

Pastoral Visits

The Minister and Pastoral Assistant are happy to visit church members who are in ill, either at home or in hospital. If in hospital, please also pass on the ward number, as this is not available to Ministers. This information should be given to the Minister (890800) or via the Church Office (892800). Thank you.

Newsletters

The next newsletter will cover April and May 2018. The deadline for submitting articles is Tuesday 13th March 2018. Please send to Abbey Church Office.

If you would prefer to have your copy of the Abbey Church and Dirleton Kirk newsletter emailed to you please inform your district Elder or the Abbey Church Office.

Abbeychurch.org.uk
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Abbey Church, North Berwick (Church of Scotland)

Scottish Charity No. SC0 04761—CCL51436



Abbey Church

and

Dirleton Kirk News

February/ March 2018

Minister: Rev. Dr David J Graham, BSc, BD

**Sunday Morning Worship
at**

**9.30 am (until 10.20) Dirleton
Kirk**

**10.30am (Until 11.30) Abbey
Church**

Come along. All welcome.

Wednesdays 10am

**Half Hour Prayer Service
Dirleton**

Abbey Church,

116 High Street, (at Church Road)

North Berwick

Church Office: 01620 892800

abbeychurch@abbeychurch.co.uk

*Office open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday
10am until 1pm*

Dirleton Kirk,

Dirleton Kirk, Manse Road,

Dirleton. EH39 5EJ

Forthcoming services

In our morning services over the next few weeks (apart from the special Easter services), we'll be thinking about some of the basics of our faith. Topics to be covered include: Why read the Bible? Do we need a church? and What is heaven?

These themes will also be mirrored in the House Group, details of which can be found separately.

Church Register

Baptism

10th December Isobella Shirley Suzanne Gillies
(Musselburgh)

Blessing

31st December Theodore John Bell Byrne (Denver)

Funerals

21st November Morag Mackenzie, Dirleton Court

23rd November Mary Bourhill, Fidra House

4th December Agnes Stewart, Muirfield House

8th December Beth Blake, Middleshot Road

19th December Mike Miller, Lord President Road

23rd December James Inglis, Gylers Road

22nd January Margaret Young, Belhaven Hospital



Prayer - February and March

Dear friends in Christ

We are well into 2018 now and all the Church, Sunday School and social activities have started up once again. Why don't you make an effort—come along and join in?

Let us pray

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for Christmas, and the greatest gift of all, Jesus! Thank you, that in this country, we can worship you freely! At times we may not feel great, but if we start singing in church, at home or elsewhere, we can't help but feel uplifted. Thank you, we can gather together with family and friends and share food and fellowship. Thank you too that many were invited to join in and not feel lonely or left out. Father, bless those who remembered others and shared their lovely meal with them.

We ask your blessing on those whose lives are so different. People living amid war, drought, hunger, homelessness. Those who waken up with no hope for the future. May we find ways to help them—to encourage them.

Lord, we bring before you all who are ill and are unable to be helped. The shortage of staff, beds, ambulance crews etc. Bless those working longer hours to do their best. May all staff feel appreciated. May love flow amongst all your people— and not just St Valentine's day.

At the end of March our thoughts go forward as we celebrate Easter. This is such a wonderful celebration for Christians. Let's rejoice, let's praise his holy name.

Amen

Betty Hawthorn (Prayer Secretary)

May 2018 be a good one for you and yours

Dear Friends,

The Scottish Government has designated 2018 as the Year of Young People. The Church wants to support this and foster the involvement of young people in what it does.

'Scotland's first ever Year of Young People is happening in 2018. The Church of Scotland plans to be actively involved, through events and activities, celebrating church engagement with children and young people at local, presbytery and national levels. We want children and young people to be at the heart of designing, developing and deciding what shape the year takes and how churches get involved.' (Church of Scotland YOYP website).

