



# THE BELFRY

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Number THIRTY EIGHT

Summer 2009

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Families of Balquhiddar Glen—THE MACLARENS



ARMS OF THE CHIEFS OF CLAN LABRIKAN

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## From the Manse

The Rev John Lincoln

In this year of "Homecoming Scotland 2009" or "An Tilleadh Albannach 2009" we have a great story to tell. On Pentecost Sunday the Presbytery of Stirling organised an with a series of historical sketches reminding us of our Christian heritage. Amongst the characters we saw were the Haldanes who sold their estate (where Stirling University now stands) to finance their work.

The Haldane Institute sent a Mr. Farquarson to Aberfeldy to be a scripture reader in that district. This was before the clearances when many more people lived in country districts. Bibles were scarce, and only just becoming available through the work of the Bible Societies.

Around the early 1800's a religious revival swept along Lochtayside and through much of the district. People would travel from Glen Lyon, to Loch Tayside, and from around Loch Earn and Balquhidder to hear the popular preachers of the day. One minister involved in this was the Rev. Robert Findlater, who was minister at Ardeonaig. Great congregations of between 4000 to 5000 gathered to hear him. At his invitation, the famous Dr John MacDonald of Ferintosh "The Apostle of the North" came to preach regularly right up to the 1830's.

Robert's nephew was the Reverend Eric Findlater, the first minister of Balquhidder Free Church in Lochearnhead, who was buried just outside the graveyard at Balquhidder. An account of the revivals was written by Eric's father, the Reverend William Findlater, minister in Durness, Sutherland.

We have some great stories to tell. Let us seek a new moving of the Spirit, and a renewing of the Lord's work in our own day.

Finally a reminder. This year St Angus' Day falls on Wednesday 12th August. At 6.30 pm there will be a short bilingual service. Afterwards there will be refreshments available and at 7.30 pm we will hold the "Friends" AGM.

*If you are able to come along and take part you will be most welcome. Beannaich dhuibh uile ...*

John Lincoln

Minister – Balquhidder linked with Killin and Ardeonaig

**CHURCH SERVICES**  
**Balquhidder, Lochearnhead & Strathyre**  
**CHURCH OF SCOTLAND**  
**Balquhidder Parish Kirk**  
Every Sunday at 12 noon  
Minister: Rev John Lincoln  
The Manse, Killin. Tel: 01567 820 247

Dear Friends

In this issue we focus our attention on The MacLaren family and their interesting history in Balquhidder Glen, as part of our series of the families of Balquhidder. We were fortunate to have Donald MacLaren of MacLaren write our article.

The next issue will centre on The Fergusons of Balquhidder.

Again if you have any information you wish to share please contact me, details as below.

Have a good summer.

Mal Dingle  
mal@rosebankhouse.co.uk  
01877 384208  
Rosebank House  
Main Street  
Strathyre  
FK18 8NA

#### Church News Balquhidder

First, a reminder that we have a fund raising event on 16<sup>th</sup> July in the afternoon following the Church service. Cream teas, hopefully with strawberries, will be available in Balquhidder Village Hall. Funds raised will be shared with the Hall. We should appreciate help- in the kitchen or with the sales table on the day. Please contact Pat Barber or me if you can help, even for a short while.

Our Property Convenor has been very busy investigating the possibility of further work on the Church stonework, with a view to mitigating the effects of damp, which is still a problem. The main area affected is the west wall behind the Sanctuary. There has been some debate as to the benefits of exterior treatment, particularly re-pointing with lime mortar. The theory is that this would allow damp to escape outwards instead of inwards as seems to be the case at present. The heavy rainfall and prevailing westerly winds lash that wall relentlessly. Earlier work has not completely solved the problem, leaving us with quite a challenge.

Historic Scotland has been helpful as have various contractors who specialise in such work. No decision can be made until the cost is known. Even then, we may not have the resources to cope with such an expense. What is most problematic of all is that whatever we do may not work! There can be no guarantee!!

