churches their spiritual home. As we celebrate our past, we ask for

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Your blessing on our future.

Fill us with the courage of our ancestors and the joy of the Holy Spirit, that we may continue to be a sanctuary of hope for all in our communities.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.'



Fig. 25: Tom Buckman, cantor, at the Mass of re-dedication in 2018.



Fig 26: First Communicants with Fr Gregory Umunna and Bishop Emeritus Stephen Robson in June 2026



Fig 27: Sunday worship at St Stephen's

Abbots at Coupar Angus Abbey

Fulk c.1164-70	William III 1258-83	Thomas de Levingstone 1456-59
Ralph 1171-89	Andreas de Buchan 1284-96	John de Hudton 1460-61
Adam 1189-94	Alan 1300-c.1315	David Bane 1461-1479x83
Arnold 1194-1200	John Orwell c.1325-1341x56	John Schanwell 1479x83-1506
William I 1201-02	Lambert <i>fl.</i> 1356	Robert Beaton 1507
Udard 1202-07	Walter <i>fl.</i> 1387	William Turnbull 1507-24
Richard 1207-09	John de Ketnes pre-1395-1419	William Stewart 1511-12
Alexander 1209-40	William de Ledhuys 1419-c.1428	Thomas Hay 1524-25
Gilbert 1240-43	Thomas de Furde 1428-29	John (Alexander) Spens 1524-26
William de Binin 1243-58	William de Blare 1429-1453x56	Donald Campbell 1526-1562x63

Clergy of the Parish, past and present

James McKay
1836-50

Joseph Creegan
1977-81

John Carmont
1850-82

Patrick McNally
1981-88

Andrew Dempsey
1853-54

Hugh Sreenan
1988-2005

Thomas Crumley
1882-90

Ian Thomas Mullen
2005-10

John Malcolm
1890-1917

James Eugene Walls
2010-13

Walter Robert Stretch
1917-51

Gregory Ejiogu Umunna
2013-present

Jeremiah O'Donoghue
1951-59

—

Kevin Aloysius Smyth
1959-64

Anthony Cousins (1996)
Permanent Deacon
(On Sabbatical)

Patrick McNamara
1964-69

Christopher Doig (2021)
A son of the parish,
ordained for and serving
in the Diocese of Aberdeen

Edmund Purcell
1969-77

Hamish Stuart
1977

Michael Hewling (2021)
A Hermit Priest living
in Balhary, Alyth.



1 St Luan Comes to Alyth

A story of faith,
community,
and beginnings



2 St Luan came to Alyth 1500 years ago.



3 He met the people and shared his message.



4 They chose a quiet place for a church.



Alyth – Faith, Community, Heritage

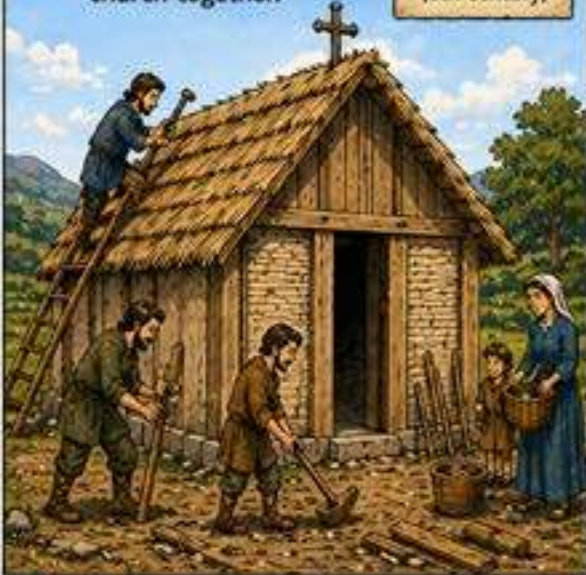


- 5** Everyone helped gather what they needed.



- 6** They built a simple church together.

Early church
(6th century)



- 7** They prayed and learned together.

Thank you for
our home and
our people.



- 8** Today Alyth's Arches are the remains of the later 12th century church on the site.

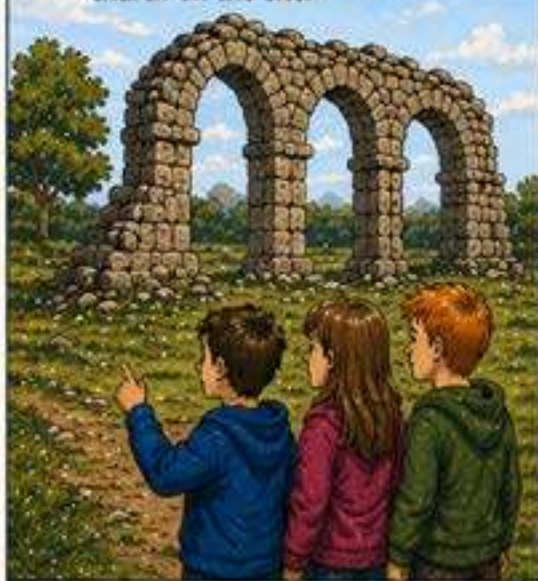




Fig. 28: The Sanctuary Lamp at St Luan's: Alyth declares the True Presence of Our Lord in the Tabernacle.