In Abbey & Dirleton, we'll be having special themed services to mark this, special events for young people, and every week we'll have a 'slot' in the service with young people in mind.

Please support this initiative, and pray that through it we may reach many young people with the gospel, and support them in their journey of faith.



Your friend & Minister,

David



GO IN LOVE



We're nearing the end of the Guild Session entitled '**GO IN LOVE**' but still have **JOINT** (with StAB) meetings in Feb and Mar when we will learn a great deal about the two projects we are supporting.

The first, on **6th FEBRUARY at 2.30pm** in Abbey Church Hall is:-

PROSPECTS -ALL FRIENDS TOGETHER which is about helping churches to welcome people with learning disabilities, to include them in all aspects of church life and to help them build friendships with Jesus and with other Church members.

The second, on **6th MARCH at 2.30pm** in St Andrew Blackadder Church Hall is:

MISSION INTERNATIONAL-HAITI PROJECT. This project began in 2010, working with a local Christian Church in the north eastern town of Ouanaminthe. The aim (which is well underway) is to construct a multipurpose building to be used as a school, community centre and church centre. The building will provide space to educate up to 300 children, will house a congregation of 700 people on Sundays and will provide services for the community throughout the week.

Another interesting meeting will be held on **20th FEBRUARY at 7.30pm** in Abbey Church Hall which will probably be of widespread interest so is regarded as an **OPEN MEETING** - Mr NEIL BAIN is coming to speak to us

Abbey Church Morning Tea Rota February and March

4th February	Morna McClure	Sadie Young
11th February	Sarah Kerr	
18th February	Isobel Hardie	Fiona Gibson
25th February	Mary Graham	Dorothy Kirkpatrick
4th March	Irene Nichol	Sheila McCubbing
11th March	Ann Bell	Richard Bell
18th March	Liz Harrison	Irene Brodie
25th March	Catherine Andrew	Isabel Smith

Abbey Church Creche Duty Rota February and March

4th February	Joan Lunn	Catriana Spencer
11th February	Margaret Lawson	Janice Cobb
18th February	Mandy Vance	Sadie Young
25th February	Sarah Kerr	Carol Stobie
4th March	Ann Bell	Rose Leslie
11th March	Joan Lunn	Catriana Spencer
18th March	Margaret Lawson	Janice Cobb
25th March	Mandy Vance	Sadie Young

Abbey Church Flower Rota February and March

Date	Donor	Arranger
5th February	Miss D Adams	Elma Danks Dorothy Kirkpatrick
12th February	Mrs A Jardine	Elma Danks Dorothy Kirkpatrick
19th February	Mrs V Lamont	Violet Lamont Elma Danks
26th February	Mrs S Young	Sadie Young

18th March	Ms K Campbell	Kate Campbell
25th March	Mrs C Aitken	Claire Aitken Irene Nichol

4th March		Claire Aitken Irene Nichol
11th March	Mrs J Cobb	Claire Aitken Irene Nichol

about THE CHRISTIAN POLICE ASSOCIATION.

This year **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER** is being held on **2nd MAR** in St Andrew Blackadder Church at 3pm.

The final meeting of the Session will, as usual, be the **AGM followed by entertainment-on 20th MAR.**

Some of the present Committee Members wish to retire so please start thinking seriously about possibly being part of the 2018-19 Committee or suggesting who you feel would be ideal but just needs a little persuasion.

OCTOBER 2018 will be the 75th Anniversary of the start of Abbey Guild so it is essential that we have a viable committee in place by 20th MARCH.

If you need transport to any Guild Meeting, be sure to let Liz (89-4922) or any other member of The Abbey Guild Committee know.

ALL will be made VERY WELCOME at every Guild Meeting .



Dirleton Kirk Session Clerk's notes

We had a busy time of it over Advent and Christmas, and now, with Christmas having given way to the season of Epiphany, I catch my breath and thank everyone for their assistance and fellowship during the past couple of months.

