

COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



What's on in November in Tring Church

Services at Tring Church

Sunday 3rd November

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **
4pm All Souls service

Sunday 10th November

8am Holy Communion traditional language**
10am Short Worship for all
10.45am Remembrance Service at Tring War Memorial
3pm Piano and More concert

Sunday 17th November

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **

Sunday 24th November

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **

** Streamed service on our website and YouTube

Mid-week Services in Tring

9.15am Tuesdays

Holy Communion

10am Thursdays

Holy Communion in traditional language

Lots more going on



Mondays 3.30pm - 5pm

Youth Café in term time - toast, chat etc for secondary school kids

Food Bank

Monday to Friday

10am - 12noon.

Drop-off donations and collect food



Tuesdays 2pm - 4pm

Craft and a Cuppa

Drop in for chat, cuppa and bring a craft to do if you would like to

Social Coffee

Fridays, Saturdays

10am - 12 noon,

and after Sunday, Tuesday

& Thursday services



Piano & more series **Sunday November 10th**



3pm for an hour's concert of music followed by refreshments.

Free but collection for church and piano expenses

Everyone is welcome to join us at any of our church services and activities.

Forgiveness and reconciliation



One of the most moving experiences I had recently was listening to two young women: Tifferet is an Israeli Jew and Hiba is a Palestinian Christian and they both work for Musalaha, an organization that is working for peace in the Middle East. They were on a brief tour of England, talking to groups and churches about their lives. One of the clearest messages that came across was how important it is for people to talk and to listen, particularly when they are on opposing sides. Often what authorities try to do is to keep groups separate, to imply that those who are not with us are 'other' and different – we saw it happen in Ireland and in South Africa. Yet in conversation, people find similarities and learn what they have in common.

That makes it seem simple and easy when we know that it is not, because the other important point made by Hiba and Tifferet was that each side needed to listen to the other and to

acknowledge their pain and anguish. A conversation is only possible if each side listens as well as talks. Musalaha hold wilderness retreats for young people of all backgrounds and it provides this valuable time away together where they can do just that, listen and talk. They also create space for groups to meet regularly, and it was pointed out that what made the organization move forward was when they created places for the women to talk: female-only groups (which also have a cultural aspect) and mixed groups were successful, but it was much harder to get men-only groups to discuss in the same way.

What listening to them has also made me think about is forgiveness and what it is. Tifferet spoke of how many in her community talk of 'never forgive, never forget' when they speak of the Holocaust; Hiba spoke of how some in her community call her a traitor for working with Israelis. Their organization works for reconciliation: is that something one can have without forgiveness? I also had the very strong feeling that we come from such a privileged position that we have no right to ask people going through what they are whether they can

forgive. However, we can surely attempt to create a world where forgiveness and reconciliation are recognized for the value that they bring to us as individuals and to our communities and churches.

Forgiveness is a long process: it means acknowledging wrongdoing, and trying to repair what has been broken. It is something that has to be both offered and accepted. But are we also saying that if one side struggles to accept, then all work to bring about change ceases? Or is this where reconciliation is an organic thing, that needs time?

Desmond Tutu said 'Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence.' It is about working towards renewal which is what God wants, and not destruction, not continuing hatred and pain.

Maybe all we can do is to offer up the ancient prayer known as 'the Jesus prayer':

'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner'.

Jane Banister
Tring Team

TRING TEAM PARISH
Living God's Love

All Souls Services in Tring Parish

Tuesday 29th October
10am All Souls service Wilstone
Thursday 31st October
5.30 - 8pm "Hot Dogs and Prayers" at Long Marston
Sunday 3rd November
3pm All Saints service Long Marston
4pm All Souls service Tring
6pm All Souls service Aldbury

You are invited to come and remember those who have died.

You may wish to bring a sprig of rosemary or a flower to lay on the altar.



TRING TEAM PARISH

10th November - Remembrance Sunday
10.45am Service of Remembrance outside at Tring War Memorial

10.50am Act of Remembrance outside at Long Marston War Memorial

10.50am Act of Remembrance outside at Wilstone War Memorial

10.50am Service of Remembrance inside Aldbury Church.