Chapter 3

St Luan's Church, Alyth



Fig. 29: Parishioners pause for a photograph outside St Luan's, Alyth.

Complementing the well-documented history of St Stephen's, Blairgowrie, we turn now to St Luan's, Alyth, which provides a related yet distinctive account of Catholic life in eastern Perthshire. While Blairgowrie's parish reflects a steady re-emergence of the Church from earlier missionary foundations and Penal Time endurance, Alyth presents a narrative shaped by more recent social change, even as it remains yet more deeply rooted in the same ancient Celtic-Christian inheritance associated with St Luan himself.

The earliest traditions of Christianity in Alyth are found in the seminal missionary activity that shaped Perthshire in the

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

6th century, as we saw earlier in Chapter 1. Chief among the figures associated with this period is St Luan, the former student of St Brendan and contemporary of St Columba. We recall from Chapter 1 the memorable description of St Luan reaching Lismore by divine intervention, and becoming recognised as Patron Saint of Argyll before extending his missionary work north-eastwards across Pictland and up into the Black Isle where he died in 592.

Local tradition maintains that St Luan founded an early place of worship in Alyth, most likely on or adjacent to the site marked by the Alyth Arches. Though no visible remains of St Luan's original church survive, its cultural memory is embedded in the history of Catholicity in Perthshire: at the intersection of Celtic and Latin, Irish, Scottish and European traditions.

The Reformation of the 16th century brought profound disruption to Catholic worship. As in Blairgowrie, the suppression of Catholic worship and the dissolution of established religious



Fig. 30: The sanctuary at St Luan's. Hand-embroidered altar cloth by parishioner Nancy Dellaquaglia.



Fig. 31: Beautiful wood-panelled interior of St Luan's

institutions followed. The Missions at Murthly and Stobhall, which were closer to Blairgowrie, successfully preserved some Catholic continuity through the protection of sympathetic families. But Alyth appears to have lacked such sustained support, and the town's Catholic life entered a prolonged period of absence, with little evidence of organised worship for several centuries.

The Conditions of Renewal

The revival of Catholic life in Alyth during the 19th century must, then, be understood within a different context from that of Blairgowrie. Unlike Blairgowrie's unbroken local tradition, it was industrialisation with its radical social and economic changes that succeeded in regenerating Alyth's Catholicity.

The expansion of the linen industry in the later 19th century brought new populations into the town, among them a significant number of Catholic workers. These families, often drawn from elsewhere in Scotland and from Ireland, formed the heart of a

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

renewed Catholic presence. In the absence of a dedicated place of worship, they gathered as best they could, attending Mass in temporary venues such as the local hall, now the Alyth Hotel.

Such conditions recall the humble beginnings of the Blairgowrie Mission, where worship likewise took place in hired rooms before a permanent church could be secured. In both instances, the faith endured through the commitment of small and scattered communities, sustained by visiting clergy and a shared determination to preserve their religious life.

The Foundation of St Luan's Church

The decisive moment in the history of the Alyth parish came with the construction of St Luan's in 1900. In contrast to the more gradual institutional development seen in Blairgowrie, this was an undertaking driven largely by the local community itself.

Funded by public subscription, the project depended heavily on individual effort, sacrifice and generosity. One figure especially closely associated with its success is Sergeant Murray, whose remarkable fundraising single-handedly secured the greater part of the building costs within a relatively short period. His contribution stands as a striking example of the personal commitment that underpinned the establishment and continuation of the Parish.

The opening Mass, celebrated in April 1900, which also saw Sergeant Murray's baby daughter baptised, drew a large congregation and marked a moment of significance. After centuries during which Catholic worship had been absent from Alyth, the

Alyth, 1879.—Served from Blairgowrie on first Sunday of month. Mass at 9; Confessions before Mass.

An excellent feu in a most desirable locality has been secured here, and a Chapel is at present (November, 1899) in course of erection. Contributions in aid will be gratefully received by the Bishop of the Diocese, or by the Rev. John Malcolm, Blairgowrie.



Fig. 32: The wooden church built in 1900 is now clad in harling.

Church once again resumed a visible and enduring presence. In its shared expression of restoration and renewal, the occasion can be seen to echo the solemn opening of St Stephen's almost half a century earlier, in 1856.

Growth and Consolidation

Throughout the 20th century, St Luan's developed as a small but stable parish, its life shaped by the rhythms of the local community. The church itself, originally constructed of wood, was later strengthened and structurally enhanced through the voluntary efforts of parishioners, demonstrating a sustained tradition of direct practical action, involvement and care.

