

The 'Iona Abbey Refectory Café' is now open!

On Monday 2nd of July Iona Abbey Refectory Café opened its doors to the public.

Although the weather has been glorious for many weeks here on Iona, for me this marked the end of the winter season and the beginning of summer.

It has been a long 'Winter' – very different from other years, with us sharing some mealtimes with quiet builders from Mull and the mainland, men who eyed us up pretty suspiciously first but have become almost friends by now. Stories shared over bacon butties, laughter over 'weird' choices of soup ingredients (Cauliflower and cheese soup, really?), strong arms moving refectory tables, the pride and satisfaction in Murdo's (the foreman) face when he showed me the finished library, warm wood all gleaming in the morning sun, will stay with me as good memories of the past months.

So will the many great conversations with all the community members who came up to help for a week or two – without you and your help the winter would have been much harder.

There have been plenty of frustrations though – the ceiling of the MacLeod centre kitchen collapsing in November, not enough staff to cover all the little jobs which needed to be done, the Abbey being on half power for 6 weeks over March and April, to name a few. Not to forget, that the building work is still ongoing.

So while Murdo, Paul and Harry of TSL (our contractors) are working on the finishing touches of phase I, we have been baking cakes and breads. The Abbey Kitchen is busy again!

I think it was Bénédicte's idea to run a café in the refectory, to open it up to the visitors of the monument, show face and keep people up to date with the Iona Community. I loved the idea immediately, and having been very much involved in setting it up, I felt very proud when we welcomed our first costumers on Monday morning.

We have an amazing international core team: in front of house there are Hylke from the Netherlands, and Miriam from Spain. In the kitchen there are Paty, a very talented and warm young woman from Paraguay, and Stina from Finland, who worked with me previously as a volunteer and is now employed as second chef. Community members, associates and former staff have joined and will be joining us in the next few weeks to make up the café team. There is lots of hard work to come, for sure, but we already love the interaction with the colourful variety of people coming through our doors. It's like in the 'olden days' when the Community run the coffee house.

So, if you are on Iona this summer (we will be open until the end of September), come and see us and have a big piece of cake.

Anja (Abbey Cook)