

Forth Pilgrim, in association with the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum and Fife Tourism Partnership



www.forthpilgrim.org/

www.sprf.org.uk/

www.fifetourismpartnership.org/

Scottish Pilgrimage Gathering - 27th September 2013 held at The Vine Centre, Dunfermline

Summary Report

A total of 80 people, including representatives of nearly 50 organisations and churches, met for the first ever 'Pilgrimage Gathering' held in Scotland. This one day event, organised by **Forth Pilgrim** led by **Roger Pickering** and his team and planned and promoted with additional input from **SPRF** and the **Fife Tourism Partnership**, provided a very successful format for bringing together a wide cross section of people and organisations interested in the development of pilgrimage travel and faith tourism in Scotland today. For background information on the Gathering, see www.scottishpilgrimagegathering.co.uk

Following Roger's opening remarks, the **Lord Lieutenant of Fife, Margaret Dean**, gave her official welcome and expressed the hope that this event would help raise the profile of Dunfermline's rich but all too frequently overlooked pilgrimage heritage.

Rev Prof David Atkinson, Chairman of SPRF, then opened the morning session, saying that the Gathering was designed to show different facets of pilgrimage in Scotland today in celebrating both the different walking routes that were being developed and, on a more spiritual plane, the wonders of God's creation as expressed in Scotland's world famous natural environment.

Riddell Graham, Partnerships Director, Visit Scotland, gave a wide ranging overview of the Scottish tourist market, covering the current scale and history of faith tourism in Scotland and its relevance to famous places of worship. He commented on the role of the Scotland's Pilgrim Journeys project led by **Scotland's Churches Trust**, as well as the huge opportunities in the 2014 Year of Homecoming to communicate with the anticipated large number of overseas visitors of Scottish descent, especially from North America. Riddell considered the general outlook for faith tourism in Scotland is good in terms of appealing to a global niche market based on the country's rich Christian heritage. The offer of "a pie, a pint and a kind word" may reflect the basic attitude of many local tourism providers in Scotland, and religious faith as such may not be the main driver it once was, but historic places of worship are definitely a key element of Scotland's tourist 'product' today. There is the latent potential to convert an escapist message of 'well being' into a more focused activity with economic benefits. More could be done to clarify the key players in this field. Riddell

felt that it was more important to develop a relatively small number of well publicized pilgrim routes rather than a proliferation of many new ones, and that travel businesses would only buy into profitable on line activities which make sense from their customers' point of view. All of this makes it imperative that pilgrim route operators know who they want to attract. Questioned about the absence of reliable data on the number of 'faith tourists' coming to Scotland, Riddell accepted there was scope for more work to be done in plugging this information gap and improving the content of VS surveys to that end.

Peter Yeoman, Head of Cultural Services at Historic Scotland presented a fascinating account of the development of the Celtic monastic church on Iona, now incorporated into a new HS interpretive display at the Abbey Church which would help to improve the visitor's experience. Peter observed that St Columba came to an island on the edge of the 'known world' that already had a considerable spiritual significance in the immediate post-Roman era; subsequently, the Celtic monastery became an important land manager and the economic hub of the local farming community. The layout of the complex of buildings and roads incorporated a 'Street of the Dead' with physical features to simulate the experience of a pilgrim visitor walking along the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem; much of this is referred to in Adamnan's biography of St Columba. As of this summer, a new HS interpretive display has now been opened adopting a strongly authentic approach to the visual re-creation of Iona as it would have looked in the early C9th AD, based on latest research. This was a fitting way to commemorate this year's 1450th anniversary of Columba's arrival on the island.