Jean Edwards

## LILIAS AITCHISON



Lillas at Kirkton



Lillas Aitchison with grandchildren  
Louis, Florian and Donald, outside  
Lenin's tomb at the Kremlin

We were saddened by the death on 14th December 2008 of Mrs Lillas Aitchison of Kirkton, Balquhiddy, just one day after her 81st birthday. Lillas moved to Balquhiddy after her retirement as a radiographer to be near her family at Kirkton. She was our Session Clerk for a number of years, mainly during Mr Benson's ministry. She also served on the School Board for a time, and was Secretary to the SWRI. She was an intrepid traveller and visited her family on several of their diplomatic postings; in Berlin, Moscow, Havana and Kiev. Lillas was a well respected and much loved member of the community and we are missing her very much indeed.

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## ALLAN HULME

It was also a sadness to hear of the death of Mr Allan Hulme of Broomfield, who died on 29th December 2008 aged 91. Allan moved to Balquhiddy after his retirement as a neuro-surgeon in Bristol. He was a member of the Committee of the Friends at one time, and he and his late wife Christine often acted as guides to welcome visitors to Balquhiddy Church. Many of us remember the flower stall by their garden gate with its honesty box for Save The Children. Allan was a humanist and not a member of the Church, but he was a true friend who enjoyed the Summer Music concerts and loved Balquhiddy glen.

Jean Edwards

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## SUMMER MUSIC PROGRAMME AT BALQUHIDDER KIRK

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### **Sunday 28th June DIECI (vocal octet)**

Eight vocal studies students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama make their third (and possibly final?) visit to Balquhiddier for more excellent songs and opera extracts. Come along - this may be their last concert together!

### **Sunday 5th July Djordje Gajic (accordion) and Andrea Gajic (violin)**

A return visit by the virtuoso accordionist who made such an impact last year, this time accompanied by his wife Andrea for an exciting programme of Hungarian and Gypsy music. Not to be missed

### **Sunday 12th July The Primrose Piano Quartet**

We are privileged to have a return visit of the immensely experienced Primrose Piano Quartet, who so enjoyed last year's visit that they are coming again! Hear some more wonderful chamber music played with the highest competence.

### **Sunday 19th July VoiceMale (male voice quartet)**

This is probably the first time that a male voice quartet has sung at Balquhiddier Summer Music. They will sing a range of songs composed from the sixteenth century to the present day, often for very convivial occasions!

### **Sunday 26th July The Dalmeny Trio (violin, clarinet, piano)**

Ingrid Sawers (piano) and Joanna Nicolson (clarinet), who gave a recital in Balquhiddier in 2006, are joined by fabulous violinist Cheryl Crockett for some wonderful trios and sonatas.

### **Sunday 2nd August Simon Thacker (classical guitar) and Daisy Chute (vocalist)**

Simon Thacker is joined for this end-of-season concert by Daisy Chute for jazz-influenced classical song, the great American songbook and classical popular song. Pure magic - bring your friends!

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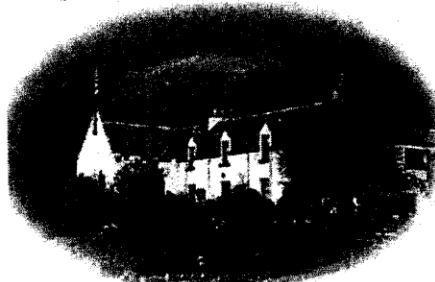
**For more information see [www.balquhiddersummertime.org.uk](http://www.balquhiddersummertime.org.uk)**

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Tulloch Lodge  
Balquhiddier  
Perthshire  
FK19 8PQ  
UK

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email: [summermusic@tullochlodge.co.uk](mailto:summermusic@tullochlodge.co.uk)

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The treasurer is David Adams  
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# BALQUHIDDER and The Clan MACLAREN

by Donald MacLaren of MacLaren and Achleskine

*"Mr. Stewart, I am thinking" said Robin.*

*"Troth, Mr. MacGregor, it's not a name to be ashamed of" answered Alan.*

*"I did not know ye were in my country, sir" says Robin.*

*"It sticks in mind that I am in the country of my friends the MacLarens" says Alan.*

This dialogue set in Balquhider, from Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, was of course between Alan Breck, a Stewart of Appin, and Robin Oig, youngest son of Rob Roy MacGregor (and whom we shall meet later—at the end of a rope). It well illustrates the need to separate fact from fiction. At least Stevenson got his history right.

