

Scalan News

Official Voice of the Scalan Association (SC022814)
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The time by the goodness of God will come, when the Catholic religion will again flourish in Scotland; and then, when posterity shall enquire, with a laudable curiosity, by what means any sparks of the true faith were preserved in these dismal times of darkness and error, Scalan and the other colleges will be mentioned with veneration, and all that can be recorded concerning them will be recorded with care...”

The above comes from an address given by Rev. John Geddes to his students in the Scots College, Valladolid, Spain, on 18 June 1777, at a meeting of the community known as “The Academy”. He was the saviour of Scalan as its rector, 1762-67, built the house we can visit today, and established it as a centre of excellence in piety, learning and even agriculture. In 1770 he was sent to Spain to rescue the Scotch College, Madrid. He re-established it in the northern city of Valladolid where it flourished for over 200 years before it re-located to Salamanca in 1988. There are many priests in Scotland today who are “Spaniards”, as they are known, former students of the Royal Scots College, Spain.

Contents:

Page 2 - **Office Bearers of the Association.**

Page 2 - **The Fiftieth Edition of the Scalan News.**

Page 3 - **Subscriptions.**

Page 3 - **A Flock of Priests** - *Ann Dean*

Page 5 - **Bishop Hugh MacDonald** - *Sylvia Toovey*

Page 8 - **Photos.**

Page 9 - **New Publication.**

Page 10 - **Forthcoming Publication.**

Page 13 - **The Glenlivet Chasuble** - *Pru King (Blairs Museum)*

Page 14 - **St John Ogilvie's 400th Anniversary National Pilgrimage**- *Ann Dean*

Page 15 - **Points of Interest** - *Sylvia Toovey*

Page 16 - **Bishop Gilbert's Homily at the Annual Scalan Mass**

Page 18 - **The Holyrood Silver** - *Ian Forbes (Blairs Museum)*

Page 19 - **Scalan's 'Wooden' Candlesticks** - *Ian Forbes*

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Fiftieth Edition

In producing the 50th Edition of the Scalan News it is appropriate and important that we recognise the part played by Alasdair Roberts in conceiving of the idea, being its first editor and setting it on the firm foundations which have led us to the point of marking this auspicious milestone in its own history.

This occurs by coincidence on the threshold of the year in which we will celebrate

the 300th anniversary of the Foundation of our beloved Scalan. There are a number of initiatives taking shape to commemorate this important anniversary. It is probably too early to go into detail, but a film and a book are both in the making, as well as some other ventures. Now is the time for members to make a special effort to be present for the **Annual General Meeting** in the anniversary year which will be held on Tuesday 31 May 2016, and to attend and bring many friends to the **Annual Pilgrimage Mass** which will take place on Sunday 3 July at 4.00pm. The Right Reverend Leo Cushley, Archbishop of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh, has agreed to preach on this occasion.

Subscriptions

According to our most up-to-date records, 277 people have paid subscriptions in the last two or three years. However only 148 have paid for the present year which expires at the AGM on Tuesday 31 May 2016. You will be able to tell if you are paid-up by looking at the label on your envelope. If it says "Scalan News 2016" your name is good. If there is no "2016" you are in arrears. The annual subscription stands at £10 and can be sent to the treasurer/secretary at the address shown on page two. We do not want to lose you, and for that reason we continue to send the "Scalan News" for some time after subscriptions have not been paid, but we can't keep that up for ever, you will understand. In this 300th anniversary year we hope you will not only stay with us, but you will encourage others to join.

A Flock of Priests

1. Peter Cumming and Thomas Robertson from Scalan.

Both these priests were born at Scalan, Peter in 1827 and Thomas in 1830. Peter was probably the youngest son in the large family of John Cumming who worked at Scalan from the 1770s until the college moved to Aquhorthies in 1799. There are no records of the Robertson family at Scalan; in Charles Gordon's 1839 census the family was no longer there.

With only three years between them in age, they must have shared their first schooling and been part of a large group of children walking out of Scalan daily to attend Abbe Paul MacPherson's school at Chapeltown, opened in 1832. In 1840 Peter went to Blairs followed in 1847 by Thomas. Both were sent to the Scots College, Valladolid, Peter in 1846 and Thomas in 1849.

At this point their lives went different ways. Peter was ordained deacon in Spain,

then returned to Scotland to be ordained priest by Bishop Kyle in 1852. For a short time he was a professor at Blairs. Bishop Kyle gave him to the Eastern District where his parishes were in Edinburgh, Forfar, Dundee, Perth and Crieff. He worked indefatigably to provide a church for the people of Crieff and as a result suffered a breakdown in health, retiring in 1872. In 1875 he was able to return briefly to his congregation in Crieff where he died.