The generosity of benefactors gradually built an enduring legacy of devotional objects and furnishings contributing to the dignity of worship to the present day. These additions, though modest in scale, connected the parish to broader artistic and liturgical traditions of the Catholic Church while adding a distinctive Scottish focus. While some visitors are compelled to view The Arches, those

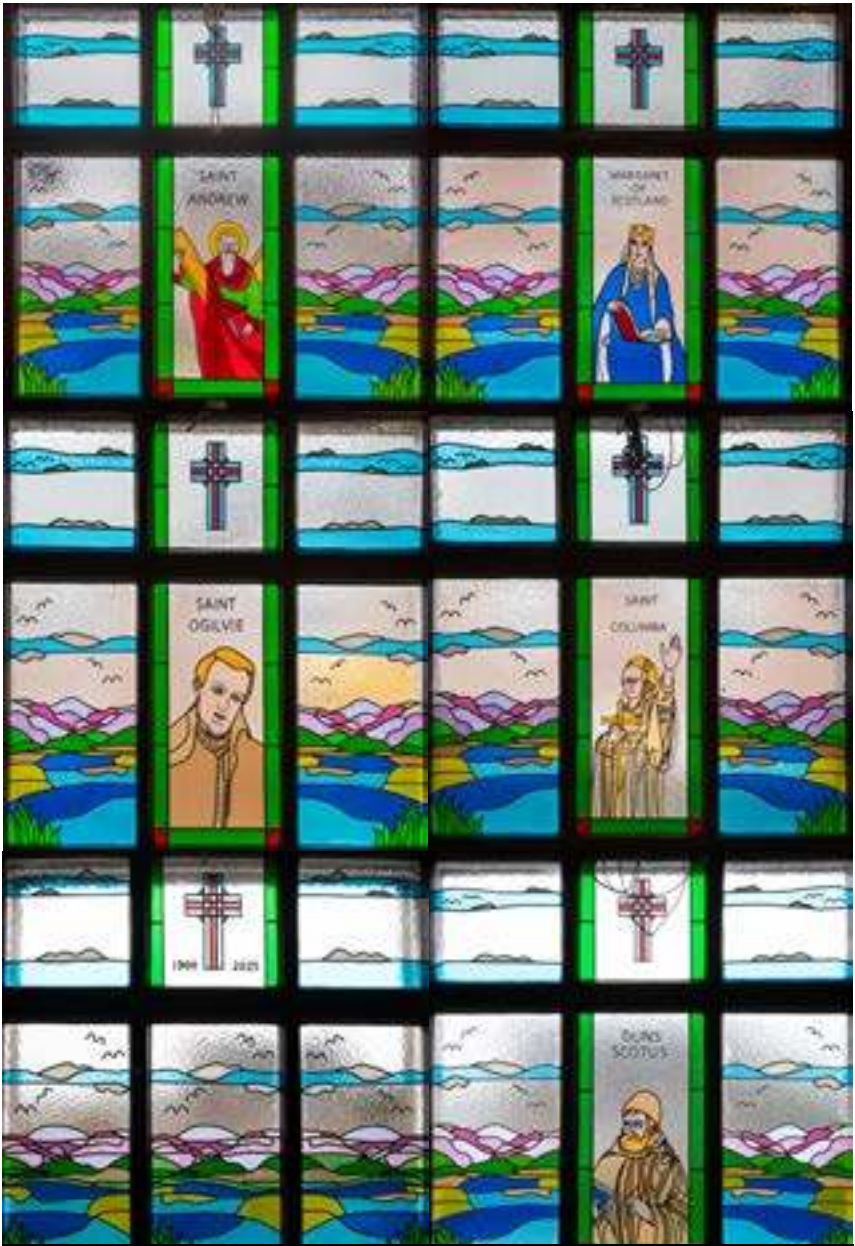


Fig. 33: St Luan's anniversary windows depict figures of singular importance to Scotland's religious and intellectual history. Opposite: St Luan



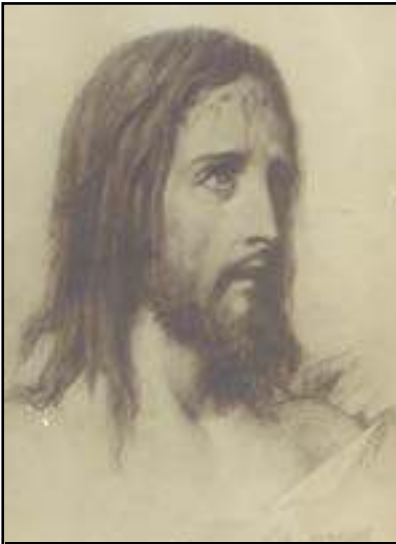


Fig. 34: Station of the Cross by Lazerges.

attending Mass in St Luan's are often intrigued by the unusual Stations of the Cross which were produced by celebrated French artist, Jean Raymond Hippolyte Lazerges (1817–87), the painter who may well have been known to André Kinloch-Smyth, of Balharry, since both were contemporaries in the circles who studied sculpture under Rodin and painting in France. Lazerges' significance is attested by the fact his work is housed in museums and galleries in all major French cities.