Monday 11th November - Armistice Day
11am Act of Remembrance outside at Tring War Memorial

All Welcome.

www.tringteamparish.org.uk



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

TRING TEAM PARISH
Living God's Love

Time for toddlers



There was a Wednesday toddler group at St Peter & St Paul's during the 1990s, but it had finished by about 2000 when Margaret Gittins and Rosemary

Carpenter opened a new group. This was to be held every Wednesday afternoon in term time. They needed extra helpers and this is when I and others became involved, because the numbers soon multiplied as word went round. We had a rota!

Each week we set up a circle of chairs at the top of the nave for the adults and a carpet in front of it for the little ones. We had a programme, based on the Teddy Horsley books which are specially produced for toddler services. We had our own Teddy Horsley and Betsy Bear who had clothes knitted for them to match the book illustrations and they sat at the front facing the children, who got very fond of them. They liked to hear the stories.

We had songs accompanied by the piano and our big box of musical instruments which were played with gusto!

At the end, we all went up to the altar

rail for the Lord's Prayer. It was quite a sight to see all the little ones standing there. Then there was a rush to see who could be first to get to the back for their juice and biscuit, followed at a more leisurely pace by their mothers. This was now time to talk, as we had some very new mothers who needed to be able to compare notes on how their babies were doing.

Apart from the Wednesdays, we had some special meetings. On the FOTCH Family Fun Day, we always had craft activities in the Children's corner. These were very popular as the big brother and sisters could join in too; it was always busy.

On the Sunday afterwards, Rosemary would lead a Family Service (now called All Age Worship, of course!) and we would sing some of our songs accompanied by the instruments and perhaps wear the hats we had made the previous day.

In the summer, we had a garden picnic at various venues in the town which was much enjoyed by all. Then, right in the middle of the summer holidays we had a special meeting in church, which was open to all. It was called Fun in the Sun. One year it absolutely poured, but lots of families came and we renamed it Pain in the Rain!



At Easter we had the Easter Garden and an Easter egg hunt in the church. Our Christmas meeting was very special as the children could come already dressed as angels, wise men or shepherds and would bring their toy lambs. We had extra clothes so all could take part and we had our own retelling of the nativity story.

The Toddler Group and Toddler Services went on for many years. Margaret and Rosemary were given the 'Rock' one year, thanking them for their contribution. But all good things come to an end. Nurseries were opening at all the local Infant schools, our numbers dwindled and so we closed.

I still see some of those mothers and hear about the children and remember it as a very happy time for all.

Erica Guy
St Peter & St Paul

Poem of the month



Here (almost complete) is an intriguing poem – a word-play using the first two letters of the name of the month, November. There are no sentences; each

line is introduced by and uses the letters 'no' to describe all that is absent in 19th century London in gloomy November, because of the cold and ubiquitous smog. The poet describes the city, its streets, churches, parks and meeting places and ends, as he began, with the bare, natural world around him. Though gloomy, it is surely not a depressing poem. Rather, the tone is almost playful and light-hearted because of the exaggerated repetition and extended pun and the use of exclamation marks. We are left with gratitude for central heating, clean air, electricity and the internet.

Thomas Hood, poet, author and humorist, was born in 1799 in London, above his father's bookshop. His father's family had been Scottish farmers, and he went back to Scotland at various times because of his health. His father died when he was 12. He was educated by a private schoolmaster who encouraged his writing and study of poetry. Fond of practical jokes and puns, he was well known for his light verse, but he also depicted the working conditions of the poor with clarity and sympathy. In 1821 he was made sub-editor of the London Magazine and mixed with well-known writers and poets of the time. He married in 1824 and both his children followed his profession. It was apparently a very happy family, though

No!

*No sun – no moon!
No morn – no noon –
No dawn – no dusk – no proper time of day.
No sky – no earthly view –
No distance looking blue –
No road – no street – no "t'other side this way" –
(probably means the other side of the street)
No top to any steeple –
No recognitions of familiar people –
...
No mail – no post –
No news from any foreign coast –
No park, no ring – no afternoon gentility –
No company – no nobility –
No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
No comfortable feel in any member –
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds,
November!*

Thomas Hood, 1844

Thomas was constantly troubled by ill-health and financial problems. He died in 1845 and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Kate Banister
St Julian's, St Albans

Women across the divide



On 13 September, Hiba, a Palestinian Christian woman and Tifferet, an Israeli Jewish woman, came to lunch in Tring at the invitation of Churches

Together in Tring, as part of a one-week UK Tour.

