

Congregational Profile of St Ninian's Portpatrick - 2021

Portpatrick Village

Having referred to a road map, it would be easy to assume Portpatrick is simply a suburban extension of the Royal Burgh of Stranraer. It is in fact much more than this. While dependant on Stranraer for general shopping and some leisure facilities, Portpatrick has its own pride, its own character and its own history.

Therefore think of a typical pretty Cornish fishing village, but transferred much further north and importantly with space and with tranquillity. Space to avoid crowds, to avoid traffic and often with a lower housing density. In May 2021, the BBC featured Portpatrick on "[Escape to the Country](#)" and this is a phrase to hold in mind. Despite the latitude, the climate is generally mild, albeit the characterful wind can be interesting. For many years, Portpatrick was the main port for travel from Scotland to Ireland; however the shift away from this happen long ago so while there is fond community memory of this history, the more recent move of the ferry terminals from Stranraer to Cairnryan has not had the same detrimental effect on the local economy here as it has had for our sister congregation, St. John's in Stranraer. When our village served as the major port for travel between the two nations, many thousands of soldiers were required to make the crossing at various times during the ongoing troubles; and with an uncertain Irish sea, one can imagine the doubts and feelings of these soldiers. Even today, one of the streets in Portpatrick is named "Barracks Street" i.e. where soldiers were billeted prior to the crossing. Moreover, one of the greatest prides of Portpatrick is its [RNLI lifeboat station](#) which more often than not, travels across the Irish sea to help those in difficulty on the Irish Coast. This connection with Ireland remains and is manifested also by inexpensive travel and shopping in Belfast.

Much of the income of Portpatrick these days is related to tourism. There are several attractive pubs, restaurants, hotels, and guest houses around the harbour front.

Also on the low hills around the village can be seen innumerable mobile home sites and for several years now, when the writer has identified where he lives, to some stranger elsewhere in Scotland, the response almost invariably has been "I used to go there on holiday as a small child and I really have the fondest memories of Portpatrick". Occasionally also in the harbour can be seen small boats (often from Ireland) with the occupants taking advantage of the harbour facilities which are now owned and operated by the village itself – yet another deserved source of pride.

Very recently buildings on the harbour quayside have been re-developed by the village community to offer services to residents and "boatees". Described as "[The Hub](#)" this is a new village venture that is well liked and supported. There are several [promotional videos](#) of aspects of the village available online which highlight the beauty of God's creation and the quaint, quiet life that is to be found here.

The congregational membership is primarily comprised of persons of pensionable age. While this may imply that the population of Portpatrick is largely retirees, [the statistics available from the council tell a different story](#). There seems to be little further growth in permanent housing within the village; however, substantial flats/houses have been recently built and appear to be doing very well with short and long term rentals. Generally housing costs are low compared with other housing in Britain and together with other advantages, it is hoped Portpatrick will continue to attract new residents.

In recent years, many residents in the historical homes have moved from the area. This shift has affected the morale of the congregation as we strive to meet the spiritual needs of a changing community. Many of the historical homes have become holiday homes which has presented the

opportunity to discern how the church can reach out to invite holiday goers to join us for a season. The same opportunity is also presented in the longer term caravan and camp homes. We have begun some work in this area and we hope for a spiritual leader to help us with our vision to reach out to those in our community – both permanent residents and seasonal holiday makers.

The attractions of Portpatrick with respect to lack of congestion etc. have already been noted and these are further enhanced by the values provided by Nature within the area. Walking is an ever present attraction with the [Southern Upland Way](#) taking in the whole of the village as well as the adjacent cliff tops. The [Whithorn Pilgrim Trail](#), leading to the architectural finds at Whithorn, is to also be found in the area. Our village is surrounded by small farms with sheep, lambs, and cattle providing constant interest in the fields. Ten miles beyond Portpatrick are the lovely Galloway hills and forests. Now a [Unesco biosphere site](#), and with more countryside and less buildings than almost anywhere else in the UK south of the Highlands, there is hope this will become a National Park. The pride in the ["Dark Sky"](#) viewing points, cycling, walking and horse riding facilities is evident as we choose to make our home in this beautiful area of Scotland. This section of our profile could go on for pages with the wealth of local resources and attractions such as the [Logan Gardens](#), [Glenluce Abbey](#), and the [Galloway Folklore Tradition](#). We look forward to sharing our love for this corner of God's world with you!