The Clan MacLaren did not adopt its surname until the early 13th century but as a kindred they were well established in Balquhider long before that. It is interesting that their chiefs were among the few Scottish chiefs' genealogies included as worthy of record by mediaeval writers. The line descends from King Lorn Mor at the beginning of the 6th century.

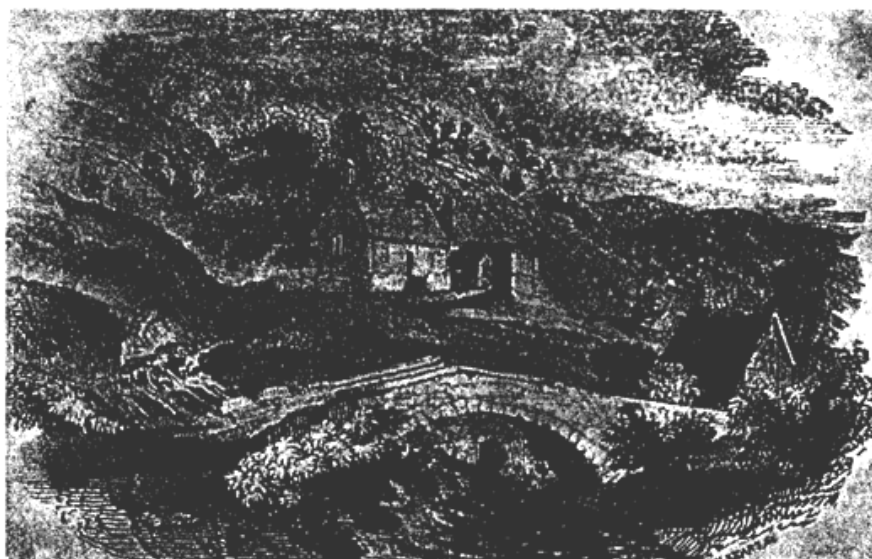
Balquhider once covered a far wider territory than the parish of today and included Loch Earn and Loch Lubnaig. This was the traditional "country" of the clan, formalised by the land dispositions of Kenneth MacAlpin when he united the two kingdoms of Dalriada and Pictland in 843. In the middle ages the chiefs held Achleskine in the heart of Balquhider (comprising also the lands along the eastern half of Loch Voil, through Achtow and round the shoulder of the hill to Glen Ogle); with chieftains (descendants of younger sons) holding Ardveich on Loch Earn; the Stank on Loch Lubnaig; and the Bruach, or Inverenty, to the west.

We know from heraldic evidence that the chiefs of the Clan were cadets of the Celtic dynasty who were first *mormaers* and later earls of Strathearn. (They bear the same arms—two red chevrons on a gold background—with the addition only of the black galley of Lorn.) The Clan fought at Bannockburn led by their chief, Donald, under the banner of his kinsman, Malise, 7th Earl of Strathearn. But the Clan's fortunes were inextricably linked to those of that



old Celtic dynasty and when the earldom was forfeited to the Crown in 1344 the then chief was required to obtain a formal charter to the lands. This he could easily have done. But, holding to the Celtic principle that the rights to their lands were inalienable, he and his successors consistently refused to do so.

Throughout its history, the church formed a central part in the life of the Clan. Abbot Labhran was a pivotal figure to both. A feature of the Celtic church was that an abbot could marry and have legitimate succession. Labhran—Laurence in Gaelic—was an abbot (a title still



THE OLD KIRK OF BALQUHIDDER, WITH THE RUINS OF EAGLAIS BEG  
(Taken from an old engraving)

used then by the head of a family holding abbatial lands) who lived in the early 1200s and he was sufficiently distinguished that his name was taken by the clan as a patronymic: in Gaelic, MacLabhrainn (from which MacLaren is derived, together with other variants including a transliteration closer to the original Gaelic, MacLaurin).