Just over forty of us were there and they talked to us about their personal experience of living in Israel and Palestine and of working together as Project Managers in Musalaha's women's groups for reconciliation. One striking feature was the quality of their developing relationship with each other, something that comes across very clearly in their reflections on their UK Tour. Many of us were deeply touched by their stories.

The plan was for both to arrive on a Monday for the first event. But plans can sometimes change fast. Here is their account of how everything unfolded:

Hiba

I had a lot of excitement as a Palestinian who was able to travel and speak about what has been happening. For Palestinians in the West Bank, the only way to travel internationally is to go through Jordan which entails crossing many checkpoints. While my flight to the UK was on Monday, I needed to take an extra day to travel to Jordan on Sunday to make my flight on time. I was all ready for my trip and on the way to the borders in Jericho when unfortunately, a shooting attack happened on the Israeli border side from a man in a truck. The attack killed three Israeli security personnel and led to the complete closure of the border. No one was allowed to travel to Jordan.

When something like this happens to an enemy, some people will praise and celebrate it. While I understand the strong solidarity movement across Palestine for the people of Gaza, it should never be in celebration of violence. Even though I am committed to nonviolence, I have witnessed throughout my life how Israeli oppression leads to these reactionary violent attacks. Nonetheless, those who celebrate it do not realize that there is a cost that other Palestinians like myself have to pay. This comes in the form of missing two flights, longer

and humiliating waits to cross borders, double security checks, and more anxiety and stress as travel becomes scary and difficult. It is a collective punishment for all Palestinians including infants, the elderly, the sick and vulnerable.

It is hard for me to explain the disappointment and anxiety I had to manage waiting for the borders to reopen. While I was stuck, I was confident that Tifferet was sharing my voice at the events in the UK and the reason why I could not make it. In total, I missed three in-person events and was able to attend one online.

Tifferet

When Hiba finally arrived, I felt relieved. For me, it was one of the first times that not only could I talk about injustices, but I could also see how it affects someone whom I admire and love so much. It was also the first time I understood how, in a moment of helplessness against the authorities, you enter survival mode, and it's so hard to see the other side. This endless cycle of violence that harms both sides reflects the reality of our lives. It always surprises me how the systems that affect our lives do everything they can to prevent meetings from happening.

As the conversations progressed throughout the week, we both learned so much about each other. For a moment we even considered switching places and allowing each other to present our side. To us, it was powerful to see how our words influenced the discourse between us, so much so that we slowly began answering on behalf of the other. When that happened, I realized how much Hiba's recognition of my words opened my heart more and more to listening and to my ability to continue critiquing my own society.

Hiba

I was proud to be able to deliver the voice of the Palestinians living under occupation with no freedom of movement and about the work that Tifferet and I do. Upon reflection, it is really sad how comfortable I felt sharing my life story in the UK without any boundaries, but at



home, I am afraid and do not have the same freedom.

When the audience asked how to help, we emphasized the power of education; that there must be an acknowledgement of the humanity of both peoples. It is not only the oppression and cruelty by bad people that has enabled this military occupation to exist, but it is also the silence of good people. Too many people and organizations have been silent while over 40,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza. The focus must extend beyond a ceasefire and hostages being released to an end of the occupation. This will pave the way towards a nonviolent justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

Our speaking tour was not always easy. While there were some confrontations between us and those listening, this too is part of the reconciliation process. It highlighted the importance of listening and understanding each other, and how we all need to continue working together so that there may be liberation and redemption for all.

Hiba Allati and Tifferet Oryah
Project Managers
<https://musalaha.org>
<https://www.musalaha.uk>

From Musalaha's September Newsletter
Colin Briant
High Street Baptist Church

Holiness



Many years ago, before I went to university, my father recommended a book called 'The Idea of Holiness' by Rudolf Otto. It was first published nearly a century ago. It was certainly appropriate for one about to study Theology for a degree. This book points out that religion not only involves reason and the other emotions, but also 'the feeling of the uncanny, the thrill of awe and reverence, the sense of dependence on nothingness', and so on. Otto called this 'the numinous'. In other words, we analyse with our minds what we believe about holiness, describe our emotions and experience and so on, but there is still more that cannot be put adequately into words about the holiness of God.

Coming across a reference to this book again recently, and at a time when I am looking back over sixty years of Holy Orders, I have been thinking again about the experience of holiness in those decades, what it means, for example, to preach about the Holy Bible, the Holy Communion.

What is holiness? Sometimes it seems to be the idea of separation – some things are separate from the human because they belong to God. The Old Testament idea of holy seems at times to be referring to the gulf between God and man, as when Moses alone can ascend to Mount Sinai. However, we may feel holiness should be to do with closeness to God rather than separation from God. In fact, we think of people or things as holy without exactly defining what the word means. I suppose we should say all creation is holy since it is God's work, but in practice, we think of particular places, people or things as holy. So, a church building is a holy building in one sense, since it was consecrated, that is, set apart for the worship of God. But does that mean it is a building only to be used for the things of God, for worship? One of the changes in my lifetime has been the way in which church buildings are used. Once, most churches were used as places of worship only. Now many more have extended uses. The church I can remember first worshipping

in has been divided into two parts – one is now for worship, the other serves as a village hall. Think how many churches have kitchens, lavatories, play areas and so on. Then, too, particularly large churches have uses as theatres, concert halls, cinemas, dance halls and so on; not to mention churches which are tourist centres with shops, etc. Does this multiple-use affect the holiness of the building?

Further, and one thing I'm puzzled by, is the idea of consecrated ground for burial. Obviously, a churchyard is a fitting place for burials, but what about cemeteries? Do they need to be divided up according to religion or no religion? I once attended the consecration of part of an extension to a civic cemetery. The bishop and clergy processed around part of the area, saying psalms, if I remember rightly, and with prayer. So, should burial be in consecrated ground or unconsecrated? Is there a lack of holiness in one area because some have no faith or other faiths? Does it make any difference to the dead or the mourners? I would certainly prefer to be buried in holy ground but...

Another interesting aspect of holiness is that we have churches that have been consecrated but what happens when the buildings are no longer used for worship? What does de-consecrate mean? Before we consider that, it is worth reminding ourselves that the Bible makes much of the Temple at Jerusalem as a holy building containing the Holy of Holies. Yet, when the Romans destroyed the Temple in AD70, as Our Lord had prophesied, the Jewish faith and worship continued. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the Scrolls of the Jewish Law are considered holy and very specially prepared and then used in worship.

But back to our situation in the UK, which sadly has too many buildings for the needs of the 21st century worshippers. Not long ago I read of a diocese (not ours) which was refusing to sell a redundant church to the Muslims for use as a mosque. I wonder what readers think of that? Places of worship have changed their usage throughout the centuries. One of the greatest of all churches, the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul, is now used as a mosque. Certainly, churches now redundant have been

turned into dwellings, flats, halls etc, or for other uses including bars and restaurants. A church I used to serve at as a student, built interestingly in the style of a Greek temple, is now a café and arts venue. What happens or happened to the holiness of such a building? Does the celebration of Holy Communion in a house or hall, or, indeed, out of doors, mean the service is any less holy? Of course not.

To pursue another line – I wonder how many of you have wondered about the fact that in the Nicene Creed in the Book of Common Prayer Anglicans assert our belief in 'one Catholick and Apostolick Church'. In Common Worship we say 'one holy, catholic and apostolic' church. Did Archbishop Cranmer not believe the church was holy? Certainly, the church has, at times, or some of its members, behaved in a very unholy fashion – notably at the Reformation! Yet surely the church as the Body of Christ, is indeed holy. But, as with its unity, so with its holiness, the body of the church has failed to live as the body of Christ.

There is also the question of holy people – the saints of God. November's calendar begins with two days which raise the issue of holiness. All Saints' Day (1 November) reminds us of the holy men and women who have gone before us and are now in heaven. All Souls' Day (2 November) recalls our departed relations and friends for whom we pray that they may rest in peace and rise in glory. Some departed Christians have attained holiness, others are on the way.