The Kirk looked magnificent, with the beautiful arrangements at the lectern and elsewhere- works of abstract art, as much as floral arrangements- and the splendid tree, donated by Archerfield, erected by Neil and Tracy Walkingshaw, and decorated by the Sunday Club.

Ross Gubby, music student at York University, played the organ for us throughout December, and gave a recital on Sunday 17th December, along with his friends Justine Corr, Angelica Aydin, Catherine Johnson and Eoin Spence. This was an excellent occasion enjoyed enormously by the large audience which gathered to appreciate the music and to participate, with three Christmas carols sung enthusiastically during the evening.

During the service of worship on the previous Sunday morning, the organ had developed a fault, but urgent repair work carried out by Jamie Lightoller, together with consultations with Jim Dickson (who started playing the organ for us last year and who will be a regular organist this year) put the instrument in a fit state to be played. I was rather on tenterhooks during the concert, lest the repairs break down- or, as one of the audience put it to me later, lest Ross open up the stops to create a spectacular musical effect, causing a birds' nest to blow out of one of the pipes! But the organ came through with flying colours, and is playing better than before.

Special thanks also to the young musicians of the 'Dirleton Strings', led by Cathy Johnson, who played festive music before Ross's concert. Among the performers were Hannah, Ella Malaika and Bethany, who were in church earlier that day, among the cast in this year's Nativity play.

The Nativity Play was performed by the kids with characteristic verve and enthusiasm, and was hugely enjoyable as always. Old Testament prophets fulminated from the pulpit; Herod raged and threatened; Zacharias and Elizabeth were astonished; the three Wise Men realised Herod's wicked intentions, and proffered to him their gifts of...a handkerchief, a piece of



Teams from Abbey and Dirleton catered twice towards the end of 2017 at the Bethany Car Shelter. On each occasion we served approximately 38 meals though we had been asked to cook for up to 65. Thank you all who helped and donated.

From 8th January 2018 the Care Shelter will be at one venue in Meadowbank Church until the end of the winter. We at Abbey and Dirleton will be catering again on Saturday 31st March and Wednesday 11th April. If you are available to help on these dates, please contact Dorothy Kirkpatrick .

Little Nippers

Our Christmas party was a very happy occasion for the Mums and children. Everyone went into the Church to look at the lovely Christmas tree and receive a gift from our Minister. The children were too little to play games but they did enjoy the little gingerbread biscuits and the jelly and ice cream. It was the first time that most of the children had tried jelly! Mums and grandparents are very appreciative of the support of Abbey Church and really look forward to coming along each Thursday.

Little Nippers is on Thursdays 10am - 11.30am during school term. All children under 4 years and their Mums/Dads/grandparents/carers are warmly invited to join us. We could do with some more willing helpers- even for half an hour on the occasional Thursday - please think about offering to help!

Julie Loporto

string, and a bag of pandrops (whilst hiding the gifts for Jesus from him), the Angels were terrifying and reassuring, and the Shepherds terrified, then reassured. Thanks too to the Abbey Sunday Club for organising a terrific Christmas party, on Saturday 16th, and inviting us round.

We marked the final day of the old year with a service of worship at Dirleton, held jointly with Abbey, binding the link between the two congregations tighter. We had Advent discussion groups together with St. Baldred's, North Berwick, which were most enjoyable and thought-provoking, and I would encourage everyone to go along to these if they are held again over Advent 2018.

