

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 638 November 2014

Pulpit Diary

Nov 2

9.30am First Sunday Service
led by the Guild

10.30am Morning Worship

Nov 9 Remembrance Sunday

10.45am Morning Worship
(Springboard and Spectrum 2
and 3 remain in Church for
the Act of Remembrance.
Spectrum 1 commences in
Upper Hall at 10.45am)

Nov 16

10.30am Morning Worship

Nov 23

10.30am Morning Worship

Nov 30 First Sunday in Advent

10.30am Morning Worship

6.30pm Evening Worship (Exploring
different ways of worship –
Taizé Service at Morningside)

Dec 5 Friday

7.30pm Pre-communion service

Dec 7 Second Sunday in Advent

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Springboard
and Spectrum meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

For information about church organisations,
please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri,
9.00am–12.00 noon, 1.30pm–3.30pm):

Mrs Virginia Johnston

tel and fax: 0131 447 9969

e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com

The pastoral team can be contacted through the
Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

tel and fax: 0131 447 4032

email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk

Rev W. Peter Graham

tel: 0131 445 5763

Youth Minister: Rev Bill Stone

tel: 07883 815 598

email: billstoneiii@gmail.com

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

Since my last letter we have launched our YACHT Appeal with a very encouraging response. It was great to see so many families at the Ceilidh. On the Open Day the fresh scones, baked on the premises, sent a lovely aroma round the building, enticing many of those who had come for a Doors Open Day tour of the sanctuary to



stay and sample one. The Harvest Baskets put together by the Guild from your many generous donations were a great hit. The plant and baking stalls offered healthy and not so healthy temptations, while the speciality coffee generated an instant caffeine hit! The bouncy castle and the games put on by the uniformed organisations were much appreciated, especially in the afternoon. And I for one was sorry to have missed the opportunity to splash a BAG! However the minister's skill in determining the number of sweets in the Rainbows' jar did benefit the congregation (or its younger members) at our Harvest Thanksgiving service!

I would like to thank all who gave so willingly of their time, their energy, their money in support of the launch of our Yacht Appeal and I look forward to your continued support over the next 5 years as we seek to build up a fund that will make Youth Ministry in Greenbank a long-term possibility.

I would also like to say how many people commented to me on how welcome they felt in the church. Hospitality is such an important aspect of the Christian faith. Many of us will be familiar with and some of us will have enjoyed the corporate hospitality offered by businesses. Companies pitch their buffet tents at high profile sporting events or book boxes at the theatre or concert hall to offer cultural entertainment. Corporate hospitality has been seen as a useful way of promoting and encouraging business development.

In biblical times, hospitality carried a different significance, as it still does today in

some parts of the world. First of all it was customary to offer hospitality to all travellers, whether they be friends or strangers. And hospitality did not only include food and entertainment. It also included, perhaps even more importantly, an element of care and protection. In the bible, in the letter to the Hebrews, we find

these words: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:2)* I was blessed to experience something of the giving and receiving of this kind of hospitality during the two years I spent in Malawi. Before the age of mobile phones, travellers would frequently turn up in Ekwendeni unannounced. A flurry would then ensue around the mission station as we sought to gather food and accommodation and ensure that their needs were met. But the travellers brought their own gifts of stories, conversation, song and laughter, as well as the occasional luxury item like eggs or chocolate. Hospitality given and received brings its own blessings. But in practising the gift of hospitality we are also following the example of Jesus, the itinerant preacher who gladly gave and received hospitality during his earthly ministry and who still today welcomes men and women, old and young, offering them his care and protection. And it is this kind of hospitality we need to learn to practise in the Church, not only on a Sunday morning, in our receiving people as they come into church and at coffee after the service, but also during the week as we welcome friends and strangers into our lives. Offering hospitality may cause chaos to our own tightly regulated lives but could it be that the interruption is more important than the schedule?

With warmest wishes,

Alison I Swindells
Minister

Greenbank's Local Church Review

In the April edition of the *Leaflet* I wrote about Greenbank's participation in the Presbytery's Review of how we are getting on in various aspects of church life. I promised an update when the Review was completed. I am now pleased to report that Greenbank has passed through the process with flying colours! We got a very favourable report to Presbytery from the Review team led by the Rev Moira McDonald of Corstorphine Old Parish Church.