There is unquestionably a first rate Primary School in the village with older children travelling on an excellent bus service to the Academy in Stranraer. The primary school has a deserved appreciation for its quality of teaching and in particular it places emphasis on the role of children in the village and their responsibilities to the community. We have done outreach to the children in the community, both schools and holiday going children through an annual art contest during the summer holidays. We hope that our new priest may find opportunity for ecumenical cooperation with regards to school chaplaincy and religious education curriculum/assemblies in the local schools. There is a weekly paper with news of the town. The harbour also encompasses a cluster of simple leisure facilities such as tennis, bowls, putting green and a children's play area.

The nearby village of Sandhead has a comprehensive GP surgery with two physicians and a number of ancillary staff. There are additional major medical surgeries in Stranraer. Stranraer also has a newly upgraded community hospital; more extensive medical facilities are available at the large new hospital near Dumfries. Passing briefly to the Portpatrick Bridge Club and the Golf Club with its welcoming social events for both players and non-players, we are left solely with the comment: "What is there not to like about living and working in Portpatrick?"

ST. NINIAN'S CHURCH, PORTPATRICK

St Ninian's takes its name from Saint Ninian who is thought to have been born in Ireland and baptised when he was young. Saint Ninian was later consecrated as a Bishop by Pope Siricius and returned to build a Church at Whithorn in Galloway. Saint Ninian is said to have travelled across Scotland with the message of Jesus. There are many places in south western and central Scotland that are associated with him and an east coast journey can be traced all the way to Shetland.

We realized in creating this profile that we don't know as much about the life of our patron saint as we'd like and discerning how we can shape our mission and vision by learning more about our namesake could be an opportunity to explore with our new priest.

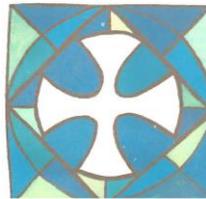
Visitors have been ministered to in St Ninian's church since 1937 and before that in a house group which began in 1916 during World War 1, and it is recorded that occasional Anglican Services were conducted as long ago as the 1890s for summer visitors to Portpatrick.

St. Ninian's church building is traditional and small: it is only approximately 15 feet wide and 34.5 feet long. It can seat 40 people in normal times. A challenge of our site is visibility. Our building is up the hill from the harbour front and surrounded by other buildings which means many visitors to the town pass us on their way to the harbour front having not noticed we are there. We have worked in recent years, as mentioned elsewhere, to embellish the beauty of our garden and signage to stand out. We are proud of this effort and hope to work with our new priest to improve upon the foundation we've begun in this area. Understandably, due to size constraints, we do not have wide ranging facilities within the church building, but we are creative with our resources and use other community facilities when necessary.

Portpatrick is endowed with two churches in close proximity on Main Street, ourselves and the Kirk. (There is a third church building nearby, but it is now a [historical site](#) rather than an place for community worship.) The Church of Scotland Kirk is a handsome building in its own grounds. Local relationship with the Kirk seem to be very good. There have been a number of joint services including those at Christmas and Remembrance Day. The parish church has also generously facilitated a funeral service for a well-respected former vestry member since our wee building would have been unable to accommodate the number of mourners expected.

In short, we not only have a lovely and peaceful church building and garden, we are a very welcoming and loving church community. Many seasonal visitors return each year to worship God in community with us. We look forward to working with our new priest to find ways that we can further our reach into the community and beyond.