Rev Dr Ian Bradley, Principal of St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, contrasted Peter's account with the contemporary pilgrimage scene at Iona in the early C21st. Ian commented on the modern day 'living pilgrimage' legacy of Columba as expressed in the work of the Iona Community, and also on the current media fascination with pilgrimage generally, e.g. in Neil Oliver's television programmes on the 'Sacred Places of Britain'. He was very encouraged by SPRF's commitment to establishing a designated Pilgrim Way footpath connecting Iona to St Andrews, and along this route he detected several centres of local pilgrimage activity, e.g. at St Conan's Kirk at Loch Awe, at Luss on the shores of Loch Lomond – a role model for other churches - and in the town of at St Andrews itself, which now held regular prayer walks and had recently seen the restoration of the Martyrs Memorial sponsored by local businesses. Ian saw in this an increasing public interest in re-enacting history in ways that also brought about reconciliation and healing between previously divided faith communities; every church in St Andrews now participates in the annual Good Friday pilgrimage through the town and this event is actively promoted by the Fife Interfaith Forum. He saw new opportunities for practical involvement of the armed forces in creating the physical infrastructure, e.g. new bridges, for new pilgrimage walking routes as part of civilian interface projects, and he also highlighted the pro-active role of the Lutheran Church in Norway in developing the St Olaf Way as an excellent role model for other countries.

Billy Kay, independent author and broadcaster, then introduced an open debate session to address the question "Can pilgrim walking routes meet a spiritual and cultural need in Scotland today?" He gave a very helpful commentary on the connection between the subject of this debate and the life and work of the renowned C15th poet and teacher Robert Henryson, who had close associations with Dunfermline Abbey and is portrayed in the Abbot House in the town. Much of this is now forgotten today, but Billy hoped that the re-establishment of Dunfermline as a pilgrimage destination on the Fife Pilgrim Way would restore his reputation.

Billy introduced three invited panel speakers – Peter Yeoman, Rev Dr Ian Bradley, and **Rev Richard Frazer, Minister of Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh**. Richard spoke about his own personal need to find a spiritual and cultural narrative to underpin his early love of hill walking; he questioned the modern day use of the word ‘pilgrimage’ but he also recognized that the Scottish Parliament, led by the C16th century Protestant reformers, was wrong to have outlawed the traditional practice of pilgrimage as this effectively deprived many ordinary people of the ability to discover more about themselves. For Richard, the act of journeying provides a spiritual ‘home’ where we meet and travel with other people using the outdoor environment to gain a richer dimension to our lives.

Other contributors to the debate then spoke about different aspects of modern day pilgrimage that were important to them, some also referring to the experience of journeying, which they saw as being as significant as reaching one’s destination, and the different impacts which this experience has had on many people’s lives. Some speakers highlighted the value of a new designated Fife Pilgrim Way walking route in bringing economic benefits to some of the more deprived local communities in mid Fife, just as the *camino* route to Santiago de Compostella has done in Galicia in northern Spain, also another former coal mining region. There was a clear opportunity also for pilgrim routes to plug into the fact that increasing numbers of people are changing the outward expression of their faith by going on a physical journey of spiritual discovery, which could turn many more ‘tourists’ into ‘pilgrims’. This trend will require a simple but carefully focused approach to the interpretation of pilgrimage destinations; one way of bringing this about would be to encourage local communities and congregations to tell their own story about the heritage of their local church buildings. Peter Yeoman commented on a new policy shift within Historic Scotland to recognize local cultural significance as a key criterion of future investment in a particular historic monument or site, which was clearly relevant to this aim.

Billy Kay closed the debate with thanks to the panel and all the other speakers who had contributed. A soup and sandwich lunch was provided in the spacious cafeteria area of the Vine Venue, with time for delegates to visit the information tables in the main hall with leaflets etc provided by **Celtic Tours, Fife Tourism Partnership, Forth Pilgrim, Frontier Holidays, Paisley Abbey, Scotways – Fife Pilgrim Way, SPRF, and Walking Support**.

The afternoon session was allocated to two 45 minute workshop sessions, with delegates able to choose from any two out of four topics on offer – see below. Earlier, each workshop leader gave a 1 minute summary of their key theme at the close of the plenary debate.

Green Pilgrimage Network: Rev Andrew Patterson recently retired Minister of Old Portobello Church, Edinburgh was joined by Rev Richard Frazer, who discussed the role of the growing inter-faith global Green Pilgrimage Network and its development in Scotland with particular reference to the role of the Luss Pilgrimage Centre, now recognized as Scotland’s first ‘Green Pilgrimage City’. See <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=549>

The Fife Pilgrim Way – a Case Study: Sue Crossman, an independent tourism and leisure pursuits consultant, discussed her interest in the Pilgrim Way project and its potential impact on the Fife economy from a secular standpoint. Her recent report to the Fife Tourism Partnership on the FPW can be seen on http://media.wix.com/ugd/2759a1_7112402ff557a34afe3ff0d33a5d481e.pdf and can also be downloaded via the SPG website.

Developing the Two Saints Way: David Pott, now based on Arran with the Sannox Christian Centre, provided a very interesting illustrated overview of the planning, physical creation and marketing of the newly designated 88 mile Two Saints Way walking route linking Chester and Lichfield in England, for which he acted as the professional Project Officer in 2011 -12. See <http://twosaintsway.org.uk/>

New Walking Routes for Today's Pilgrims: John Henderson of Walking Support, based in the Scottish Borders, gave a wide ranging account based on his professional experience of the drivers underpinning the current growth in the Christian walking pilgrimage market in Scotland, linking this to factors to be considered by path managers when planning walking routes on the ground, with specific reference to the criteria for success and the potential economic benefits. See <http://www.walkingsupport.co.uk/>

Following the Workshop sessions, David Atkinson chaired a short closing plenary session to highlight some key messages from the day.

Kenneth Gray from **Scottish Tours and Guiding Services** suggested that a key stage in establishing any new designated Pilgrim Way should involve local people in using different sections of the path/ cycle way so they could learn from the experience and thus became part of an organic, community led development process. Susi Cormack Brown of **Cormack Brown** encouraged tourism managers to look at the *camino* to Santiago de Compostella as a paradigm for what could be achieved in Scotland. One of the key lessons to be learnt there was the investment by national and local government in Spain to diversify the tourism market and provide a stimulus for the Galician economy; this was highly relevant to the contrasting lack of awareness shown by public authorities to the potential impact of the proposed Ayrshire Pilgrims Trail, and the real need for effective lobbying of the Scottish Government and Councils.

This led to a wider discussion on the relevance of faith tourism to the 'Tourism Scotland 2020' strategy led by Scottish Enterprise – see <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/industry-support/tourism> - now being actively pursued by public authorities such as Forestry Commission Scotland and Visit Scotland. One of SPRF's key roles would be to act as the lead intermediary body in working with these agencies on faith tourism activities.

David then drew the Gathering proceedings to a close with sincere thanks to all the speakers and workshop leaders and a round of applause for Roger and his organising team for all their hard work behind the scenes in making the day run so well. After tea, SPRF held its 2013 AGM proceedings.

Analysis of Feedback – based on 48 responses

Our thanks are due to all who completed the feedback forms. 37% of delegates said they heard of the Gathering via SPRF, 33% via other organisations, and 30% via the internet or word of mouth. The Gathering was actively publicized via interviews on BBC Radio Scotland programmes and feature articles in the Scottish daily press as well as via the websites of several third party organisations and networks, for which we are very grateful.

Delegates were invited to 'score' five key aspects of the event. An overall majority of responses gave the maximum score to (1) choice of The Vine Venue as a location for this type of event, (2) the

ease of the ticket booking system, (3) the relevance of the day's programme to delegates' interests and (4) the timing of the event in late summer / early autumn. The second highest score was given by an overall majority to (5) the usefulness of the SPG website and (6) the standard of catering at The Vine.

Many respondents commented on the usefulness of the event and their enjoyment of its novelty factor and the range of speakers and topics, and they also provided useful suggestions on future improvements to the programme and organisation. Based on the generally very positive feedback, we plan to hold a second Scottish Pilgrimage Gathering at the same venue in early October 2014, building on the valuable experience gained so far. Further details will be announced early in the New Year.

Nick Cooke
Secretary, Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

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