The information that our Kirk Session presented to the Review team before we met them on 27th May outlined our present situation and plans for the future. We emphasised the high priority we attach to the spiritual and practical care of our members and our outreach to all people living in the Parish. We told them about our priorities for youth ministry and for older people. We also gave them statistics of our membership, numbers in our organisations and our finances. This led them to describe us as a successful congregation though not immune from the challenges faced by most other churches of falling numbers and rising average age of membership.

The last stage in this round of the Review came at the meeting of Edinburgh Presbytery on 9th September. Our Minister and several members of the Kirk Session were present. We were congratulated for our willing participation in the Review and for the energy shown in our activities and future plans.

But it does not end there. Now we have to take the Action Plan forward. Some of it is happening already. Other parts involve reviewing current activities and possibly adapting them, or starting new things. The details will start to be worked out when our Committee Conveners meet with the Minister in the next few weeks. We will be looking then at our existing Road Map and deciding how to bring it up to date. We will want to involve more people in the Congregation in the process. We need to take some time to do this –but not too much or the Presbytery follow up in a year from now will be upon us. More details in a future *Leaflet*.

Valerie Macniven

World Mission Committee

Together We Walk

The following article is taken from the Church of Scotland's World Mission Council's annual booklet about the Council's activities.

“The World Mission Council's focus this year is on Europe where churches are facing similar challenges and opportunities as we do ourselves. We face increasing needs for witness and mission but with reduced resources and numbers of members. We are called to share the work of the gospel (Philippians 1:5), and working in a European context gives us the opportunity to give and receive as we look for new ways and forms to do so together. The prophet Amos asked *do two people walk together unless they have agreed to meet?* (Amos 3:3). In Europe, we have not only agreed to meet, but have an ongoing desire to walk together in the company of Christ: and we do so because we need one another: we walk because we believe such mission in unity is what the gospel demands of us.

The Council's new strategy uses the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) to highlight how the whole Church of Scotland can

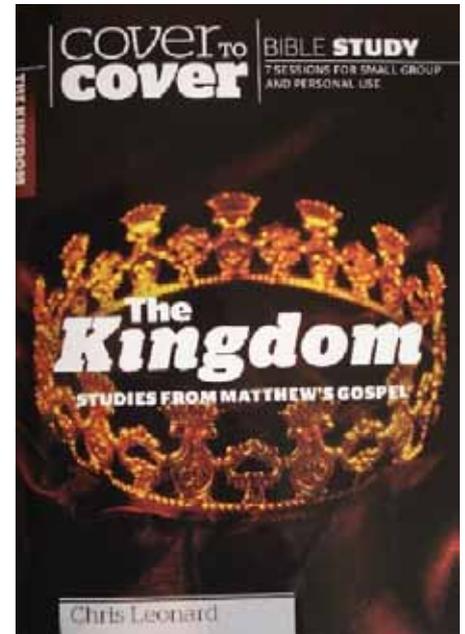
build relationships with the church in the wider world. In that biblical story the disciples' eyes are opened and their hearts burn as they realise they are in the company of their friend, the now risen Christ, who interpreted to them the things about himself in the scriptures (Luke 24:27). Relationships are important: the Council is tasked with helping the Church of Scotland to enjoy being part of the worldwide Christian Church, whether in the Caribbean, Asia, Africa – or Europe. The road to Emmaus reminds us that it is through the journey, in the sharing, in the companionship, in the talking, and in the breaking of bread and the drinking of the wine, that we can feel our eyes being opened; it is as we invite the journeying companion into our fellowship that we find our hearts ablaze in the company of Christ, as well as our comfort zones challenged as we labour to interpret the scriptures and traditions afresh for a new day.”

One World Stall

Greenbank is a Fair Trade Church so we promote Fair Trade by using Fair Trade

Monday House Group

The Monday group now meets at the church – in the Pentland Room at 7.30pm on **3rd, 17th November and 1st December**. This term we are learning about the Gospel of St Matthew using The Kingdom bible study guide (Cover to Cover series).



New members would be most welcome. For further details contact

Gillian Sweetman
or Joan Ritchie

products and selling goods from the One World shop through the One World Stall. The next stall will be on **2nd November**.

Friendship Club

Over the last month we have experienced life in the Shetlands over the last fifty years, been visited by Rupert Bear, and heard a selection from Kathleen's collection of classical music.

In this year of remembrance for 1914, we will have a “*Battlefield Experience*” on **12th November** from Wendy Doran, a history teacher for many years, a past secretary of the Scottish Historical Association who has worked on curriculum development at home and teaching history in Europe, and who has taken many groups of secondary school pupils to the battlefields of Belgium and Northern France.

