

# THE GRAPEVINE

CRAMOND KIRK MAGAZINE

SPECIAL EDITION OCTOBER 2020

Issue 115

[www.cramondkirk.org.uk](http://www.cramondkirk.org.uk)



## *A Celebration*

This special edition of The Grapevine is created to celebrate the 27 years during which Very Rev Dr Russell Barr has been our Minister at Cramond Kirk and takes a look back at some of the key moments

which were reported over the years in Grapevine, the Church and community magazine which Russell created.

We hope you will enjoy sharing some of the special moments and events which

have left very happy memories for very many people, from a Minister who has touched all of our lives here in Cramond, and very much further away too.

### **“Young Minister” to Elder Statesman: *preacher, pastor and friend***

It took Cramond a long time to fill the last vacancy but it found well, eventually. The choice was wide but Cramond was choosy – so choosy it settled for a late recommendation rather than eager applicant.

Someone remembered the poet's line: “Westward look, the land is bright”, for Russell Barr (though he had looked East to marry Margaret) was a Kilmarnock lad whose previous ministries had been in Glasgow's extended East-end at Garthamlock and in Greenock.

A “lad”? He was still playing Rugby until he left Greenock. Despite two testing parishes, and their lasting impact (sometimes movingly shared in Cramond sermons) he still had the look of a “young minister”. He has never quite lost it.

But Cramond has seen him become elder statesman and learned doctor of the Church. It has heard sermons add new graces of style and depth to their vigour. It has seen his wider impact in practical social concern which created and sustained Fresh Start: all done without injury to his vocation as leader, preacher, pastor, and friend to our parish.

There may be eminent ministers who fancy the whirl as Moderator of the General Assembly, even bid in genteel fashion for the job. Such notions never worried Russell until the possibility occurred to other people and turned out an inspired idea. At a time when religion seems marginalised in public life and media estimation, he has been what St Paul called an “ambassador for Christ” and effective spokesman for all that is best in the Kirk.

### **“I love being a Minister”**

When the whirl ended for Russell and Margaret - his sure support then as always - he achieved what not all ex-Moderators comfortably manage. He returned home and gave a leadership which was providentially sustained in adjusting to our troubled times of Covid.

But ministers are not remembered just for fine public and pulpit or even video ministry. Russell's legacy includes myriad memories of encouragement,



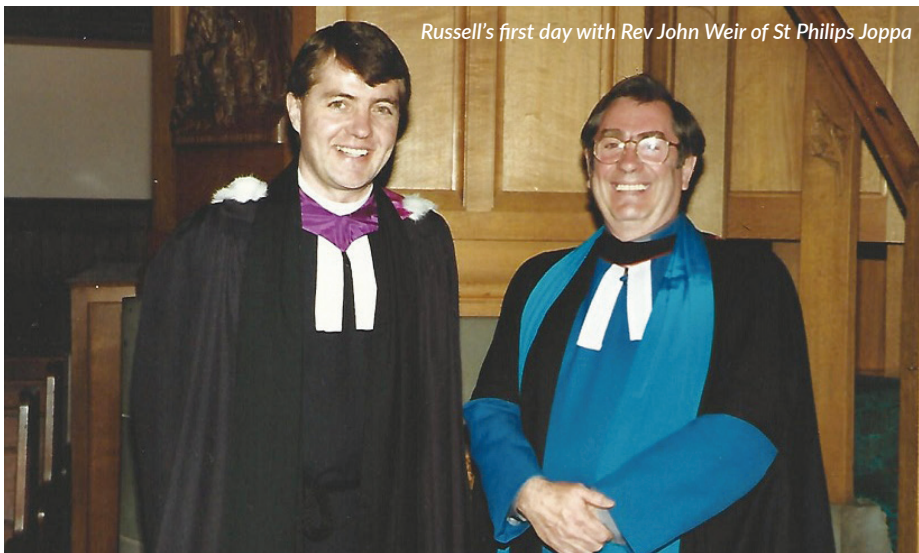
comfort, and blessed assurance, encounters with very personal griefs and joys, at hospital bedsides and home Communion as well as at the great occasions in church and hall. Privately as well as publicly he followed what a hymn calls “the great example”. We shall not forget.

