SCO 11288: St James the Less is a charity registered in Scotland

http://stjamesthelesspenicuik.org/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 5</th>
<th>Pages 6-8</th>
<th>Pages 10-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The real Santa Claus?</td>
<td>The Penicuik Community Development Trust</td>
<td>Agnes’ Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages 13-17</td>
<td>Pages 18-19</td>
<td>Page 23-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Storehouse Community Meal</td>
<td>Messy Church</td>
<td>The Astonishing Community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We’d be delighted if you would join us for worship sometime....

1st Sunday of the month
8:00am     Holy Communion
10:30am    Service of the Word
Junior Church gives younger children an opportunity to engage with Bible stories in their own way.

2nd Sunday of the month
10:30am    Family Holy Communion
We all worship together at Family Communion.

3rd Sunday of the month
8:00am     Holy Communion
10:30am    Service of the Word
Junior Church gives younger children an opportunity to engage with Bible stories in their own way.

4th Sunday of the month
10:30am    Sung Holy Communion
Junior Church gives younger children an opportunity to engage with Bible stories in their own way.

5th Sunday of the month
10:30am    Service of the Word or Holy Communion
Junior Church gives younger children an opportunity to engage with Bible stories in their own way.

The following services take place in the cosy Peace Chapel

Wednesdays
12:30pm   Said Communion
First Wednesday of the month
7:00pm    Healing Service
30 mins of simple worship including opportunities for prayers and anointing for healing.
Advent & Christmas Services

All welcome!

Contact Rev’d Lynsay for more details: 01968 672862

Sunday  3rd December: First Sunday in Advent
10:30am  Morning Prayer - Advent Service of Light

Sunday  10th December: Second Sunday in Advent
9.30am  Party Breakfast
10.30am  Holy Communion including Scratch Nativity.
All welcome! Costumes provided.

Friday  15th December
7pm  Hope for Penicuik Carol Service in the Town Hall.

Sunday  17th December: Third Sunday in Advent
10.30am  Morning Prayer
7pm  Nine Lessons and Carols

Sunday  24th December: Fourth Sunday in Advent
10.30am  Holy Communion service
11:30pm  Midnight Holy Communion

Monday  25th December: Christmas Day
10:30am  Holy Communion service around the piano
1pm  Storehouse Christmas Lunch in St James the Less Hall
Contact June 07740586878 or Sue 01968 670678
Regular groups and activities

Contact Rev’d Lynsay for more details: 01968 672862

Tuesdays

(JTots is currently not running, but may be revived in the future)

Every week 12:30pm The Storehouse Community Meal
(10am for cooking)
Everyone welcome - it’s free!
Donations are appreciated if you can - but not obligatory
Contact June 07740586878 or Sue 01968 670678

Term time only 7pm Guides

Wednesdays

Every 2 weeks 1pm Mothers Union lunch and blether.

Term time only 6:30pm Brownies

Thursdays

Every 2 weeks 2pm Probus group meets in the hall
(contact Richard Philips rphillips52@toucansurf.com)

Every week: Term time only 7pm Choir practice
No auditions! You are welcome to join us!

Fridays

Every 2 months 7:30pm Penicuik Women’s Ministry (SPACE)
(contact penicuikwomensministry1@gmail.com)

There is also a St James the Less Book Group which reads one book each month and meets to discuss it, often on a Monday morning or afternoon, but also on other days. Please contact Angela angelasibley@talktalk.net
The real “Santa Claus”?

Later in this issue of Outreach you can read about the “Astonishing Community”, a new venture that I am launching this month. It uses the lives of some extraordinary “astonishing” saints to help the Community be more aware of the blessings that different, unusual, people bring to us. Nicholas of Myra, better known to many as “Santa Claus” is one of the Saints included on our calendar. His day falls on 6th December and this is his story, told in a typically Astonishing Community way.

Nicholas was born in Lycia (in Asia Minor) around the end of the third century, to pious Christian parents. From early youth he was inclined to solitude and silence; in fact, not a single written or spoken word of the Saint has come down to us. Whilst he may simply have been quiet, an introvert by nature, I can't help but wonder whether Nicholas had autistic traits, especially given the combination of his preference for silence and solitude alongside his sudden violent outburst at the Council of Nicea in AD325, where he struck Bishop Arius on the face. This act should have led to Nicholas being deposed as a bishop, but while praying, the other 316 bishops were convinced that Nicholas had acted out of love for truth and not through malice or anger and so allowed him to remain a bishop.

Nicholas had wanted to be a hermit in the Holy Land, but was ordained priest by his uncle, (then Archbishop) who told him to return home to serve the Church publicly and save souls. His desire for a life of simplicity led Nicholas, when his parents died, to give away all of his inheritance to the needy, taking particular care that this charity be done in secret. Perhaps the most famous story of his open-handedness concerns a debt-ridden man who had no money to provide dowries for his daughters, or even to support them, and in despair had resolved to send them into prostitution. On three successive nights Nicholas threw a bag of gold into the window of the man’s house, saving him and his daughters from sin and hopelessness. The man searched relentlessly to find and thank his benefactor; when at last he discovered that it was Nicholas, the Saint made him promise not to reveal the good deed until after he had died. This story may be the thin thread that connects Saint Nicholas with the modern-day Santa Claus.

Rev’d Lynsay
What is the Penicuik Community Development Trust?

A quote from Restless Natives, one of the first films shown in Penicuik Cinema – “We could hole up in Penicuik. No one would find us there ... ” The implication is that people do not know or talk to their neighbours in Penicuik. It is far from true but a population expanding from 6000 to 23,000 in 50 years and becoming a dormitory town for Edinburgh is a challenge. Maintaining a sense of place and community is something we all have to work at. The Trust tries to do that by creating specific projects that harness people’s energy and ideas to add more to community life. This article looks back from our most recent project to our beginnings a dozen years ago.