Thomas was sent home to Scotland in poor health in 1856 and on recovering his health was ordained priest in 1857 at St Andrew's Church, Glasgow at the centre of the Western District. This would suggest that his parents had moved from Scalan to Glasgow for work. He remained there until he was appointed parish priest at Port-Glasgow in 1858. His health deteriorated and he died of consumption in 1865.

Belonging to the Northern District they served the Catholics of the Eastern and Western Districts of Scotland going where they were most needed at that time; both were sons of Scalan crofters.

2. Reverend Charles Gordon, and his 1839 and 1841 Chapeltown censuses.

At the Special Collections, Aberdeen University, in the material sent from the Scottish Catholic Archives, there are some interesting papers listed under 'Individual Missions'. IM 16: 6-7 would be of great interest to family historians as there are lists drawn up by Priest Gordon in 1839 and 1841 of the Chapeltown congregation or, as he put it, his 'flock'.

Extracting from these lists only the families of Scalan and Wester Scalan, the flock in 1839 consisted of 60 souls and 49 in 1841. There is another list, drawn up in 1849 by Priest Gordon's successor, in which the numbers have risen again to 68. This casts an interesting light on the density of population in a small crofting community in the mid 1800s.

What is also of interest is the life of the priest Charles Gordon. He was born at Clashnoir, Glenlivet in 1813, entered Aquhorthies in 1826, passed on to Blairs in 1829 and sent to the Scots College, Valladolid in 1833 where he was ordained priest in 1838. Returning to Scotland his first appointment was Keith and the following year he took charge of Chapeltown and remained there until 1842 when he was sent to Ballogie.

In 1847 he had to leave Ballogie in poor health, retiring to Strichen where it was confirmed that he suffered from epilepsy. He assisted the Portsoy priest John Gall from 1848 to the summer of 1849 when he was chaplain to Gillespie of Cambus near Biggar. In October he was at Preshome and the following spring returned to Glenlivet to Tombae where he assisted the priest Robert Stuart, at Tombae from 1842 to 1860. For a brief time after Robert Stuart left, Charles Gordon was in charge but in 1861 he was sent to St Ann's, Courtrai in Belgium where he died in January

1864.

3. Reverend James Glennie

When Charles Gordon left Chapeltown in 1842 he was succeeded in the same year by James Glennie who remained there for 33 years.

Born in Dalkeith in 1811, the son of a soldier, he was educated first at Aquhorthies and then Blairs. In Rome he attended the Scots College, Propaganda College and again the Scots College between 1832 and 1837 where he was ordained in 1837. Returning to Scotland, he was appointed a professor at Blairs from 1837 to 1841, then briefly at Preshome that year before being sent to Chapeltown.

He is remembered especially for getting the Duke of Richmond and Gordon to agree to the construction of three miles of road from Auchnarrow to Chapeltown, at long last a metalled road to take the place of foot-paths and tracks. The people of the Braes of Glenlivet likened this achievement to that of General Wade's roads through the Highlands and the couplet remembering Wade's success became:

If you'd seen these roads before there were any,
You'd hold up your hands and bless Mr Glennie.

James Glennie worked tirelessly for the good of the whole community and it is said he was a much loved priest. In 1875 he was appointed to Inverurie remaining there until his death in 1882.

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Bishop Hugh MacDonald

Hugh was born on the second of February 1699 at Meoble, the younger son of the tackman for one of the main farms of South Morar (West coast of Scotland). He is incorrectly referred to as the son of a laird who was, in fact, his uncle Allan, the great-great-grandson of the first Macdonald of Morar. Hugh had no thoughts of inheriting the estate but was quite prepared to make his own way in life. His parents reared him with strong beliefs; personal loyalty, kindness to others and strong Catholic faith. As he matured he developed an abhorrence of heresy, strong political beliefs and an implicit sense of providence. He was always a Jacobite and a Highlander. His childhood was a happy one. He saw the Hanoverian troops in their red tunics with shining brass buttons but kept out of their way; how different they looked to the dull plaid of his family.

He was told of Bishop Nicholson's first visit to Morar, the first by a bishop in a hundred years, and it is said he blessed the fifteen month old baby. The bishop travelled far and wide baptising and giving the sacrament to the people. He stayed on Ei-

lean Bà; the safe home of Father Cahassy. A meeting of priests was called on the island and this was the start of rebuilding the church despite the law passed in 1700 in Edinburgh to try to stop the spread of Popery. Troop numbers had been increased; they had to be more vigilant and capture more priests. Father Mongan was caught, tried in Edinburgh and banned from the Highlands. Some priests threatened to leave the mission. Despite the religious unrest four year old Hugh was an adventurous child; his parents keeping open house and family and friends were always welcome. It was a safe house for disguised priests. The house with its heather thatched roof was enlarged to accommodate more visitors.

