

Scottish Churches' Rural Group Annual Report

For the year ending 2011

Scottish Churches' Rural Group have been extremely busy and actively engaged in a number of rural concerns throughout 2011 under the convenership of Rev Professor David Atkinson of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage became a major focus of the Group and a successful Reception at Holyrood in February to promote the vision of re-establishing Pilgrim Routes throughout Scotland excited and enthused those gathered. The carefully prepared Manifesto was well received at the event which was hosted by MSP Robin Harper and supported by his colleague Roseanna Cunningham, MSP.



MSPs Roseanna Cunningham & Robin Harper

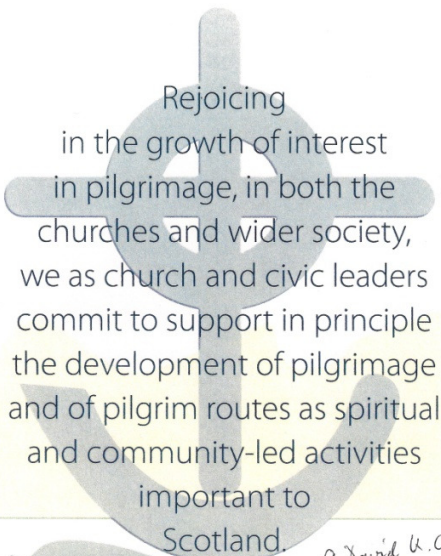
A number of representatives from secular agencies, either interested in, or already engaged in Pilgrimage or Long Distance Routes attended.

Following on from this a month later, a Conference at the offices of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh delivered the vision while engaging with those from the churches and related agencies.




Some of the participants of the Pilgrimage Conference held at the offices of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh in March.

During this time, Nick Cooke, Convener of SCRG's Pilgrimage Working Group and Network Officer, Shona Paterson were busy establishing links with those from the secular agencies and were invited to attend the Long Distance Routes Forum, run by Scottish Natural Heritage, whose membership is mainly local authority Access Officers. Shona made contact with Rona Gibb of 'Paths for All' while Nick and David Atkinson met with those from Scotland's Churches Scheme, The Whithorn Trust and Ayrshire Pilgrim's Trail (to name a few). To further promote the venture Nick spoke in an interview on Radio with Sally Magnusson and appeared on BBCs 'Reporting Scotland'.



Rejoicing
in the growth of interest
in pilgrimage, in both the
churches and wider society,
we as church and civic leaders
commit to support in principle
the development of pilgrimage
and of pilgrim routes as spiritual
and community-led activities
important to
Scotland.

A. Bowden
Pamela McDougall
John A. Thompson
A. David W. Scott
Sally P. Turist
Keith Bruce
Nick Cooke



At the Royal Highland Show at Ingliston in June, Church Leaders signed a Declaration of Commitment to support, in principle, the development of Pilgrim Routes in Scotland (left). Since then work has continued and the inaugural meeting of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum was to take place on 8 December but was postponed due to the incredibly high winds throughout Scotland that day. A handful of folk did, however, battle their way through to Culross and met for an interesting and worthwhile discussion, but the official inaugural meeting is due to take place in February 2012. ACTS will be a member of this Forum and have given a 'Start-up grant' which is hoped will help to support the group in these early stages.

Of course this is not all SCRG were engaged in during 2011. The Group also contributed to Government Consultation Papers in Food Advocacy; The Future of the Cairngorms and Rural Communities; Woodland Expansion; Rural Education and Ofcom's Consultation on 'Securing the Universal Postal Service'. Consultation Papers on 'Faith in the Countryside' and 'What Matters for Rural Scotland' were also submitted. Members of the Group attended the Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Edinburgh hosted by the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland in February. Planning was already underway for the Churches Stand at the Royal Highland Show, a Training Day for volunteers which was held in Perth in May - and a couple of Rural Group meetings in-between. Meanwhile a Rural Conference, to be held in August was also now in the early planning stage and members of the Group attended the Rural Conference in Swanwick, further fostering good links with the Arthur Rank Centre. More recently The Rural Theology Journal have said they intend to publish a paper written and submitted by SCRG to a conference held at Stoneleigh.

