

IPS PRESIDENT'S SPEECH 2024

by

John M Dawson, Dip Com, FIPS

Good afternoon, everyone,



It is a great pleasure to see you all here today.

Today I am going to mention some of the highlights of the year for me and how several involve my use of shorthand, the IPS and how I have met people associated with shorthand and the IPS throughout the year.

First of all, I attended the St Columba's Burns Supper, Royal Ascot where I backed horses in several races that came in 1st, two in second place and one in 4th place that resulted in me coming home slightly richer than when I first arrived at Royal Ascot where I saw the King and Queen and other members of the Royal Family. It was a warm, summer's day and the atmosphere and other facilities at the racecourse were superb. I had lunch at the Queen Anne Enclosure and the races were fantastic. I often go to Royal Ascot where I get reduced priced tickets via the Comets, the sports and social side of the Met Police where I worked for several years.

Another highlight was when I attended the Christian Police Association Annual Conference in Lancashire where many of the delegates were intrigued to see my bible written in Pitman shorthand and some of them never knew that a bible written in Pitman shorthand existed but were very pleased to learn of this and the IPS.

Also in June I attended the marriage of Ruaraidh Walker Kennedy Drummond and Carlos Antonio Martinez at St Columba's Church of Scotland, Pont Street and the reception at the Caledonian Club, Halkin Street, London. This was the first same sex marriage held at the church. This was a glorious summer's day and many of the men were dressed in kilts as we walked accompanied by a piper through the streets of London from the church to the club.



The wedding followed on from the first same-sex marriage held in Crown Court Church of Scotland, Russell Street, Covent Garden on 25 November 2023. I was also present at that marriage of James Alexander Corley and Harry Thomas Mackrill.

It was on the 26 June that I sang with the Parliament Choir Beethoven's Missa Solemnis at the Royal Festival Hall in order to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the formation of the choir. The concert was well attended and a big success and was followed by another sell out concert of Handel's Messiah at St John's Hall (previously known as St John's Smith Square) on Wednesday, 27 November. Earlier this week the Parliament choir was invited to sing carols at Mr Speaker's Staff Christmas Carols at the Speaker's House, House of Commons and the following day to sing carols accompanied by the Salvation Army band in Westminster Hall, Palace of Westminster. Both events were very well attended by members of both Houses of Parliament, staff and visitors to Parliament and they were a great success.

Like last year, I went on a cruise on the Ambience but on this occasion it was a Highlights of Britain cruise around the British Isles, The Republic of Ireland, Le Havre in France and Guernsey. We sailed from London Tilbury on Tuesday, 3 September and our first port of call was Invergordon. From the late 1950s onwards, Invergordon became known for its production of grain spirit, with major distilleries that still dominate the eastern side of the town today – such as Glenmorangie distillery. I also visited the local parish church, Balnagown estate owned by the Al-fayed family, former owners of Harrods, where we saw salmon jumping and this was a very interesting experience. Mr Al Fayed bought the castle, the former stronghold of the Ross clan, in 1972 and the estate now stretches from the east coast between Alness and Tain in Ross-shire to within three miles of the west coast in Sutherland. We carried on to the town of Dornoch where we visited Dornoch Cathedral where Madonna and Guy Ritchie baptised their son Rocco in the church before their wedding in nearby Skibo Castle. It is a beautiful cathedral where I met the organist Roderick MacLean who is the sister of Catrina, a lady who attends St Columba's Church of Scotland in London.

Four miles along the Dornoch Firth is Skibo Castle, built by the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, who became vice president of Royal Dornoch Golf Club. In 1901 he presented the members with the Carnegie Shield and the competition for this magnificent prize is now one of golf's oldest amateur open tournaments which was held for the 100th time in 2013.

On 6 September we visited Kirkwall, Orkney where I visited many places including St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney Wireless Museum where, to my great delight and pleasant surprise, whilst engaged in conversation with the receptionist, 78-year-old Bruce Gorie, he informed me that he was also a Pitman shorthand writer and in 1963 he gained an 'O' level in shorthand at school in Orkney and he was, like me, the first boy ever at the school to learn shorthand and typing and he excelled in both of these subjects. Bruce, after leaving school, left Orkney to work in Edinburgh for 25 years

before returning to Orkney where he now thoroughly enjoys working at the Wireless Museum. I informed Bruce about the IPS and he was very pleased to learn about the IPS but he unfortunately had never heard of the IPS before. Bruce attends Kirkwall Cathedral.