It was Labhran who built *Eaglais Beg*, the "little church", the earliest of the three churches within the present kirkyard of Balquhidder. It stood just east of what are now the ruins of the "old Kirk", built some four hundred years later. Burial within a church was the prerogative of the founder's kin and this right was vested in – and exercised by – his heirs, the chiefs of the clan that bore his name: Clan Labhran. The latest Chief to be buried there, in 1966, was Donald, father of the present.

Another tradition linking the Clan and the church was the MacLarens' right to enter and take their places before others. This was renewed just twenty years ago on the occasion of a joint service in the kirk for MacLarens and MacGregors.

Over the centuries, life in Balquhidder, as in most of the highlands, alternated between periods of calm (if not prosperity) and violence – often erupting out of small incidents. The origins of some remain unknown: for example, the murder in 1532 of the then vicar, John MacLaren, apparently

by some of his own parishioners and kinsmen, including three MacLarens who were subsequently dispossessed and outlawed. (It seems a high price was paid by all parties for what might have been an exceptionally poor sermon.)

Other events were better recorded. One such was the battle at the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th century between the MacLarens and the Buchanans of Leny. Tradition tells us that a MacLaren was on his way home from St. Kessog's fair at Kilmahog when he was overtaken by a party of Buchanans who taunted him and smacked him across the face with a salmon. Turning on his tormentors he cried that it took fine courage for half a dozen Buchanans to set upon a solitary MacLaren, but they would not dare to repeat the insult at St. Angus's fair.

Now apparently this MacLaren was an "innocent" (i.e. simple; not to be confused with the fact that the MacLarens are always the innocent party) and he forgot to tell the rest of the clan about the challenge he had just issued. St. Angus Day came and, with it, a great body of men marching up through Strathyre. The two clans met at *Beannach Aonghais* but the MacLarens, caught unprepared and outnumbered, were forced back almost to the Kirkton. There on the slope beneath *Creag an Tuirc* (the ancient rallying point and slogan of the Clan) they made a last stand, prepared to fight

it out to the end, when one man, seeing his son cut down, hurled himself with fresh fury against the enemy.

Inspired by his rage, or *mire chatha*, the MacLarens counter-charged and drove the Buchanans down the hill towards the Balvaig River. By this time reinforcements were coming up in response to the *crois taraidh*, the fiery cross sent round at first enemy; and the Buchanans were caught between the river (deeper than it is today) and the merciless claymores of the MacLarens. Those who stood were cut down. Those who tried to swim were drowned. Only two succeeded in getting across and they too were pursued and slain: one at Gartnafueran and the last at the place whose name recalls the whole affair, Stroneslany.

A later account has it that the MacGregors stood by and offered help in return for the MacLarens surrendering their right to enter the church first; that the offer was accepted; and that the MacGregors won the day. As the MacGregors did not establish a foothold in Balquhiddy until about two hundred years later, and at the time were still principally in Glenurchy and Glen Dochart, this version, sadly, is a *Boilich Clan a Gregor* (which scarcely needs translation).

Incomers there had always been; and numbers increased gradually from the 16th century. With Stewarts, and then Fergussons, relations were friendly. Sir William Stewart of Baldoran, the Royal Baillie for the lands of Balquhiddy, established his own people particularly in Glenbuckie. The marriage in 1535 between his grandson and the daughter of Patrick Mor MacLaren of Achleskine, the then chief, was the first of many marriages between the two families.

(And it was the daughter of a MacLaren Chieftain of Ardveich who married Sir John Stewart, the Lord of Lorn, in 1463 and whose son, Dugald, founded the Stewarts of Appin.) The great-grandmother of the present MacLaren Chief was a Stewart of Glenbuckie; the grandmother of the present Stewart of Ardvorlich, a MacLaren.