Now our loss of Russell and Margaret is St Andrew's gain. Its Presbytery will rejoice in greatly reinforced pulpit supply for the East Neuk. But there will be more time for its galaxy of golf courses than there was for Cramond's.

**R.D. Kernohan**

[www.cramondkirk.org.uk](http://www.cramondkirk.org.uk)

T: 0131 336 2036  



Russell's first day with Rev John Weir of St Philips Joppa

## The early years

Russell was born in 1953 to George, a GP and Isobel, a theatre sister. He went to school at Kilmarnock Academy, and was a member of the Boys' Brigade.

He wanted to be a professional golfer, and he played off scratch when he was 15 winning many competitions. He says he "lived and breathed golf".

Although keen to encourage his sporting career, his parents insisted he pass some exams, as he left school with no qualifications, so Russell enrolled at Langside College, Glasgow.

There he met an inspirational history teacher, Yorkshireman Bill Hodgson, who realised he had academic potential and he coached and encouraged his studying. It was around this time that Russell became interested in the Church and Faith. He used to give golf lessons to his local Minister Rev John Weir Cook, and in return, John gave him some ministry coaching which

developed his interest. It was Rev John who was with him at his first service in Cramond Kirk (see photo above).

With exams passed, he proceeded to Edinburgh University in 1972 where he achieved a BA degree in history and philosophy, before studying for an honours degree in theology from New College. There he won the divinity honours class prize, and he was awarded the Sir Will Y Darling prize as student of the year in 1978.

At university he played football for Red Star and helped run a Youth Club at the Old Kirk in West Pilton. When taking some of the young people on a holiday in the countryside, one lad was so overwhelmed by the landscape outside the city, and the big sky, that he spent a whole day just drinking in the view.

Russell's probationary period in the Ministry was spent at Jedburgh Old and Trinity Parish Church linked with

Ancrum and Edgerston, where he learned from the Rev Ronnie Blakey (and also apparently from the church Beadle!)

His first posting at Garthamlock & Craigend East in Easterhouse Glasgow was followed by St Luke's Greenock, before being "headhunted" by Cramond Kirk in 1993.

Back in Edinburgh, he returned to Edinburgh University as a part-time student to complete a Master's degree in 1993. This led to the opportunity to study for a doctorate of ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA in 2000.

He was inspired to set up the charity Fresh Start in 1999 after he met a homeless man called Sam who had been allocated a flat but couldn't afford to buy cutlery, crockery, pots or bed linen. As part of its Millennium commemorations, Cramond Kirk had already identified homelessness as a priority - "No room at the inn" was the theme. Meeting Sam provided the impetus for practical action.

Russell met his wife Margaret, while studying at Edinburgh University and they have two children Robert and Lindsey, and four grandchildren Eva, Caterina, Alessandro and Angus.

His interests remain playing golf, music as he plays the guitar, is learning the piano, and sings bass, and rugby, which he played till he left Kilmarnock. He took up refereeing in Edinburgh for a while. And one of his secret ambitions? To play a round of golf at Augusta, home of the US Masters.

## ON A WING AND A PRAYER

When Russell admitted during a sermon that he couldn't imagine himself parachute jumping out of a plane, he little realised that a "fairy godmother" was listening, and in April 1996, he did just that, to help the Youth Club raise £30,000 required to buy play equipment for the new children's playground in the Walled Garden. He had encouraged the Senior Youth Club to begin the Walled Garden playground project.

Russell accompanied by Bob Hope and Robert Barr of the Youth Club and Max Homewood.