The Paper Making Heritage Centre opened on September 9th 2017. It is easy to forget, but Penicuik was once amongst the most important centres of paper making in the world. The Trust has long sought a permanent home to celebrate “Penicuik the Paper Making Town”, wanting to build on Penicuik Historical Society’s 2008 celebration of 300 years of papermaking in the town. Now, Scotland’s only Paper Making Heritage Centre has just opened in Bridge Street, aiming to restore pride in the town and bring in national and international visitors.

From the century and a half of making paper by hand in Penicuik, you can see an 1838 paper mould; from the paper making machine age, we have a dandy roll impressing watermarks, even the 28 feet of seamless cloth from the machine’s felt conveyor belt. Pictures give a comprehensive story of how papermaking skills travelled from China to Penicuik and then from Penicuik to Canada; of how the mass printing and shortage of rags created a production crisis; of the 1872 visit to Valleyfield by the Japanese Emperor’s embassy to find out how machine-made paper could be made in Japan; of Charles Cowan’s visit to “my old friends the Montgolfiers”, inventors of the hot-air balloon... . Visitors quote: “A fantastic little museum”; “I learnt more about Penicuik in the last hour than in the 50 years since my childhood.”

The Trust acquired Pen-y-Coe Press in March 2013. After our expensive failure to secure Bank Mill as the paper making heritage centre, the Bridge Street premises served two needs: first, the large paper store could be refurbished for the museum; secondly the retail stationer and jobbing printer was itself a much loved vintage shop, a living museum reminiscent of places like Beamish Museum. Importantly, it remains a viable commercial enterprise, providing enough income to pay for the refurbishment of the paper store and the overheads for both museum and shop.

Quadrant balance from the museum
With an ability to print on demand, we have re-published local books and pamphlets – three accounts of visits to Valleyfield Mill from 1872 to 1922, a Penicuik provost’s two visits to his relatives and Penicuik emigrants in North America in the 1870s and 1920s, even a 1900 Tourist Guide to Penicuik. Our most recent and most ambitious publication is *The Cuckoo Calls*: illustrated reminiscences of her 1950s childhood by Monica Whitfield, brought up in the gardener’s bothy in the ‘Lost Garden’ of Penicuik Estate. She has dedicated the book to the Trust with all profits going towards restoration of the garden.

We leapt at Penicuik Estate’s offer in 2012 to lease the derelict New Garden because a few years earlier the Trust’s Food Project had aimed to encourage healthy and wholesome food. The garden, by then cloaked in rampant rhododendrons, waist-high comfrey and nettles, and swamped by unharvested Christmas trees, soon acquired the name **Lost Garden**.

Although seen as a 30 year project, in the first season, volunteers cleared about a third of the upper terrace, then meticulously hand dug it and removed roots before planting potatoes. From the start, we followed the principles of organic horticulture. Now, most of the upper terrace is under cultivation, with fruit cages and a poly-tunnel giving protection for soft fruit, green vegetables and salads. The big holly tree growing through the grand staircase blocking access from the terrace to the main garden was cut down and the stairs re-opened. Most of the Christmas trees have been felled with one part of the area planted as an orchard and elsewhere innovative self-composting Hugel beds have created mounds of growing area over tree stumps.

The Lost Garden is not just about growing food – it is a place of beauty, tranquillity and therapeutic activity. Adding to the many local gardeners, there have been working volunteers from prisoner rehabilitation groups, the Royal Bank of Scotland, adults with learning difficulties, school children and individual helpers from all over the world.

Three years ago, the Lost Garden was the focus of Gardeners’ Question Time, broadcast by the BBC across the whole UK. One Devon resident was surprised to hear her childhood home being talked about on the radio. So began an exciting link between Monica Whitfield and the Trust. She began to write an account of those early days, now just published by Pen-y-Coe Press.
How does the Trust chose its projects? Pen-y-Coe Press and the Lost Garden came from grabbing opportunities that presented themselves. **Penicuik Cinema** started in a more deliberate way. After the 2007 AGM, the Trust pushed 7200 copies of our annual activity report through the letterbox of every household in the town. It included the question “What would you like to see developed in Penicuik?” One of the things most requested was a cinema.

Only four months later, an audience of 53 people came to see “The Last King of Scotland”. This was the opening event of Penicuik’s wonderful community cinema on October 7th 2007. Our public cinema, the only one in Midlothian, has now been running weekly for the last decade showing some of the world’s best films: a mixed programme of classics, new independent films, block busters, children’s cartoons, thrillers, interspersed with wonderful documentaries like ‘Babies’ – the first 15 months of life in Namibia, Japan, Mongolia and California.

When, in 2005, the Council considered disposing of the **Cowan Institute**, for long the town’s community focus, the public meeting called to protect its future overflowed the Town Hall’s capacity. What made me really proud to live in Penicuik was the audience: many born and bred in the town sat alongside newcomers, including Penicuik residents from 16 different countries, all feeling part of our community and passionately committed to maintaining its vitality. Of course, Penicuik has not totally outgrown its small town tribal factions but we share in a huge reservoir of goodwill and concern for our community. Penicuik Community Development Trust started from this need to protect the Cowan Institute, not just because it is an iconic building and a cultural focus for the community, but because it is a tangible link to Penicuik’s papermaking history. Is history going to repeat itself? “Penicuik Community Development Trust”. What does it say on the tin? A community works best when people spend time working together voluntarily and for the common good. The word ‘amateur’ does not mean the opposite to ‘professional’: it means someone doing things out of love rather than personal gain. The Trust is made up of ‘amateurs’: even though our annual turnover is now more than £50,000, we have no paid employees and have no grants to cover recurrent expenditure.