Our Logo and Our Mission



The artwork for our logo was designed by a member of our congregation. It is also the logo for our action group who organize a variety of events/activities. The congregant who designed it was inspired by our collaboration with a clergy member from the Diocesan Mission Review Team. The Rev. PJ O'Maoil Mheana came to meet with our congregation after we submitted an application for a Diocesan Mission Grant, three years ago. The application was looking for funds to increase our visibility in the community with signage and money to create promotional materials to share around town. The Mission Review Team sent Rev. PJ to work with us because they could read in our application a desire to share the love of God in our community, but could also see the need for spiritual guidance and visioning work to help us move towards our goals. The logo reminds us of the ways our faith and our outlook were expanded by Rev. PJ's prayerful and missional guidance. We look forward to expanding on this work with the guidance of our new priest.

Services

During our lengthy interregnum, there have been regular Eucharistic services on a fortnightly basis, which have been led largely by retired priests. On the alternative Sundays, Matins is usually held, led by lay members of the church. The services are traditional, using the 1982 Liturgy, and are held at 10.30am on a Sunday morning. There have been additional services such as Carol Services and Christingle Services. The Services are welcoming and relaxed. After Communion Services we have regularly served refreshments and had the opportunity to speak to the Priest. We have recently been gifted a computer and speaker with software which enables us to sing hymns with recorded accompaniment. We recognise that the service times for both churches in this linked arrangement are exclusive to one another (10.30am St. Ninian's and 11.00am St. John's.) We feel this presents

an opportunity for our two congregations to work together with our new priest to discern a pattern of services that will be life giving for both communities.

The Congregation

There are 17 members of the church with some coming from the village and others from the wider rural area. In addition to the members, there are regular holiday makers and other visitors who join us from time to time. A large proportion of the congregation are of pensionable age. The congregation share in a variety of roles on a rota basis such as organizing refreshments, cleaning, flower arranging and so on. The congregation also gathers on a regular basis to undertake the maintenance of the garden and other outdoor tasks. It is used as a further opportunity to develop fellowship. The congregation and vestry are also very active in the locality in both volunteering roles and fundraising amongst other things.

It is important to note that although the current congregation is made up of individuals who live within about a 5 mile radius of the village, our "patch," or congregational area, is much larger. We recognise that a priest coming to join us will have a wide pastoral area to cover, as do all of the priests in the Galloway region of the Diocese. St. Ninian's "patch" includes all of [the Rhins](#). We also recognise that while to population of Portpatrick (and the current membership of the church) live relatively comfortable middle-class lives, the broader regional context includes more socio-economic diversity and opportunities for outreach from St. Ninian's could be developed with the guidance of a missional leader.

Spiritual Formation

One of the ways the absence of a Priest-in-Charge has affected us during our extended vacancy is in the lack of opportunity for education and formation opportunities. We hope to find a new priest with interest in leading seasonal or long term classes and studies to deepen our understanding of our faith and our denomination. Some members have expressed interest in learning more about the Scottish Episcopal Church and its liturgies and traditions – An Episcopal 101, if you will. Bible studies or book groups have been discussed. As mentioned earlier in our profile, we discovered we don't know as much about our patron saint as we'd like, and this led to an idea that we would, perhaps, enjoy a study of the saints. The possibility of engaging our faith in new ways is exciting and we hope to find a new priest who will work with us, and our sister congregation in Stranraer, to discern how God is calling us to "go deeper."

Out and About in the Community

The congregation is very active in the community and has been involved in a wide range of activities. These have included things such as holding plant sales, supporting the very popular Lifeboat week (including a Lifeboat Service at the church), food collections for [Apex](#), volunteering to support those who have been isolating, providing Christingle kits to the School, providing Christingles as part of the Christmas hampers given out by The Hub, a newly formed village support group, making and selling face masks and dog bandanas, organizing a summer art competition for children both local and those on holiday, making a recording of a carol service for distribution to members isolating over the festive period and many other activities. There are often notices in the local shops along with those in Stranraer regarding activities that are going on. There is also an on going scrapbook.

We make donations to local and national charities along with the [Bishops Lenten Appeal](#).