Before Hugh's birth farming was changing. The old farm towns were split up into individual units; each farm had its own fenced fields; Cattle breeding was introduced and cattle were sent south to the lowlands. Drove roads came into being. Crops were sown into land ploughed by wooden ploughs. Those who could afford it used horses or oxen to pull them. The lairds were now landlords, money being made from farming. The Bank of Scotland was born in 1694. The change was slow, but throughout the Clanranald remained Jacobite and were considered a threat to the Protestant succession.

The Scottish Mission had been established less than fifty years and was under the control of 'Propaganda fide', the Papal Department for territories which were new, young, or under persecution. Thomas Nicholson was the Vicar Apostolic of Scotland appointed in 1694. He travelled to the East hoping to recruit men to become priests; he needed Gaelic speakers. Due in part to John Knox and the 1560 Book of Discipline, Catholicism was deemed evil and had to be suppressed. Nicholson established a small seminary in Glenlivet in 1699 run by Thomas Innes which closed in 1701.

In 1700 a new law was passed to prevent the growth of Popery which outlawed Mass: it was aimed at wiping out Catholicism. In 1704 Queen Anne ordered all officers of the law to obey it correctly - to harry priests and make Catholics unwelcome everywhere. When Hugh was eight year old James Gordon was appointed Vicar Apostolic for the whole of Scotland. He and George Douglas, interpreter, stayed overnight on Eilean Bà and from here he toured the islands celebrating Mass and baptising thousands. They went to Knoydart where George Douglas was ordained, the first for 150 years. After two days the bishop headed east. A new school was opened at Cross, Arisaig. Hugh attended Cross with his brothers and the sons of other tackmen. When not at school Hugh shared in the farm work with his other siblings.

In 1707 with the Act of Union, Scotland was governed from England. This did not go down well with the Jacobites and rumours were spreading for an uprising with French support. In 1710 Bishop Nicholson had given Bishop Gordon charge of church affairs in the Highlands, at his own request; he had come to love these lands and wished to learn more of their culture and to learn Gaelic. He stayed throughout

the winter and early spring using Eilean Bàn as his base, travelling widely, assessing the area's needs. Rome at last accepted that the Highlands were unique. Bishop Gordon served as Vicar Apostolic for all of Scotland from 1718 to 1727 and then for the lowlands from 1727 to 1746. In July 1727 Rome decided that the Highlands and the Lowlands had very different requirements. He returned to the west of Scotland in 1712 and re-met Hugh and his family. He established a small seminary in Eilean Bàn in 1714 with George Innes from the Scots College in Paris chosen as master. Seven boys from the best families were enrolled but only three or four entered.

By this time the uprising was fact and in 1715 the standard was raised at the Braes of Mar. Most of the men were from the Grampian Highlands and the North-East with Clanranald and Clangarry. The uprising was a failure with James Stuart fleeing back to France. The soldiers dribbled back home to find their homes burnt, their cattle killed and their women maltreated. The persecution that followed was aimed at Catholic clergy and the Jacobites. Bishop Nicholson was arrested, a sick elderly old man later being released, but those that escaped capture were broken in health whilst living rough in the mountains. Clanranald and Clangarry were almost finished. The little Seminary just survived. Those pupils wishing to leave were sent home but George Innes stayed and taught those remaining including young Hugh. It became a no-go area for clergy and bishops, persecution being rife.

In December the Catholic Duke of Gordon died and his estate passed to Alexander who fortunately had his father's beliefs and not his mother's who was a staunch Whig. The vast estate in the North-East became the mainstay of Catholicism for twelve years until he died in 1728. Bishop Gordon decided to re-locate the seminary to the safety of the Gordon lands. He found a tiny turf house high in the hills recently built by the Glenlivet priest who was escaping the harassment of his Hanoverian neighbours. It was approached by tracks through juniper and mossy bogs. John Gordon moved out to a station at Mortlach. Facing a long and hazardous journey, George Innes and the boys willing to go, gathered up their belongings and set out from Eilean Bàn and arrived at Scalan in September 1716. How homesick they must have been. The change was horrendous, but Hugh and the other boys were determined to stick it: Scalan was now their home.

George Innes moved out of Scalan in 1722 and was replaced by George Alexander Grant. He had been trained in Paris and only had three years experience of the Mission. He found it very hard to adapt and longed for Paris. Bishop Gordon supported him plus the two senior students, Hugh MacDonald and George Gordon who were to receive minor orders. In June 1723 the Bishop returned to the Western Highlands where the opposition to Catholics was steadily growing. The government passed an act of abjuration which affected Scalan and all Catholic Schools. The Protestants helped where possible as Scalan was doing no harm. Bishop Gordon was finding it hard to get and keep masters at Scalan. Four students were transferred to

