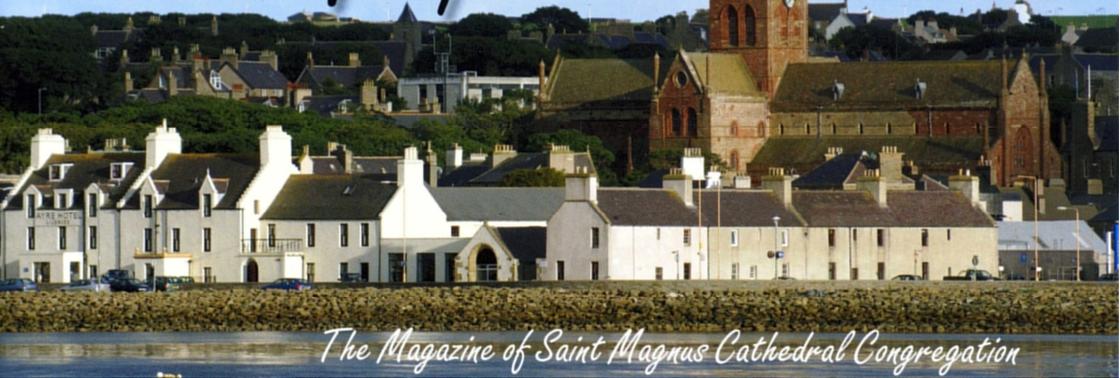


The Grapevine



The Magazine of Saint Magnus Cathedral Congregation

WORSHIP AT THE CATHEDRAL THIS SUMMER

Services are held in St Magnus Cathedral every Sunday at 11.15 am.

Sunday 21st June

St Magnus Festival Service: music by the Cathedral choir and members of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Sunday 26th July

The Sacrament of Baptism

Sunday 16th August

Celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion to celebrate the Kirkwall Flower Arrangement Club's Annual Flower Festival

Sunday 6th September

Science Festival Service and Celebration of Holy Communion

GRAPEVINE

The magazine of St Magnus Cathedral
Summer Edition 2009

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EDITORIAL

For over 850 years, St Magnus Cathedral has stood against the elements that have battered it. This magnificent building stands as a worthy memorial to St Magnus and St Rognvald, but the life of the Church has been the people who have worshipped here over the centuries. In this edition of the Grapevine, we focus on the memories and thoughts of some of those who have loved and still love our great Cathedral.

Visitors come to look, to wonder and to worship, but for those who attend Sunday Services regularly – especially as a winter gale howls outside - it is our Parish Church, our spiritual home. When I participate in leading worship I am aware of whispers and glimpses of the past all around me. It is both awe-inspiring and a huge privilege to be part of that continuous chain of worship. I hear echoes of meditative mediaeval chanting as well as the colourful exuberance of the songs of a choir from Malawi only a few years ago. We hope this edition of Grapevine will help you to feel part of the community who have kept the “[Light in the North](#)” burning for over 850 years.

Material for the Autumn Grapevine should reach the editor by Sunday August 16th 2009

Views expressed in this magazine are personal and are not necessarily those of the Minister and Kirk Session.

Summer Notes from the Manse



I met someone last summer who had as the 'wallpaper' on their computer screen a photo of St Magnus Cathedral taken while they were here on holiday. He described the picture. "The sky is blue, with white clouds brushed gently across it. The stones are roughened by the winds, worn smooth by memories of all the pilgrims who touched them, faded from all the love of Magnus and the saints who followed." And he finished by saying, "You know, the silence that day was a gentle embrace from God, deepening that moment."

Sometimes during the week, maybe after a wedding or other service, I sit for a while in one of the choir stalls, waiting until the last footstep has echoed away, until the last whispered voice has wandered off.

In the stillness, just staring at the stone walls, I think of how many voices had been lifted in this place, how many times believers have gathered together over the centuries, all differences set aside for the sake of the oneness they had in God. I think of all the chants and songs that have echoed back and forth, from stall to stall, from wall to wall; how many prayers have been flung upwards towards God, and whispered into the hollows of the hearts of the supplicants.

These walls are in one respect wailing walls – the repositories of the fears and failures, the hopes and hauntings, the tears and the torments, the joys and the jealousies, the longings and the lives of so many people. The

stones are the silent witness of the faithfulness, as well as the foolishness, of people who come as pilgrims to this holy place and leave, to continue their journeys in all those places where life is tangled, thick, troublesome, yet hopeful.

But they will listen - to our songs and prayers, our whispers and our longings, our aches and our joys. They take what they have heard, cradle them, and offer them to the Holy Spirit, who will set them afire with her tears, offering them as sweet incense to our God. For this is a very special place.