We are also affiliated to the [Gurkha Welfare Trust](#), [The Mission to Seafarers](#), and the [RNLI](#).

While our church may be small in numbers and building size, we make up for that with the depth of our hopes and prayers for the potential of our community. Members of the congregation action group have made efforts to improve our visibility and recognition in the local community, including:

- A) **Changes in the pew layout to facilitate the services** - These did not allow more seating but facilitated movement and were undoubtedly welcome with Covid to help a little in allowing appropriate social distancing. In due course new, flexible seating would be welcome.
- B) **Beautifying our gardens:** Work on the front and side gardens was undertaken with pleasing results. The added colour helped attract local attention and increase our visibility. Even here thought is given to our responsibility towards the community; in addition to seeking to beautify our neighbourhood and grounds we also choose to use non-carcinogenic weed killer to protect the environment and the health of visitors and pets.
- C) **Doors Open Days:** An open day was held some time ago to allow both residents and visitors to visit the church. Many shared appreciation and were duly impressed by our "wee" church. We look forward to continuing participation in local open days when they are recommenced following covid lockdowns.
- D) **Notice Boards and Branding:** The notice boards and contents have been re-appraised and constantly refreshed. Our own logo is always used where possible.
- E) **Digital Footprint:** The major part of the plan to improve awareness and fellowship was to develop our internet facility with a view to having our own web site and to use Facebook etc. to communicate with others. Partly because of covid and possibly for other reasons we have to report little progress in this area. Suitable equipment has however been purchased and the development of the facilities is now of the utmost priority. We plan to work with the Diocesan Digital Missioner to increase our digital footprint.

COVID PANDEMIC

Overall the church came through the pandemic stages reasonably well. As far as Eucharist Services were concerned, we were able to hold these whenever there was reduced risk in Dumfries and Galloway and the church authority had signaled "go ahead" with the proper protocols. Our two retired locums presiding were more than willing to conduct the service in these circumstances, although we were ever conscious of their ages and vulnerability and of course never allowed them to put themselves at risk. In addition, our interim Priest in Charge, the Rev. Canon Stephen Hazlett, helpfully undertook several services.

Our finances were obviously affected adversely when no services or collections were allowed. The negative effort of this was minimized by the efforts of the treasurer to encourage congregation members sign standing orders in lieu of collection moneys. Also there were very welcomed and generous donations by a few individuals, which enabled us to not only keep up with expenses but to also continue on this path towards the calling of a shared priest. We remain optimistic by nature which has aided us throughout both our vacancy and the pandemic.

Perhaps the most noticeable of the effects of the Covid lockdowns was the impact it had on the work of the "Action Group". The Group is small in number (6 individuals) and had set its sights on growing the fellowship of the church, enhancing its awareness to residents and visitors, supporting local good causes, and also to ease the financial strains on the church. Because of the need for shielding and lockdowns, the active numbers within the group was reduced and restrictions on meetings also seriously affected what could be done. Rebuilding the Action Group and discerning the ways we can be most effective in our mission is a top priority.

Looking beyond Covid, we feel that a priest who brings with them energy, enthusiasm, and hope will be the most helpful resource in rebuilding the efforts we've been making in recent years, as

well as expanding the church's vision for the future. We also hope to find a priest who can help us to balance the load to avoid burn out amongst our leadership. We are a few people who are trying to do so many things; sometimes it can feel overwhelming. Support in prioritising our efforts, refilling our spiritual cups, and pastorally guiding us through all that life has in store will strengthen our church as we move into this "new normal."

Like most church groups and charities, we are both anxious and curious to see what this new, post-covid reality will mean for the future of our church community. We recognise there is no "going back to normal," but we aren't yet sure about the ways we will need to modernise our approach to worship, stewardship, mission, and outreach in order to meet the community where they are and to welcome them to participate in our church.

Please read this document in conjunction with the video which provides more visual material to enable you to grasp more fully the opportunities at St Ninian's