

# Lerwick & Bressay Parish Church

## Parish Profile

Scottish Charity No. SCO17535



### Lerwick & Bressay – The community

The town of Lerwick, which lies at the heart of the parish, is the main town in the Shetland Islands and has a population of around 7,000. Sheltered by the island of Bressay to the east, its harbour, which is the northern terminus for the Northlink car ferry service linking Shetland with Aberdeen, is a busy commercial port for the oil and fishing industry.



Inland from the picturesque waterfront of its old harbour lies a thriving modern town with a wide range of shops and services including two primary schools and a six year secondary school with a roll of over 800 pupils. The town also boasts a theatre, a large sports centre and swimming pool among its wide range of recreational activities.

Although Shetland is Britain's most northerly island community, it is less than an hour's flight from Aberdeen, and there are twice daily flights to Edinburgh which take less than 90 minutes. The picturesque Shetland Islands are famous for their scenery and wildlife, as recently featured by Simon King's TV programme, and for their Viking ancestry. This Viking connection is celebrated every winter in the famous Up-Helly-aa fire festival in which almost 1000 guizers in fancy dress march through Lerwick's street's in a torch-lit procession.



*View across Lerwick harbour*

St. Columba's Church, which serves the Lerwick community, lies in the heart of the old town overlooking the old harbour and the island of Bressay. Bressay, with a population of about 400, is reached by a short car-ferry journey and offers a more traditional lifestyle with crofting being one of its main industries, although many residents travel to work in Lerwick.

A mile or so to the west of Lerwick lies the rapidly expanding commuter village of Gulberwick whose church overlooks the wide sweeping bay.

## The Parish

The parish of Lerwick & Bressay dates from a formal union in 1955 between the two Church of Scotland congregations in Lerwick, one of which (St Olaf & St Ringan's) had united ten years earlier with the ancient parish of Bressay, in existence from before the Reformation. There are three church buildings in the parish - St Columba's in Lerwick (known locally as the 'Big Kirk'), Bressay Kirk on the island of Bressay and Gulberwick Kirk in the nearest community south of the town. Services are held weekly in all three churches for most of the year, with united parish services in St Columba's on special occasions.

The Communion Roll currently comprises 448 members, and a further 23 adherents have applied for inclusion on the electoral roll during the vacancy. The parish has a *quoad omnia* constitution with a Kirk Session of 35 elders on active duty -19 men and 16 women – and the usual sub-committees dealing with matters such as finance and fabric reporting regularly to Session meetings. The Session meets 12-14 times per year.

The number attending worship in St Columba's averages 130 - 150 throughout most of the year, with much larger attendances at special services and civic events. The numbers attending worship in Gulberwick and Bressay are smaller – usually between 10 and 20.

The Church has an active social calendar which includes a Christmas social, summer BBQ, Easter breakfast and a Harvest supper, all of which are open to the public and are attended by non-members. During the past year St Columba's has been open for teas, coffees and homebakes regularly on Tuesday mornings, and a



development plan is in preparation for using the building more effectively for the church and the community. Bible study meetings have been held prior to Christmas and Easter, and there are occasional educational and instructive meetings open to all.

*Tables laid in preparation for a Kirk Social*

The Church is solely responsible for conducting worship in King Erik House, a very sheltered housing complex offering independent living for the frail elderly. A number of elders, volunteer organists and members of the congregation take part in these services, and also conduct worship in care centres and other churches throughout Shetland.

Lerwick & Bressay Parish Church is involved in conducting approximately 50 funerals per year, when members of the parish are offered comfort and support at critical times in their lives. There is an average of 10 weddings per year.

## The Buildings

**St Columba's Church** is the third building to have served as the parish church in Lerwick, and was built between 1825 and 1829. In 1895 the building was extended with the addition of the apse at the south end and the organ, which had originally been installed in 1871, was moved to its present position and a second manual was added to it. The original organ is still in use, and is about to have major restoration work carried out.



*St. Columba's Church exterior*

In 2008 it was decided to sell the church hall and undertake remodelling of the interior of St Columba's which involved the removal of the downstairs pews to create a modern multi-functional sanctuary, whilst retaining the original horseshoe gallery which was recognised as an important architectural feature of the building. The re-modelling also allowed the creation of a meeting room, a new kitchen and toilets, and a greatly enlarged vestibule. After redecoration the church was rededicated by The Very Reverend Sandy McDonald on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009.



*The newly re-furbished interior of St. Columba's Church*



**Bressay Kirk** was built in 1858, replacing a kirk built around 1722 which had, in turn, replaced three ancient chapels in Bressay. The present building, which lies close to the sea shore, has a more traditional interior with two stained glass windows on the south side, one on either side of the pulpit.

*Bressay Kirk exterior*

One of these commemorates Sir Robert Cruickshank, son of one of the ministers, who became Governor of Tasmania.



*The stained glass windows and pulpit in Bressay Church*



**Gulberwick Kirk** has been a centre of worship since 1898. Positioned as it is in the midst of a rapidly expanding community of mainly young families there is plenty of opportunities for growth. Over the years members of the congregation have

*Gulberwick Church*

been active in the community, and the recently established local action group 'Gulberwick Together' arose out of ideas the church had for serving the growing community in which it is set.



**The Manse** is a semi-detached stone built villa in central Lerwick sitting in an elevated position with an open outlook over municipal parks. The property has been well maintained, and essential repairs and re-decoration are taking place during the vacancy. This includes a complete refurbishment of the main bathroom on the first floor. The house is centrally heated throughout, with a connection to the Lerwick District Heating Scheme. A garage and storage shed are sited behind the house.



*The Manse*

## **The Organisations**

**The Sunday School** There are over 30 children in the 4 – 12 age-range who attend Sunday School regularly. Most of the children live in Lerwick but there are several whose homes are out of town. There are seven very active and enthusiastic teachers, some of whom job share, and they receive great support from parents. All child protection procedures are in place and up to date.

The children are in church for the first part of the service each Sunday, then disperse to various rooms in the building where all age-groups use “Light”, Scripture Union’s new range of contemporary resources.

Before Christmas the children are encouraged to pack a gift box for the Blythswood appeal, and last year 72 boxes were sent from St Columba’s.

**The Youth Group** The Youth Group currently has 16 young people in the 11+ age-group. It meets on Sunday evenings from 7.00 – 8.45 and offers an interesting range of activities and guest speakers. The session also includes a very popular weekend trip to an outdoor centre on the island of Burra, and the production of a mystery play.

**The Guild** St Columba’s Guild has a membership of 34 women. It is an enthusiastic friendly group with members attending very regularly. Meetings are held fortnightly from October to March. Having separated from the National Guild in 1998 the suggested Guild syllabus is no longer followed but the programmes remain varied. Leading the meeting is shared by several members.

There is outreach into the community with parcels of food being given to a nearby sheltered housing scheme at Christmas, and these are eagerly anticipated. Meetings are held in four of the local care centres when, after entertaining the residents, homebakes are shared over a cup of tea.

Guild members give generously and, as well as donating to any charity highlighted by visiting speakers, between £1,000 and £2,000 is given to church funds annually.

## **The Minister**

Since the formation of the Parish of Lerwick & Bressay in 1955 there have been five ministers, each of whom has made a significant contribution to the life of the church and the community, and each contribution has been quite different. The congregation is a committed body of people who are prepared to give of their time, talents and money to support the church, both locally and in its wider ministry, and who have a good track record of strong support for their minister. It is a busy, varied and interesting charge which offers the potential for a committed minister to develop his/her strengths in ways which demonstrate an understanding of, and empathy with, the community and the challenges it faces.