A lifetime of remembering saints and praying for the dead and taking funeral services means I am still puzzled about holiness. I have known some holy people and many more who try to be holy, but I am relieved that, in the end, it is not up to me but to God to judge both the quick and the dead, the living and the dead.

In this life we strive for holiness, and, occasionally, have glimpses of it in worship and prayer. Sometimes, too, there is a glimpse of 'the numinous', the holiness of God, when we feel taken out of ourselves for a moment and beyond the limitations of this life.

Martin Banister
St Albans Cathedral

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Tweet of the month



After spending a day in a boat on Jakarta Bay, we returned to our hotel, picked up our luggage and, at five minutes past midnight, caught our five-hour flight to Jayapura, a city in the Indonesian province of Papua on the island of New Guinea. Indonesia may be made up of islands, but it certainly covers a large area!

We arrived in Jayapura airport in the morning and were met by guides and taken to Jamil Homestay, our accommodation in Nimbokrang – a rural town about two to three hours' drive from Jayapura. A homestay is the Indonesian equivalent of a bed and breakfast. We had been warned before we went that it was basic, so it was no surprise that there was no running hot water, and the showers didn't work. However, there was electricity, and the owner of the homestay had a washing machine so we could get laundry done – a pleasant surprise in a very hot and humid country where I frequently felt like a human colander as I was leaking so much water! On arrival a couple of us wandered round the village looking for birds and in the afternoon we all went out and got our first taste of

birding in Papua – it is very exciting going out and seeing birds that are completely unfamiliar apart from seeing pictures in books.

Europeans first became aware of Birds-of-paradise when specimens were brought back from New Guinea via trading expeditions in the early 16th century. Traders bringing back these wonders said how the local people called them 'bolon diuata', which means, 'birds of God'. Also, most of the specimens had their wings and feet removed so they could be used for decoration, as is the practice in New Guinea, but this was not explained; so the belief arose in Europe that these birds never landed and were kept aloft by their ornamental plumes. In Europe the birds were named Birds-of-paradise because they were from a place described as paradise on Earth. Fittingly many of the Bird-of-paradise species still have English names that include this appellation.

The next day we had an early start as most Bird-of-paradise species are best seen at dawn when males display to impress females: either a solitary male or many males in a lek. We got up at 4:30am and put on dull clothing – even a light or brightly coloured shirt can cause the birds to not display; silence is essential and no light sources can be allowed to disturb these sensitive birds. So, we



travelled into the forest to arrive at a known display site before the male did in an attempt to see a solitary displaying male Twelve-wired Bird-of-paradise.

The excitement and anticipation while waiting to see this almost mythical bird was palpable throughout the whole group, and when eventually the male did appear, everyone was smiling, happy and relieved to see this amazing, beautiful bird. It is called Twelve-wired Bird-of-paradise because it has twelve feathers that are so fine that they look like wires sticking out from the tail – hopefully, this can be seen in the photograph.

Personally, I like the fact that the local people call them 'birds of God'. Obviously, God creates all birds, but it is fitting that such beautiful, fantastic birds are named thus and were thought to live in paradise on Earth.

Roy Hargreaves
St Peter & St Paul

The tunnel of friendship



I have not been to Indonesia myself, but having read about the Pope's recent visit in September 2024, I am very impressed by the tolerance and

friendship there between the different religious communities. There are six recognised religions: Islam (87%), Catholicism (3%), Protestantism (7%), Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. What particularly struck me when reading about the Pope's trip to Indonesia was the tunnel of friendship he visited, an underground passage connecting Jakarta's Istiqlal Mosque, south-east Asia's largest mosque, with the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, apparently one of Jakarta's most iconic buildings. I thought this connection between the two religions, expressed in such physical terms, extraordinary and am not aware of any similar construction anywhere else in the world.

When facing the entrance to the tunnel, Pope Francis told Nasaruddin Umar, the Grand Imam of the Istiqlal Mosque and donors who helped build it: 'When we think of a tunnel, we might easily imagine a dark pathway. This could be frightening, especially if we are alone. Yet here it is different, for everything is illuminated. I would like to tell you, however, that you are the light that illuminates it, and you do so by your friendship, by the harmony you cultivate, the support you give each other, and by journeying together which leads you in the end toward the fullness of light.'