Royal Highland Show



Face painting is a major attraction

This year's event continued to attract hundreds of people to witness an excellent display of visual unity among the churches in Scotland. The Church Leaders' appreciated their themed programme for the day and were delighted with little clocks presented to them as a token of appreciation for their valuable time and support.



While puppets and face painters continue to be a major attraction for children, MSP Richard Lochhead attracted the more 'rural conscious' to the stand. (right)

As Mentioned earlier in this report, the highlight of the event this year was the signing of the document in support of the Pilgrim routes in Scotland.



(Left) The Church of Scotland Moderator signs the Declaration with Richard Lochhead and Church Leaders from the United Reformed Church, Quakers and Methodists looking on; while (below) Bishop Brian Smith, (SEC) of Edinburgh crouches down to lay a pebble, followed by a Parliament Aide and witnessed by Cardinal Keith O'Brien and Pamala McDougall.



Rural Conference

In August, more than 30 people attended the SCRG Rural Conference which was held at Falkland Estate, Fife. The aim of the conference was to 'offer a good opportunity to bring people together who would be inspired by its content and leave the day with more knowledge than they had before'. The day certainly lived up to its promise as participants listened with great interest and appreciation of the Speakers and the range of topics they delivered.



Participants at the Rural Conference, Falkland Estate in August

Rt Rev Mark Strange told of the complexities, and challenges which come with rural ministry and of the difficulties and tensions 'incomers' often face when moving to a rural environment.

After this, participants were led through the process involved in buying an island! Deacon Martin Matheson, delivered a most interesting talk about his success on South Uist. Participants also heard from Rev Lorna Murray, Choose Life, of the high suicide rate in rural areas, and of the problems and isolation many living rurally can face. Pete Ritchie, gave everyone a treat when hearing about locally produced food and the aims of Nourish Scotland to encourage everyone to buy locally or grow more of what we eat – and eat more of what we grow to support a sustainable local food market.



Deacon Martin Matheson

The event was hosted by Falkland Estate and participants were gifted in further information about the work of the Estate by Mr Neil Anderson.

All in all it's been a busy year, but at this stage not over yet. A further Group meeting was held in November and a 'Convener/Network Officer meeting took place in December. Both generated further discussion and interest noted about the following topics:

- Broadband provision in rural areas
- Rural deprivation
- Rural affordable housing
- The future of Scotland's rail services
- Further talks with supermarket giants on food advocacy
- Progress of rural migrant workers
- Gypsy travellers in Scotland
- How the churches deal with secular agencies

Many, or all of these topics may feature in the agendas of 2012. Meanwhile, planning has already begun on next year's Highland Show and consideration given to the planning of 2012's Rural Conference at Falkland in July.

Leading this past year so successfully has been David Atkinson, Convener for a number of years who has now stepped down from this busy role to become an 'ordinary' member. Taking over the reigns as Convener is long standing member Bill Harvey. Great thanks go to David for an extremely successful time as Convener of SCRG. Thanks too to Nick Cooke who has worked tirelessly as Convener of SCRG's Pilgrimage Working Group taking the initiative to the next stage in its life as Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum – and of course every best wish to Bill as he begins his role guiding SCRG through the coming year.



(L-R) Bill Harvey; Nick Cooke and David Atkinson

Members of SCRG over the past year have been: Rev Prof David Atkinson, SEC (Convener); Mr Bill Harvey (CofS); Dr Bill Reid (Methodist); Mr Harry Sprange (BUS); Mr David Rice, (URC); Mr Martin Robb, (SEC); Mr Adrian Shaw, (CofS); Mrs Carol Leech, (CF); Fiona Fidgin, (CofS); Deacon Martin Matheson, (RC); Very Rev David Mumford (SEC); Dr Tom McEvoy, (RC); Mrs Lesley Hamilton-Messer, (CofS); Mr Nick Cooke, (PWG); Rev Lindsey Sanderson, (ACTS); Mrs Shona Paterson, (ACTS).



2011

Scottish Churches Rural Group

Action of Churches Together in Scotland is a Scottish Guarantee Company (no SC348236)

Registered as a Scottish Charity No SC0000295

Registered Office 7 Forrester Lodge, Inglewood House, Alloa FK10 2HU