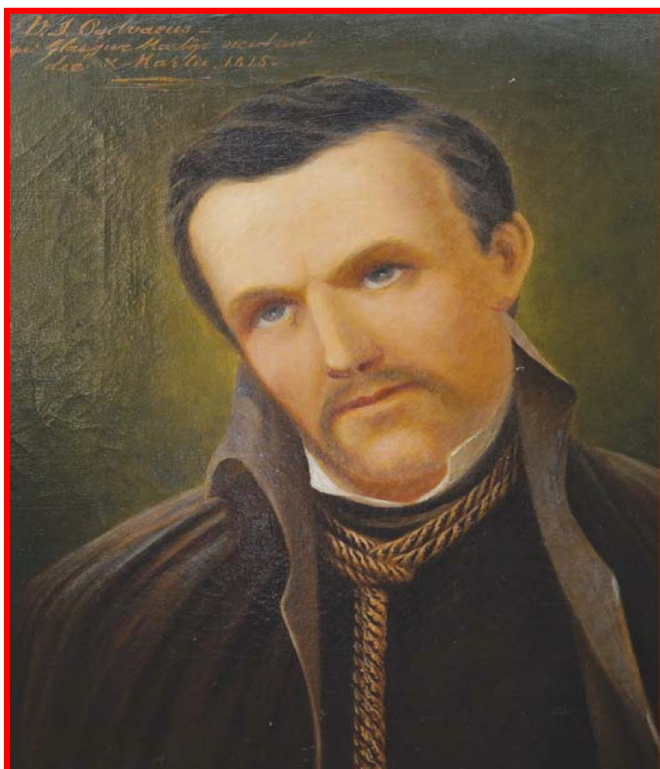
Rome. Hugh MacDonald and George Gordon were to be ordained at Scalan. Both requested to return to the Highlands; Hugh to Eilean Bàn in Morar. Bishop James Gordon died in harness in 1746 aged 81. Bishop Thomas Joseph Nicholson died in October 1718: he survived a prison sentence and returned to work in Preshome in the Enzie (Duke of Gordon's estate) and is interred at St. Ninian's, Tynet, with many other priests. Spring 1726 saw the persecution greatly increase. It was a hard time at Scalan, would they survive?

To return to Hugh, back home in the Highlands where Protestants and Catholics were enemies, Bishop Gordon had numerous meetings with clergy and contact with Rome about a new bishop and finally settled on Hugh, his family having high standing in the community. King James added his support. In February 1731 he became titular Bishop of Diana. He was set on opening a seminary in the West Highlands. Unrest was spreading; Scotland wanted Charles Stuart to be king. Charles sailed from France on the 9th August 1745 and landed at Glenfinnan. The Jacobites were gathering on the riverbank, the bagpipes were playing, when Hugh arrived and they all moved onto a knoll. The aging Marquis of Tullibardine bowed to the Prince unfurled and held aloft the crimson and gold standard (Bratach Bhàn) which was set up at the topmost point of the knoll. Bishop Hugh stepped forward and, raising his right hand, blessed it first in Latin, then repeated in Gaelic, English, and possibly French.

The repercussions following the uprising in 1745 were to be the most critical in Hugh's life. He became a penniless fugitive abroad with a price on his head and residing at the Scot's College in Paris. He paid a heavy price for being a staunch Highlander, Jacobite and Catholic.

Next year September 2016 marks the 300th anniversary of the founding of Scalan. It was the only seminary in Scotland at the time. It is a grade A listed building standing on the east side of the Crombie burn surrounded by grazing land with the hills as a backdrop. Nearby are two nineteenth century barns replacing the old buildings. Scalan had its own farm due to its isolation. It survived the 1745 uprising and the persecution that followed due to the dedication of the bishops, masters, priests and students who wished to preserve the Catholic faith; each will have left their own mark. The atmosphere is one of peace and tranquillity: a place to rest and think of the past and look to the future.

Spare a thought for the two students who entered Scalan at the beginning in 1716; Hugh Macdonald from the west and George T. Gordon from the east of Scotland. Despite all the hardships they received all their education at Scalan and were ordained by Bishop Gordon on Ember Saturday 1725. The first priests ordained since before the Reformation. His dream was fulfilled. Scalan was an excellent choice for a seminary but by 1799 the premises were too small and a move was made to Aquhorties. Both priests returned to Highland Scotland.



**Portrait of Saint John Ogilvie
in the Royal Scots College,
Salamanca, Spain,
painted by
a 19th century student
of the Royal Scots College, Val-
ladolid.**

**See article reporting on
the Pilgrimage to Keith
for the Mass marking
the 400th Anniversary
of his martyrdom,
page 14.**

New Publication

Fr. Michael Briody, our secretary/treasurer, has had a book published by the Pontifical University of Salamanca entitled: "The Scots College, Spain, 1767-1780: Memoirs of the translation of the Scotch College from Madrid to Valladolid". It is an 84,000 word production, of which 69,000 words are a transcription of a manuscript kept in the archives of the Royal Scots College, now in Salamanca, written by Rev. John Geddes, who, in 1767, built "The Scalan" we can visit today. In 1770, he was sent out to Spain to rescue the Scotch College, Madrid, which had fallen on hard times, and he then transferred it to the northern city of Valladolid, where it served the Scottish Church well for over 200 years. The document narrates in great detail his daily struggles with bureaucracy and other difficulties before succeeding in his task. Fr. Briody has added introductions, footnotes and appendices to assist the reader.

