

## **Choral Evensong at St Margaret of Scotland, Braemar – Last Service Sunday 16 June 2013**

I begin this address with a note of personal self-indulgence. I've preached many hundreds of sermons, but never one from a pulpit such as this one. So here I am.

I begin with words of appreciation to those of you from the village of Braemar and roundabout who have helped get the church ready for this evening's worship.

Many turned up on Friday for a session of cleaning. It was a good effort and well done. Likewise Astrid has prepared the flowers for this service continuing a practice of many years of devotion for this building and its worship.

A number of years ago the Dean of the Diocese, who is here with us in the sanctuary tonight, came to this church and rescued as many of the original Ninian Comper fabrics as could be rescued and took them for safe keeping and restoring so far as was possible.

Likewise Doreen and Shirley having read our lessons tonight and Hugh in his capacity as lay reader in charge of this congregation have continued many years of deep devotion here.

For it all, and I count myself blessed to be at worship with you in this finest of fine buildings.

And to the Deeside Choristers and Canon Poobalan. You are taking part in an historic event tonight and it is a further blessing that as your patron I am here with you.

Twice in the last five years I have been within days of disposing of this building on the open market to anyone who might want to take it off my hands.

The financial burden and the burden that goes with sole trustee responsibility has been a very heavy one to carry with very significant risk. The likelihood of finding a viable end-use for this building whilst at the same time as retaining it as a church, the interior of which is the only reason why benefactors would want to give towards its restoration, was almost insolvable.

That was until a newly formed group comprising Brian Wood, Pete Mulvey, Dave Chandler and Ken MacKenzie together shared a vision for the use of this building.

They together with the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust and the Princes Regeneration Trust plus funding from various stakeholders have identified an end-use which more than justifies the restoration of this magnificent building.

As from midnight tonight the effective management of St Margaret's passes from me to the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust. Various legal documents enabling and ensuring transfer of ownership still need to be signed but for all intents and purposes we can presume that that will take place without hitch.

A press release tomorrow will signal this transfer.

So tonight is indeed an historic night. This service is the final public worship in this building whilst under the ownership of the diocese.

The congregation, let it not go unsaid, the growing Episcopalian congregation, in Braemar will continue to worship in St Ninian's Chapel at Mar Lodge. Its size is more congenial to our needs.

Meanwhile the first public event in St Margaret's under its new ownership takes place on Wednesday evening when the school will be in here.

It is therefore a good week therefore for the people of Braemar.

I am glad, nay relieved, that I hand the building over with these security nets in place and for that I express my thanks to the gang of four, if I may continue to call them by that name, for having put it in place.

The four of them have shown vision, courage in leadership, and displayed a real talent for the use of a derelict church building.

St Margaret's will continue as a consecrated Episcopal church available for all under its new owners. Within it will begin an ongoing sequence of events that will revolve around its hub as an international arts centre housing Paul Anderson's fiddling school.

What will happen is that a gothic church will thus be used as all gothic churches originally were, as centres of community life in all its aspects.

Taken together all this will betoken a real renaissance in the village of Braemar.

I wish the whole endeavour well and every possible success. From having worked with St Margaret's for almost six years I know it is in the best hands that are available for what lies ahead.

May God's blessing be with you and with those to whom it is now entrusted.

Amen

+Robert Gillies  
Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney