



## Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

### Forum Meeting held on 28th April 2016 at the Grassmarket Centre, Edinburgh

#### Summary Report

A total of 37 delegates representing Full and Associate members of the Forum and visitors met at the Grassmarket Centre next to the Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh. A total of 16 apologies were received. See list below.

The Chairman, **Rev Prof David Atkinson** warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, a former Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2011, and all members attending a Forum meeting for the first time.

The Secretary reported that Adrian Shaw (CofS Church & Society Council) was currently walking the *camino* to Santiago de Compostella, and that the Confraternity of St James was promoting a very interesting CD film 'Walking the Camino – Six Ways to Santiago' which was publicly available. Closer to home, Rev Paddy Allen of the SEC Strathearn Churches was organizing a 4 day pilgrimage along the Three Saints Way walking route between Crieff and Killin over the coming weekend.

The morning session consisted of the following presentations:

#### **'Building Pilgrimage in the Community – Outreach at Greyfriars': Martin Ritchie.**

Martin's illustrated talk set the scene for the Forum meeting. He covered the history of the existing Greyfriars Kirk from its foundation in 1620, following the dissolution of the mediaeval Friary in the Reformation and its subsequent use as an overflow burial site for St Giles Cathedral. The Kirk became famous in 1638 for the signing of the National Covenant, was then used as a prison for Covenanters later in the century, and in the 1720s was physically divided between two separate church congregations for 200 years. Martin reminded us of various types of 'pilgrim' visitors to Greyfriars, from followers of 'Bobby' the sheepdog to fans of J K Rowling. The Kirk today, with the adjoining Grassmarket Centre, is a vibrant, living community and the open plan seating in the church demonstrates its connectedness with the outside world in which all are made welcome.

#### **Reports on Pilgrim Route Development Work:**

##### **Fife Pilgrim Way: Roger Pickering, Sarah Kettles and Nick Cooke**

Roger introduced Sarah as the full-time Fife Pilgrim Way Project Development Officer recently appointed by Fife Coast & Countryside Trust, and referred to the growing partnership between public, private and voluntary sector bodies who now comprise the re-constituted FPW Steering Group.

Sarah spoke on FCCT's role as lead body for the current Heritage Lottery Fund project, which builds on the Trust's main role of promoting access to the outdoors across Fife. Under the £76,000 'development

phase' of the project, business and interpretation plans were being written and landowner agreements were being taken forward; a total of 45 key pilgrimage sites were identified for publicity. The whole project was costed at £680,000, for which HLF has ring fenced a total of £370,000 based on match funding being found by FCCT for the delivery phase. The FPW route echoed the spirit of Scotland's ancient pilgrim journeys without claiming to be an exact replica of an actual route. Sarah stressed the depth of expertise among the Steering Group member organisations and the strong focus on working partnerships between local communities, churches, businesses and investment in heritage interpretation using a range of apps. The case study of St Finglassin's Well, a pilgrimage holy well located in the former mining village of Kinglassie and badly overgrown, showed the huge potential for developing local community projects linked to the Pilgrim Way. ***A copy of Sarah's presentation will be accessible on the SPRF website.***

Nick then spoke about developing the Christian faith dimension of the project through the ACTS Fife Pilgrim Way programme group, of which he is convenor. The group's work is currently funded by ACTS for 2 years until autumn 2017 and is solely focused on the ecumenical input of local churches in support of the larger HLF project. This is a unique initiative which could provide a template for practical church involvement in developing other Scottish pilgrimage routes.

### **Iona – St Andrews Pilgrim Way: John Henderson and Rev Peter MacDonald**

John's presentation gave an overview of current progress along the entire coast-to-coast Pilgrim Way route, of which key sections are now recognized (together with the Fife PW) as a 5 year priority under the new National Walking & Cycling Network action plan. Experience on the St Cuthbert's Way suggests that currently only 15% of long distance walkers constitute genuine 'pilgrims', but John felt that developing the historical authenticity of the new Pilgrim Way routes would enable them to appeal strongly to a much wider audience of 'faith seekers'. He commented that on this PW route, the challenge is to achieve meaningful results within a reasonable time frame, bearing in mind the challenges posed in more remote areas; on the Ross of Mull, off-road ground conditions make provision of a LDR footpath of recognizable quality almost impossible, leaving a clear opportunity for provision of a local boat service between Oban and Iona as an alternative. Elsewhere, SNH was funding route feasibility studies on some mainland sections of the PW route, and much of this was now walkable in terms of encouraging more 'boots on the ground'. John's belief in a bottom-up approach to developing pilgrimage walking routes and getting them used early on has been reinforced by the recent progress of the Three Saints Way Steering Group of local volunteer representatives in triggering the SNH funded feasibility study which he and Andrew Donaldson had carried out during the past winter on specific areas of the Crieff – Newburgh section through Strathearn. John thought this exercise had provided SPRF with a very good template for other routes.