# PILGRIMAGES

## Israel, 1999



In November 1999, Russell led a pilgrimage of some 40 Kirk members from Cramond to Jerusalem. "The cacophony of sound outside the hotel in Jerusalem, the horns of the vehicles, with the coffee vendors balancing their trays, weaving between buses the voices from the street all mingling with the Muslim call to prayer - the colours, noises and smells of the Souk in the Old City - listening to the Orthodox liturgies in the Holy Sepulchre early on the Sunday morning - a deserted Qumran at seven in the morning - a baptism on the shores of Galilee - a swim in the silky waters - making friends with people previously only on nodding terms with - one could go on forever, but no words in the English language can convey the impact of these, and all the other events. It was truly a trip of a lifetime," reports Marjorie Vennelle.

## IONA 2006



In 2006 eight parishioners, including our Minister Russell spent a week living with the Iona Community on the island of Iona, off Mull on the west coast, sleeping in dormitories and helping with chores. "Our first impression was formed by horizontal rain and a rather bouncy sea crossing. This however only emphasised that Iona is a special place, accessible, yet isolated and unique."

"We stayed at the MacLeod Centre, named after George MacLeod, an ex moderator who founded the community in 1938. We met people from all over the world, young and old, all seeking to work or volunteer. One moment we were helping prepare the most superb food in the kitchen, next off to a service in the abbey where the same young people would be playing beautifully on the piano or leading us in worship -so talented, but so modest. We walked with them, talked with them, laughed with them, and hugged them a lot".

**June Kemp**

## Former Session Clerk Bill Scholes pays tribute to Russell's leadership

Russell's legacy is of a church transformed by his ministry.

An early indication was his encouragement of the congregation to become self-sufficient through its donations. Proceeds from fund raising events were to be given to charity. Initially this came as a bit of a shock. Now it is accepted as demonstrating a Christian response to helping our needy fellow man, including nearby congregations, with financial and human resource support.

Russell's banner of 'Homelessness is a stain on our society' reached a wider audience. His election as Moderator provided a solo platform from which he took no prisoners in proclaiming his widely reported message.



*Russell with his parents as he receives his Doctorate at Princeton Uni USA*

In retrospect he achieved a minor miracle in forcing society to do something practical.

Somehow between church and parish demands, family, and becoming a public figure, he achieved a doctorate.

His non-confrontational manner of getting on with people has been a hallmark of his success. Life will not be the same without Russell and Margaret, but they leave with our grateful thanks and very best wishes.

# HOMELESSNESS

## Fresh Start

Supporting people who were homeless and helping people make a fresh start in life has been something very dear to his heart.

Russell inspired the initiative “Room at the Inn AD2000”, which led on to the founding of Fresh Start, the charity which provides vital support today to the homeless as they take up their first tenancies.

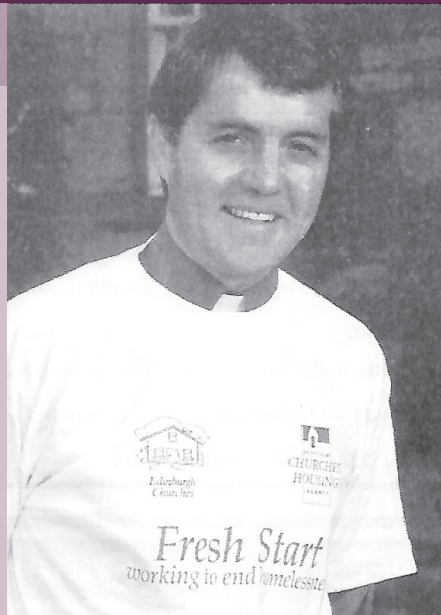
Over these years Fresh Start has reached out to people at what was often the very lowest point in their lives and helped them make a home for themselves. It has provided challenging and rewarding work for dozens of members of staff. And it has created training opportunities for many unemployed young people. It has offered volunteering opportunities for hundreds of church members across Edinburgh. And been supported by many of Edinburgh’s congregations and many more businesses and organisations across the city.

“Fresh Start is what it looks like when the Christian people take seriously Jesus’ instruction not to walk past on the other side of human need” says Russell.

Starter Packs were launched, as Russell sought for the community and other churches to “work together” ecumenically to end homelessness. From small beginnings, seven churches soon became 33 churches working together to collect things required for starter packs – boxes of essentials required when you move into your own home, with nothing and no money to buy the necessities.