The book can be had from him at the address on page two. It costs £15 (+£1.50 for P&P for one copy). Please phone him about larger orders. Cheques should be written to "SAN AMBROSIO SOCIETY"

Bishop Gilbert preaches at Scalan, Sunday, 5 July 2015,
assisted by Fr. Thomson, President of the Scalan Association.



Forthcoming Publication

Dr. John Watts, author of “Scalan: The Forbidden College, 1716-1799”, is producing a new work, commissioned by the Scalan Association, to mark the 300th anniversary year. It has the working title of “Scalan: Leaves from the Master’s Day Book”, and it is written in the form of a diary spanning the years 1741-56, during most of the rectorship of William Duthie. It does not have an entry for every day, but covers the most difficult period of the ’45 and after until government troops were withdrawn from the Highlands in 1756 because they were required for the “Seven Years’ War”, and so Scalan entered its most peaceful period. The diary style acts as an “open door into Scalan”, as Dr. Watts describes it, where the reader learns through the events of the period something of all those elements which made up the daily life of the students: weather, landscape, working on the farm, food, dress, their accommodation, timetable, methods of study and, last but not least, prayer. The book should be ready between Easter and the Annual Pilgrimage Mass in July.

Swallows: cf Points of Interest,
no. 6, page 16.



**The Scalan News wishes all its Readers
a Holy Christmas
and a Happy New Year in 2016,
the 300th Anniversary Year
of the Foundation of Scalan**



The Glenlivet Chasuble: see article on the opposite page

John Watts' book - *"Hugh Macdonald, Highlander, Jacobite and Catholic"* ISBN no. 0859765601 gives a real insight into that period; it wasn't all Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora Macdonald, a glamorous story, but persecution and bloodshed.

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The Glenlivet Chasuble.

The sacristy of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at Chapeltown was being reorganised and the team from Blairs Museum were invited to help with assessing various items. Several items were found to be very interesting and as they were of no use to the church, they came to Blairs Museum. One of these is what is now being called "The Glenlivet Chasuble". It is of special interest as it may be the chasuble given for the opening of the new church in 1890 as it bears the emblem of the Pelican in Her Piety, and lilies for Our Lady.

The main ground of the chasuble is creamy white silk damask with a quatrefoil design filled with leaves centred round a stylised flower. The orphreys (richly embroidered bands on ecclesiastical vestments) are of gold silk woven in a tiny chevron pattern which is so small it appears to be almost plain. The embroidery on the chasuble makes it outstanding. The sprays of lilies have been worked separately as "slips" and then applied to the silk ground of the orphrey. They are worked in tambour stitch (or perhaps Cornelly machine stitch which was popular at the time), giving the effect of closely set rows of chain stitch; the blossoms are worked in white and greys, the leaves in shades of green, and all overlaid in parts with gold thread and cords to emphasise the veining. When the slips were laid on to the gold ground, they were edged up with more of the same cord to neaten the edges. At the same time, the stamens on the lilies would have been worked directly onto the silk ground, using the gold thread and red silk to match the main design.

The chasuble has a pillar orphrey on the front with simple sprays of lilies. The back orphrey is cross shaped with lily sprays and a central motif of "The Pelican in Her Piety", the mother bird piercing her breast to feed her brood and so to succour them. In the design, the mother bird extends her wings a little to bare the breast which she has pierced with her beak. Her four young are gathered below her to receive the nourishment of her blood. As is the norm, the birds are worked in white silk. The nest is a stylised crown of thorns in brown, against a ground of green foliage with white blooms. The emblem is set in a mandorla (or oval) with aureole rays in gold threads worked in tambour or chain stitch edged with red silk threads. The main embroidery is worked in polychrome silk floss in satin stitch and long and short stitch and it is a lovely example of the ecclesiastical embroidery which was in use and being worked in Britain at the time when the new church was renamed. It is interesting to note that the main emblem was worked directly on to the ground and not ap-

plied as a slip.

There is no visible label to connect it with any of the church houses which were producing lovely vestments in late Victorian times. Books were published with designs for church embroidery which could be traced and copied onto the fabric by talented embroiderers. Convents produced a great deal of ecclesiastical embroidery and some of the great designers such as Sir Ninian Comper had their work executed by Orders such as the Sisters of Bethany or the Society of Saint Margaret, to mention only two, but it would not be strictly correct to imply that the chasuble came from one of these sources. It remains a mystery. Sometimes the workers put their names on the inside of the piece where it remained unseen, and this is excellent practice from an historical point of view as they also may have put the name of the person, or church, for whom it was made, but unless the lining becomes detached and requires repair it will continue to remain a mystery.