Fraser Macnaughton

Thoughts from a past Minister's wife

St. Magnus Cathedral is a very beautiful building and a very special place to worship in. Ron and I miss it and its congregation a lot. Ron always said it was a comfort knowing that even if the congregation got nothing from his sermon they could still sit there and enjoy the beauty of the building and the lovely music. I particularly enjoyed playing with the music group in the Cathedral with its wonderful acoustics. The best thing was the practices in an otherwise empty space - just a smile as Stan or Rodney or Ivan or Balfour passed by. I always found it a friendly place and loved the sense of history - hundreds of years of worship and prayer.

There were many memorable services to mark special occasions and the passing of the seasons. I remember the visit of the King and Queen of Norway who were delayed by fog and had to circle the skies for ages before being able to land. By the time they finally arrived Sandy Firth had cramp from playing the bells for so long! The Family services were great fun with the children taking part. Once a small angel fell asleep 'on stage' during a nativity play, tired out from waving to her family! Altogether a very special place.

Cristine Ferguson



IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST MAGNUS

Here, like a grove of God,
Strong arches build stone branches in a tall
Paeon of polychrome; like jagged leaves,
Dog-toothed fringes arcs of majesty.
Dark forest shadows flit across a floor
Flowered with changing light, while, like the beat
Of a far cataract, the organ thrills;
Now like a peal
Of a high lark, it soars,
Now like a shower,
Of summer rain, it pours,
Now like a wind-tossed sea,
Pounding the shores...
Now like the thunder-chariot of God,
It roars
Its tempests on the soul, the primal joy
Of elemental worship caught, distilled
Into the clarity of sun and rain
And silence...

I lean back against the stones,
Red-shadowed, strong as prayer and cool as time.

Vera Rich

This poem from "Heritage of Dreams" is reproduced by kind permission of The Orcadian.

A Light shining in the North

And of course, above and beyond all... is the spiritual impact of the Cathedral. The growth of the mediaeval town meant a greater general bustle and activity in the affairs of this world; the mediaeval cathedrals gave a corresponding counterweight to matters of the spirit. From a busy market place, and the often intense day-to-day matters of island life, a door only a few short steps away leads to a still place in a turning world, where solid pillars stand firm on the rock they are founded on, and where human eye and spirit can rise upwards through the harmony of the building.

There is something too, in the stone of the Cathedral, which has retained its character through the process of cutting and shaping, and retains within it the warmth and strength of the natural world rather than the neutrality of building blocks shaped to human design. The writer Eric Linklater observed how the red stone of the exterior makes it seem to rise up like a great sea cliff at the west front.

Within the Cathedral itself, the stonework was in the early days covered in thin plaster and richly painted with the images of angels and saints. Today in its warm, natural form, it seems to reach to something deep, beyond where intellect and architecture and mathematical design can take us: what the philosopher Henri Bergson called "that more vast something out of which our understanding is cut, and from which it has detached itself.

Howie Firth

This excerpt from the book "Light in the North" is reproduced here with Howie's kind permission.

Plant and Pancake Afternoon

The Friendship Group would like to thank all who gave plants, those who helped in any way at the sale, and everyone who came and supported the Plant and Pancake afternoon. It was a very busy day for everyone involved but very rewarding in that we made £796.60. Many, many thanks.

The Friends of St Magnus Cathedral

In 2008, the Friends of St Magnus Cathedral celebrated 50 years of vision and support for the magnificent building where we worship each week. In that time, they have raised £3,000,000 and their financial contributions continue to help maintain the fabric of the Cathedral.

The following extracts are taken from an address given at the 50th celebrations this autumn by Gladys Leslie – who then just “a mere slip of a lass” - became Secretary of the St Magnus Cathedral Appeal Fund.

“ In 1972, Colonel RAAS Macrae had approached me to become Secretary to the Appeal and I had no hesitation in agreeing, as a survey had shown there was severe structural damage to St Magnus Cathedral. The west gable was being pushed outwards at the top. There was obvious cracking in the vaulting and cracks in the walls adjacent to the gable. It was so serious that the nave area was no longer safe for public use.

The Launch was on 18 January 1972. I will never forget meeting the invited national and international press representatives at Kirkwall Airport off a chartered Loganair Skyvan. What could they have thought as they arrived in a January gale that at times reached 75 mph and was speckled with typical sleety showers? The party consisted of people from the New York Times, The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Glasgow Herald, Scotsman, Press & Journal, BBC, Daily Express and Scottish Field. Already in Orkney that day was Alex Heward the Architect, the Consulting Engineer and the Quantity Surveyor. They had, the previous day, been interviewed by a BBC Television crew for a broadcast that would come out on the evening of the launch – showing the Cathedral and the problem.

The opening address by Lord Birsay, the President, was to have been out in front of the Cathedral but the weather meant it had to take place inside. The clear message from Col Macrae (the Chairman) from the outset was that the Appeal had to begin here in Orkney and that we, the people, would show that charity begins at home. With this in mind the folk of the town and county had been asked to make their donations that

day with the doors of the Cathedral being open from 11 am – 3 pm, and plates ready to receive donations.