The Clan Gregor was altogether less fortunate when pressure was put on their lands. As the Campbells acquired greater holdings they were



THE FAMOUS DUELL 1734  
(Taken from an old engraving)

ruthless in supplanting MacGregors with their own people. This in turn had its impact on Balquhiddy. One of the most notorious MacGregor chieftains was Duncan Ladosach who, in 1542, raided Balquhiddy from his stronghold on Loch Rannoch, as recorded in The Black Book of Taymouth:

"My cheif and freindis then I gart convene To ane prive counsall all thegidder, Quhilk the Clanlaurent full soir micht mene. The caus thair of ye may weill consider: In the Passion oulk into Balquhiddy Sevin and tuentie we slew into that place Be fyre and suorde, thai gat na uther grace"

Ladosach and his two sons were later captured and beheaded by Campbell of Glenurchy. But again, sixteen years later, the MacGregors came over from Glendochart and burnt and murdered eighteen households of MacLarens in Edinchip: men, women and children.

This period marked the nadir in the fortunes of Clan Labhran. The two massacres had been preceded by the loss of 130 men nearly a hundred years before at the battle of Leacann an Dothaidh, in support of Dugald Stewart of Appin against the MacDougalls and MacFarlanes; and by further heavy losses in the royal cause at Sauchieburn (1488), Flodden (1513) and Pinkie (1547).

Yet the Clan never lost its integrity. In 1587, "Clanlawren" appeared in the Roll of the "Clannis that hes Capitanes, Cheiffis and Chiftanes quhome on they depend, oftymes againis the willis of thair landis lordis" (i.e. Crown-appointed feudal superiors).



This was annexed to an Act of Parliament passed "for the quieting" of the Borders, Highlands and Isles – a sort of grand, early ASBO. The Highlands at this time were plagued with large numbers of "broken men", those wanted by the law or those who, dispossessed from their former lands, had taken to marauding. Again, in a follow-up Act of 1594, Clan "Lawren" were cited for harbouring "broken men". Ironically, several MacLarens were recorded in the Privy Council Register as being fined for "resetting" i.e. giving shelter to...MacGregors.

There was intermarriage too. But relations between the two clans remained tense and once more came to a head, in 1734, through the pretensions of Rob Roy. He had his eye on a tack held by John MacLaren of Wester Invermenty and demanded that he should get it when the lease fell in. When this was refused he issued a challenge to settle the matter by force. Both clans called up their allies (the Stewarts of Appin coming fifty miles to support theirs) but, seeing himself outnumbered, Rob Roy changed his mind and suggested single combat. The duel took place in the haugh below the Kirkton. The MacLarens offered Alastair Stewart of Invernahyle the honour of being their champion and he dealt Rob Roy the wound from which he died some weeks later. It might have seemed that justice was done - but not for John MacLaren of Invermenty. Fifteen months later, as he was ploughing, he was shot in the back by Robin Oig, aided by others of Rob Roy's progeny. Robin Oig was finally brought to account, not for this, but for the later abduction and manslaughter of Jean Key. He was executed in 1754.

On the broader canvas of Scottish history, the Clan was proud to play its part: from the Wars of Independence through to the last moment when clans had a military role to play. Together with their allies from Appin, they fought consistently for the Royal House of Stuart: in the campaigns of Montrose for Charles I, in 1644-5; for James VII at Killiecrankie, in 1689; for his son at Sheriffmuir in 1715; and for his grandson in 1745-6. On the right at Culloden, together with the Camerons and the Atholl Brigade, they were the only part of the Prince's army to break the Government's front line.

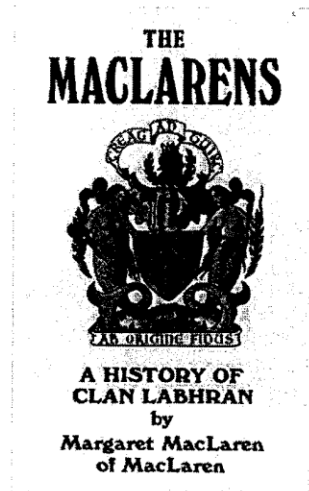
Today, long after the Clan ceased as a political, economic and military institution, the ties of kinship that originally cemented it remain as strong. Though the Chief still lives in the ancestral *duchus*, or special patrimony of the Chieftly House, the Clan itself is scattered in different parts of the world. Wherever they have

