

A tired, worn out old lady. That was the West Church Hall in Dornoch. Much loved and much used but drastically in need of refurbishment and re-visioning. It was a renewed and very strong call to the congregation of Dornoch Cathedral, to provide a space to help people to become whole in body, mind and spirit that provided the inspiration to take the step in faith that became the Creag Mhor (Big Rock) project.

Waters were tested in the wider community and lots of professional and voluntary organisations were consulted as the congregation sought to find the role God had in mind for us – a way, faithfully, to serve Him and in his name, the whole parish.

So many possibilities opened up and in tandem with other local community projects, a development plan was mapped out for the area with the congregation keen to seek to make room for those most frequently sidelined. Even before the refurbishment, a lunch club and a group for adults with learning disabilities and a youth cafe were established and with their success, conversations and ideas took flight.

The refurbishment plans were drawn up with three distinct phases. Very quickly it became clear that aiming for phase 1 alone was going to be too limiting so the decision was made to do phases 1 and 2 together putting in place the infrastructure for phase 3 which could be completed at a later date.

All we needed to do was raise £625,000.

A small, Highland parish of less than 2000 people.

At the same time, more and more possible uses for the hall, surfaced - over and above the usual church activities we would normally have, so grants were applied for – including to the General Trustees – and an enormous amount of fundraising (and prayer) began.

The hall was officially reopened on Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 2016 by the Very Rev John Chalmers with 94yr old Jessie Bell who had been baptised in the building when it had been a church, cutting the ribbon. A labour of love blessed on St Valentine's day. There was a ceilidh too – lots of dancing and singing and music – celebrating the miracles God brings about even today.

Just a few weeks since it's opening and the pristine hall is already a little dented – but that's fantastic because that is precisely why it's there. To be used!

And even better still – new groups are being formed to help the socially isolated, those with mental health issues and long term health conditions – and we see so much more we could do.

The refurbishment is the next chapter in the continuing story of the life, work, witness of the congregation of Dornoch Cathedral.



A room we had upstairs in the hall which (for obvious reasons) was barely used.



Roof space hidden above the suspended ceiling you see in the next picture.



The day of the clear out to allow the work to begin. What's not obvious in the photo is the slope of the floor. The building was the local cinema at one point in its varied history.



The calm before the storm of feeding the 5000 on the re-dedication day (if that's not mixing too many Gospel stories).



All ages share in the feast - a symbol of the open, welcome all receive in the West Church Hall.