We have achieved much in the past dozen years but what of the future? We must not be complacent. Amongst the artefacts I have just come across in the papermaking museum is a letterpress plate for a leaflet celebrating the bicentenary of Alexander Cowan & Sons: “Celebrating 200 years of Papermaking – Preparing for the next 200 years”. The paper makers were obliterated by asset stripping and globalisation only a decade after this optimism. The challenge for us all is to embed in a new generation the commitment to community values and voluntary activities that the Trust has so far harnessed successfully. We all have to work hard so that the very real achievements survive.

Roger Hipkin
Penicuik Community Choir was founded in 2012 by Elizabeth McKeon and her husband Andrew Macfarlane. Elizabeth has performed throughout the UK for over 30 years. Her varied repertoire ranges from opera and classical to musical theatre and popular styles. She has taught music for over 25 years in schools in Midlothian. Andrew does not have a musical background but loves singing and is also the choir chairperson.

The aim when the choir first formed, and to this day, is to promote fun and community spirit by bringing together local people who love both music and singing who would benefit from the enjoyment and fun of singing within a group. Since starting with 20 members, choir numbers have increased to over 60 locals and we perform concerts throughout the year across the Lothians.

However next year we are going international!! From the simple beginnings of a local French teacher heading abroad for some experience to the current day relationship, Penicuik has had a twinning agreement with the town of L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, in Southern France since 1978. As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of this association, to keep alive the friendships already formed and hopefully create some new ones, the Penicuik Community Choir has accepted an invitation by Penicuik Twinning Association to perform in the French town, in the summer of 2018. We are very proud to announce participation by 32 members of the Choir in this venture and many fund-raising activities are planned in the coming months to assist towards the significant funding challenges of an adventure such as this.

We are very grateful for the support that the Penicuik community gives us by sharing of venues, attending our concerts and helping us in our fund-raising activities. The choir eagerly share any donations they receive through concerts and events with local and national charities.

If you are interested in finding out more please visit our website, www.penicuikcommunitychoir.co.uk.
Agnes’ story

Editor’s note: When I look around the congregation at St James the Less church, I realise (with some shame) that there are still quite a few people whose stories I know nothing about. I chanced to chat to Agnes Thorburn one day. She began to talk about her life as a musician. I was fascinated; as a relative newcomer, I have never known Agnes in that role. She kindly allowed me to ask her more questions, and to share her story with you.

How did music become important in your own life?
I was born in Penicuik in 1928 just over the old post office in Bridge Street. The building is now occupied by Pen-Y-Coe Press. I remember my father taking me as a wee child (about five years old) to listen to my brothers singing in the choir at St James the Less Church. Only boys and men were allowed to sing in the choir at that time! I loved to listen to the music.

My brothers attended the “Tin School” in the grounds of St James the Less church, and I remember their comments about the noise of the rain on the tin roof. I started school in the new building of St James the Less school, which is now the premises of Findlay-Irvine in Bog Road. There were three class-rooms and each teacher taught two year-groups in their class-room. My head mistress was Miss Evans. I suppose she noticed my musical talent and offered to teach me to play the piano. I remember the tumbler of milk and a chocolate biscuit at each lesson! I had one lesson a week at her house just round the corner from the school. After I left school, Mrs MacFarlane, who was the organist at St James the Less church, took me on for piano lessons.

When did you start and end your music career?
I married Alex, who was a violinist, and I started to accompany him on the piano. Later, I began teaching piano to school pupils, and I taught for seven years. My hands are arthritic now, so I can’t play the piano any more. I gave my piano away to Cuiken school.

What training/qualifications did you have or need for the job?
Mrs MacFarlane put me in for the piano grade exams, and I qualified up to a teaching grade.

Can you describe your musical life?
Alex worked with MacTaggart Scott at Loanhead, making arresting gear for planes landing on ships. After a disaster at sea in 1958, a benefit concert was arranged to help the bereaved families. Alex was asked to play at the concert, and I accompanied him and all the singers. I even accompanied a sword-player! Alex also conducted the Loanhead orchestra in the concert, and was presented with a small trophy as a thank you from MacTaggart Scott.

We also used to play support acts with the Penicuik Male Voice Choir, which performed concerts across the region from the east to west coasts.

I think I was in high demand as an accompanist, because I made efforts to empathise with all the performers. I continued to accompany Alex’s violin performances for many years, sometimes with only one week’s notice of a concert!

Alex and I had birthdays in the same week. As a joint 70th birthday gift, our three daughters commissioned a caricature picture of us illustrating our main interests - the piano and violin figure prominently! (See photograph on the next page)
The Headmaster at Cuiken School knew Alex as a friend, and asked him if he would teach violin to school pupils on a Saturday morning. I used to call in at the school with coffee at mid-morning, and then I began to accompany the pupils. I remember giving lifts to children in my car to their violin exams in Edinburgh. I tried to comfort and encourage them on the journey there, and they were always relieved to find out that I was going to be there for their exams. I offered this service for free - normally people had to pay a lot for an accompanist. After their exam ordeal, I always bought the children an ice cream!

At the end of every term at Cuiken School, parents were invited to come to hear their children’s music. On one occasion, the head of the Midlothian music department called in to listen. He watched me accompanying the children’s violin pieces and then had a chat with me about the possibility of teaching piano to school pupils. I was offered two days a week teaching at St Margaret’s School in Loanhead, and at a Gorebridge primary school. On one occasion, the Gorebridge primary school asked me to play accompaniments for a Burns songs competition in Edinburgh. I drove the Headmaster to the venue, but I can’t remember the location now. Nobody that I’ve spoken to in Penicuik took part in that competition. I still wonder where it was!