During the buffet lunch, Colonel Macrae announced that the amazing sum of almost £5,000 had been donated that day. Lord Birsay had informed the company in the morning that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother had agreed to become a patron of the Friends and had sent a donation.

18 January 1972 has a significant place in the history of the Society of the Friends of St Magnus Cathedral. From that day on the donations came flowing through and – some 2,552 names in all!

On the day of the launch, Lord Birsay concluded his speech - delivered in his slow and wonderful Orcadian accent, delivered as the wind roared at the west door and the floodlights beamed on the cracks so apparent in the vaulting of the nave:

“And if we can bespeak your aid to keep the Cathedral and all it represents for future generations, I will feel this morning has been well spent. Remember Rognvald the ballad-maker, the sailor, the fighter, the Christian, the great administrator, and Magnus who was not afraid in those bloodthirsty days to keep the vision alive. All I ask you is to help us to keep our own vision alive.”

Your support for the Friends continues to be needed today. The recent replacement of the South Rose window was only possible because of the work of the Friends. The cost of the new chairs in the nave was entirely funded by the Friends.

You are invited to join the Friends of St Magnus Cathedral and so keep its vision alive.

Application forms are available in the Cathedral and the Friends Room at the St Magnus Centre.

Memories of the Cathedral

Violet Couper, now 99 years old, has worshipped in the Cathedral for much of her life. She remembers that when she was a youngster, the congregation worshipped in the choir as had been the custom since the Reformation. Extra seating was provided by a gallery in which a few of the congregation sat. After the extensive renovation of the building - made possible by the generous bequest of Sherriff George Thoms - was completed in 1930, the full Cathedral was once again used for worship.

During the Ministry of Rev W.M Cant

The Church is not the building, but the people who gather to worship in it, Bill often said. He was however much inspired by the structure and history of St Magnus cathedral. When chunks of plaster started to fall from the nave ceiling in the early 1970s, people were in danger and building investigation was urgent. The west gable was slowly moving and much repair work was required. A temporary wall was erected at the crossing and for worship, we entered at the Priest's door and gathered in the St Rognvald Chapel including down steps and behind pillars. It was a chummy squash with strong congregational singing filling the smaller space. We were almost reluctant to return some months later to the safety of the beautifully restored nave.

The Orcadian artist, Stanley Cursiter greatly appreciated St Magnus Cathedral and painted it frequently over many years. He had designed the furnishings of the St Rognvald Chapel which Reynold Eunson carved so beautifully. Permission was given in the early 1970s for an end choir stall to be changed into a seat for an Assistant Minister. Although in his eighties, Dr Cursiter was keen to help and he and Bill discussed an end carving to fit in with those on the choir stalls. The final design was based on Matthew 10:29 which emphasises God's love for all life. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, yet not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father's knowledge." The little group of sparrows and farthings were again the lovely work of Reynold Eunson.

Margot Cant

From Septuagesima

When we enter the Cathedral - whether as sightseers or as worshippers - we can easily forget the work of those whose devotion and physical love has maintained it over the years. These lines remind us of those quiet workers whom we rarely see and of the loyalty of those who worship regularly within its walls.

Let's praise the man who goes to light
The church stove on an icy night.
Let's praise that hard-worked he or she,
The Treasurer of the PCC.
Let's praise the cleaner of the aisles,
The nave, the candlestick, the tiles.
Let's praise the organist who tries
To make the choir increase in size,
Or if that simply cannot be
Just to improve its quality.
Let's praise the ringers in the tower
Who come to ring in cold and shower.
But most of all let's praise the few
Who are seen in their accustomed pew,
Throughout the year, whate'er the weather,
That they may worship God together.
These, like the fire of glowing coals,
Strike warmth into each other's souls.
And though they be but two or three
They keep the church for you and me.



From: Septuagesima by John Betjeman

These lines from "Church Poems" 1981 are reproduced by kind permission of John Murray (Publishers) Ltd.

WE NEVER KNOW WHEN WE MAY BE NEEDED

A couple of years after I retired, I was offered the job of Relief Custodian in the Cathedral. This was one of the most enjoyable jobs I ever had. The full-time Custodian was still working to the old Cathedral working week, while the rest of the County work force were working considerably fewer hours per week. It was realised that the Custodian needed a long holiday to compensate for those extra hours. I was the lucky person who gave him this period of time off and then covered his weekly days off.

I loved the work from the start. Visitors come in many guises. Some did the rounds at a fast trot and were gone in ten minutes. Others took things more sensibly, using the guide book and taking time to savour the building. Others sought me out to ask questions. It was fascinating to watch the effect the Cathedral had on children who had never been in here before. They would enter the Cathedral bubbly and noisily. About three steps in, they would stop dead and look up. As the grandeur and awe of the building imposed itself on them, they became quiet and subdued. There was plenty for me to do and I would get on with the work as quietly as possible. Sometimes eye contact would be made with a smile and a passing remark.