settled, MacLarens have made their mark; but they still know Balquhiddie as their ancestral home. The Societies of the Clan – in Scotland, North America and Australia – now act as the practical framework for the Clan's activities in modern society. Besides clan-specific events, they contribute materially to the welfare and life of the community and the area of their origins: from supporting the kirk, and village hall; to the highland games, to the local schools. It is kinship that this year is bringing together people from all clans, not just MacLarens, in what will be the largest international clan gathering. The Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs are directly involved in the preparations to welcome their kinsmen. A historical footnote worth remarking is that two of the closest collaborators in that joint effort are the MacLaren and MacGregor Chiefs.

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It has been said that stubbornness is a dominant MacLaren characteristic. It led their Chiefs to refuse to compromise by asking for a charter for their Clan lands, or for official recognition by the Crown. But it was stubborn tenacity and a strong sense of kinship that made the Clan what it is today and brought it unbroken through forfeiture, wars, massacres, emigration, economic and social revolution. We cannot see what the future will bring, but so long as family means anything the Clan will survive, adapting itself to changing conditions and to horizons no longer limited by the Braes of Balquhiddie and the hills of Drumalban.

**To read the story of The Clan MACLAREN  
Purchase The MacLarens  
by Margaret MacLaren of MacLaren**



The book is available through Rosemary Whittemore at a cost of £12 plus post see p13

## THE MACLAREN OF MACLAREN

Donald MacLaren was appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to Tbilisi, serving there from 2004 to 2007.

His daughter, Iona, is living there now having married a Georgian chieftain from the mountains of Svaneti.

Entering the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1978, he previously served in Berlin, Moscow, Havana, Caracas and Kiev. He left the FCO in 2008 and has formed a partnership called Perfect Pitch, teaching the skills of persuasive speaking

He re-acquired Kirkton Farm thirty years ago and has lived there with his family since 1987.

He and Maida were married in the Kirk in 1978; and their five children were baptised there.



The MacLaren Family Group  
From left to right  
Iona, Donald Og, Maida, Marina, Florian, Donald Mor, and Louis

**The Lady's Well** by Alexander Stewart ( born at Cuilt, parish of Balquhidder)

The gentle breeze o' hairvest  
Wis Blawin' thro the wind,  
An' swayed the leafy rowans  
That hung wi' berries red.  
I saw the pheasant glidin'  
Adown the rural deel,  
When sittin' neath the willow  
Asidethe Lady's Well.

I sat aneath the willow  
Upon its crooked stern,  
An' on the glossy surface  
I carved a lassie's name;  
A name that frae the tree tops  
In siller accents fell,  
I thrilled to see it graven  
Aside the Lady's Well.

An' for a blissful moment  
I saw a vision pass  
Wi' flowin' hair like sunlicht  
A heavy, gowden mass;  
A dreamy kin' o' music  
Enthralled me wi' a spell  
An' fairy notes were chimin'  
Aroon' the Lady's Well

The The whin on the gatepost  
A cheerie twitter gae',  
An' O, I kent fu brawly  
The name he tried to say,  
The name that I had whispered  
In silence to myself,  
Tho' there wis nane to listen  
Aside the Lady's Well

A bee flew over the brambles:-  
The robin turned his head;  
The fairies ceased their music-  
My pleasant dream had fled;  
But aye a sweetness hovered  
That time could ne'er dispel  
Where I wis left my lanesome  
Aside the Lady's Well

Nou after years of absence  
I find the willow gane,  
An' tho' the robin twitters  
He doesna seem to ken  
The magic name that often  
My saddest thochts wad quell  
The name I carved in boyhood  
Aside the Lady's Well.