After we left Orkney, we proceeded to Stornoway which is the main and largest town of the Outer Hebrides as well as the capital of Lewis and Harris. Donald Trump's mother Mary Anne MacLeod was born in the village of Tong on the Isle of Lewis near Stornoway. Raised in a Gaelic-speaking household, she was the youngest of ten children born to Mary Ann MacLeod and Malcolm MacLeod. Her father was a crofter and fisherman. English was Mary's second language, which she learned at school. I was informed by our guide that Mary regularly returned to Lewis and worshipped in her local church where the services were conducted in Gaelic.

In Stornoway I visited Lewis castle where a wedding reception was taking place and I visited the museum next door to the castle but to my great horror when I looked more closely at the fridge magnet I had purchased at the museum shop as a souvenir of my visit to Stornoway, I was shocked to read on the back that it had been made in China. Stornoway is a very interesting place to visit but as I walked along the road near the River Creed towards Lewis Castle it reminded me very much of Saltcoats which is next to my hometown of Stevenston, Ayrshire. It took me almost 50 years since I sang the song about lovely Stornoway at my brother's wedding reception before I actually did make my way to Stornoway and this was a great milestone and delight for me. I will sing a couple of verses of the song to you as follows.

Make your way to Stornoway
On the road to Orinsay
Where my thoughts return each day
By lovely Stornoway

Where the folk are truly kind
Where you leave the world behind
Where each cloud is silver-lined
By lovely Stornoway

[We could not embed the audio here, but it is on the website for you to play!]

There's many more verses and I sang this at my brother's wedding. It took me 50 years to get there, but it was worthwhile going.

Also, on this visit to the Outer Hebrides we saw some very outstanding scenery on our way to Harris where we visited a whisky distillery and a shop where I bought this very good quality Harris Tweed scarf that had been produced locally. I brought it



along today and I think this is the first time I have actually worn it. Made by local people in their croft. This is very special. It wasn't made in a factory, but by local people in their home.

Following our visit to Harris and Lewis we sailed to Tobermory which is the capital of the Isle of Mull in the Scottish Inner Hebrides. It is located on the east coast of Mishnish, the most northerly part of the island, near the northern entrance of the Sound of Mull. Iona is just south of Mull where I have spent several holidays staying at the Abbey and the MacLeod Centre, named after the Iona Community's founder, Lord George MacLeod, a soldier and Church of Scotland Minister in Govan, Glasgow. It was on an earlier visit to Iona and Mull that I first tasted baked potatoes with Haggis (a thing you can rarely get in England) in a restaurant in Tobermory, something that I had never had before but often make for myself now in London. I also visited, amongst other places on this very beautiful island, a whisky distillery where we had a whisky tasting and I bought a bottle of the famous Tobermory malt whisky that I still have at home in my cupboard for drinking on special occasions!

We visited Tobermory on a Sunday and on that day I produced my shorthand bible as two of the ladies on my dinner table were Pitman shorthand writers. Again, they did not know that such a thing existed, the bible written in Pitman shorthand and they had not heard of the IPS before but I gave them the details as they said that they were very interested in the work of the IPS, that they would look at the website and may contact the IPS with a view to possibly joining in future.

As we sailed away from Mull - our ship The Ambience was too large to enter the port and we entered Tobermory by tender - we proceeded to Ringaskiddy, Ireland from where I went on a visit to Cork City via lovely Irish countryside en route to Jameson's Midleton Distillery, Cork where I enjoyed a fully guided tour of the distillery as well as a tasting of some premium whisky produced by Jameson's. However, what delighted me most about this visit was to learn that although many millions of bottles of Jameson Irish whiskey are sold annually worldwide, Jameson Irish whiskey was actually created by a Scotsman John Jameson of Clackmannanshire, and a Presbyterian too. It gave me great pleasure to learn about this from our guide and to learn that Jameson was born in Alloa during 1740. This was indeed a highlight of my holiday.

However, we proceeded from Ireland to St Mary's, Isles of Scilly where I visited the home and grave of our former Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Harold Wilson frequently attended services at The Old Church of St Mary The Virgin near where he was laid to rest in 1995 and at the church of St Mary's, Hugh Town.

From my early childhood I had often heard of the Isles of Scilly and Harold Wilson's many holidays there but I had never been to the Isles of Scilly before and to visit Stornoway, the Isles of Scilly and Guernsey all on this one trip was a very big thing for me.