Kathleen's musical theme for **19th November** is “*Anniversaries*” and on **26th November** we have a welcome return of Dr Peter Kendrick, this time following the career of Busby Berkeley in film in a talk entitled “*Going through the roof*”.

Val Smart

Christmas Card Sale

Cards and calendars will be on sale on behalf of CrossReach (previously C of S Board of Social Responsibility) and a small number of other charities on **Sunday 2nd November between 10am and 10.25am, and after the 10.30am Service.**



CrossReach works with a wide number of groups within the community including Children and Families, Criminal Justice such as Perth Prison Support and Advice, homelessness including Cunningham House in Edinburgh, learning difficulties, mental health, older people (The Elms and Morlich House locally), substance abuse (Rankeillor Initiative) and counselling training.

Ladders

Falling off a ladder is an important cause of serious and even fatal accidents.

The Property Committee have been reviewing the use of ladders within the Church: firstly to see if tasks can be done without using ladders, and then, where ladders are unavoidable, to train staff in how to use them safely. Volunteers also need to have similar training.

Please contact me if your volunteer role includes using ladders. I can then arrange to go through the training with you.

Gillian Sweetman

Fund Raising Event for Children's Literature for Children

On **Saturday 22nd November, 10.30am–3.30pm**, there will be a fund raising event in the Main Hall of Greenbank Parish Church in aid of *Children's Literature for Children* (www.childrensliterature.org), a charity dedicated to bringing children and books together. Its out-reach programme extends to inner city schools in the USA and to remote villages in Africa.

Our focus for this event is to raise money to build a library and fill it with books beside a primary school in Kingongo in the foothills of Mount Kenya where there is a community in need of our help.



Please join us for tea, coffee, home baking and a sale of art and craft, vintage clothing, collectibles and bric-à-brac. If you would like to make a donation of items for sale or money, please contact me (email moismall@talktalk.net).

Please tell all your friends to come. See you there!

Moira Small

christian aid **POVERTY**

Morningside & Fairmilehead
Christian Aid Committee

Presents

A Scottish Film Evening

with Ian Rintoul

On Friday, 7th November 2014 commencing at 7.30pm (doors open at 7pm) at Morningside Parish Church Hall, Braid Road, Edinburgh.

Tickets priced £6 (including ice cream at the interval) will be available after the Sunday 10.30am Service, and at the door.

The Guild

Following our summer activities, including serving refreshments to the Holiday Club in August and packing and selling harvest baskets with the generous donations of food, toiletries and toys for the Harvest Fête in September, we have now embarked upon our winter programme of meetings. On 7th October we welcomed members and visitors to a most interesting talk about the Trussell Trust and its work in establishing an expanding network of Food Banks, and by the time you read this we shall also have heard more about our theme for the year, *A World to Serve*, which also was eloquently illustrated by our minister in her sermon on 5th October. Members of the Guild will be taking the First Sunday service at **9.30am on 2nd November**, and joining with members of other local Guilds at a joint meeting in Fairmilehead Church on the afternoon of **Wednesday 19th November at 2.30pm**.

Our own evening meeting in November is on **4th November at 7.30pm** with the intriguing title of *You rang Madam?*

Kathleen Patrick

Greenbank Parish Church: War Memorial

The War Memorial Window in Greenbank Parish Church commemorates three men who died as a result of their service in the First World War. This is an account of their lives.

Sydney Chantler Huddestone was a 27-year-old Second Lieutenant (the Memorial incorrectly says Lieutenant) in 3rd Battalion of the Black Watch when he was killed in action on 25th January 1915 at La Bassée, France.

He was born in 1887 at Kendal in Westmorland, the son of a maltster, and came to Edinburgh to study medicine. On the night of the 1911 Census (2nd April 1911), he was staying in Hawick in the home of a local GP, presumably as part of his studies. His

usual address at the time of his death was 6 Greenbank Terrace.

Sydney volunteered to join the Army on 15th August 1914, within days of the outbreak of war. He was attached to 1st Battalion of the Black Watch and went to France in November 1914. He was killed on 25th January 1915, fighting as part of the 1st Battalion Black Watch, in repulsing a German attack at La Bassée. He has no known grave but is commemorated at the Le Touret Memorial on the south side of the Bethune-Armentieres main road, about 3 miles from where he fell.

