

# SONAS CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS

## NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2025



Dear Friends

The months are ticking by and already we are seeing the leaves falling off the trees. It has been a wonderful period of summer weather, and we are delighted to report on another very successful holiday to Belfast. Catherine Maclean has written up a lovely report on the holiday.

We have planned our 'Reunion Day for Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November in Perth so please do save the date. This will be a good opportunity to renew friendships again from our holidays and discuss 2026 destinations. A flier is attached with the details.

Regards

Elsie Normington  
Chairperson

### **Belfast Holiday Report – Catherine Maclean**

On Monday 8th September, 14 of us arrived at Inverness airport for our Sonas Holiday to Belfast. Loganair saw us there and back in comfort with its touches of tartan on the tail and headrests. A very relaxed and contented group returned on Friday morning with only 40 minutes of air travel. What could be easier than that?

Each holiday is unique, so was this one. Meeting with old and new friends is such a pleasure when we share one big common factor: salvation by faith alone, through Christ alone. We had hearty singing each evening, including the hymn "In Christ alone, my hope is found...". We were somewhat delighted when the hotel staff referred to our group as "The singers"!! One of our group wrote that "the friendship and unity of the group both aided getting to know each other and our fellowship together".

Our leaders were so dedicated. We felt our holiday had started 2 weeks earlier! Ruth sent out a daily morning message with interesting facts about Belfast's history and language. Belfast's motto is 'Pro tanto quid retribuamus', which means 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?' Each morning Sandy gave a short devotional including spiritual facts about the day's visit ahead of us. For example, John Harper's last convert as the Titanic was sinking, Rev W Nicholson during the Northern Ireland revivals, and CS Lewis with his books written particularly for children. The evening devotionals on John 17 were really appreciated, they were "helpful, instructive and challenging". Christ prayed for Himself, then His disciples, and lastly all believers to come until the end of time. All to receive eternal life (John 17 v 2&3). How encouraging.

On Monday afternoon, we walked to the Botanic Gardens. Who knows what a jammie joe is? Well, you can buy them in Maggie Mays, not far from the University of Ulster. Delicious, and served with a pot of hot or cold custard. An excellent reminder, but superior version, of school canteen lunches back home in Scotland in the 1960s. And who is Maggie May? Well, after asking the staff, they were delighted to inform the Scottish lady that she worked in the kitchen. Off they went to find her, and there she was, a wee Irish lady with a big, wry smile, who worked for over 20 years in this same kitchen. We all had a wee (or rather big) laugh! All adding to the fun of our first day out in Belfast. After a huge jammie joe, and a visit round the Botanic Gardens, with its amazing fern display, the Scottish lady jumped on one of Belfast's pink buses, and still had space for the tasty meal at the hotel!

A hop on/off bus tour of Belfast was booked on Tuesday. We spent the whole morning at the Titanic Experience, a highly recommended tourist attraction. One comment from our group was, "It was amazing, full of interest, and very moving." As the Titanic was built in Belfast, the sound of hammering was heard throughout the city for years. The workmen were wary of the new lifts, so some would put their lunch boxes in the lift but still used the ladder, which took 20 minutes to climb! Over 100 people died in the process of building, the youngest being 14. Tragedy before it sailed. We learned much about those on board, each one with its own poignancy. Enlarging on the story of John Harper, a minister sailing on the Titanic with his niece and 6-year-old daughter Annie. As he was drowning, he asked his fellow traveller if he was saved. Receiving a negative reply, he urged him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The man survived, John Harper's last convert. John made sure Annie was on a lifeboat and she survived, a little girl who had lost her mother when she was a baby, and now her father. In the afternoon, we travelled through the areas more affected by The Troubles, 67% of all the deaths during the years of trouble occurred within a few metres of the Shankhill Road. The Peace Wall remains to this day, with those on either side not wishing it to come down. To count Belfast's chimney stacks and Union Jacks would be almost impossible!

The train to Coleraine/Londonderry on Wednesday did not disappoint, with spectacular views along Northern Ireland's coastline. It is noted as one of the most beautiful train journeys in the UK. Some of the group went to Portrush, with its famous sandy beaches, promenade, and the White House, a fascinating old-fashioned store. Others went to Londonderry, visiting the Guild Hall with its beautiful stained-glass windows featuring the different guilds. The clock inside replicates Big Ben. Many signs in Londonderry say 'Welcome to Derry-Londonderry.' We were fascinated with a newly-completed tapestry depicting fishing, farming etc. The modern, white, iconic Peace Bridge crossing the River Foyle stands in contrast to the thick, dark city walls running along the Bogside (equivalent to Shankhill Road in Belfast).

On Thursday, we visited CS Lewis Square, a stunning display of public art featuring 7 bronze sculptures. Some continued on to view the church where he worshiped in his youth. In the afternoon, we were free to hit the shops or meet with friends. Two of the group went on the train to Dublin for the day, and another couple took a minibus tour to the Giant's Causeway.

The Belfast folk were so cheery and helpful, adding to the friendship of our Scottish group. In the hotel, shops, wherever we went. It was no problem for new students to help us out with directions in the city centre, even going a few extra steps, or using their Google maps to help us get our bearings. Buses and gliders (Belfast's name for trams) all seemed fresh and new with frequent services. The hop on/off tour of Belfast provided us with the most pleasant music, The Rose of Tralee was a favourite. The taxi service provided by the hotel was super, in a few minutes the receptionist would say, 'There's a black Skoda waiting for you at the door.' At only a couple of pounds per person, and a few hilarious stories on board, we got our money's worth! We did walk around a lot, but this gave an alternative for weary legs.

Belfast has a very compact city centre, beautiful, old stone buildings beside modern glass ones. The Albert Memorial Clock is similar to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, due to the River Lagan running underneath. The Guild Hall is a stunning building with a circular glass dome and a cosy cafe. The Cornmarket, a dome of architectural spikes, is surrounded by numerous streets forming a modern shopping precinct. There's Avoca and Dunnes, plus a very interesting lady's shop with reasonably-priced items, all in colour-coded sections. Belfast, Stirling, Falkirk, and East Kilbride are its only 4 high street shops. The name has escaped us, a good reason for another trip back, which some of us may jump at!

Thank you to Sonas for putting Belfast on their travel map, and all the hard work behind the scenes. And special thanks to Sandy and Ruth for organising the itinerary. It was a successful trip enjoyed by all! 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?'