But it is not a hidden mystery – the chasuble can be admired at Blairs Museum.

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St John Ogilvie's 400th Anniversary National Pilgrimage, 4th July, 2015

After months of preparation and meticulous planning, Saturday 4th of July, at last arrived, not alas, bright and clear but with gale force winds accompanied by frequent destructive gusts and torrential rain from leaden skies which looked like staying that way the entire day - so much for the Diocesan Office's advice to stallholders, each to provide a gazebo for their stall to give pleasant shade from the sun! All 30 stall-holders did arrive, the earliest there seeing the wisdom of attempting to erect their stalls close to the walls of the Football Club's buildings which offered a modicum of shelter. The rest of us, (Scalan Association included) had no option but to attempt anchoring our gazebos to the railings encircling the football pitch, attempts which did not always succeed, as one gazebo went flying off. The musical display which was to have been given by the Keith Pipe Band had to be cancelled but the Strathbogie Fiddlers fought on, taking refuge in the Spectators' Stand which kept them and their fiddles dryish. Some of us gave up (Scalan Association included) and went home to get into dry clothes and get ready to try again. By 2 pm the wind had subsided a little and the rain was still wet but gentler and the sky at times a lighter grey. Scalan Association attempted to set up its informative display but the wind was having none of it.

By 2.30pm the decision was bravely taken to proceed with the Mass in the Football Park. Despite the terrible weather, busloads and carloads of pilgrims had arrived and by now there was a very large crowd waiting – a crowd which had the good sense to gravitate briskly towards the Stand which was very soon full up. Out

of somewhere a long and apparently unending line of archbishops, bishops, priests, monks, nuns and deacons, the like of which many of us in the north-east of Scotland had never seen before, proceeded onto the pitch to take their places around and in front of the altar which appeared to be well sheltered by an ample awning.

The stalls were smartly packed up and abandoned to their fate, and the stallholders now discovered the disadvantages of having to stand outside the pitch railing for two hours, the grass definitely in no state for sitting or kneeling on. But Mass was being celebrated and it was St John Ogilvie's 400th Anniversary and it was in Keith and that was all that mattered. Bishop Hugh's homily was inspiring and tantalising at times as gusts of wind snatched the sound away, and then it stopped raining and very fleetingly there was a glimpse of blue sky and everyone was happy with Archbishop Cushney's address before the end of Mass.

What had appeared at 10am to promise a total wash-out ended up a wonderful holy happy Pilgrimage.

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Points of Interest

1. Scalan and Sandy's cottage survived the winter remarkably well despite the long windy and wet spells. Scalan itself needed its doors and windows painting which have been done during the summer. The disabled toilet door, despite a closer on it, broke a mortice joint in a gale which has been repaired. From now on the disabled toilet door will be locked and only opened when required by large groups i.e. Scalan Mass.
2. The lottery funding is going ahead but nothing much will happen until May 2016.
3. Saint Columba's Church at Culloden on the outskirts of Inverness now has its own priest, Fr. Domenico Zanré. He is of Italian descent but born in Kirkcaldy, grew up in Peterhead and was educated at the academy where he excelled in his studies. Fr. Domenico taught at Glasgow University, changed tack and joined the priesthood training at the Pontifical Scots College in Rome. He was ordained at St. Mary's Aberdeen. After a spell in London he returned north to be welcomed by Bishop Gilbert. St Columba's has its own website.
4. St Gregory's Preshome: this majestic baroque building in the Enzie built by the Gordons of Letterfourie was open for worship in 1790. It is thought to be the first publicly-built post-Reformation church in Scotland and is steeped in history. The interior is as flamboyant as the exterior. It was shut two years ago for re-roofing. It is now open for Mass in the summer months.
5. Blairs Museum is currently exhibiting artefacts from Scalan and Preshome including Bishop Hay's violin which has been lovingly repaired and waiting to be

played by an expert. There are a number of excellent paintings. Call Ian Forbes 01224863767 to book a tour.

6. Scalan's barns had their usual summer visitors this year: two broods of swallows. See the photo on page 11.

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Homily for the Scalan Pilgrimage, Sunday 5 July, 2015

Delivered by Rt. Rev Hugh Gilbert OSB, Bishop of Aberdeen.

I know many of you are from the south. I hope you'll forgive me if I first say something about the area of Scotland in which we are – more immediately Upper Banffshire, more widely Moray.

It's an area of great natural beauty, with a firth and a wide sky and rivers and hills, forests and sweeps of field. It's also one of the spiritual lungs of Scotland, and of Catholic Scotland. This is the setting of Scalan.

It is an area with a long Christian history, from Pictish times to our own. Burghead, Mortlach, Birnie, Kinneddar, Spynie all had, and some still have, their holy places. Just across the Moray Firth, on the Tarbat Peninsula, stood the Pictish monastery at what is now Portmahomack. It flourished from the 6th to the 9th cc, It has only recently been excavated, and is earning the name of the Iona of the East.