In his will, dated 11th November 1914, he left his estate of £678 9s 3d to Mrs Mary Green of 126 Braid Road "as a small token of my great love for one whom I had hoped to marry and who through her great love and devotion has given me the greatest happiness of my life". Mary Green, born in 1869, was the widow of Rev G Kilgour Green, a minister of the English Presbyterian Church, who had died in Kendal in 1903. The 1911 Census records her as living at 126 Braid Road with her mother and her children Irene (14) and Alan (10). In 1922, she applied to the War Office for Sydney's medals – so his affection was evidently reciprocated. Mary Green never remarried, and died in Corstorphine in 1956, aged 87.



wife and their daughters (Jessie, 32, and Hannah, 29, who were both teachers, and Jane, 25, and Catherine, 23, who were typists). John himself was a commercial traveller in stationery. At the time of his death, the family lived at 25 Braid Crescent.

He was a volunteer soldier long before the War. In 1903, as a Lieutenant, he commanded a Company of the 4th (Queen's Edinburgh Rifles) Battalion of the Royal Scots, when his picture (below left) appeared in the Edinburgh Evening News.

John Tait Kirkwood was a 61-year-old Captain in 13th Battalion Royal Scots who died on 18th December 1916 in the Royal Edinburgh Asylum at Craighouse, of exhaustion following acute mania.

He was born on 28th January 1855 at 23 Bedford Street in Stockbridge, the son



of James Kirkwood (then a gentleman's servant and later an innkeeper) and Hannah Tait. He married Jane Bennett in 1878 and they had four daughters. They lived for many years at 55 Warrender Park Road and James worked initially as a jeweller and watchmaker. In 1903, he had his own showroom and workshop in Hanover Street. At the time of the 1911 Census, he lived at 15 Thirlestane Road with his

He was serving at the time of his death with the 13th (Service) Battalion of The Royal Scots, part of Kitchener's "New Army", which had been formed in September 1914 as part of the rapid expansion of the army at the outbreak of war. The Battalion had fought in France since July 1915 but, because of his age, John Kirkwood may have been home-based, in an administrative role. The "mania" which caused his death – a form of acute psychosis, then incurable – was almost certainly due to the stress of war service, whether as a result of overwork or of the effect of the death and injury of so many of his men.

He was not a wealthy man: his estate amounted to £252 16s 11d and he did not leave a will.

Douglas Alexander Lindsay was a 40-year-old Captain in 5th Battalion Royal Scots who was killed in action in Gallipoli in May 1915.

He was born in 1875 in Leith. His father William Lindsay was a grain merchant and Douglas followed him into the family business. The 1911 Census records him living with his sister at 152 Newhaven Road. On 24th April 1913, aged 37, he married Edith Couper at the Caledonian Hotel in Edinburgh and the couple set up house at

25 Pentland Terrace. They had two children: Douglas, born on 15 January 1914, and Argyll, born on 5th March 1915.

Douglas joined the 5th (Queen's Edinburgh Rifles) Battalion of the Royal Scots shortly after 1900. The Battalion was part of the Territorial Force (the reserve army) and Douglas was called up at the outbreak of war. His Battalion was part of the original Expeditionary Force which landed on the Gallipoli peninsula in western Turkey on 25th–26th April 1915. The Gallipoli campaign was fought by Commonwealth and French forces in an attempt to force Turkey out of the war, to relieve the deadlock of the Western Front in France and Belgium, and to open a supply route to Russia through the Dardanelles and the Black Sea. The 5th Royal Scots landed at Cape Helles in the south of the peninsula and on 28th April the first attack was mounted towards Achi Baba, the ridge which dominates the southern part of the peninsula. Fatigue brought the



assault to a halt some kilometres short of the objective, near the village of Krithia (modern Alcitepe) and the British troops dug in, successfully resisting Turkish counter-attacks on 1st May. Early on 2nd

May, the 5th Royal Scots took part in a further attack which advanced a short distance but during which Captain Lindsay and two other officers were killed. The regimental record states that he died on 3rd May; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission incorrectly specifies 15th May. Douglas Lindsay is commemorated in Redoubt Cemetery, Gallipoli, one of 349 casualties

who are unidentified but who are known or believed to be buried there.