**Describe a typical working week**

I went to St Margaret’s school to teach on a Tuesday, and to Gorebridge on a Thursday or Friday. I also taught privately in people’s houses.

**Do you have any particular story to share about your life as a music teacher?**

At St Margaret’s school there was a wee boy called Christopher. He didn’t practice very much, but I tried to be forgiving and kind. Our first grandchild was born at around that time, and he was also given the name Christopher. When I told this to my wee piano pupil, he was thrilled, and thought the new baby had been named after him! Alex taught violin to his sister Kathleen at Roslin school. Before long, Alex and I became friendly with their mum & dad. When Kathleen grew up she invited us to her wedding, and I made their wedding cake. Kathleen and her new husband, Craig, went to live in Colorado. Two years ago, she phoned me to say that they were coming to the UK to their nephew’s wedding & wanted to take me out to lunch. They told me they would “never forget me”, which was lovely.

Some months ago, I fell & fractured my wrist. My daughter used Facebook to thank everyone who had helped me at the time. This resulted in a call from Colorado: it was Kathleen & Craig sending their love. When their mum died, I felt honoured to be invited to sit with the family at the funeral.

Our daughters learned to play instruments - the youngest and eldest both played the violin and the middle daughter played the cello. Sadly, they are too busy to play these days.

**What were the main problems in your life as a musician?**

Problems? I don’t think I had problems. Alex was always there to talk things over with if I needed to. I enjoyed it very much.
Has any particular person inspired you before or during your music career?
My husband, Alex, was my main inspiration. He was an only son (he had had a twin brother who died at birth, and there had been another brother who had died of diphtheria). When Alex and I started courting, Alex’s parents bought a piano for their own home so that they could hear Alex and me playing music together when we visited. Alex died eleven years ago.

How did music feature in other parts of your life? How does it feature in your life now?
As an adult, accompanying on the piano lasted all my married life. I also liked to sing. I was still a small girl when girls and women were eventually allowed in the choir at St James the Less church. At that time, my father’s sisters (Aunt Bella and Aunt Liza) and their two friends were the only female choir members. They had to stand hidden away, between the men and the organ!

I became a choir girl in my teens. At that time, there were still only four female choir members (Dorothy Braggins, Betty Nisbet, Margaret Bell and myself). The female choir members still had to stand hidden between the men and the organ. We didn’t wear robes, and we didn’t process in and out. We simply slipped quietly into our place at the beginning of the service, and then left quietly after the boys and men had processed out. Our mothers always bought us new coats and hats at Easter time, which we proudly paraded at church (see photograph).

Nowadays I sing with the Dalkeith Singers every Thursday evening. They are a wonderful choir of about seventy singers. We’re giving a concert on 9th December!

What were the main joys in your life as a musician?
I loved all of it! If I hadn’t met Alex, I don’t think I would have had such a wonderful musical life. I owe it all to him.

Dorothy Braggins, Betty Nisbet, Margaret Bell and Agnes - choir girls in the 1940s. Mrs MacFarlane can be seen behind the girls.
In September, 2016, Scottish Government’s Social Justice division were persuaded to give the Penicuik Community Alliance (PCA) funds to establish a club where people, dependent on food bank and housing support, could find a route to more dignified, sustainable lifestyles. We were convinced that we would have social facilities, including a training kitchen, on the upper floor at The Storehouse by January 2017, but to date, those facilities are nowhere to be seen and are unlikely to materialise before the project ends in March 2018. We had recruited two paid staff to get the project off the ground, but frustrated by lack of premises, our employees were occupied with related work which did not meet the funded milestones. Naturally, our Fairer Food Transformation funders (FFTF) were thinking of pulling the plug on the project. However, our employees did get one activity underway - the Community Meal. With no facilities of its own, the PCA asked Rev’d Lynsay and Vestry (the church management committee) whether we might use their hall for a Community Meal on Thursdays over the summer, as that was the only day the hall was available which suited staff and volunteers at the time.

So now (astonishingly, with FFTF staff no longer on the payroll), the PCA is doing some of what it promised, thanks to compassionate support from St James the Less church and the sterling efforts of volunteers. The meal was moved to Tuesdays of every week when the church hall and kitchen became available on that day, and it’s still going strong every Tuesday. For a while, gatherings were very small but as word spread, numbers grew and so, thankfully, did the supply of donated food, because we had not budgeted for any! First Costco and then Whitmuir Farm came to our rescue and are now regular suppliers. The Lost Garden, Tesco and Jade Palace also support the project with practical donations.

**The Storehouse Community Meal**

*Gifts of fresh fruit and vegetables from the Whitmuir Farm Community project “2000m²”*

*Volunteer chefs and cooks working together*
In the early days, we hadn’t considered what to do when our staff chef-of-the-day needed a day off, but on one occasion, three volunteer chefs turned up!

Meal preparation, cooking, serving and cleaning up are overseen by volunteers June (PCA committee member), Derek (chef and trainer supreme!) and Sue (general side-kick and fills in if June or Derek have to take a day off). Various other volunteers help with all the jobs and it’s a joy to see such a diverse bunch working well together. Volunteer and Guest numbers tend to fluctuate, but there are usually about a dozen or more people sitting down to eat at 12:30pm. The meals are free, but monetary donations are welcome from those who can afford it.