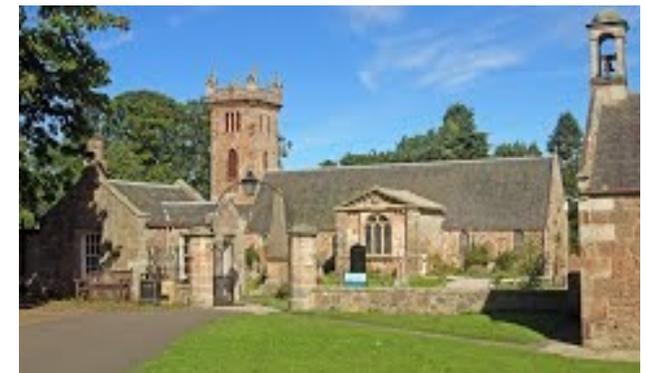
The Advent Concert and the Christmas services offered an opportunity to contribute to our Christmas charities: the Big Sleepout, to end homelessness, and our Kalimpong Twinning Fund, which assists with the huge amount of good work carried out by our twin Congregation in North India.

David and Bob's ministry included not only Sunday worship but also the extra services, but also, as always, tireless pastoral work, available to those in need at all times. And in the midst of all the excitement of the season, we gave thanks for the lives and service of Jim and Betty Inglis, faithful in their membership, and in Jim's case in his duties as elder; always reassuring, always encouraging, for as long as I have been in Dirleton.

Finally, thanks for the work of those who open up the Kirk, clean and tidy it, and the hall; and those who put on tea and coffee, mulled wine, mince pies and biscuits, for the hungry and thirsty worshippers.

Keith Stewart

9th January 2018



REGAL - February

Local photographer Ian Goodall has produced five books portraying various aspects of life in and around North Berwick. At the time of writing, Ian is in the process of producing his sixth book; this latest book will reflect the pictorial changes that have taken place across East Lothian since the early 1900s.

On Thursday, 8th February at 12 noon Ian will take us on a journey of nostalgia through the window of his postcard collection. Ian's talk will be based on his book "From North Berwick with Love" and reflects Ian's affection for the town where he has lived for many years.



The talk will tell the story of North Berwick through original postcards, many of them sent by visitors in the early to mid 1900s. He will use his recent photographs to compare today's views, places and scenes with what it was like way back then.

We'll see the original messages as written a long time ago in what was the "social media" of its time (and very speedy too with up to 7 deliveries of mail a day).

This promises to be a fascinating talk about our own town - do come along.



Teens Group

The Teens group had an old fashioned Christmas party with traditional games and party food including ice cream and jelly. Fun was the order of the evening! At the moment, all the young people attending are girls. If you have any teens in your family - boys or girls - who would like to join us at one of our monthly meetings, please let me know.

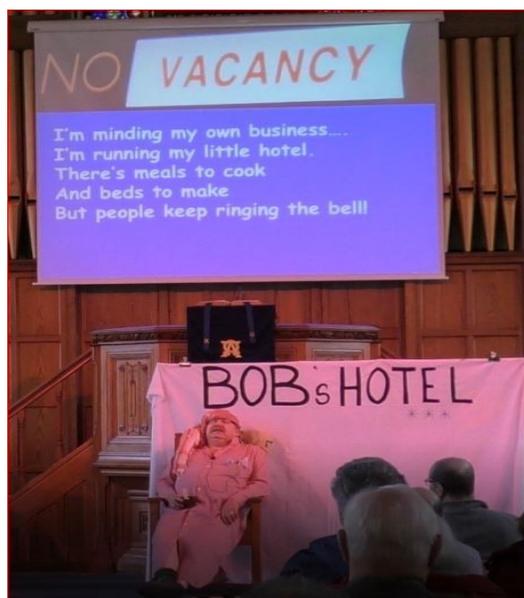
Julie Loporto



Super Sunday Club

Our joint Christmas party with Dirleton Sunday School was voted the best yet! 18 adults and 18 children attended and a great time was had by all. The day after the party was the big day for our Nativity play. The title of the play was The Angry Hotel Man and the part of the angry hotel man was played by none other than Bob Kane. Bob was superb in the role and arrived looking particularly well dressed for the part! Our Director, Carol Stobie did a brilliant job of directing the play as usual and the children played their parts really well and brought the whole story to life. Thanks as always to the parents for getting the children to the church at the crack of dawn for a rehearsal.