Of further significance is a religious artefact in the style of a wooden wayside shrine, depicting a figure of Our Lady and inscribed in Polish, 'POD TWA ORBRONE' (*Under Your Protection*). This was donated by Polish servicemen, billeted nearby during World War II.

The original exterior walls of St Luan's church were wooden panels until about 40 years ago when Albert Richmond and his brothers in-law, Peter Robertson and Craig Robertson gave up countless hours of their time for the harling of the exterior walls as we have them today. Jim Roddy generously donated a supply of



Fig. 35: Wood panel at Alyth depicting St George and the Dragon.

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gravels and sand while Andrew Kilpatrick, owner of the Saw Mill, then provided all the wood necessary for the work.

Louise Louvau and Nancy Dellaquiglia until they passed, were very devoted to St Luan's and were outstanding in looking after the church. Similarly, Tom O'Malley, Elma Sharp and Daria McDowall have helped significantly to look after the building. We are thankful to all who bless St Luan's with their time, dedication, and care.

Renewal in the Present Day

In more recent years, St Luan's has sought not only to preserve but also express its heritage in new and engaging ways. The installation of stained-glass windows in 2025, commemorating the 125th anniversary of the church represents a significant moment in this ongoing process of renewal.

Moreover, practical renewal has included tarmacking the surrounding perimeters of the church to prevent weed growth, generously funded by donations from parishioners, while Gerard L'marche and family, friends of Fr Gregory from Luxembourg donated £5,000 for the installation of new electrical cables, lights and heating. Jim Graham, the parish Fabric Adviser, gave many hours of his time selflessly to supervise these works.

A central fixed-cross window funded by donations from parishioners forms part of eight new sets of stained glass windows depicting figures of singular importance in Scotland's religious and intellectual history. These are: St Andrew, the Patron Saint of Scotland; St Margaret, Queen of Scotland (1045-93); St John Ogilvie (1579-1615); and Blessed John Duns Scotus, the leading medieval theologian and philosopher (c.1265-1308). Set against a consistent and colourful Scottish landscape, the glass windows and artwork were inspired by Fr Gregory's perception and love of the Scottish landscape.



Fig. 36: The elaborate front of the Altar at St Luan's. The Dowager Countess of Airlie hand-stitched this replica of an original design from St Mark's, Venice in 1900: a remarkable gift to the Church by a non-Catholic.



Fig. 37: Jesus is taken down from the Cross.

Fig. 38: Lazerges' Sixth Station of the Cross.



Fig. 39: Known as 'The Little Flower,' St Thérèse taught that holiness is found in simple acts of love, humility, and trust in God. Her 'Little Way' continues to inspire millions.



Fig. 40: Donated by Polish servicemen billeted nearby in World War II, this figure of Our Lady is inscribed in Polish, 'POD TWA ORBRONE' (Under Your Protection).

Chapter 4

St Mary's Church, Coupar Angus



Fig. 41: St Mary's Church in Coupar Angus (active 1965-2016).

St Mary's Church, Coupar Angus took its name from the Catholic community's roots which lie in the Cistercian Abbey of St Mary's, dedicated on Ascension Day, 15 May, 1233. Following the Reformation and until 1829, Catholic worship had been outlawed. Those in the town who still adhered to the old faith risked their lives to meet and worship, secretly, in the ruined vaults of the former Cistercian Abbey. As we saw in the previous chapter, the first Priest of St Mary's Church in Coupar Angus, Fr McNamara, had formerly been a Cistercian monk himself, bringing the Cistercian backdrop sharply into focus.

Originally built in 1863 to serve the United Presbyterian congregation, this building became the South United Free Church



ANDREW
DEI ET APOSTOLICAE SEDIS GRATIA

EPISCOPUS
DUNKELD

DECREE

Returning the Church of Saint Mary's, in the Parish of St. Stephen's, Blairgowrie
To secular usage

I, the Most Reverend Andrew McKenzie, the Bishop of the Diocese of Dunkeld, having taken into consideration the following:

- The permission of the appropriate authority in time past to establish a church in the parish of St. Stephen's, Blairgowrie;
- The present status of the land on which the parish church exists;
- The fact that the said church has not been utilised for acts of divine worship or other religious gatherings in the Church's name in recent times;
- The fact that the church was in such a state of disrepair that it was no longer suitable to be used for acts of divine worship or other religious gatherings in the Church's name;
- The fact that the church has been previously permanently made over to secular usage, not by decree of the competent Ordinary, but rather, simply by fact, that the property has been leased to an individual in a contract binding in civil law, albeit not authorised by the Ordinary (Canon 1212);
- The unlikelihood, in accordance with canon 1222 §1, of the need for the said church to be utilised in the future for acts of divine worship.