The PCA had promised the project funders that they would draw clients from Pentland House, where the Salvation Army had been contracted to run a hostel for the temporarily homeless for Midlothian Council, starting back in January 2017: it has only just opened but the Community Meal doors at St James the Less Church are open in welcome, should residents wish to join us to help with tasks and/or eat.

We need to spread the word, and make it clear that this is a Community Meal - for anyone at all. We have Food Hygiene and Environmental Health certification and we train volunteers in safe handling and preparation of food. Most important of all - the three-course meals are always delicious, and there is always someone to chat with.

Rev’d Neville & Sue Owen

Meals ready to serve  Bon appétit!
The Volunteer Leaders’ views…

**Derek Mair**

The Community Meal is very lucky indeed that Derek is “Head Chef”. His involvement with the meal started some time ago. He had met Roger Kelly (PCA Chairperson) by chance at Roger’s stall at the Penicuik Friday market and began a conversation with him. Roger persuaded Derek to go along to the Penicuik Town Hall Saturday coffee morning to help with making the soup. Then in July this year, Derek started to help with the Community Meal at St James the Less church hall, overlapping with Charlie Cornelius (one of the project staff) by about 4 weeks. When Charlie left, Derek slipped naturally into place as the “Head Chef”, although it was never his original intention! It was a natural move, as Derek has 18 years experience as a chef. He left school in 1995 and spent three years studying at Blackburn College. He’s had experience of working with a lot of big corporations and at many big events - Aintree, Royal Ascot, Cricket matches, football stadiums, 5-star hotels, several restaurants, different hotel groups.

When I asked him “What do you do each week to make it happen?”, he replied that he just turns up, inspects the food donations, and brainstorms for the best meals using the available ingredients. He then master-minds preparations, cooking and serving. He also makes big efforts to train the volunteers in different cooking skills. This can be extremely challenging, as it’s never known until the day how many volunteers will arrive, what their capabilities and experience are, what the ingredients will be, nor how many will sit down and eat. Somehow, Derek takes it all in his stride and always produces a delicious meal with the resources available.

To me, it sounds like the most stressful voluntary work I can think of! So I then asked Derek why he does it. He assured me that he does enjoy it, even though it can be a bit too challenging occasionally! He adds that it gives him relevant experience during the current period of his unemployment.

He would like to see the project grow and evolve, with more people coming to eat together. He feels that since the Meal started, it's improving on all fronts.

**June Horne**

The Community Meal is also very lucky to have June on board. With an SVQ level 3 certificate in Health & Social Care, and a PDA certificate in Teaching in Further Education, she is passionate about making a difference to the lives of people who are struggling in any way. She first came into contact with the Storehouse Project when working with a Penicuik Foodbank. She met Charlie & Julie, the Fairer Food project staff, and started helping out at the Community Meal. Because she held the Supervisory Food Hygiene (Level 3) certificate, she was asked to cover for the Meal during Charlie’s paternity leave in July 2017.
When Charlie returned to work, June volunteered with him until he left a few weeks later. June was happy to continue in a role of responsibility for the Meal along with Derek, who had been involved for a little longer.

Roger Kelly had also spoken to June about joining the PCA Management Committee, and so June also became a Board member at the beginning of August 2017.

June told me that she feels that she doesn’t really “do a lot in the larger scale of things”. Generally she keeps an eye out for recipes and creative ideas. She goes to Costco for food donations at around 9:30am each Tuesday. She selects foods which are available, that she thinks will go well together. She then takes the food to the church hall, where she meets Derek. Together, they check over the Costco donations, the fresh produce from Whitmuir farm (which is normally left at the church door on a Monday evening), and any other donations of food from trusted suppliers. June and Derek agree the fine details of the day's Meal and if necessary, June pops to the shops to buy extra ingredients, such as eggs & milk.

During the preparation of the Meal, June is aware of her Food Safety responsibility and tries to keep an eye on procedures, offering advice to volunteers who are not qualified in food hygiene.

June also spends time networking with suppliers & potential guests & volunteers

I asked June why she enjoys volunteering in this way for the Meal. She replied “I feel I’m developing my skills. I’ve never taken on this type of project before. I had to study quite a lot to come to terms with the Cook Safe procedures. I love doing it - it’s lovely to see people moving on. For example, I sometimes see one ex-volunteer who’s moved on to college. She still appreciates that experience of helping at the Community Meal. It's a totally inclusive environment, and we value anyone who comes to help - everyone has something to offer”.

Like Derek, June admits that there are challenges. She says “We rely on other people for everything. We have no control over any of the resources. However, every Tuesday we’re a team, and we try to work as well as we can together in the face of all the uncertainties. It’s also difficult in that many volunteers don’t have food hygiene qualifications, and trying to supervise several activities at once can be challenging - but it’s always worth it, and everything always works out well.”

June is hoping that the Community Meal will run on Christmas Day this year at St James the Less Church Hall. For that day only, she will need to know in advance how many will be catered for (though anyone turning up without letting her know beforehand will not be turned away). As for the usual weekly Community Meal there will be no “rules” about who can come to the Christmas Meal, but June is particularly keen to support people spending Christmas on their own, or who are struggling financially at the moment.

Finally, I asked June about her future hopes and dreams for the Community Meal. In the longer term, June hopes that the Storehouse will become a “centre of excellence”, providing training in life skills for young people & adults with additional needs. With funding cuts, training services such as “Skills Path” are shutting down. June hopes that all the future Storehouse activities (including the Community Meal) will provide these training opportunities in Penicuik.

Ed: Well Done Storehouse Community Meal Team!