In its first year, nearly 200 church folk had been actively involved in organising collections and making up individual packs – 1,375 of them. And 576 households, including an estimated 350 children had benefited.

Financial support was sought from the Bank of Scotland which provided funding for a full time organiser for Fresh Start and premises. Volunteer Hit Squads were created to help with cleaning and decorating first time flats.



# YOUTH

## The TURI project



In 2015 Russell inspired a long term relationship between Cramond Kirk and the remote African village of Turi, in west Kenya. It began with an important gift of a big new water tank to provide irrigation for crops through the dry season, and ensure the children in the Turi Project enjoy nutritious food all year round.

The Turi project is a sort of after school club for under privileged children of the village set up in the grounds of St Andrews School, an international boarding school, by its headteacher, inspired to improve the lives of the children who live in Turi. It is run on a strong Christian ethos and all the assistants, who work on a voluntary basis, are chosen from the local churches.

Children of Turi are of a generation where a high proportion do not have parents, from a generation devastated by AIDS, and if they are lucky, they live with their grandparents. The grandparents are often unable to provide enough food and clothing for the children. The children are left for hours in a day to look after themselves leaving them vulnerable and at risk of exploitation substance abuse and poor health.

Despite Kenya declaring every child is entitled to a primary education, there are few enough classroom

spaces and teachers, and any reason is taken to bar a child from school. No jumper, shoes that are falling apart, no jotter or pencil – these reasons will see the children turned away from school on a daily basis.

Every day of the year around 60 primary age children come in the afternoon after school. There are so many that each child may only attend on alternate days. Teams of volunteers help with their homework, mend their clothes and shoes, provide them with a meal and take time to play games with them. Pupils from St Andrews School run games, set up craft sessions and help in other ways with the children.

David Thaw, a member of our church had been teaching at St Andrews School and sent this message: There is a great deal that Cramond Kirk can give to Turi, but there is also much that Turi can offer in return. Most importantly, perhaps, the children of Turi can share with us something of village life in Kenya – a life of struggle, certainly, but also a life of courage, resilience, hope and joy. I hope that this will be a partnership through which Cramond and Turi can celebrate their shared faith, hope and love.”



## Cramond Primary and Cargilfield School Chaplain



In 1993, recognising the need to develop enduring connections with younger people, Russell encouraged Bob Hope and Gena Wylie to establish the Youth Club. Since then, this focus on young people has been maintained and encouraged through various Kirk groups, the thriving youth organisations, and Russell's chaplaincy at Cramond Primary and Cargilfield Schools.

Young people have regularly contributed to Services, not just at the annual Youth Service. They have participated in, and led Sunday Worship, and served Communion to the congregation on occasion. Young people have played and sung while the Offering is uplifted, and enthusiastically participated in ringing our historic Kirk bell before the 10am Service.

## Monarch of the Realm meets Monarch of the Glen

The Parish of Braemar and Crathie

12<sup>th</sup> September, 2010



**Welcome to Worship!**

Whether you are a first-time visitor, a regular participant, or a returning friend, we are glad you have been able to join us today. We trust that you might sense something of the peace and presence of God amongst us.

*'Within these walls let no-one remain a stranger'*

[www.braemarandcrathieparish.org.uk](http://www.braemarandcrathieparish.org.uk)

Charity Number: SC012075

In 2010 in Grapevine's "From the Manse" Russell tells the story of

the telephone call and letter from Buckingham Palace inviting him to be guest preacher at Crathie Kirk on 12th September, with an invitation to be Her Majesty the Queen's guest at Balmoral Castle that weekend. The "memorable weekend" included an official role as Chaplain to the Royal household for the weekend offering pastoral care and support.

One highlight was a barbecue held in one of the Lodge houses in the shadow of Lochnagar. "As the Queen drove me through the estate we rounded a bend and encountered two stags. One took fright and ran away, but the older one stood its ground, eyeing

us carefully. "Monarch of the Realm meets Monarch of the Glen" I deduced. "I conveyed the greetings and the good wishes of the Kirk Session and congregation of Cramond Kirk to the minister and members both at Braemar and Crathie. Prince William was there having just concluded his training as an air sea rescue helicopter pilot. "My only regret was that I didn't manage to smuggle my footman Gareth into the car and bring him back to Cramond. It's surprising how quickly you get to like someone to lay out your clothes and bring you an early morning tray with coffee and orange juice!"

