

## Clan's American cousins help save historic Borders church



Charlotte Maberly and Alan Bailey have led the campaign to buy the church

**Thomas Martin**

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**A call to help save a historic church from property developers has been answered by American descendants of a family with centuries-old links to the Borders.**

Ruberslaw Parish Church at Bedrule - between Hawick and Jedburgh - is one of dozens of churches being closed and sold off across the region due to low congregations.

The community launched a fundraiser at the start of the year to meet the £35,000 asking price - and about half the money has come from the US-based Clan Turnbull.

Many of the clan's ancestors were buried at the churchyard.

Charlotte Maberly is among the local people heading up fundraising efforts at Bedrule Church Future (BCF).

She said: "Americans are much more familiar with fundraising than us Brits are.

"For them, their sense of heritage is much stronger than people who are here."



Walter Baxter

The church building in Bedrule is over 200 years old

The current Bedrule church dates back to 1804, but many of the gravestones in the surrounding graveyard are from several centuries earlier.

And many of the headstones are memorials to members of the Turnbull family who originated in the area.

Throughout the 15th and 16th Centuries, the Border Reiver families controlled lands on either side of what had become a lawless Anglo-Scottish border.

Across the middle march, which now takes up most of the central and eastern Scottish Borders, the Turnbells emerged as one of the most renowned and feared clans.



Jim Barton

Many of the graves at Ruberslaw date back to before the church was built



With reducing congregations across the country, the Church of Scotland has been scaling back its places of worship over the past decade or so.

Ruberslaw Parish Kirk and neighbouring churches in Minto and Southdean are all being "disposed of" this year.

Churchgoers and the wider community at Bedrule were informed in November of the decision, leading to the formation of a fundraising group.

Charlotte added: "Pubs have been closing, other communal spaces have been closing, and with all these different churches closing, we need to rethink how we create community cohesion rurally."



Charlotte Maberly is excited for the future of the Bedrule building

Many former churches have already been turned into private dwellings - and there were fears that, if the asking price could not be raised, a property developer would snap up the listed building.

However, with just days to go before the closing date, BCF, which has preferred bidder status, reached its target - with a big debt to the US-based organisation.

The clan describes the church as a "historic Turnbull landmark with a breath-taking view across the Rulewater Valley to Ruberslaw mountain".

"The kirkyard, which holds the Turnbull cairn, is the final resting place of many of our ancestors," it added.

"The sanctuary of the church is a holy place where the power of the faith of our fathers is tangible."



Alan Bailey was among the fundraisers trying to preserve the church

With the funding in place, meetings will now take place in the coming weeks and months to forge a plan for the building's future in a tiny village with just a couple of hundreds residents.

Alan Bailey, who is also a trustee of BCF, said they would have to come up with an innovative use for the building.

"We don't have footfall around here," he said. "If you are a church in a town, you can become a café, a gym, a kids club.

"So we are going to have to be imaginative."