Look who popped in with their mums, dads and friends for a cuppa and a chat!
The “Storehouse Community Meal”
Rev’d Neville’s view:
“bringing order out of chaos”

A symbolic shared “meal” lies at the heart of the worship at St James the Less church on most Sundays, as those present partake of bread and wine at Holy Communion, recalling the way love quelled mounting chaos at the Last Supper. We pay homage to a God ‘who is in all places at all times, bringing order out of chaos’ and pledge to do likewise through reordered daily living. Meister Eckhart, a 13th Century Dominican prior, said “If humankind could have known God without the world, God would never have created the world”. I reckon Meister Eckhart would be delighted to see what is happening every Tuesday in The Storehouse Community Meal: one might even say “God is happening”! A semblance of order is certainly being restored to the affairs of Penicuik Community Alliance (PCA).

Just as our Holy Communion Service restores order to the lives of the faithful, Sunday-by-Sunday, so the Community Meal restores order Tuesday-by-Tuesday to both the PCA and the people it pledged to support.

It is a wonderful opportunity for the congregation of St James the Less to share their lovely premises with the Community and support such a worthwhile project. I can think of nothing better for St James the Less church to be doing!

Rev’d Neville

Editor: Rev’d Neville is a non-stipendiary minister at St James the Less church, and is also a very active long-term member of the PCA committee. The Storehouse Community Meal at St James the Less Church Hall is not run by the church (though their generous support is much appreciated) and it is not a religious occasion. There are no prayers, no hymn-singing, no indoctrination. Anyone is welcome to help out, eat, or both! People of all faiths and none are important and necessary to keep this social occasion alive. Absolutely no strings attached!
Messy Church – what is it, and who is it for?

Penicuik Messy Church is part of the UK ‘Messy Church’ organisation, which is ‘a way of being church for families, involving fun’ – details can be found at https://www.messychurch.org.uk/. It’s aimed at a variety of people – people who have a live church connection, and are keen to have some additional Christian input for themselves and their children, people who have given up on traditional church but who would like to find a way to renew their faith and introduce the Christian faith to their children, and people who have no church connection whatsoever. The hope is that people will develop a sense of “belonging” and that Messy Church will become more than just a fun thing to do. We hope that by coming along and taking part people will learn about the Bible, the Christian faith, and in time come to a living faith of their own.

Every month ‘Messy Church’ publishes ideas for an event: we generally use this material as the basis for our sessions, adapting it to suit our circumstances. Sometimes we make up our own programme, if that seems more appropriate. We follow the same pattern most months – families arrive at St Mungo’s Hall from 4 pm on a Sunday afternoon, and find a wide range of activities (crafts and games) based around the day’s theme. In September we were thinking about John the Baptist, and how he showed people who Jesus is and helped them prepare for his coming. In October, using the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, we considered the idea of being ready for Jesus, and in November, we were preparing for Christmas.

At 5 pm we all go across to the church for a Celebration, where the bible-based theme for the afternoon is explained and developed in various ways: drama (often involving the youngsters), storytelling, question and answer, etc. We usually have a couple of songs, often accompanied by a video clip, and frequently involving one of two extremes – getting up and dancing, or sitting quietly reflecting on what’s been talked about. And we always have a short prayer time, which again takes various forms – lighting candles, drawing/writing, talking to others ….. it may not always look like prayer, but we know that God is listening!
Back in the hall it’s time for our hot dinner (in November it was Christmas dinner, a little different from our usual dishes such as cottage pie or spaghetti and meatballs). Parents, children and helpers sit down together, and can share some of the thoughts arising from what we’ve been doing during the afternoon, or talk about more general things. It’s a good time to get to know people better. We’re usually finished just after 6 pm……anyone for vegetable locusts?

Penicuik Messy Church is aimed at families with Primary School children – each child/group of children has to bring a responsible adult, and adults need to bring at least one child. Adults are responsible for their children throughout the afternoon, and are expected to join in the craft activities, games and discussions, and to attend the Celebration and meal. Recently we have had around 25-35 parents and children attending – but have had as many as 80 for the ‘Christmas dinner’ at the end of November.

The event is “staffed” by volunteers from several Penicuik churches – some help with the crafts and games, some help in the kitchen, and some lead the Celebration. There is also (of course) a team of people who work behind the scenes to make it all possible, and we are grateful to those who provide financial support. No charge is made for attending; we do provide an opportunity for donations to cover costs.

We meet on the last Sunday afternoon each month, except July and December, in St Mungo’s Hall at the foot of Kirkhill. In August (weather permitting) we have for several years now organised games and a BBQ at the Bog Road playing field, and we usually have a BBQ at the end of the June meeting, if the weather is good. St Mungo’s Hall has a small garden which is used for the BBQ, and also for some of the games activities, weather permitting. The activities start at 4 pm, with people free to arrive as suits them, and the dinner is usually finished by just after 6 pm.

Look out for monthly information in the Town Crier, and also in your church notices. You can also find us on the Penicuik Messy Church Facebook page, and a report of each month’s activities is usually available in St Mungo’s newsletter at http://www.stmungos.freeuk.com/.

For further details, whether you’d like to come along, help us as a volunteer, or just want to find out more about what we do, please contact Joan Cape on 674276 or capefamily@talktalk.net.

Joan Cape
When you walk through the darkest valley

Probably all of us have had to make journeys at one time or another that we would have rather avoided.

Right in the middle of perhaps the best known psalm in the world - Psalm 23 - the author uses a powerful and vivid metaphor to describe a journey that no one wants to take describing it as “walking through the valley of the shadow of death”, or in modern translation, “walking through the darkest valley”.

“The darkest valley” here is a poetic but meaningful way of describing a crisis in life, an experience potentially filled with danger, despair, fear, anxiety and uncertainty. This vivid phrase has most often been used to explain the experience of facing death or grief.