## Moderator – from milking to trooping the colours

In 2016, Russell served as Moderator of the Church of Scotland, taking him away from the pulpit at Cramond.

His role as Moderator of the General Assembly in 2016/17 gave him an opportunity to work alongside others to change Scottish Government policy.

In his recent farewell remarks to Edinburgh Presbytery, Russell tells his colleagues "never to under-estimate the role the church continues to play in the public life of this country – and to grasp with both hands the opportunities which continue to exist for ministry to shape public life and public policy for the better."

"As Moderator of Edinburgh Presbytery, as chaplain to the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly on two occasions, and as Moderator of the General Assembly, from weekends at Balmoral to days spent in Kibera, the shanty town on the edge of Nairobi, I have been blessed beyond words to represent the church at home and abroad, meeting, eating and spending time some of the world's most privileged people and meeting,



eating and spending time with some of the world's least privileged people."

"Yet the greatest blessing throughout these 42 years has been to be a parish minister and to share in the everyday lives of the people of my three congregations and communities, a blessing perhaps best illustrated last week when I called to visit a couple who were celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary. As they sat together holding hands, they recalled the day of their wedding in Motherwell all these years ago. "65 years", said David, "and it gets better all the time". Quick as a flash Marion replied – "Oh, is that what you think?"

Here we share some of the pictures during that special year away from Cramond:



Milking a cow at the Royal Highland Show, Ingliston



Attending school prize giving ceremonies, and most Sunday mornings as guest preacher at churches the length and breadth of Scotland.

Russell created the Grapevine – Cramond Kirk and Community magazine in 1993 – with a message from the Manse “In the Christmas gospel, we read that the angels appeared to the shepherds with glad tidings that would

bring great joy to all people. Our aim is much more modest and we have set our sights on the immediate parish. Nevertheless, we hope that you will enjoy reading the news and information in the pages that follow.”



## Russell – The Singer.

In the mid – nineties a group of people from Cramond Kirk formed a singing group calling themselves ‘Canticum’ comprising - Lorna Jackson, Dot Kemp, Sheila Mutch, Jeanette Scholes, Leslie Pendreigh, John Wood, pianist - Ian Macpherson our organist at Cramond at that time, and later Morag Young. Russell was in the audience for our first concert in Glenfarg Parish Church, and subsequently, he asked if he could sing Bass with us and so became a member of the group.

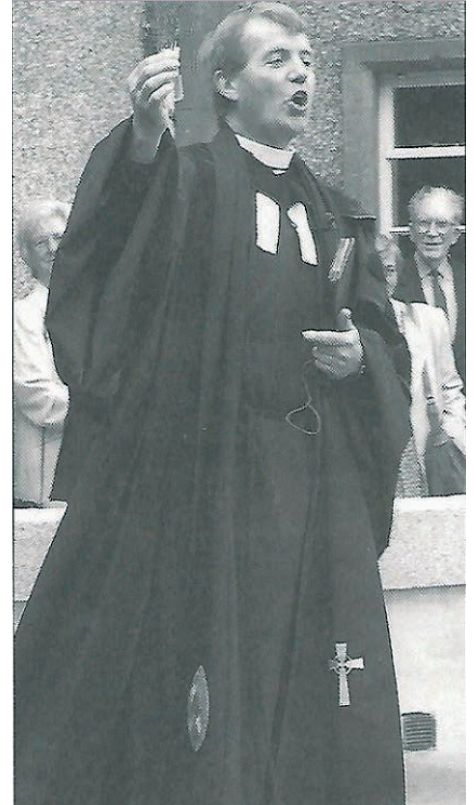
Russell wanted to improve his singing technique and he took singing lessons with Helen King (nee Cochrane) a very accomplished concert soloist in her day. Many of the songs he learned to sing on his own started with ‘Bonnie’ - ‘Bonnie Dundee’ and ‘Bonnie Galloway’ and so we always would say ‘what bonnie song are you going to sing for us tonight Russell?’