St. Mary's is the Isles of Scilly's largest island (population 1,800) and Hugh Town is the largest settlement on the Isles of Scilly and its administrative centre. We were taken on a walking tour of Hugh Town and in particular to the Star Castle Hotel which is set in a 16th-century castle with 4 acres of gardens and sea views. The gardens surrounding the castle and the views from it are superb. I found the people on the Isles of Scilly to be extremely helpful and friendly and it was whilst I was in the Tourist Information Office that a couple overheard me asking the staff how to get to the grave of Harold Wilson and they said that they were going that way and they offered me a ride on their buggy (similar to a golf buggy) and I accepted. This was a great way to explore St Mary's and an ideal way to drive along the countryside and coast of the island, especially on a warm and sunny day.

From the Isles of Scilly we sailed to St Peter Port, Guernsey. Again, we arrived on Guernsey by tender as our ship was too big to enter the harbour.

However, it was a very special event and great thrill for me to visit Guernsey because ever since I was at primary school I had often heard about the Channel Islands and how wonderful they were but it was not until September this year that I first visited the Channel Islands although I had flown over them en route to Madeira a few years ago.

St Andrew's in the Grange is a Church of Scotland church that I had heard about many times and when I knew that I was going to visit Guernsey I emailed the Reverend Justin Taylor, minister of St Andrew's in the Grange, to let him know that I would be visiting Guernsey within the next few days and to my great delight and surprise within 5 minutes I received a phone call from Justin saying that he would be delighted to meet with me in Guernsey and to take me on a tour of the island and I immediately accepted his kind offer. I told Justin my date and time of arrival on Guernsey and he met me at the harbour about 12 noon and proceeded to take me on an extensive and very enjoyable tour of the island. We visited the German Hospital, the Little Chapel and German Naval Signals. We travelled many miles through narrow streets and saw how buildings were numbered during the war as the Germans often got lost whilst travelling around Guernsey. We went to coastal defences where we had our pictures taken and finally, after having an extensive tour of the island, we went to St Andrew's in the Grange where Justin introduced me to members of the congregation and presented me with a book detailing the history of the church on Guernsey. I then had one or two hours of free time to shop and send postcards before boarding the tender to take me back to the ship and have dinner. I had a glorious time on Guernsey and the weather was very good too but later in the day I saw a large and very beautiful rainbow in the sky!

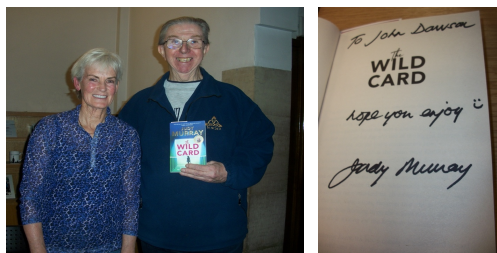
If you just pass this round. That is me and the Minister of the Church there.



Having left Guernsey, the Ambience then proceeded to Le Havre, France, our final port of call where I visited Notre Dame Cathedral and lit a candle beside a statue of Jesus in the company of other fellow passengers from the Ambience. I then had a wonderful lunch near the beach and watched and fed some of the birds nearby as I sat in the open air restaurant.

We then proceeded back to Tilbury but the cruise was full of many highlights, many happy experiences and great memories.

More recently, I attended the St Andrew's Book Festival in London on 28 November and attended a talk given by Judy Murray, a former Scottish international tennis player and mother of Andy Murray. She has 64 national titles to her name and is a former GB Womens team Captain. I bought a copy of Judy's book "The Wild Card" and she signed the book along with a personal message to me. Judy is a very good speaker and I had a very pleasant conversation with her that evening. I have brought along a copy of her book to show you.



These are some of the highlights of my year and I have mentioned the IPS at every opportunity and met several shorthand writers, many of them Pitman shorthand writers.

I will just conclude by saying that it is a great pleasure for me to be with you this afternoon and I wish you all a very, very Happy Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.



*(L-R: Mary Sorene, June Harris, Richard Ward, President, Damian Pitman (Patron)
Wendy and Charles Goldwater listening to John's talk.)*

Please note that the IPS President, John Dawson, would be very pleased to hear from any member of the IPS or reader of his speech in relation to any comments they may have relating to this speech and the IPS as a whole. John can be contacted at noswadmnhoj@yahoo.com