Rev Peter MacDonald then spoke about plans for his 2016 coast – to – coast fundraising walk this summer along the Pilgrim Way route from St Andrews in aid of the Iona Community's capital appeal for the refurbishment of Iona Abbey. He plans to stop off with members of the Community along the route and post regular blogs on the Iona Community website.

### **Whithorn Way: John Henderson and Sylvia Jenks**

John began by reminding us that the Whithorn Way project was originally begun by Sylvia with fellow

members of the Paisley Abbey congregation in 2013; over the past 2 years it has now been clearly endorsed by Historic Environment Scotland as part of a bigger agenda to create a network of 'St Ninian Ways' long distance routes converging on Whithorn which in time will collectively comprise Scotland's first European Cultural Route. The WW walking route project offers real scope for regenerating disadvantaged rural communities in Ayrshire, evidenced by recent Steering Group meetings hosted by local contacts in towns along the route along with 'test walks', e.g. between Ayr and Maybole. Sylvia commented that the WW website now identifies sections where route directions are available, and in addition she is now actively using a dedicated Facebook page to raise the WW profile with regular news stories supplied by others; she has also started a 'Whithorn Way Buddies' scheme to encourage people who might be worried about walking the route on their own. This summer Derek Stuart will help promote the route by walking the 127 miles in costume, timed to coincide with the mediaeval Paisley Fair and the Maybole 500 events. John added that a major priority of the Steering Group was to encourage walkers to spend an extra day covering the triangular route linking Whithorn Priory, the Isle of Whithorn and St Ninian's Cave. Rev Alex Currie, chair of the Whithorn Trust, plans to hold regular ecumenical services at the Whithorn Priory church and this may in time lead to new links between the church and 'retreat houses' along other pilgrimage routes.

## **Lunch**

A soup and sandwich lunch was provided by the Grassmarket Centre catering team and enjoyed by all. Leaflets, banners and other information brought by member organisations were also on display.

The afternoon session began with three further presentations:

### **Forth to Farne Way: Rev Joanne Evans-Boiten**

Joanne began her talk focusing on the recent revival of the annual 'Rugged Path' pilgrimage from Haddington to Whitekirk in East Lothian, which has very old associations with pre-Reformation society and once attracted many thousands of pilgrims during the Middle Ages. Christian pilgrimage has long been a major feature of communities across Fife, East Lothian and the Borders, heavily influenced by the shrine of St Cuthbert on Lindisfarne and encompassed within the former kingdom of Northumbria, which the new Forth to Farne Way walking route seeks to celebrate. Meetings of the Steering Group established in 2015 began at Athelstaneford and have now moved to Coldingham and, like the Whithorn Way, they also feature 'test walks' between key points on the route, which follows existing designated paths for the entire 70 miles between North Berwick and Lindisfarne. Joanne discussed the thorny issue of the name of the Way, ideas for its promotion, the importance of consultation with local communities, and the long term addition of 'spurs' and 'loops' to the core route, with the aim of encouraging increasing popular usage. A short promotional video about Coldingham Priory was shown to illustrate some of the points in Joanne's talk.

### **Deeside Way: Rev Prof David Atkinson**

David's presentation showed how the existing Deeside Way long distance route is not just a nice walk in the countryside but is now being used by local churches as an important resource for exploring and interpreting the spiritual dimension of outdoor pilgrimage for a secular audience. The programme of 'walks and talks' organized by Rev Lisa Eunson of St Ternan's, Banchory and led by David during the

spring and autumn of 2015 was funded by a grant from the Templeton Foundation under its ‘Scientists in Congregations Scotland’ grant scheme which also financed the creation of a dedicated website – see <http://deesidepilgrimage.org.uk/> . David’s talk used a series of photographs to illustrate how everyday scenes from nature along two stretches of the Deeside Way seen on these walks capture important connections between science and faith.

### **Isle of Arran Pilgrimage ‘Hub’: George Hazel**

George gave a wide ranging account of the 45 year journey towards the establishment of an ecumenical Christian Centre at Sannox on the north end of Arran, putting this into the context of the island’s long and rich religious history. His own background in transport and planning is very relevant to the Sannox Trust’s relations with North Ayrshire Council, which in 2015 had given full planning approval for the building of a new beehive chapel as the main focus of the Centre. Inspired by the ruins of Skellaig Michael in Ireland, this will provide a haven of rest and spiritual restoration open to all and be designed to the highest standards of environmental sustainability in keeping with the historic traditions of the Celtic Church; the imminent erection of an 11 ft high ‘Dundarroch Cross’ at the Centre will further emphasise this connection.

John Jackson spoke about the work of the ‘Friends of Sannox’ group and said that the Trust also input considerably to the local community on the island to provide a real ‘hub’ of local services. He and George hoped that the Trust’s work would encourage pilgrimage links (‘coracles over the water’) between Arran and the island of Bute and the Cowal peninsula, thus echoing the original spread of Christianity along that part of the west coast.

**Nick Cooke** then presented an **Overview of the SPRF Strategic Plan 2016-21**. This was accompanied by a handout for delegates which summarized key features of the Plan and a map of the current development of Pilgrim Routes across Scotland.

Nick reminded members of the workshop session at the Forum meeting a year previously at Dunblane, which established a consensus that SPRF existed “to promote Scottish pilgrimage walking and the development and co-ordination of pilgrim walking routes” and identified a range of key inputs, partners, and services provided to make this happen. He then summarized the key results and successes achieved by SPRF during the past 12 months and related these to the main priorities identified in the draft Strategic Plan, highlighting the overall purpose of the document as presenting a ‘shop window’ of SPRF services available. The Plan would set out a 5 year vision of where and how the Forum should aim to deliver 10 key goals, with a clear identification of the additional resources and external funding required and a statement of the core values and priorities which will underpin this effort. Nick asked all Forum members to consider whether the balance of the overall content of the Plan was right and whether it represented the collective interests of Forum members; all comments or ideas should be passed to him as soon as possible to enable the final Plan to be launched publicly in June.

In the course of the open plenary session that followed, Paul Gilfillan (Way of St Andrews) said the meeting was very helpful for him as there is currently great interest among academic social scientists in the role that pilgrimage can play in a largely post-religious society. Jonathan Sheldrick (Heart of Argyll

Tourist Association) commented that the role of local churches in faith tourism was of growing significance in Argyll.

Concluding the formal sessions of the meeting, David Atkinson thanked everyone for their attendance and all the speakers for their contribution to the proceedings. After a cup of tea, members enjoyed a guided tour of Greyfriars Kirk and Graveyard led by Sheila Young, which was much appreciated.

**Nick Cooke**  
**Secretary**

**May 2016**

**Attendance List:**

**Full Members:**

ACTS (Miriam Weibye)  
ACTS - Scottish Churches Rural Group (Rev Prof David Atkinson; Harry Sprange)  
Church of Scotland – Church & Society Council (Marjorie Paton)  
CLEAR Services (Nick Cooke) **(Secretary)**  
Confraternity of St James (Ken Spittal)  
Fife Coast & Countryside Trust (Sarah Kettles)  
Forth Pilgrim (Roger Pickering)  
Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance (Jonathan Sheldrick, James Duncan)  
Holy Socks (Margaret Wyllie)  
Iona Community (Rev Peter Macdonald)  
Luss Parish Church (Donald Hardie)  
Paisley Abbey (Sylvia Jenks, Sally Cook & Gerry Murdoch)  
Sannox Christian Centre (George Hazel, John Jackson)  
Scotland's Churches Trust (John Graham)  
Scottish Episcopal Church - Home Mission Committee (Margaret Pedersen)  
Three Saints Way (Sheena Cleland)  
Walking Support (John Henderson) **(Treasurer)**  
Way of St Andrews (Hugh Lockhart, Paul Gilfillan)  
Whitekirk & Tynningham Parish Church (Rev Joanne Evans- Boiten)

**Associate Members:**

Dr Marion Bowman  
Very Rev Dr Ian Bradley  
David Langworth  
Dr Gilbert Markus  
Sister Margaret Ann Minards  
Rev Dane Sherrard  
Eric Simpson  
Rena Simpson

**Visitors:**

Lord Wilson of Tillyorn KT GCMG  
Andrew Barrie (Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust)  
Dr Valentina Bold (Solway Centre for Environment & Culture)  
Michylo Sato

**Apologies:**

Church of Scotland – Church & Society Council (Adrian Shaw); Comrie Croft (Andrew Donaldson); Dunfermline Heritage Community Projects (Clive and Yvonne Willcocks; St Ternan's Church, Banchory (Rev Lisa Eunson); Strathean Churches (Rev Paddy Allen); Discover Dunfermline Tours (Jack Pryde); The St Andrews Way (Cameron Black); YWAM (Arno Bremer); Whithorn Trust (Julia Muir-Watt); Hazel Anderson; David Pott; Rev Dr David Pickering; Jill Baker.