And having carefully enquired that any obligations or conditions concerning the grantors and benefactors
And having been assured that the good of souls would not be harmed,

Herby decree that

The Church of Saint Mary's is no longer a sacred place and ought to no longer be used for acts of divine worship or religious gatherings in the Church's name; furthermore, should there be any sacred objects remaining, they are to be appropriately obtained by the Diocese. Consequently, it is permitted that this church may be used for some secular but not unbecoming purpose.

Given at the Curial Offices of the Diocese of Dunkeld on:

Decretum: 17. 05. 19

Die: 17. 05. 19

Signatus: Andrew McKenzie
Episcopus Dunkeldensis
Bishop of Dunkeld

Signatus: [Signature]
Episcopus Dunkeldensis
Bishop of Dunkeld

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and continued as a place of worship until 1929, when it was converted into a cinema. In April 1965, it was claimed for Catholic worship, and adopted the Abbey's dedication of St Mary's. The enormous task of converting the building back into a church began in early 1966 and was largely a volunteer effort of the congregation and its supporters. Mr Frisken, an architect from Dundee, provided expert advice on the work, and Mr Dan Sweeney undertook the role of clerk of works.

St Mary's church continued to serve the community and the parish with a Vigil Mass celebrated there every weekend, many thanks to the extraordinary work done there to keep it running by Mary O'Brien, a few ladies and Mr John McKenna who did minor maintenances and continues to keep an eye on the property.

Regrettably, the Church closed in 2016, desperately needing major refurbishment and the treatment of dry rot. In 2025, by a special Canonical Decree of Bishop Andrew McKenzie, St Mary's Church, Coupar Angus was officially decommissioned as a church and returned to a '*secular but not unbecoming use*'.

The religious items therein moved to St Stephen's, Blairgowrie, especially the main crucifix which now hangs on the centre of the altar.



Fig. 42: Alyth Arches: the remains nave of the medieval church dating from the 12th century.



Fig. 43: The original St Stephen's school 1841-2009.

Chapter 5

St Stephen's RC Primary Blairgowrie



Lyndsey Smith (headteacher)

Headteacher Lyndsey Smith writes:

'Today is a moment of deep gratitude and joyful celebration as we come together to mark the joint anniversaries of St Stephen's and St Luan's Church, and to give thanks for 300 years of combined Catholic faith and witness in these communities. This is far more than a celebration of buildings or milestones; it is a celebration of people — generations of faithful men, women, and children who, through courage, prayer, and perseverance, ensured that the Catholic faith was lived, protected, and handed on.'

Catholicism has shaped lives here: often quietly, sometimes at great cost; always rooted in hope. As we celebrate these anniversaries, we are reminded that our faith has been sustained not by comfort,



but by conviction. Today, we live the fruits of that faith freely and publicly, and none of us should take that gift for granted.

As the Headteacher of a Catholic school at the heart of this parish community, I feel deeply privileged to stand within this living tradition. It is a great joy to lead a school where faith is not an add-on, but a foundation; where Gospel values shape daily life; and where children are nurtured not only academically, but spiritually. Catholic education is one of the strongest ways this community's faith story continues to be written, and I am honoured to play my part within it.

Our Catholic schools in Scotland were founded on the faith and sacrifice of those who came before us—priests, sisters, teachers, parents, parishioners—pilgrims in their own time, who believed that education should not simply fill minds with knowledge but should also form hearts in faith, love, and service. They handed on to us a living legacy: the chance to teach not only subjects, but values; not only skills, but the dignity of every child as made in the image and likeness of God.

This anniversary celebration invites us to see ourselves as part of

Headteachers of St Stephen's Primary School

1895 - Early 20th Century
Run by Parish Priests

Early 20th Century – 1946
Miss Donnelly

1946-1951
Thomas Hanavay

1951-1966
Andrew McCormack

1966-1969
Isabella O'Neill

1969-1974
Mary Rose Reville

1974-1989
Jane Duffy

1989-1995
Marian Kernahan

1995-2003
Helen Donald

2003-2013
Elizabeth Douglas

2013-2022
Simon McKell

2022-present day
Lyndsey Smith

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that same journey. We walk in the footsteps of pilgrims, but we also carry the torch forward for those who will come after us. For me that journey has been deeply personal. My role has strengthened my faith in ways I did not expect, and at the same time, my faith has shaped the way I lead St Stephen's Primary School. On days of joy, I have seen God's light shining through the laughter of children, through their questions, their wonder, their acts of kindness to one another. On days of challenge, I have leaned on prayer, on the Gospel values, and on the belief that Christ walks beside me, giving strength and wisdom beyond my own.

Being a pilgrim of faith means that I know that I don't walk alone. Each member of the school community—staff, pupils, parents, parish, and Diocese—walks this path with me. Together, we hold on to the vision of Catholic education as a source of hope: hope for young people who are searching for meaning, hope for families who long for their children to flourish, hope for society that longs for compassion, justice, and peace.