In his will, Douglas Lindsay left £15,241 19s 8d, of which £13,271 represented his share in the family grain merchant business. His widow Edith brought up their two young children at 25 Pentland Terrace, where she continued to live for the rest of her life, dying in 1957 at the age of 79. The

family business was continued by Douglas's brother, and subsequently by his sons (Douglas died in 1980 and Argyll in 2000), grandsons and great-grandsons – and celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2014.

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A fourth casualty of the First World War is also commemorated in the Church. The Revelation Window in the Chancel, installed in 1928, was "Given in memory of Capt. Charles Inglis Clark, BSc. Served from August 1914 and died of wounds in Mesopotamia on 6th March 1918."

Charles Inglis Clark was a 29-year-old Captain in the Army Service Corps at the time of his death. His name is not on the Roll of Honour under the War Memorial Window because, although his parents (Dr and Mrs W Inglis Clark), who gave the Window, were members of the congregation, Charles was not. At the time of his marriage in 1916, he lived at 29 Lauder Road and his bride Mary Matthews-Frederick at 1 Bruntsfield Gardens. Charles and his parents were keen climbers and the Scottish Mountaineering Club's refuge below the north face of Ben Nevis, the "CIC Hut", also commemorates his life.

Duncan Macniven
4th October 2014

Poppy Scotland 2014



SUPPORTING OUR HEROES

Remembrance Sunday is the 9th November. I will be outside church collecting for Poppy Scotland on the 9th and for both the early and the main service on **Sunday 2nd November.**

Once more Greenbank Church donated generously to the Poppy Scotland appeal, an impressive £600 last year. Over £2 million was collected in the 2013 Poppy Appeal and this went to provide and fund a variety of services for veterans and their families to give advice, support and financial assistance where it is needed most.

The 100 years since the beginning of WW1 has been commemorated in many ways. Poppy Scotland has started a new campaign to try to remember each and every one of the

1,117,077 Servicemen and women who lost their lives during the First World War. It is called *Every Man Remembered* and is a collaborative project with the Royal British Legion and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The public can look up a specific person, such as a family member. Information on the person can be viewed and they will be able to plant a virtual poppy. If this interests you or you would like more information on Poppy Scotland then go to www.poppyscotland.org.uk

I look forward to seeing you outside church at the beginning of November.

John Adair

Congregational Board Matters

As well as approving various recommendations in respect of the Church properties and Manse, the Board has considered a report on the possible introduction of "green" energy saving measures but has reluctantly come to the conclusion that the costs of implementing such measures could not be justified at a time when there was pressure on the Church's finances. The Church accounts to the end of August showed a deficit but one which was better than what had been budgeted. David Allan has volunteered to take on the role of Property Convenor in place of Ian Thom who is standing down. At the August Board meeting the Preses, Roddy Morrison paid tribute to Ian for his hard work and dedication over the past seven years.

Greenbank Parish Church Christmas Event

Saturday 6th December
1.30pm to 4.30pm



An afternoon of fun for
children of primary school age

To reserve a place, register online at
www.greenbankchurch.org

Greenbank Parish Church, Braidburn Terrace, Edinburgh, EH10 6ES

The Advent Calendar

By Steven Croft

Darton, Longman & Todd, ISBN-10: 0-232-52680-X, £9.95

I like to read a book which follows the Christmas story during Advent. Good books which do this well are hard to find but this is one such – not just my opinion but also the opinion of members of the Greenbank Reading Group. The author of this inspired work is the Archbishop of Sheffield. *The Advent Calendar* can be read on many levels and is suitable for adults and children alike.

The story begins on 30th November with Alice receiving a letter from A Gabriel Esquire stating that she has been selected to receive a special Advent Calendar at Hamley's toyshop.

“The door at the top of the calendar slowly began to swing open. There was blackness on the other side – not the kind of blackness you expect to see in a painting. For Sam and Alice it was like looking down a tiny black hole or through a window into nothingness. They both took a step backwards in shock. A split second later, the tiny door was as big as a large window and it came rushing towards them. A moment after that, before they could move or think or do anything at all, they were completely swallowed up by the great and utter darkness and, at first, complete silence.”

There follows the biggest adventure of Alice's life. In a new city and at a new school, Alice isn't looking forward to Christmas. But when Sam, her less than bright uncle, brings home the mysterious Advent calendar that's short on chocolate but big on surprises, she is thrown into an Advent she never dreamed of.