The Pope and Imam signed a document 'Joint Declaration of Istiqlal

2024' titled 'Fostering Religious Harmony for the Sake of Humanity'. 'The values shared by our religious traditions should be effectively promoted in order to defeat the culture of violence and indifference affecting our world', the declaration states. The declaration clearly identifies 'human exploitation of creation' as a contributor to 'climate change' and laments that the 'ongoing environmental crisis has become an obstacle to the harmonious coexistence of peoples.'

'The visible aspects of religion – the rites, practices and so on – are a heritage that must be protected and respected', the Pope said. 'However, we could say that what lies "underneath", and what runs underground, like the "tunnel of friendship", is the one root common to all religious sensitivities: the quest for an encounter with the divine, the thirst for the infinite that the Almighty has placed in our hearts, the search for a greater joy and a life stronger than any type of death, which animates the journey of our lives and impels us to step out of ourselves to encounter God.'

Pope Francis said: 'Sometimes we think that a meeting between religions is a matter of seeking common ground between different religious doctrines and beliefs no matter the cost. Such an approach, however, may end up dividing



The Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, in Jakarta. Photo by Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen / CC BY 4.0

us, because the doctrines and dogmas of each religious experience are different. What really brings us closer is creating a connection in the midst of diversity, cultivating bonds of friendship, care and reciprocity.'

was an idea born in 2021. The idea to connect the two places of worship came from the president of the country. Initially, an external bridge was considered, but the president preferred an underground passage. A presidential order was issued, a joint Catholic-Muslim committee was created, and the Ministry of Public Works began construction. A year later, the tunnel was dug and an open call for artists was launched to create a work symbolizing tolerance, respect, and friendship to decorate the sacred site. Generous donations from both Muslim and Catholic communities funded the massive copper artworks that now line the tunnel's walls.

For Cardinal Suharyo, 74, 'This passage is a very strong symbolic act to further strengthen our already fruitful dialogue with the Muslim community, which makes up the majority in Indonesia.'

The Pope's visit to Indonesia generated enormous enthusiasm among the people, who are mostly Muslim. In fact, Indonesia, with a total population of 284 million, is the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world. Jakarta's great mosque, which can accommodate 250,000 people at a time, is second only in size to Mecca and Medina. The tunnel of friendship, which hopefully will be open to the public soon, expressively symbolizes the unity of a country, founded on harmony and respect for the religious convictions of all its citizens. As such it is a model for the rest of our world.

