

Scotland

5 May 2024

Edinburgh, Scotland

Digging into
the Auld Sod
(the Presbies)

Rev. SIGRID MARTEN

She preached the sermon at the 11 a.m. Sunday service that Hank, Mary Wood, Emily and I attended at St Giles Cathedral.

The High Kirk

St Giles turns 900 years old this year. It spent its first 436 years as a Catholic church and its most recent 464 years as a Presbyterian church.



Digging into the Auld Sod (the Presbies)

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them.

Compared to the far more modest Stone Church of Willow Glen, the Presbyterian church Emily and I belong to in San Jose, the High Kirk of Edinburgh — St Giles' Cathedral — where we went to church our first Sunday in Scotland, is also built of stone and is Presbyterian. After that, we're talking about entirely different visuals. Part of that is because all mothers who are 850 years older than their children — and St Giles is the mother of all Presbyterian churches — can reasonably be expected to bear only a small resemblance to their kids.

St Giles' rocks are older, bigger, grayer and burdened by far more history than Stone's. It spent the first half of its 900 years as a Roman Catholic church before it was violently wrenched out of the Pope's control in the 1500s by the Reformation, a religious rebellion among former priests, including Scotland's John Knox, and political power grabs by monarchs of the time that swept across Europe. A centuries-old statue of St Giles was tossed into the polluted water of Edinburgh Castle's protective loch, stained glass windows were ripped out and the church's silver melted down because they were considered examples of Catholic excess.

Stone's stones were carefully laid by a Spanish Catholic stone mason, Manel Sunyer, who said reportedly he slept among his rocks to gain divine inspiration for exactly how they should be placed and then sang in the choir at our church after he was finished building it. The rabbi of Temple Emanu-El downtown donated an eternal light for the sanctuary because he and the church's founding pastor were good friends.

The preacher we heard in Edinburgh (the full service is on YouTube and we are occasionally on camera) was the Rev. Sigrid Marten, who moved to Scotland from Germany 30 years ago. When I spoke to her after the service and asked about her history, she said in a perfect Scottish brrrrr that she had long wanted to go into ministry "but there were no Lutherans in Scotland, the Anglicans weren't ordaining women at that time, and so I became a Presbyterian. We're all praying to the same god."

In the 16th Century, King Henry VIII, whom I wrote about in the last newsletter, created a separate Anglican denomination so that England's monarch — not a Catholic pope in Rome — was head of his nation's church. Freedom from papal authority had obvious appeal to kings and was most enticing among monarchs across northern Europe. Knox, a Scot, was held in captivity in Catholic France because of his opposition to Catholic authorities that included being caught up in the murder of a Scottish cardinal. He was later exiled to England where he helped Anglican authorities draft its Book of Common Prayer and founding documents.

But Knox had to leave England when Catholic Queen Mary I (known to Protestants as "Bloody Mary") came to the throne and he lived for awhile in Geneva, Switzerland, where he refined his theological beliefs and rules for church government. When the Reformation began to take hold among the nobility in Scotland, who opposed that country's Catholic monarch, Mary Queen of Scots, Knox returned to write a confession of faith for a "reformed" church. It would be known as the Kirk, a word borrowed from Germanic-speaking countries with their own national churches such as the Netherlands (*kerk*), Norway (*kirke* or *kyrkje*) and Sweden (*kyrka*), because Knox and his supporters wanted Scotland to have a national church as the English did. Using the word "kirk" is the Scots' way of differentiating between the national church and the Anglican Church of Scotland.

A Catholic church

St Mary & St Finnan Catholic Church stands in the village of Glenfinnan (Finnan Valley) in the Scottish Highlands.





BURNS window

The stained glass window over St Giles' main entrance was installed in 1985, designed by Icelandic artist Leifur Breidfjörð to honor Scotland's most notable poet, Robert Burns.



New organ

In 1992, a new pipe organ built in Austria by Rieger Orgelbau was installed.



 GLORY OF GOD, AND IN MEMORY OF
 OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN
 OF THE
SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS,
 WHO DIED DURING THE
 NATIONAL OCCUPATION OF CRETE 1897.

1. SERGEANT W. OLLIVANT.	2. LIEUTENANT P. I. FINCH.
3. CORPORAL J. FERGUSON.	N° 4464 PRIVATE A. GRACIE.
4. PRIVATE D. M. GREGOR.	N° 5080 J. GRAY.
5. CORPORAL T. HUTCHESON.	N° 4451 M. M'KAY.
6. PRIVATE C. CAMERON.	N° 4751 E. M'PHERSON.
7. PRIVATE M. CONNELL.	N° 3555 J. MOLYNEUX.
8. PRIVATE J. CORMACK.	N° 3895 E. RICHARDSON.
9. PRIVATE T. DREW.	N° 4773 G. SHEW.
10. PRIVATE N° 4831 A. WHITELY.	
11. PRIVATE N° 5047 C. YOUNG.	

THOSE WHO FELL IN THE NILE EXPEDITION 1898
 BATTLE OF THE ATBARA 8th APRIL 1898.

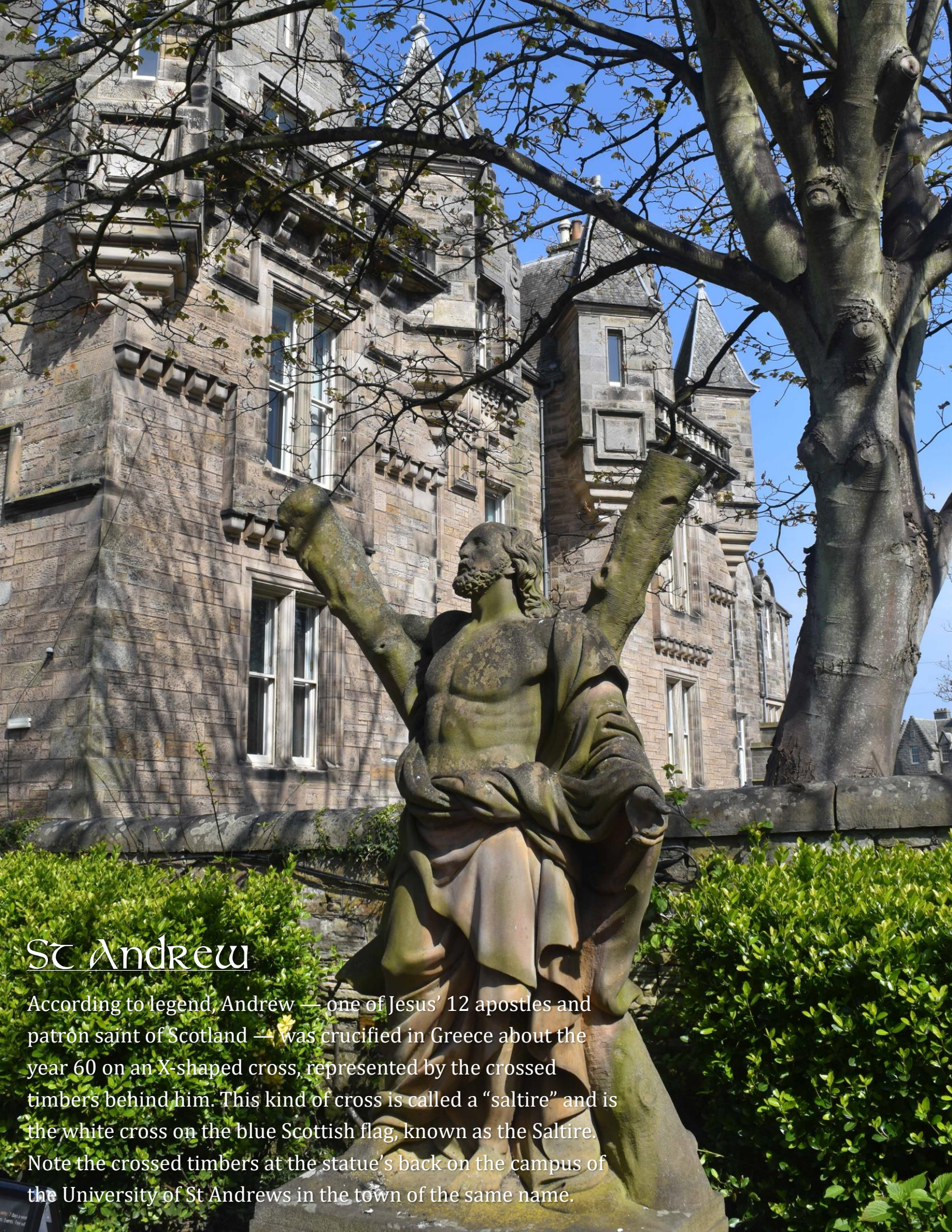
LIEUTENANT P. A. GORE.	KILLED IN ACTION.	N° 4977 PRIVATE J. DEVLIN.
13. 3 rd L ^{ieut} CORP. D. MARTIN.	N° 3910 A. DUFOUR.	J. McNEILL.
14. 180 PRIVATE W. BOWMAN.	N° 4484	
DIED OF WOUNDS.		
CAPTAIN A. C. D. BAILLIE.	N° 4642 DRUMMER D. FAIRBAIRN.	
BATTLE OF KHARTOUM 2 nd SEPTEMBER 1898.		
KILLED IN ACTION.		
15. 5286 PRIVATE H. MULLEN.	N° 5373 PRIVATE J. JOHNSTONE.	
DIED OF DISEASE.		
16. 2684 SERGEANT P. GORDON.	N° 4098 PRIVATE T. JOSS.	
17. 4779 CORPORAL W. GIBSON.	N° 3627 W. NEWMAN.	
18. 5114 1 st L ^{ieut} CORP. A. M. LOWSON.	N° 5215 D. McIVER.	
19. 4691 DRUMMER A. S. HOUNGTON.	N° 4259 W. McKENZIE.	
20. 3434 PRIVATE J. CHRISTIE.	N° 4686 J. RAE.	
21. 4274 E. COLECAT.	N° 4089 J. PATTERSON.	
22. 3838 R. ELLIS.	N° 4560 G. SCOTT.	
23. 4151 H. EVANS.	N° 5201 M. RIPPON.	
24. 3912 F. HEYNE.	N° 5177 G. STEPHEN.	
25. 3679 PRIVATE W. SHERLOCK.		