The good news is that the author of the psalm doesn’t just describe this journey we would rather avoid but tells us some vital truths about the journey that will help us make it. Specifically, He tells us it is:

An Unavoidable Journey
There will be dark valleys in your life, they are unavoidable. No life is care free or trouble free. At one time or another we are all going to have to take this journey no one wants to and walk through the dark valley. No one is immune. The author of psalm 23 is helping us be realistic about life, that it’s not all plain sailing.

A Survivable Journey
Perhaps the key word for us to grasp when it comes to these dark valley experiences from what Psalm 23 says is “through.” The author says he is going to “walk through the darkest valley”.

He’s not going to be trapped in it or be unable to escape from it. It’s an experience, however difficult, and he is going to make it through to the other side. Crises in this life are all ultimately temporary. He knows he is going to survive this journey, and that he will make it through even the darkest valley.

He is not claiming that he will make it through this dark valley under his own steam. Instead he claims he will make it through the valley because of who will walk through it with him, his God, who he thinks of as his Shepherd. He tells us specifically that he will not be overcome by fear or despair in life’s dark valleys but instead will find strength and encouragement to carry on by relying on his God’s presence. “I will fear no evil; For You are with me.”
Nepal’s Dark Valleys

For people in Nepal, where living is hand to mouth, there is often no care for people who are sick or in pain. They find themselves in life’s darkest valley alone, without a shepherd, without someone to care for them.

Juna’s Story

Manju is training to be the very first specialist palliative care nurse in Nepal. She is a Christian, and says “For me, serving God and serving the poor are one and the same. If I can relieve the suffering of others, then I do this with a glad heart.”

One such person needing help was Juna. Her life had been marred by poverty and tragedy. Ostracised by her family for her choice of husband, widowed at 33 years old and suffering leprosy, Juna became known to Manju after being diagnosed with incurable cancer.

Juna could have gone the rest of her life thinking nobody cared for her and her two children. Instead she received the care she needed, and she and her children were supported by a local church. All this meant that, despite her suffering, Juna says “I have been blessed abundantly”. We can all do something to help others through the dark valleys. Sickness, pain, grief and poverty cast dark shadows but our love, kindness, prayer and generosity bring hope and comfort.

How do we play our part?

The “Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society” (EMMS international) advertises itself as an organisation inspiring hope, helping churches to care for the sick. This Advent, anyone can collect a Nepal Advent journey pack from St James the Less church to help you pray with, and for, the people of Nepal as you prepare for Christmas. If you’d like to give a small amount of money each day too, you can send it to EMMS during January in the envelope provided and the government will match your gift, helping their work even more.

Here’s hoping that some will take up this opportunity to make a difference!

Revd Lynsay
At Christmas time, most of us (individuals, groups and communities) are busy preparing for Christmas. Some of us love it, and some of us loathe it. Whatever we feel about the festive season, the thoughts of most of us also turn to people in dire need, both near and far. We tend to give more to charities at this time of year. EMMS is one of the charities supported by St James the Less congregation. It’s based in Edinburgh and involved a world-famous Scottish doctor!

EMMS International is a Christian international healthcare charity founded in 1841. EMMS International works with partners in India, Malawi and Nepal to improve health and healthcare, and facilitates respite for people in Scotland with serious illnesses.

How EMMS International began
In 1841, a group of doctors formed the Edinburgh Association for Sending Medical Aid to Foreign Countries to “circulate information on medical mission; help other institutions engaged in the same work and assist as many Missionary stations as their funds would permit.”

The name was changed in 1843 to The Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society – a name which lasted until 2002 when it was split into two separate Charities - EMMS International and The Nazareth Trust.

EMMS International and Dr David Livingstone
It is our great privilege to count Dr David Livingstone among our earliest members.

On 4 March 1858, the General Committee of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society unanimously resolved to add Dr David Livingstone’s name to the list of Corresponding Members of the Society.

Even then, David Livingstone was an inspiration to the organisation. At a breakfast meeting arranged in his honour the Scottish explorer and medical missionary shared stories of his travels and medical endeavours among the African population. The minutes record the event as “a notable occasion in our history - bringing before us a real medical missionary - a true man raised by Providence for a great purpose.”

This relationship with Livingstone continued until his death, in Africa, in 1873. Dr Livingstone continues to be an inspiration to EMMS International. We continue in the footsteps of Livingstone, and those like him, who sought to bring improvements in healthcare along with Christian compassion to some of the world’s poorest communities.

EMMS website
https://www.emms.org/
Why ‘Astonishing’?

One of the first things that I found out, as my family discovered the Autistic Spectrum and our various positions within it, was the concept of neurodiversity, and the idea that all of our brains are wired differently, giving us differing gifts and challenges. Whilst many people have a “neurotypical” set up, sharing common patterns of functioning, many others use their brains in delightfully quirky ways. The community identifying itself as “neurodiverse”, trying to embrace all these quirks and typicalities, has adopted for its patron saint, St Christina the Astonishing.

Who is St Christina?

The inspiration for the community’s name comes from a little-known saint: Christina the Astonishing.

For those who don’t know Christina’s story, here’s the short version. Christina was born in Belgium in 1150 and died in 1224 at the ripe old age of 74. The fact she lived to be 74 is something of a miracle in itself given the eventful life she led.

At the age of 21 or 22 she had some sort of seizure and was assumed to have died. At her funeral, it is said that she levitated out of her coffin, to the ceiling of the Church. This, unsurprisingly, terrified her mourners who fled the church, with the exception of one of her sisters and the priest. These two carried on to the end of the Mass at which point the priest talked Christina into coming down from the rafters of the church. She then regaled the two with stories of having been to heaven, purgatory, and hell and from this time forward she dedicated her life to praying for the souls in purgatory.