Michael Demidecki
Corpus Christi Church

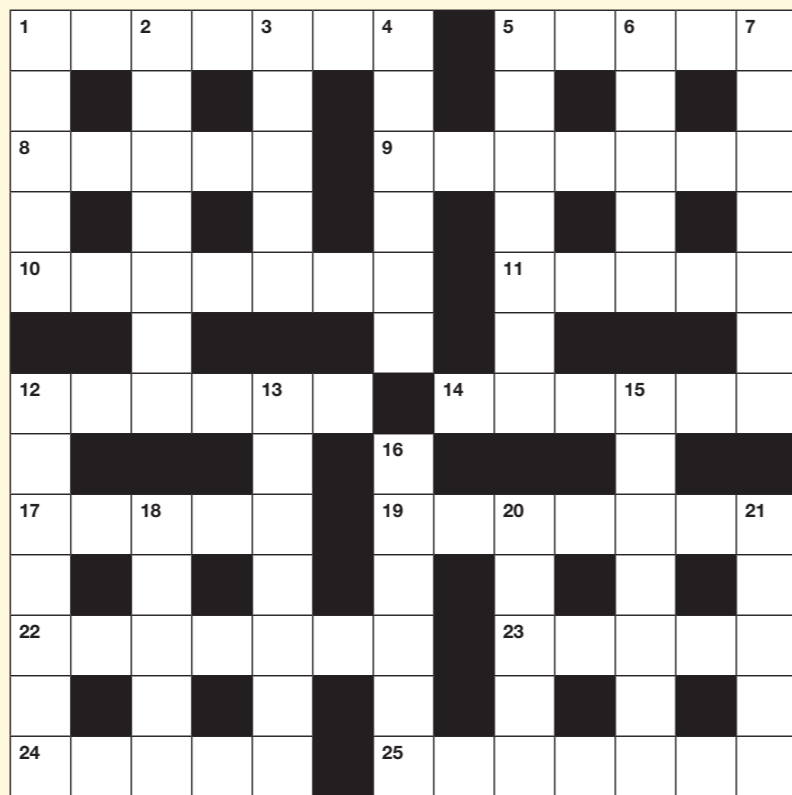
Crossword

ACROSS

1. Religious day (7)
5. Counsellor (5)
8. Mother-in-law of Ruth (5)
9. Each of the family (7)
10. Outside sleepers (7)
11. Long upland (5)
12. Ceremonial march (6)
14. Fire, nearly out (6)
17. Used to ring the bells (5)
19. Meditate (7)
22. Entreat (7)
23. Ready for playing (5)
24. The chosen (5)
25. One under instruction (7)

DOWN

1. Relating to noise (5)
2. A big mistake (7)
3. '.....' with me (5)
4. Non acceptable belief (6)
5. Traveller to a shrine (7)
6. Not the most recent (5)
7. Everlasting (7)
12. Story, told by Jesus (7)
13. Objection (7)
15. Everlasting (7)
16. Gateways (6)
18. Fix together (5)
20. Go and get (5)
21. Medieval dynasty (5)



Answers see page 30

Jane Ducklin
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A Christmas box from St Martha's



In the early years of the last century, my grandmother was 'in service' as a scullery maid at Copt Hall in Essex. Doubtless, each Boxing Day, her employers at the big house would pack her a Christmas box to take home to her family. So, on the day following Christmas Day, she had a holiday and would walk the two miles or so home, carrying left-over food, vegetables from the kitchen garden and other much-needed things for her mother. The tradition of preparing these 'Christmas boxes' for the needy in the hardest days of winter, dispatched to the poor or left in churches, is the origin of the term 'Boxing Day,' a tradition which goes back at least to the Middle Ages throughout much of Europe. In more recent times I remember my parents giving cash to the milkman, postman, or refuse collector at Christmas, as what they called their 'Christmas Box.'

So why call our seasonal entertainment at Tring's Methodist church 'A Christmas Box from St Martha's?' Well, it is a free show, so it won't necessarily eat into anyone's budget but, more seriously, the gifts it offers are more symbolic. No gold, frankincense or myrrh on offer here.

The gifts are musical, choral and literary. We are fortunate to have a rich artistic and even comic heritage of material celebrating Christmas. Our evening of readings, songs and music will feature some of the great poems and prose in our language: T.S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' and Betjeman's

'Christmas' among them. Both poems adopt the persona of a narrator who is world weary, puzzled and perhaps even sceptical about the nativity mystery unfolding. Both challenge us to confront our own belief.

But our Christmas Box will do far more than paying homage to these classic poems. The evening will feature a range of comic poetry and prose – the late-lamented Benjamin Zephaniah's 'Talking Turkeys' is included in a set of Christmas poems for children and young people. Then there is an extract from Hardy's 'Under the Greenwood Tree,' namely the comic opening scene on Christmas Eve when the church gallery musicians tour their Dorset village carolling and bemoaning the advent of the new-fangled abomination in church: the harmonium! There is more comedy in an extract from Dylan Thomas' 'A Child's Christmas in Wales' and a glimpse of Christmas past in rural Oxfordshire, from Flora Thompson's 'Lark Rise to Candleford.'

The musical offerings will also feature some classic and much-loved seasonal pieces and even an intriguing mash up of well-known carols which the audience is

'A Christmas Box from St Martha's'

An evening of poetry, prose and music for the season

Saturday December 14th 2024 7.30 pm

With local celebrities, the Vale Singers and David Berdinner.

FREE with a retiring collection for essential repairs to this lovely old church in Park St, Tring. Refreshments served during the interval.

invited to untangle and name!