On introducing the Jubilee, Pope Francis reminded us that 'Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty insecurities and compensations which limit our horizons, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile.' In our schools, that is what we are called to do every single day: to keep our eyes fixed on the horizon, to see beyond the immediate, and to walk with young people towards the fullness of life God promises.

As pilgrims, we sometimes stumble, we sometimes grow weary, but our celebrations today reminds us that God is faithful. He is with us in every classroom, in every act of service, in every prayer whispered quietly by a child who needs reassurance. He is with us when we celebrate success, and He is with us when we face difficulties. That presence is what keeps us moving forward.

Let us embrace our call as pilgrims of faith. Let us give thanks for

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the journey that has brought us here and walk forward with courage, carrying the light of Christ into every lesson, every playground conversation, every decision we make as educators. We must never forget that in Catholic education we are shaping not just futures, but eternal souls.

May this celebration fill us with hope—hope that renews us, hope that sustains us, and hope that inspires the next generation of pilgrims who will continue this journey long after us.

Now, the responsibility to continue that story rests with us. In our parishes, families, and especially in our schools, we are now the living witnesses of the faith we have inherited. As we celebrate together today, may we give thanks for all who have gone before us, and may we recommit ourselves to carrying their legacy forward. May we continue to grow as a faith-filled community — united, hopeful, and confident in the knowledge that Christ, who has walked with these communities for the past years, continues to walk beside us still.'

Lyndsey Smith - Headteacher of St Stephen's Primary School



My Church, Our Heritage



A Reflection by Kian Donnelly

Having lived in Alyth my whole life, St Luan's has always been a special place for me. It is my local place of worship, and I wouldn't change this for the world. I have seen the ups and downs of the building: despite the leaks and running repairs, not much has changed with the building's structure in my lifetime, but I do like the addition of the stained-glass windows, shining fresh life into the building.

The Church has seen many changes. I am not old enough to remember the building before it was cladded, or when there was a stove in the centre, but some who are reading this may do. This anniversary causes me to reflect on 125 years of new faces, recurring worshipers, passing travellers, beautiful Masses, joyous occasions, enchanting weddings, honourable funerals, and many a child and adult welcomed into the Catholic faith through Baptism, Reconciliation, Communion and Confirmation.

These walls have seen everything that Faith has to offer. We don't think much of this when we sit and pray, but let us make this anniversary celebration a time to do so. Let us recognise and realise that the seats we occupy as we worship have been sat upon by hundreds of people before us and will be sat upon by hundreds after us, each of whom have been or will be on their own spiritual journey. May God bless all who have worshipped, who do worship, and who will worship in St Luan's Church, Alyth.

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

**ST STEPHEN'S
PASTORAL TEAM**

Catechist
Gail McIntyre

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Maureen Jackson
07952 376985

Webmaster
Irek Kawalinski

Music Directors
Tom Buckham
Gail McIntyre
St Stephen's
Donnelly Family
St Luan's

Eucharistic Ministers:
lead person
Maureen Jackson

Children's Liturgy
lead person
Mary Wojtowicz

Lectors
lead person
Anthony Jervis
St Luan's
Maureen Jackson
St Stephen's

Social Justice
St Vincent de Paul
Society

Church Flowers
lead person
Jean Scott
St Stephen's
Elma Sharp
St Luan's

Altar Servers
lead person
Rolmark Colanse

Don Bosco Group
lead person
Esther Brown

Grounds and Flowers
lead
FitzPatrick Family
St Stephen's

Contact Person
for St Luan's, Alyth
Daria McDowall

Adviser on Finance
Mike Coyle

Adviser on Fabric
Jim Graham

PARISH MINISTRIES

Welcomers
St Stephen's
Mary O'Brien
Doreen Dobbie
Snooky Marshall
Patricia McCarthy

Carol Kennedy
Toni Nugent
Welcomer
St Luan's
Daria McDowall

Eucharistic Ministers
Mary Wojtowicz
Kathleen Fraser
Maureen Jackson
Tom McQuillan
Sonia Forsyth
Paul Brown

Parish Lectors
St Stephen's
Rolmark Colanse
Almu Appleyard
William Marshall
Dominic Pacho
Snooky Marshall
Rhydian Colanse
Monina Pacho
Dina Colanse
Charlie Crighton

Mike Coyle
Alan Scott
Jim Graham
Michal Schomski
Maureen Jackson
Philip Jackson
Anita Donald
Carol Kennedy
Ben Cameron
Leo Brown

Parish Lectors
St Luan's
Daria McDowall

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

Anthony Jervis
Monica Collins
Elma Sharp
Juliet Vivers
Anne-Marie Hogan
Godfrey Holden
Mary Gill
Kian Donnelly
Martin Donnelly