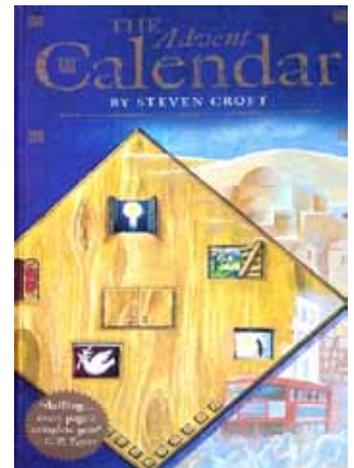
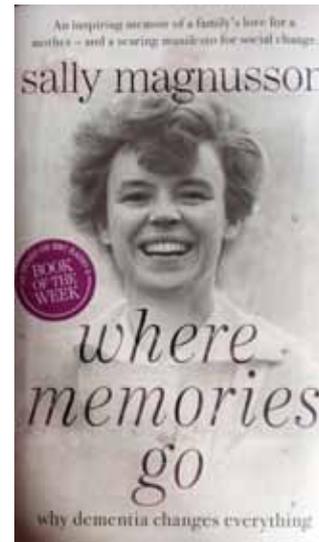
John D Ritchie

Advent and Christmas Bookstall

On **16th November** after the 10.30am Service the Bookstall will be open with a selection of books from *The Cornerstone* about Advent and Christmas, suitable for all ages. We will also have a selection of books on other religious topics that might help you on your inward journey or expand your knowledge of Christian history, doctrine or the Bible. If you would like to order a copy of *Where Memories Go*, reviewed in the October *Leaflet*, or *The Advent Calendar*, please contact us before 8th November.

The Cornerstone Bookshop stocks books, cards, candles, church supplies and olivewood products from the Holy Land. Please call in and visit them under St John's Episcopal Church at the west end of Princes Street to see their wider stock.

John and Joan Ritchie



Families at Four Greenbank's



Saturday 15 November

4:00pm-6:00pm

at Greenbank Parish Church

Families at Four is for children from three and up and their families. We will have crafts, games, songs, stories and food! Friends, brothers and sisters are welcome. Children must bring an adult with them. Families at Four is free, and even includes dinner for everyone! Donations are welcome.

We look forward to seeing you!

To register for Messy Church, visit the Church website at greenbankchurch.org or contact the Church Office (Tel 447 9969).

Christmas Event (see opposite)

Plates wanted!

Do you have any old, plain tea plates you are happy to spare? At this year's Christmas Event for children we plan to make Christmas Plates so we will need lots of plates to paint! White would be best but any plates with a surface we can paint on would do. The usual Holiday Club box will be in a corner of the Main Hall to receive your plates.

Congregational Register

Omitted from the on-line version of the Leaflet

Coffee Rota

November

- 2 WAGs
- 9 Monday Badminton
- 16 Explorer Scouts
- 23 The Guild
- 30 Wednesday Badminton

December

- 7 Communion



Crèche Rota

November

- 2 Rosemary Collier
- 9 Liz Foster
- 16 Carrie Reid
- 23 Vivien Hutchison
- 30 Alison Ambler

December

- 7 Lorna Htet-Khin



Flower Rota

Provided by

Delivered by

November

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 2 Louise Coghill | Janet Inglis |
| 9 Helen Aitken | Isabel Graham |
| 16 WAGs | Gail Beveridge |
| 23 Jean Denison | Miriam Jackson |
| 30 Marjory Fletcher | Aileen Thomson |

December

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 7 Paddy Bowman | Enid Mowat |
|----------------|------------|



Socks

Once again, I would like to thank all those kind people in the congregation who have so generously donated lots and lots of socks, gloves, hats and men's underwear for the homeless of our city. There has been so much I didn't wait, as is usual, until our first night shelter in November to hand things over. Bethany were very grateful to receive two large bags of these items in June. Please continue to donate whatever you can. Things can be put in the wooden box in the vestibule.

Thank you.

Pauline Walker

To make contact with any of the organisations referenced in this Leaflet, please use the telephone number given, if there is one. Otherwise please contact the Church Office.
Website: www.greenbankchurch.org

Material for the December/January *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by **Sunday 16th November** or sent by e-mail by **9am on Tuesday 18th November** to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There are many different kinds of question. There are simple, straightforward questions. They seek information: How high is that hill? What does this fish cost? When is the next bus due? And there are deeper, more profound questions, questions which make us think, enable us to find out something new, challenge us or draw us closer to other people: How old are the rocks beneath our feet? How does this gadget work? Have you ever thought of doing things differently? How are the family? Sometimes what at first sight seems a question with an easy answer turns out to be more complicated, as we realise what is involved in giving a full and honest response. Many of the questions Jesus asked are like this: they may seem deceptively simple, but on reflection they have no easy answer. Rather, they stimulate thought, they make us more aware of ourselves and they draw us closer to him.