ERECTED BY THEIR COMRADES



John Knox

Knox preached his first sermon at St Giles in 1559. The next year, Scotland's Parliament declared the nation a Protestant country.



St Andrew

According to legend, Andrew — one of Jesus' 12 apostles and patron saint of Scotland — was crucified in Greece about the year 60 on an X-shaped cross, represented by the crossed timbers behind him. This kind of cross is called a "saltire" and is the white cross on the blue Scottish flag, known as the Saltire. Note the crossed timbers at the statue's back on the campus of the University of St Andrews in the town of the same name.

Notes on photos

REV. SIGRID MARTEN — Marten, from Hamburg, Germany, is one of three ministers at St Giles. Her sister, Dr. Eike Marten, is an academic adviser at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. The Rev. Dr. George Whyte, a Scot, is the head pastor and the Rev. Sam Nwokoro, an Anglican priest from Nigeria, also serves while he is completing his PhD at the University of Edinburgh. There are two services each Sunday, one at 9:30am when communion is served and the one at 11am when we attended.

THE HIGH KIRK — Despite its still-used popular name, St Giles has not been a Cathedral since it became a Protestant church. Cathedrals are churches where a bishop sits, and Presbyterian Churches have no bishops, only teaching elders (ministers) and ruling elders (elected members of a congregation). “Presby” comes from Greek and means “elder.” The Church of Scotland, like the various Presbyterian denominations in the United States, has an annual or bi-annual national gathering called the General Assembly to which churches send delegates. The assembly is presided over by a moderator elected by the delegates, and that person then becomes the national spokesperson for the church until the next General Assembly. The one-year term of the Church of Scotland’s current moderator, the Rev. Sally Foster-Fulton of Beaufort, South Carolina, expires this month. She met and married an exchange student from Scotland, Stuart Fulton, at Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C. Both became ministers and served churches in South Carolina before they moved to Glasgow, Scotland. As head of Scotland’s national church, Sally preached the sermon at the service for King Charles III at St Giles when he was presented with the country’s crown jewels.

A CATHOLIC CHURCH — This church stands alongside a railway line most people in the world know as fictional Harry Potter’s way to Hogwarts. In the next newsletter, you’ll see another view down this valley filled by Loch (lake) Shiel. In the movies, Hogwarts is a computer-generated image standing on this mountainside.

BURNS WINDOW — Robert Burns (1759-1796) is considered Scotland’s greatest poet and lyricist. The text of his most famous work is written in the Scots language and sung around the world on New Year’s Even (Hogmanay in Scotland); Auld Lang Syne. Burns did not claim full credit for the lyrics but said they were told to him by an old man. The blue of the ceiling is the color of Scotland’s national flag and the chairs in which worshipers sit each have the X-shaped cross of St Andrew carved into the back. Both the color and cross are widely used in Scottish architecture that otherwise has no religious context.

NEW ORGAN — The interior of St Giles, like many old churches, is built in the shape of a cross. The pulpit where the preacher stands is in the center of the cross facing the organ and choir stalls, which are on the right as you enter the main doors. Worshipers sit at the top and bottom portions of the vertical length of the cross facing the preacher (and each other) in the center.

JOHN KNOX — This nearly life-sized statue of the Kirk’s founder stands along one wall of St Giles.

ST ANDREW — According to some ancient historians, Andrew reportedly preached after Jesus’ crucifixion in the Black Sea area and so is also patron saint of Ukraine, Romania and Russia as well as Scotland. At one of his general audiences in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI noted that the name “Andrew” is not Hebrew but Greek, indicative of a certain cultural openness in his family that cannot be ignored.” Scotland’s connection to him began in the year 345 when, according to legend, an Irish monk named St Regulus, or St Rule who was carrying some of his bones was shipwrecked on the Scottish coast at what is now the city of St Andrews.

PERMANENTLY PARKED — It seems appropriate that a hero of a people known for their practicality and thrift — “Scots have short arms and deep pockets” — would remain buried in a grave that was paved over for a parking lot.



Permanently parked

John Knox wanted to be buried within 20 feet of St Giles and was, in 1572, when this spot was in a graveyard and the automobile was unheard of.