Super Sunday Club is on every week including school holidays and we look forward to welcoming all children aged 4 and upwards.



REGAL - March

Every year in the early summer there are one or two pallet gardens displayed outside Abbey Church. Attached to them is a small notice describing the garden together with a note saying that it has won a certain prize in the Scottish gardening competitions. The pallet category has featured North Berwick winning a Gold medal for a number of years.



Stan da Prato is responsible for designing, planting and maintaining the pallet garden each year. Stan will be speaking to us on Thursday, 8th March at 12 noon on the challenges they create. In addition he will tell us how he gets the vision and imagination for the themes, which differ each year.

After the meeting we sit down to a soup and sandwich lunch prepared by the ladies of Abbey Church. Our meetings are open to all ladies and gentlemen of North Berwick and the surrounding villages. Please come along, meet friends and listen to different aspects of life.

Two Pieces of Verse

Here is the little door, by Frances Chesterton

*Here is the little door, lift up the latch, oh lift!
We need not wander more but enter with our
gift;*

*Our gift of finest gold,
Gold that was never bought nor sold;
Myrrh to be strewn about his bed;
Incense in clouds about his head;
All for the Child who stirs not in his sleep.
But holy slumber holds with ass and sheep.*

*Bend low about his bed, for each he has a gift;
See how his eyes awake, lift up your hands, O
lift!*

*For gold, he gives a keen-edged sword
(Defend with it Thy little Lord!),
For incense, smoke of battle red.
Myrrh for the honoured happy dead;
Gifts for his children terrible and sweet,
Touched by such tiny hands and
Oh such tiny feet.*

practised with them. We just went up the stage and I suppose that was our practice, playing at the dancing on the Saturday night!

Fin: What did you enjoy most about being in the band?

Jim: I think it was the fellowship and the laughs you got with the guys. I mean you were really a team. You'd the lead guitar, rhythm guitar, bass guitar, drummer and singer - you all knew your bits, practically without having to rehearse. And it was a laugh. In the early days that's the way we looked at it - it was fun.

I remember in recent years, we were at a wedding in Airdrie. There was this fellow away back up the back of the hall sitting beside his mixer... and the boy [the guitarist in the band] was shouting up to him: "Is this all right? Is that all right?" And he's moving [his mixing desk controls] this way and that for the guitars... but when we used to go on stage, we just plugged in the amps and away we went! There was none of that. Mind you, we weren't in the audience - we were playing, so we assumed it sounded all right! It was packed every time we played.

Fin: What kind of music do you enjoy listening to?

Jim: I enjoy like rock 'n' roll, country-western, some of the light operas and gospel music... But basically if I put a CD on it's probably late 50s or early 60s.

Fin: Any advice for music?

Jim: I'll tell you, what you need to do is practise, practise. I took that guitar up the stairs nearly every night when I bought it. It was me, the guitar and Bert Weedon's Play in a Day. That's how I learnt, that took you from the beginning, from your four chord structure, up to your six chords in the same key. Definitely practice!

Fin: Thank you, Jim!

requests. One time this young fellow, about 16, said, 'Play National Boogie, Jim,' I said, 'You mean Nashville Boogie!' The drummer Billy Wilson said, 'Right Jim, take your timing from me,' and I said 'No, no, just take your timing from me Billy, I'll play it the way I always play it and youse just carry on.' I just went by the record, the way it was played on the record. His brother, I think, played with the Monarchs, and this was their drum kit. So we covered it up with crêpe paper on the front so as they didn't see it and think we were the Monarchs. We were the Tonebeats, you see. Other stuff we used to play and I still do today - Poor Little Fool, Teenager in Love, Here Comes Summer, Living Doll, Traveling Light, all the simple stuff - and instrumentals... Red River

Fin: What about the contest?

Jim: This lassie that I knew also came from Glenboig [was going] back on the last bus, standing room only, hanging onto the hooks... and I heard her talking to somebody, she said, 'We're in the finals.' I said, 'What's the finals, Sandra?' 'Oh,' she said, 'You'd have to ask one of the boys, Jim.' She said, 'It's Paisley Town Hall.' So on Monday when I went into the office, I phoned up Paisley Town Hall, and a fellow there said, 'If you've got a group or that, then you should just bring them in.' We went into the heat. We won that and then they put us in the finals. We won the finals... [a national band competition, c 1961, but Jim doesn't remember the name of it!]

Unfortunately, the singer and the two guitarists, that was the last I seen of them - I think it went to their heads, because when they come out of Paisley Town Hall, they were signing autographs, and that was that.

And this group that eventually came after me to join them when my old group had broken up, this was the group that had been in the finals and didn't appear. I said, 'Why weren't you there anyway?' He said, 'It was because we heard you were going to be there, so there was no point!' I said, 'Oh aye? I must have been quite good then!' [I joined them after that and] they were good. We enjoyed it. The funny thing was, I never actually

The Oxen, by Thomas Hardy

*Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.*

*We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.*

*So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,*

*"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.*

Growing older, one seems to find more and more to complain about. Clothes, why no decent ones available in shops any more? Pop music listened to by one's children, why such utter rubbish? TV comedy programmes, why so unfunny? So it is good and necessary to remind myself of the many benefits of living in the present day; and one of those benefits which I have enjoyed most over Christmas, is the 'catch-up' services offered by broadcasters.

The Age of Frustration at missing something good- or at having forgotten to 'set the video', or, worse still, having made a mistake in setting it, so as to get ninety minutes of soaps, or snooker, instead of the football, or the film, is behind us. BBC iPlayer and similar services mean that things we missed, or heard about after broadcast; things we might have 'caught the end of'; or tantalising snatches of music, heard behind conversation or everyday noise, are now available for a month, online, to be examined, in peace and quiet, as often as we may like.

For example, the events of every Christmas Day I have ever experienced have been too frenetic to permit of listening and appreciating the music played on Radio 3's Breakfast programme- or even switching it on in the first place. But this year, when quiet moments presented during the days of Christmas which followed, I took the opportunity afforded by iPlayer to listen to what some of what was broadcast on Christmas Day. One piece of music played was Herbert Howells' carol 'Here is the Little Door', which sets a poem by Frances Chesterton. It is a carol with which I have become more familiar over the past couple of years, and has become a favourite of mine. And over Christmas I was driven to compare its text with that of another favourite poem, 'The Oxen', by Thomas Hardy.

Bert Weedon's 'Play in a Day'. I studied it too, but I'm still here and they're there!

Fin: Who do you remember playing with?

Jim: I played with the Tonebeats latterly; but I started up a group of my own away back in the late 50s and we were quite good. We practised every night more or less - I think we practised more than what we played, actually.

Fin: What did you play?

Jim: I played lead guitar, rhythm guitar too, of course, and... when it came to the instrumentals, the likes of Apache, Forty Miles of Bad Road, Ghost Riders in the Sky. I played them and the band backed me, so I was lead-cum-solo, or whatever!

Fin: Which places do you remember playing?

Jim: It's not all that far back, only 50 odd year!... We played every Saturday night at Coatbridge, The Whifflet in Coatbridge. We played at record hops, church halls. One night we were playing Wooden Heart, the Elvis Presley number. This person was cutting across the stage - he tripped over my lead to the amplifier and it cut the sound off! Of course it was repaired easily...

Fin: Who were your favourite artists?

Jim: Well, when I played in the band it was the late 50s, early 60s. You'd Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard, Billy Fury... the whole of the hit parade, they were all good. Nowadays when you go into the hit parade shop, no disrespect but you sometimes need a sick bag, when you look at the charts... that's my opinion. But it's been that way for a while now!