In the Middle Ages, Elgin had its Cathedral, the Lantern of the North, magnificent even as a ruin. It had a Dominican community from the 13th c., and from the 15th, Observant Franciscans. There were Benedictines nearby at Urquhart, the Cistercians at Kinloss, the Valliscaulians (later Benedictines) at Pluscarden. Here was a cluster of Catholic religious life.

In the penal times, blessed Moray sheltered Catholic pockets, especially in the Enzie and here in Glenlivet. There's Scalan, Tynet and Preshome. When the Church could breathe again, parishes were founded. Think of the quasi-cathedral in Buckie and the beautifully restored church in Dufftown. The Sisters of Mercy reoccupied Greyfriars, Elgin, and ran schools there, and in Buckie, Keith and Tomintoul. After the Second World War came the return of the monks to Pluscarden, and two years ago a second refounding of Greyfriars with the advent of the Nashville Dominicans. And for many years now, St Michael's Centre, Tomintoul, has been pursuing its own special mission, to the appreciation of many.

There is something here. It may be less awesome than the wilder Highlands, but it conduces to prayer and largeness of soul. A kind of spiritual Malt Whisky! May we drink it in, especially on a day like this! May it flourish and develop. Our country needs these things, these places, these memories. Each of us does.

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That's just an introduction – now for a homily!

A story well-known to lovers of Scalan: on 12 September 1760, two emissaries from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland came to inspect Scalan. The Master, at that time a deacon called William Gray, invited them in. But they did not even dismount. They rode off, expressing astonishment that so mean a place had caused so much concern. In their later written report, they described it as "a sort of college in a place called Skalon."

In fact, 1760 was a low point in the 83 year history of Scalan. But can't we also connect the reaction of those visitors with that of the people of Nazareth in today's Gospel: 'This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary'? We're colliding here with the scandal of the Incarnation:

divine wisdom, divine power concentrated, condensed, located in one human being, a carpenter of one obscure place in one, to us, distant time. One droplet in the ocean of human history carrying the meaning of the universe and the joy of eternity. It baffles our hearts and heads. And unless, by God's grace, the gift of faith opens our eyes, we won't dismount. We'll ride on. We'll pass the mystery by.

This strange logic of the Incarnation plays itself out again in Paul the Apostle. He's the recipient, he says, of extraordinary revelations, but his life isn't bathed in emotional sunshine. He makes his weary way along the roads of the Eastern Mediterranean, with a thorn in his flesh, and under a constant rain of 'insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake.' And there was minted the immortal line: 'when I am weak, then I am strong.' As for the Master, so for the disciple. As for the Head of the Body, so for every member. As for Christ, so for the Church. Her whole history will be lived as strength-in-weakness, and in the measure we're Christian, so will ours.

Scalan is a touching embodiment of this. If there was a low point in the history of Scottish Catholicism, it was the 18th c. If there was a time the Psalm we sang must have resonated, it would have been then:

'Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.
We are filled with contempt.
Indeed all too full is our soul
With the scorn of the rich,
With the proud man's disdain.'

In the whole history of penal legislation from 1560 onwards, the most far-reaching, the most disabling was the Act of 1700 for Preventing the Growth of Popery. That was a euphemism. It was effectively an Act for the Extirpation of Popery. One provision is particularly telling: children of Catholic parents were to be sent to Protestant relatives or teachers for their education. In other words, the faith was not to be transmitted to the next generation.

Yet this dark 18th c., this time of weakness, was the time of bishops like James Gordon, George Hay and John Geddes. It must have been a time when many, known only to God, kept their eyes on the Lord their God, waiting for his mercy and secretly sustained by it. And it was the time when, by the Crombie Burn, this 'mean place', this 'sort of college' became a cradle of priests, men anointed by the Holy Spirit to represent Christ, the Head and Bridegroom of his Church.

In this place, these men – their names fill 5 pages of John Watts' *Scalan* – became 'units of spiritual power', as Mgr Ronald Knox called priests. Each of them had the experience of Ezekiel: 'The Spirit came into me and made me stand up, and I heard the Lord speaking to me. He said, "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against me...I am sending you to them to say, 'The Lord says this'. Whether they listen to you or not, this set of rebels shall know there is a prophet among them'".

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'When I am weak, then I am strong.' We want to store that phrase in our memory, write it on our hearts.. It was true then. It's true now. It's true for us.

When I first came to the monastery and diocese, in 1974, the majority of the priests appeared to be from the old Catholic strongholds of the north east. It's quite different now. Where would we be without priests from elsewhere? From September, please God, we will have 6 seminarians. Not a single one was born and bred here. (I won't mention the Bishop!). This is a weakness and a strength.