Written originally about 1876. I patched up forgotten bits and added a verse or two ending in 1924. The Lady's Well is at Edinchip, and a large sprawling Willow, was close to it in 1876. Alexander Stewart. (7.2.1860—20.2.1926)

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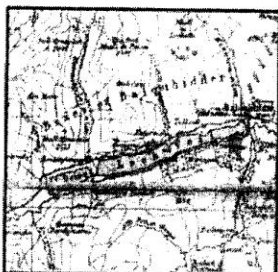
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An Historical Guide to the District

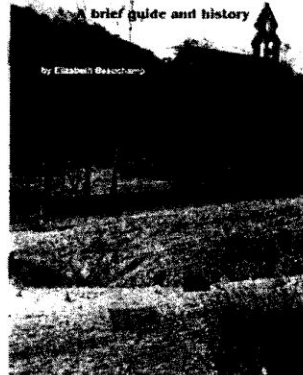


Elizabeth Beauchamp

**The Braes o' Balquhiddier  
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### Balquhiddier Church A brief guide and history

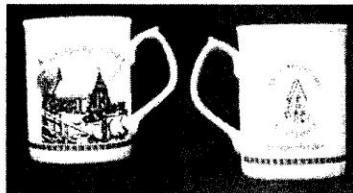
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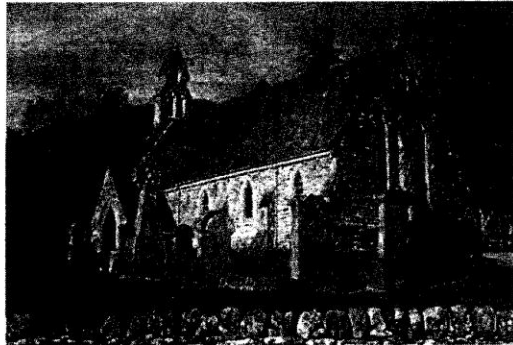
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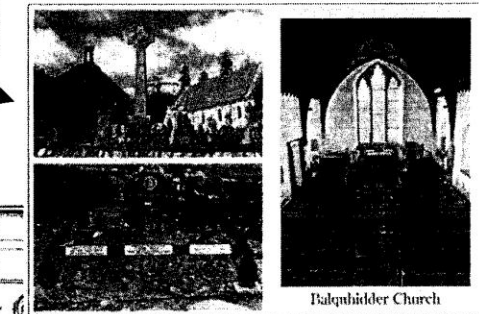
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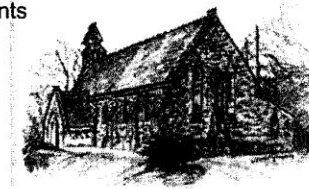


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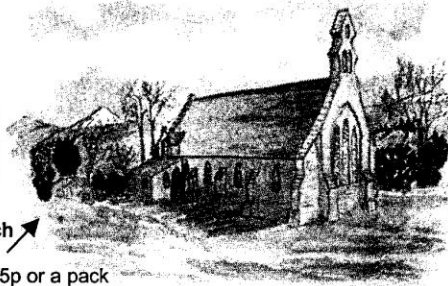
Balquhiddier Church

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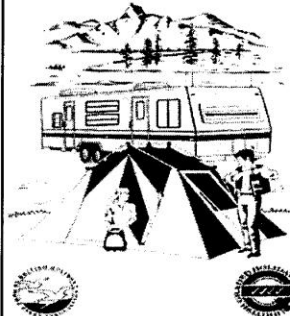
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# *Friends of Balquhiddar Church*



## Annual General Meeting

All members of The Friends of Balquhiddar Church are cordially invited to the Annual General Meeting to be held on Wednesday the 12th August 2009 in the Friendship Room of the Church at 7.30 pm.

Light Refreshments will be provided.

The meeting will be preceded by the St Angus Day Service at 6 pm.

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### Friends of Balquhiddar Church Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 12th August - 7.30 pm in the Friendship Room in the church.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

I / we - will / will not be attending

Please return to :

Miss Rosemary Whittemore  
Tannoch Taigh  
Balquhiddar  
Locheearnhead  
Perthshire  
FK19 8PB

Tel - 01877 384 359

Email : [rosemary@stronvar.co.uk](mailto:rosemary@stronvar.co.uk)

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To advertise here contact Rosemary Whittemore

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