Fin: What songs did you play?

Jim: I used to play Along the Navajo Trail. Bing Crosby recorded that as a song; I played it as an instrumental. Also I'd do



'Finterview' with Jim Hawthorne, Sunday 9 July 2017, Abbey Church, North Berwick

Fin McIlwraith of the Super Sunday Club decided to interview his friend, Church Officer Jim Hawthorne, knowing he has an illustrious past as a rock and roll performer...

Fin: What do you enjoy about music?

Jim: It makes people happy. It brings out the best in people, brings them together, brings back memories at times too. You hear a song or a tune and it can take you back 50 or 60 years or more.

Fin: How did you get into music?

Jim: My sister was a singer, the other sister played the piano, the brothers were all in the pipe band and they all played accordions, but I played the guitar and studied the piano.

I got a guitar when I was about 14 and I just learnt it. The likes of Eric Clapton, Hank Marvin, all these guys, they studied

The subject of Hardy's poem is an old story that, at midnight on Christmas Eve, animals in their stalls would kneel in worship, in acknowledgement of the birth of the Saviour: a charming story, which obviously resonated in the imagination of the great poet and novelist.



Thomas Hardy
1840–1928

The poem begins with the memory of being told the story, as a child; and remembering how neither the poet nor his friends or siblings, to whom the poem is addressed, would have questioned the truth of what they were being told about the animals: he writes, *Nor did it occur to one of us there/ To doubt they were kneeling then.*

Writing as an adult, however, the poet thinks that it is no longer open to him to believe such things: *So fair a fancy few would weave In these years!* - but he regrets that this

is the case. He knows what he is missing, what he has lost. If he were to be told that he could see the animals kneel, he would indeed go to look, going in hope that in witnessing the animals' devotion, a sign would be given to him.

*Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,*

*"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.*

There is a note of fond reminiscence of a shared past- ...by *yonder coomb/ Our childhood used to know*- as well as the innocence referred to above, which did not question the account of the worshipping animals.

Hardy was agnostic. But the poem demonstrates a yearning for belief; a yearning for faith, for the possibility of faith. He would not be trudging through the winter night in order to see kneeling animals- he would be travelling to find, in their kneeling, a sign of the truth of the Divinity of Christ, found in the fact that dumb animals, untutored, acknowledged it; recognised it, instinctively.

The poet imagines receiving an invitation from someone to come and see the marvel in *the lonely barton*: that invitation comes from someone who has confidence that they will

Hence, if Chesterton's poem reflects the experience of the Magi, it also reflects our experience of coming to the Manger, prayerfully and in our imagination, marvelling at the wonder and the honour bestowed upon us. In it we see that we must try to do what Hardy could not do; to accept the reality of something which lies beyond any ordinary human experience, something impossible. The poem speaks of *gifts for his children*, and we are His children not only in a figurative sense; we are to approach the Nativity, and the whole of Christ's teaching, with the simplicity and wonder of a child. Hardy yearns for the time now passed when, as a child, he could accept as true a thing which, as an adult, he cannot accept: but this is the very truth which we must grasp- that we will not follow Jesus in everything if we allow ourselves to be distracted or our faith obstructed by matters touching exclusively on our intellect- we must recover the attitude of wonderment which a child brings to the consideration of the Nativity: Mark, ch. x, v. 15: *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

Keith Stewart

I came not to send peace, but a sword. We understand that; there is no suggestion in Scripture that the Magi understood it. For we are taught not only that Jesus' life would, in the eyes of the world, end in betrayal and death; but we know also that His life, in spite of His Grace, His teaching and His example, would be, if not the cause of, then the pretext for, suffering, which continues up to the present day. These gifts terrible and sweet were bestowed on his children.