“What is your name” Is that a simple question? Or a deeply profound one? It depends on the circumstances and who is asking the question. More often than not, it is a request for information, so that the van driver knows he is delivering to the right person or so that your name can be ticked off the list of reservations in a restaurant. When we meet strangers, we may introduce ourselves, by implication inviting them to tell us their names. But when Jesus asks the most basic, the most human, the simplest of questions, he wants to know more.

Names are more than mere labels. It was all very well for Shakespeare to have one of his characters play down the importance of names. In his lyrical tale of “star-cross’d” lovers, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet meet and fall in love. They are doomed from the start as members of two warring families. Juliet tells Romeo that a name is an artificial and meaningless convention, and that she loves the person who is called “Montague”, not the Montague name and not the Montague family:

‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy;

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague...

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet...

Is Juliet simply saying that when all is said and done, a thing is what it is? She did not, however, demand that Romeo abandon his own name but only his family name. More than modern readers, she realised that a person’s name and a person’s identity are very closely connected.

There is a sense in which we are our names. We are tied to our names in ways that are powerful and even mysterious. What separates and distinguishes us from other people is the fact that we are called by name. As we develop, we learn to recognise ourselves as distinct, first from our mothers, then from other people, and finally from the world around us. It is as we are called by name that we discover our unique identity. According to the Bible, God calls human beings by name and in so doing establishes the unique value and dignity of each and every person.

The Bible is full of names. There are whole pages of proper names, of genealogies which more often than not we skip in reading. Nevertheless, this abundance of names has a meaning

— that the Bible does not put forward abstract theories about the human person but tells of what has happened to real people in concrete situations. Even the great Paul, at the end of his letters, after pages of abstruse intellectual teaching, mentions individuals, calling each by name.

“What is your name?” That is the question Jesus addresses to a man “with an unclean spirit”, the Gerasene demoniac. Who knew his real name, the name by which his mother called him in for a meal, the name by which his father called him when they went out fishing on the lake? But that was long past, a previous life. No one ever approached this sick man who lived in a cemetery. No one talked to him, as he harmed himself, cursed passers-by and threatened everybody. No one had called him by name throughout his illness and that has added to his torment. During his time of distress he has been known by labels rather than by a name: a madman, a demoniac, a dangerous beast. Because no one introduced him, Jesus has to ask this most basic, this most human, this simplest of questions, “What is your name?”

All he can answer is, “My name is Legion; for we are many”. He does not have a real name. He is no longer himself: his name is Legion. Everybody in those days knew that a legion was a Roman regiment of 6000 troops. Very likely this man has seen a Roman legion marching along the road. He believes that he is possessed by a whole regiment of demons who stamp through his soul in hobnailed boots. Like the country he lives in, he is enemy-occupied territory. Or perhaps he has seen the atrocities some of these legions could inflict on an area they occupied. Perhaps he has been the victim of such atrocities, or has seen his loved ones suffer at the hands of the Romans. Has some traumatic experience driven him insane? Whatever the background, by saying that his name is Legion, the sick man testifies to how torn apart and isolated he feels.

Jesus heals the man. Not by speaking to him or by touching him, but by commanding the evil spirits to leave the man and to occupy a nearby herd of pigs instead. The pigs then trot off the edge of a cliff into the lake below. The man, in a new set of clothes and in his right mind, asks if he can follow Jesus on his travels. Jesus has another idea. He tells the man to go back to his home so that his friends and family — where had they been all the time? — can hear this amazing story and see for themselves the transformation.

The man goes back to his home town. He shares the story of the miraculous thing that has happened to him and how he has been restored to life. Can we imagine him beginning his story by saying, with a tone of wonder, “The first thing Jesus did was to ask me, ‘What is your name?’” And for him this seemingly simple question proved to be an invitation to healing and an offer of new life.

The story of the man with an unclean spirit is in St Mark 5, verses 1–20. In Romans chapter 16 Paul sends greetings to no less than twenty six individuals. In this list, reflecting as it does the unity and diversity of the Church, there are truths to ponder and lessons to learn.