There were of course, people who came in to meditate or to pray. These were the visitors I made sure I left alone. We all know that St Magnus Cathedral has a wonderful calming effect. Just sit and relax. The building does the rest. Many troubles have been resolved here, problems faced and solutions found. The old building speaks to us all.

There were also times when I was sought out to simply listen to a life and its problems. I had to be so careful in these few cases. When folks get started on clearing their problems, they can say more than they realise and their voices carry despite some of the conversations being very private. One occasion will live with me forever. This lady came in on a miserable day and sat tucked away in a corner. Obviously troubled, she picked up a Bible and thumbed it over. An hour or so later, she seemed composed and was watching me further down the aisle as I tilted chairs to dust under them. I glanced her way and smiled. She responded and came

towards me. My usual opening in these cases was to say, "Isn't this a beautiful building and I find it has a lovely atmosphere." She sat down and asked me if I was busy. I sat down. A story unfolded. Her father had been in the army in Germany towards the end of the war. He was with a group who discovered a huge camp. They had smelt it before they reached it.

BELSEN.

No one was prepared for what they found. Late that night, her father wrote a letter to his loving wife and daughter. Then he shot himself.

She had the letter. This was the anniversary. She had been to Iona and donated a lamp in his memory. Other Cathedrals had been visited. What should she do with the letter? I have no idea what my reply was, but her quiet voice thanked me for listening; a small hand was pressed into mine and she was gone.

Sandy Firth



This tree isn't falling over due to wind or old age but a swarm of bees is weighing it down. There could be as many as 30,000 bees in this swarm. It is nature's way of keeping the bee population alive. The bee colony splits and divides. The swarm on the tree was placed into a new beehive allowing the bees to begin a new life of their own. With care and management they will produce surplus honey this time next year.



The splendid dinner held at the St Magnus Centre in April to help in funding the cost of bringing a group of representatives from the Thyolo Presbytery in Malawi to Orkney in June raised £2,000. Thanks are extended to all who helped and all who attended.



SUMMER AT ST MAGNUS

Friendship Group

Members are reminded that during the summer months the Friendship group meets in the St Magnus Centre on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 pm. New members are always welcome.

The Flower Festival: August 12 – 16 2009

The Kirkwall Flower Arrangement Club celebrates 50 Golden Years from 1959-2009 and the Festival this year will feature the social history of these decades.

Visitors are invited to view the displays during Cathedral opening hours from Wednesday to Sunday and to attend the special service in the Cathedral on Sunday August 16th at 11.15 am. Over the past eleven years, the Club has raised £35,000 pounds towards to the Cathedral Restoration Fund from donations given during the Festival. The Flower Club has now been offering a floral display in the Cathedral for the past 35 years.

Belle Drever (President)

St Magnus Fair - At the time of going to press no information is available as to whether or not the annual St Magnus Fair will be held in 2009.

A plea from the Editor

One of the aims of this magazine is to ensure that information is given to our regular worshippers and also that those who enter the Cathedral at any time can know of the life within this community. I find I have to chase people for information about what is happening and often I don't hear about all that is going on.

People tell me that they want to be able to use the Grapevine for reference during the three months that it is intended to cover. Some people cannot get to Church regularly each week. Because they don't see the notices in the Bulletin they only learn of meetings they would have liked to attend when it is too late and they have missed the opportunity.

Sally Heddle

CHRISTENING AT ST. MAGNUS 1944 –*from Lesley Mcletchie.*

The day of my brother's christening
I was allowed home early from school.
My mother put a pale green satin
ribbon in my hair. My brother
with his lovely dimpled smile
wore a long lace gown.

The history of the great red sandstoned
Viking cathedral escaped me.
Its high nave, rose window.
Monument to John Rae, Arctic explorer.
The memorial to the torpedoed
Royal Oak. Rannie Eunson's
Fine wood carvings of Kal and Rognvald.
Relics of martyred Magnus.
The copper spire, green-aged,
Old stones resting in the kirkyard.

What I remember of the cathedral
is my pale green satin ribbon.
My brother's smile.

***These are the words of Storer Clouston (1870-1944) author of the book
The Spy in Black"***

"There is something in the Church - something alive that vibrates to the cry of the wind and the breaking of the sea, and the little human events that happen in the crow-stepped houses."



We thank thee for the lights that we have kindled,
The light of altar and sanctuary;
Small lights and lights directed through the coloured panes of windows
And light reflected from polished stone,
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.
Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward
And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.
We see the light but see not whence it comes.
O Light invisible, we glorify Thee.

(from The Rock – T. S Eliot)