We know that Russell found this a great way to relax from the stresses and strains of being a parish minister, and we had great fun for a further 15 years.

**Leslie Pendreigh**

## COMMUNITY

2001 saw the Grand Opening of the Kirk Halls extension including the new Millenium Room.



## Leader/mentor/encouraging –

One of the most rewarding parts of Russell’s ministry has been to mentor, encourage, teach, cajole and supervise students in all three charges, as he himself reports having benefitted enormously ‘from the help and support my supervisors gave me when I was training at New College.’

“At a quick count I think I have supervised 16 probationers and between 30 and 40 students on part time placements – and having successfully completed (or should I say survived) his time at Cramond, Iain Majcher has just been called to Bothwell Parish Church”.

“And as with all the others, I have learned as much from Iain as hopefully he has learned from me.”

Among those probationers were our Associate Minister Ian Gilmour, along with Moira McDonald who will be our Interim Moderator during the vacancy period. They are pictured with Russell when they were his Moderatorial Chaplains. We know they will look after us well!





Sculptor Ronnie Rae first came to Cramond in the hope of finding a place to work at his giant sculptures. Ronnie is all too aware that the strength he has striking granite with a simple hammer and chisel, comes from God. When Russell came to Cramond in 1993 Ronnie was relieved that the new minister proved to be as kind and understanding as his predecessor and space behind the Kirk was openly and warmly given. In 1994 Ronnie's sculptures were moved to his first major exhibition and continued to London's Regent Park in 1999, where his life size Wounded Elephant became the main attraction. In 2001 the monumental Tyger Tyger, Fish and Bison moved south to the Natural History Museum. He also created the Fish, for the new Kirk Halls, the early Christian symbol of Christ.

## Pause with Pancakes



## Farewell to Russell and Margaret

God's been on the golf course, it's very clear to see  
He's been waiting at the bunker and with you at the tee.  
He's walked beside you many times as you strode out on  
the green

Guiding all your play not visible, unseen  
He'll be with you as you journey be it near or very far  
And if you're feeling rough or a wee bit under par  
It is of course the Lord's decision where each ball will  
arrive

By club, putter or chipper or even with a drive  
His plans may not seem too clear for a bogey or a birdie  
But do not worry all his plans through faith are clear and  
sturdy

He sent you into Cramond and here his will you've done  
And no doubt we can all agree, God played a hole in one.  
In playing golf we're quite sure you manage a good score

Fear not the Kirk is in good hands with the Rev Ian  
Gilmour.

When you were called as Moderator - there was no  
cafuffle

For there just waiting in the wings was the Rev Tom  
Cuthell

And then the Rev Stanley Okeke in tailored splendour  
came

With his family now in Ayr- things will not be the same.

And The Rev Iain Majcher came with youth and zest and  
drive

We wish him and Celeste all the best in - with the famous  
five.

So fortunate in the Kirk were we I do not tell a lie, and of  
course not forgetting another candidate the Rev Louise  
Mackay.

So many folks are grateful for your steadfast serving part  
Not least those whose lives were changed with a new  
Fresh Start.

Yet behind each successful man they say - well maybe I  
won't harbour it

But no doubt Cramond Kirk was blessed with your good  
lady Margaret.

Now brushing up on your swing, don't let the ball go  
hurling

Or we might have Margaret running back to take up with  
her curling!

And perhaps on a Sunday morning when we're sitting in  
the pews

We may think of you and Margaret on the green in St  
Andrews

But we're are so sad to see you go - and of course as you  
can tell

We wish you back and bid you both a thankful warm  
farewell.

*Many thanks for their contributions to this edition go to  
Louise Madeley and Jane Robson. Editor Carol Anderson*

*Contact us - [cramond.kirk@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:cramond.kirk@blueyonder.co.uk)*