The poet returns to the exclamation 'oh' in the final line; where it is used to marvel at the littleness of the baby, in tacit contrast with His supreme power: *oh such tiny feet*. It is these tiny hands and feet which, incongruously, make presents of battle and death: final demonstration that the poem does more than present the thoughts of the Magi, who demonstrate no prophetic understanding of the course which the baby's life will follow; but represents imaginatively our thoughts on becoming part of the scene- we who, for all our failings, are able to view the events of the Nativity through our reading of scripture, and to see the course that events will take.

Here, then, is poetry which takes on a sombre edge; one of those pieces which we hear and sing at Christmas, which looks beyond the joy and wonder, to the evil and suffering to come.

indeed find the animals kneeling; the imagined invitation is not expressed in terms of incredulity or amazement ('you'll never believe what I've just seen! Come and see for yourself!'); rather, the imagined invitation is expressed out of confidence- out of faith.

The final line contains the word on which the argument of the poem seems to pivot: the poet would go with someone *Hoping* to find what was promised; and, along with Faith and Love, Hope is one of the three 'theological virtues': 1st Corinthians ch. xiii v. 13.

In the poem, Hardy is seeking, in other words, the quality that Frances Chesterton's poem demonstrates- the ability to put ourselves into the events of the Nativity, faithfully, and, imaginatively: ourselves, kneeling by the baby Christ, with the shepherds, and with the Magi. This putting of ourselves at the scene was the intention of St. Francis of Assisi, in arranging the first 'Nativity' play, with real oxen and asses; and it is a desire expressed urgently in other carols which consider the events of the Nativity, for example '*O that we were there!*', repeated in the medieval carol *In Dulci Jubilo*.

Chesterton's poem begins outside the place where the newborn lay. The first words of the poem coincide with the discovery of the entrance:-

Here is the little door, lift up the latch, oh lift!

The repetition of the imperative 'lift' may, perhaps, be explained solely by the requirements of rhythm and scansion; or to anticipate reflect the exhortation, later in the poem, to lift up hands to receive the gift which Christ bestows in return for those He receives; but that exclamation 'oh' in 'oh lift' surely conveys also something of the desire to be admitted to the presence of Christ; a kind of breathless excitement giving way to an awed, prayerful presence by the manger- *Bend low about his bed... .*

The speaker in Chesterton's poem may be read as being one of the Magi. The poem, after all, states *We need not wander more but enter with our gift.* The gifts brought by the Magi are mentioned: *Gold that was never bought nor sold;/ Myrrh to be strewn about his bed;/ Incense in clouds about his head...*

But the poem should also be read in the sense that it is we, the readers, who are entering into His presence; our gifts may not be royal, may be inadequate, but we bring what we can. In travelling, the Magi had come to honour merely a King, not God; they found Jesus by the guiding of the Star, and brought gifts. Those gifts which, as David reminded us in his sermon on the last day of the year, have been read as anticipating Christ as King (gold), priest (frankincense) and Sacrifice (myrrh)- but we do not read in the Gospel account (Matthew, ch. 2) that the Magi understood that Jesus was

divine, the Son of God. There is no realisation of this, in spite of the wonder of the Star; and in spite of their being warned of God in a dream not to return to Herod, who on dispatching them to locate the one born King of the Jews had told them to bring him word that he might go and 'worship' Him.

Other scriptural figures, who were not followers of Jesus, are given to understand His divinity- for example the Centurion at the Crucifixion, in two of the gospel accounts, says Truly this was the Son of God (Matthew ch. xxvii v. 54; Mark ch. xv, v. 39): for all their erudition, it is not given to the Magi to discern what the Roman soldier discerned. Yet the speaker in Chesterton's poem understands that the baby is divine- *the Child... stirs not in his sleep/ But holy slumber holds with ass and sheep.* The speaker is conscious of the holiness- as are we.



Frances Chesterton

1869 - 1938

The poem speaks of receiving gifts in return for those bestowed- violence, battle and death; anticipating Christ's warning of the consequences of His coming, in Matthew, ch. xi, v. 34: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth:*