Altar Servers

William Marshall
Dominic Pacho
Rolmark Colanse
Rhydian Colanse
Anthonina Suchumska
Leo Brown
Sam Brown
Brayden St Maria
Gabriel Pacho
John Marek
Rhuridh Morrocco
Micha Morrocco
Leon Suchumska
Helena Datlaf
Master Wojtek

Flower Ladies and Church Decorators

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Jean Scott
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Kathleen Fraser
Lauraine McGregor
John McGregor
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Anna Markova
Esther Brown

Margaret Keast
Jean Scott
Ellie Morrocco
Fiona Morrice
Don Bosco Group
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Money Counters
Michael Coyle
James McManus
Ronnie Keast
Charlie Crighton
Tom McQuillan
Tom Buckham
Philip and Raphael

Tea and Coffee Group

Toni Nugent
Ellie Morrocco
Maureen Jackson
Philip Jackson
Patricia McCarthy
Parish Cantors
Tom Buckham
Kathleen Fraser
Marti Rennie
Gerard Cameron
Margaret Keast
Anna Markova

Historical Contributions

St Stephen's History
Babette Kenyon
Annette Stewart
Patricia McCarthy
Fr Gregory Umunna

St Luan's History
Marion Duffy
Martin Donnelly

Joint Anniversary Committee

Patricia McCarthy
Annette Stewart
Babette Kenyon
Mary O'Brien
Doreen Dobbie
Elma Sharp
Gail McIntyre
Tom Buckham
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Toni Nugent
Godfrey Holden
Mary Gill
Jim Graham

Health and Safety

Gail McIntyre
St Stephen's
Daria McDowall
St Luan's



Fig. 44: Diversity Days in St Stephen's – joyful occasions of parish celebration.



Fig. 45: Priestly anniversaries are a cause for much celebration.

Rejoicing in Faith through the ages

St Luan's RC Church, Alyth

125th Anniversary Celebration

Order of Service

Anniversary Benediction

25 June 2026

Feast Day of St Luan

Unveiling of the 125th Anniversary Plaque
by Rt Rev. Andrew McKenzie

*All are warmly invited to the refreshments
at the Airlie Hall following this service*

Benediction

Opening Hymn: O Salutaris

1. O salutáris Hóstia,
Quae caeli pandis óstium:
Bella premunt hostília,
Da robur fer auxílium.
2. Uni trinóque Dómino
Sit sempitérna glória,
Qui vitam sine término
Nobis donet in pátria.

*A brief homily to help the congregation focus
its attention on the worship of the Lord.
It is important to remember that the Eucharist
is the 'Real Presence' of Jesus Christ.*

Hymn: Tantum Ergo

1. Tantum ergo Sacraméntum
Venerémur cernui:
Et antiquum documéntum
Novo cedat rítui:
Praestet fides suppleméntum
Sénsuum deféctui.

Genitóri, Genitóque
Laus et jubilátio,
Salus, honor, virtus quoque
Sit et benedíctio:
Procedénti ab utróque
Compar sit laudátio.

Bishop: You have given your people bread from heaven.

People: Having all sweetness in it.

Bishop: Let us pray: O Lord, who in this wonderful Sacrament of the Eucharist, has left us a memorial of your passion, help us so to reverence the sacred mystery of your Body and Blood that we may experience in our lives, the effects of your redemption, you who live reign forever and ever. Amen.

The Divine Praises

Blessed be God.

Blessed be His Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.

Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most Holy.

Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be her Glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be St Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints.

Christ Be Our Light (Refrain)

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Dismissal - The Church's one foundation

1. The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation,
By water and the word;
From Heav'n he came and sought her
To be his Holy Bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

2. Elect from ev'ry nation,
Yet one o'er all the Earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With ev'ry grace endued.

3. 'Mid toil and tribulation
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forever more;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

4. O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee;
There, past the border mountains,
Where in sweet vales, the bride
With thee, by living fountains,
Forever shall abide!

St Stephen's RC Church, Blairgowrie

175th Anniversary Celebration

Order of Service

Anniversary Mass

26 June 2026

Unveiling of the 125th Anniversary Plaque
by Rt Rev. Andrew McKenzie

Entrance Hymn - Praise to the Holiest in the Height

1. Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise;
in all His words most wonderful,
most sure in all His ways!
2. O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight,
and to the rescue came.
3. O wisest love! That flesh and blood,
which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive and should prevail.
4. And that the highest gift of grace
should flesh and blood refine;
God's presence and His very self,
and essence all-divine.
5. Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise;
in all His works most wonderful,
most sure in all His ways!

Introductory Rites

The Confiteor

I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers
and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done
and in what I have failed to do,
[strike breast]
through my fault,
through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary
ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me
to the Lord our God.

Kyrie

Lord have mercy...

Christ have mercy...

Lord have mercy...

Gloria

Mass of Christ the Saviour

(Dan Schutte)

Glory to God, glory to God
Glory to God in the highest
And on Earth, peace on Earth
Peace to people of goodwill

We praise You, we bless You
We adore You, we glorify You
We give You thanks
for Your great glory
Lord God, Heavenly King
O God, almighty Father

R/ Glory to God, glory to God

Lord Jesus Christ,
only Begotten Son
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father
You take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.