She is recorded as having spent quite a bit of her time avoiding the smell of sin on her fellow humans by hiding in baking ovens, (whilst they were lit), at the tops of trees, and in general levitating herself away at need. She was considered either possessed by devils or miraculous in the extreme. She lived in total poverty, essentially homeless until the last years of her life when she finally agreed to settle down in the convent of one of her only friends, a woman named Beatrice.

St Christina has become the patron saint of those with mental illnesses and those who care for them, she is also the favoured saint for adoption as patron by the Autistic community.

The Astonishing Community’s take on St Christina

The Astonishing Community takes St Christina’s concern for souls in purgatory and translates it into a dedication to those who are suffering here and now.

We seek to be a neurodiverse community encompassing all people, no matter how atypically their minds or brains work.

I believe that will begin with a community of prayer. A community of people willing to cultivate that sense of wonder (which is the beginning of prayer), that will allow us to be astonished by the many ways God is at work in our lives and the lives of those around us.
What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a way of describing the fact that we exist in a world where people’s brains interpret information in a variety of different ways. Many people are neuro-typical (their brains function in a more or less mainstream way, so the world is designed to work for them). Others have quirkier ways of interpreting and assimilating information perhaps because their brains process information in: autistic, ADHD/ADD, dyslexic, bipolar or other atypical ways.

All six senses (Touch; Taste; Sound; Vision; Smell; Balance) may respond atypically for any one person. Some may experience only one atypicality, whilst others will experience multiple atypicalities.

These symbols have been developed by the BBC and Manchester University, to represent Neurodiversity.

You’re trying to get me interested - but what if I don’t go to church; what if I don’t really believe in God?

I’d appreciate stories from anyone - even if you don’t “do” religion!

At the moment I’m collecting stories of our contemporaries. People we know, whether they’re churchgoers or not, who have said or done something, or simply caused you to be in a situation where you’ve looked at the world differently and perhaps wondered about the mystery of life, maybe wondered about God.

It might be the love someone has for a very ordinary object, or the time they spend watching leaves blow. It might be about sitting in silence or learning to find patterns in noise. It might be about laughter when you were about to give up, or the relish with which a lasagne was consumed. If you have such a moment that you’re willing to share, with the person’s real name or a saintly pseudonym, I’d be really grateful if you could write it down and send it to me by e-mail or give it to me at church (see back page for contact details).

With the beginning of Advent 2017 the Astonishing Prayers Blog will launch, including prayers inspired by saints from across the Christian traditions, who today would be classed as “vulnerable”, hopefully cared for, but it is unlikely they would be recognised as especially holy. I’m hoping that we can retrain our eyes and our ears to the ways in which all people are wonderfully revealing God’s love.

The Astonishing Community is inclusive. If you’re interested in finding out more, please contact me!

Rev’d Lynsay
The ‘Astonishing Community’ Logo explained

The triangular shape and three elements of the logo speak both of Community and Trinity.

The figures represent St Christina identifiable by the story above her hem, and Jesus, whose story is told in the same way.

They are Carrying a fish as an echo of the ikthus.

The fish scales show the symbols for the six senses of neurodiversity gathered around a cross.

What’s an “ikthus”?

One of the earliest, and most common, symbols used by the Christians was the Ikthus, or Fish. We see it used today in its plainest form, two swooping lines, and in more elaborate forms with the inclusion of a small cross, the word JESUS, or the Greek ΙΧΘΥΣ within the classic fish shape (that’s where it’s name comes from).
Memories of Autumn

Autumn is my favourite time of year for colour: the rich browns, tans, bronze, deep pink/mauve, burning orange and the bright yellows – all the cheerful colours.

A time when the blindingly bright sunlight shines through our bedroom window onto the mirror and dazzles anyone who tries to look at it.

Leaves fall from the trees and are raked up into piles. This reminds me of my childhood when we, my sister and I, used to kick our way through the leaves regardless of whether or not they had been raked into the pile. When we had to rake up the leaves it seemed that just as we had made a small pile, the wind would blow them all around the garden.

The best place for kicking leaves was in the woods, and it still is. We used to take the grandchildren to Lowries Den and I could shuffle my way through the leaves with them without feeling a fool. Then we jumped into the puddles. Childhood re-visited.

My aunt and two cousins used to join us to go to the nearest big wood to gather chestnuts and conkers. We searched among the leaves and had to take care not to prick ourselves on the spiky shells. The conkers, so new and shiny were taken home to have string put through them ready to play conkers.

Vegetables were gradually taken from the garden to store, leaving only the winter ones. Plums were picked to be bottled to provide pies for Sunday lunch and jam. Apples were picked and stored on top of the wardrobe and the chrysanthemums flowered in all their glory. I don’t remember the wet, dull days.

Gradually the days became shorter and our winter clothes came out and tried on to see which still fitted us. Trees lost their leaves and it got colder. Winter was approaching. Winter is more or less here now - but there might still be time to revive your childish self and kick your way through the leaves. The garden of St. James the Less church is really good for this.

Angela Sibley
Autumn Gold

by Dorothy McGregor

The cloudless sun of summer
Has turned to autumn gold,
In this season, ablaze in splendour
We see its charms unfold.

A tinge of fire festoons the trees,
Crispy leaves come fluttering down,
We're kicking up the traces
In ochre, red, russet and brown.

The thrill of spiky conker shells
Lying hidden on the ground,
Eager youngsters searching long
Till all the treasure is found.

There’s magic in the twilight,
The burnish before the snow,
Mellow moments for sweet reflection
As we bask in firelight’s glow.

contributed by Angela Sibley
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