We don't now have a seminary in Scotland. We don't have an institution we can call a successor to Scalan. And most of society doesn't dismount to look at us, except when we sin (as we do). So our eyes too are on the Lord, till he show us his mercy.

Scalan *was* mercy. Even for those who did not become priests, it provided an education

in the faith at a time when Catholics were forbidden to teach or learn their Catholicism. Next year is the 300th anniversary of Scalan's foundation. May that encourage us to do what we can to transmit our faith! Is it perhaps time for some imaginative institutional initiative, some centre - not a seminary as such, not an academic institute, not a retreat centre merely – but a centre, a place for forming Christians as such, theologically and spiritually, a place of community life, a place of discernment for personal vocation, a school of evangelisation? If so, why not now?

Here we are, living the 21st c. version of the age-old story. Here we are, a kind of Scalan ourselves, weak and strong, earthen vessels with a heavenly treasure. Like our spiritual forefathers here, let's try and do something, let's do what we can!

Let me end with the ending of John Watts' fine book:

'Here was a house, dwarfed by the huge, intractable landscape, remote, poor and unobtrusive, not a part of respected society, indeed breaking the laws of respected society by its very existence, surviving at all only through dogged determination and courage. Its influence and achievement seem quite out of proportion. Whatever its shortcomings, and quite against the odds, it vindicated the original vision of its founder, and achieved as much as he and his successors could have hoped for, and more.

'It is perhaps above all this quality of *strength-in-weakness* that has won the respect, admiration and affection even of those who have no close affinity with its aims. And for those who share its ideals, and understand what a keystone it was in the survival and recovery of their Faith, it is remembered with love, and mentioned...with veneration' (*Scalan, The Forbidden College, 1716-1799*).

Now it's our turn.

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The Holyrood Silver.

1688 was the year of the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' in Scotland against the Catholic King James VII and after his proclamation in 1687 that all the King's subjects were to be allowed 'to meet and serve God after their own way, be it in private houses, chapels, or places purposely hired or built for that use.' Coming at the end of a century of religious bigotry, hatred and persecution, this offer of toleration came too soon for a population steeped in religious hatred particularly of all things Catholic. His restoration of the Chapel Royal at Holyrood and the lavish adornment of a temporary Chapel Royal in Holyrood Palace was the trigger that set off the 'Revolution'. Anti-Catholic mobs attacked the Chapel Royal, stripped it of its furnishings and vestments, throwing the sacred vessels from the windows.

David Burnet, one of the resident Chaplains, rescued what he could of the sacred vessels, put them into two saddle bags and fled from Edinburgh. His intention was to save both the sacred vessels and to warn the missionary priests of the impending danger. He fled to Leith, but had to wait until morning before he could cross the Forth. At 4am he was warned that he was being pursued and took refuge in the open fields around. At dawn he hired a boat for Fife and in his own words, 'horsed for the north country.' His pursuers followed him and in Montrose he narrowly escaped from his lodgings before the magistrates arrived to search the house. Going north by Aberdeen, he managed to warn the missionary priests of the danger,

telling them to go into hiding and to conceal all church valuables.

Finally he reached the district of the Enzie, between Keith and the Moray Firth, where he lived in hiding for a year. The silver remained concealed in the Enzie until the year 1702, when on the death of King James, the Queen Dowager gifted it to the Scottish Catholic Mission. Out of loyalty they refused to cash it for its value, keeping it safe at Preshome where somehow the pieces survived the turmoil of the 18th century troubles.

An inventory for Bishop George Hay in 1780 shows that the smaller chalice at Tynet Chapel (from where it was stolen in 1847) and other pieces were at Scalan. The thurible, monstrance, incense boat and spoon were kept first at Scalan and then at Preshome and returned to Edinburgh in 1802 when they were used in the Chapel Royal for the French Royal Family who spent their exile in the city from 1796 to 1803. Eventually these items were entrusted to the Sisters of St Margaret's Convent in Edinburgh.

The large chalice remained at Preshome until around 1880 when it was removed to the Bishop's Chapel in Aberdeen. It was used at a special Mass to celebrate the dedication of the new organ at Blairs in 1903 and afterwards presented by Bishop Aeneas Chisholm to the College. The ciborium was in use at Preshome until 1907.

In 1967 the Scottish Catholic Hierarchy agreed to deposit all the pieces of Holyrood Silver in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh and now they are usually on display in the National Museum in Chambers Street.

Scalan's 'Wooden' Candlesticks.

On display at Blairs Museum are two candlesticks. A first glance would leave one with the impression that here were two rather ornately carved wooden candlesticks. A closer look confirms that they are made of metal painted brown giving the impression of wood. So far no attempt has been made to remove a small particle of paint to discover what the metal is underneath.

The mystery is why the candlesticks were painted in the first place. Perhaps no one would be tempted to go off with anything as mundane and worthless as wooden candlesticks. Perhaps there is a more obvious solution to the mystery not yet revealed.

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