You take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer
You are seated at the right hand,
the right of the Father
Have mercy on us.

R/ Glory to God, glory to God

For You alone are the Holy One
You alone are the Lord
You alone are
the Most High Jesus Christ
With the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.

**R/ Glory to God, glory to God
Amen, amen.**

Opening Prayer

The Liturgy of the Word

Kings 8:22-23, 27-30:

May your eyes watch night and day over this temple.

Psalm 126:3

*'The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.'*

1 Peter 2:4-9

*Focuses on believers as 'living stones'
built into a spiritual house, chosen by God.*

John 4:19-24

*True worshipers will worship
the Father in Spirit and truth.*

Homily

Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

Amen

Intercessory Prayers

Offertory

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Offertory Hymn No. 1

Let there be love shared among us

1. Let there be love shared among us
Let there be love in our eyes
May now Your love sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,
Let there be love shared among us,
Let there be love.
2. Let there be hope shared among us
Let there be hope in our eyes
May now Your hope sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,
Let there be hope shared among us,
Let there be hope.
3. Let there be joy shared among us
Let there be joy in our eyes
May now Your joy sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,
Let there be joy shared among us,
Let there be joy.

Offertory Hymn No.2
Blest are you Lord, God of all creation

1. Blest are you, Lord, God of all creation,
thanks to your goodness this bread we offer:
fruit of the earth, work of our hands,
it will become the bread of life.

Blessed be God! Blessed be God!
Blessed be God forever! Amen!
Blessed be God! Blessed be God!
Blessed be God forever! Amen!

2. Blest are you, Lord, God of all creation,
thanks to your goodness this wine we offer:
fruit of the earth, work of our hands,
it will become the cup of life.

Blessed be God...

Prayer over the Offerings

Preface

Sanctus

Eucharistic Prayer

Our Father

Agnus Dei

Communion Hymn
The King of Love my Shepherd is

1. The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.
2. Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.
3. Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.
4. In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.
5. Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!
6. And so through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

Post Communion Prayer

*Recognitions for Extraordinary Commitments
to St Stephen's and St Luan's*

Dismissal Hymn - City of God

1. Awake from your slumber
Arise from your sleep
A new day is dawning
For all those who weep

The people in darkness
Have seen a great light
The Lord of our longing
Has conquered the night

**Let us build the city of God
May our tears be turned into dancing
For the Lord, our light and our love
Has turned the night into day**

2. We are sons of the morning
We are daughters of day
The One who has loved us
Has brightened our way

Let us build the city of God...

3. God is light
In Him there is no darkness
Let us walk in His light
His children one and all

Oh, comfort my people
Make gentle your words
Proclaim to my city
The day of her birth

Let us build the city of God...

(Excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal*, 2010; Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

*All are warmly invited to the refreshments at the Hall
upstairs following this service.*

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This book commemorates and celebrates the Perthshire communities who have sustained the Catholic faith at St Stephen's in Blairgowrie for 175 years and St Luan's in Alyth for 125 years. Yet beyond this combined 300th anniversary, the story of Catholic culture in northern Perthshire leads us on a journey spanning 1500 years.

Beginning with the Irish missionaries, St Columba (AD 521-97) and St Luan (AD 520-92) whose Celtic life and Christian legacy were extended and refreshed by the extraordinary vibrant monastic networks flourishing from the 12th century onwards. We examine some manuscript treasures from Coupar Angus now in the Vatican Library, and shed new light on Alyth's history, identifying it for the first time as the earliest known place of Christian worship in Perthshire.

Turning to post-Reformation times, we find determined clergy and steadfast families who kept faith's flame alive during Penal Times (c.1560-1829), often in secret and at profound personal cost in some of the most distinguished landed estates, including Murthly and Stobhall.

Concluding with the 21st-century contexts and characters keeping the Catholic tradition alive, this book delights in sharing new findings reflecting Perthshire's inspirational cultural and intellectual history. The book affirms a colourful, sophisticated tradition that has shaped Perthshire for generations, and is set to continue doing so.

Andrew Mitchell is a retired Geography teacher from St Columba's High School, Perth. A lifelong enthusiast of local history, he retains many fond memories of the generations of young people from Blairgowrie and Alyth who travelled to Perth for their secondary education. He received a Papal Medal in 2017 for his services as a Church journalist, teacher and youth worker.

Dr Kylie Murray is a medievalist who has held posts at Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, Bristol and Harvard Universities. Her work focuses on Scottish literature with cultural, religious and intellectual history. Her research has taken her to archives across Europe, including the Vatican, where she uncovered previously overlooked documents relating to the historic Catholic community of Coupar Angus. She is the author of *The Making of the Scottish Dream-Vision* and a BBC New Generation Thinker for BBC Radio 3 and 4.