As we all know, Christmas can be challenging for many, particularly those who feel the pain of bereavement more acutely at this time of year, those who are frazzled by the pressures of catering for big family gatherings, and parents trying to keep the lid on their children's rising levels of excitement. And these days, many of us feel more than jaundiced by the commercialisation of Christmas – asking why some shops display their Christmas trees and gifts from August!

For all of us experiencing any of the above, 'A Christmas Box from St Martha's' is especially for you!

David Wood
St Martha's Methodist Church

Cathedrals



Cathedra is Latin for 'seat' or 'chair' and a cathedral is a place where the seat of a bishop or bishop's throne is found, making it the head of a diocese or episcopate. The cathedral is not ruled by the bishop, that is the job of the dean. Only denominations with an episcopate (or group of governing bishops) can have a cathedral, although there is one exception which I will mention later. There is a misunderstanding that having a cathedral makes a town a city. The monarch declares a city and it can be without a cathedral. Cities without a cathedral include Cambridge, Bath and Leeds. Similarly, some towns with a cathedral are not a city. An example is Llandaff, which was once a very small cathedral town but is now virtually a suburb of Cardiff with a population of only 8,000.

A couple of cathedrals are minsters. Minsters were large monastery churches, minster being the Anglo-Saxon name for a monastery. York Minster is a cathedral that retains the minster name as does Southwell Minster.

The early church had bishops and the first-known cathedral was Etchmiadzin in Armenia, built around AD300. The first British cathedral was Canterbury, built by St Augustine around AD597, so we have had cathedrals for a long time.

Today in the UK we have Anglican or episcopal cathedrals and Catholic

cathedrals. When I was looking around the episcopal Llandaff Cathedral I was puzzled because all the cathedrals in Britain were Catholic until Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534. At this point all the Catholic cathedrals in Britain became Anglican cathedrals. Why are there no old Catholic cathedrals? Since the Reformation, twenty-two Catholic cathedrals have been built, but the oldest is St Chads in Birmingham, completed in 1841. The late date is because Catholics were only given freedom to worship in 1791 and could only then begin to plan for a cathedral.

In Scotland, the cathedrals became redundant in 1592 when bishops were abolished and the Presbyterian church system began. Bishops returned in 1610 only to be finally abolished in 1639 when the cathedral buildings started to fall into ruin. Despite this the Scots have the best of both worlds with seven 'High Kirks' keeping the cathedral name (but without a bishop). St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh is the foremost, but there are also Presbyterian cathedrals in Kirkwall, Aberdeen, Brechin, Dunblane, Dornoch and Dunkeld.

St Paul's Cathedral is unusual in that it was built as a Protestant cathedral, although its architect, Sir Christopher Wren, used St Peter's, the Pope's church in the Vatican, as his model.

In Britain, many of the early cathedrals were part of monasteries and part of the support system for the local communities. The monastery and cathedral provided a school, an apothecary complete with apothecary's garden and a hospital. King David I in Scotland introduced monasteries and cathedrals as a way of civilising the

country. The collapse of this system in the UK as a whole led to deprivation for local communities which lasted until around 1870 when publicly funded schools were introduced, and 1948 when publicly funded hospitals and doctors were introduced. Henry VIII has a lot to answer for!

Although early churches were often used for markets and assemblies, I can't find any records of the main body of cathedrals being used in the same way. Many cathedrals had covered cloisters, and these were used for public activities such as fairs. Nowadays many cathedrals use the main body for concerts and cultural activities.

Traditionally most cathedrals have bells that have been used to signal the outbreak and ending of war, deaths and marriages. Peals of many bells signify joy – the start of a service, marriage or the declaration of peace, and tolling of one bell a declaration of war, death or disaster.

Despite their grandeur, cathedrals carry out the same functions as a parish church and hold regular services and events for the local residents. Anyone is welcome at their services which are often fully 'sung' services with a choir. If you are visiting a cathedral, try to fit in a service, and become part of the local congregation.

John Allan
High Street Baptist Church

Do you have a favourite cathedral you would like to write to Comment about? Tell us where it is and when you visited. What stood out for you? Ed.

Free to a good home

I have a barely used wireless printer which is taking up space. It's an HP Colour LaserJet Pro M254dw (I don't do American spelling).

If you need one and are reasonably tech savvy, you will make better use of it than I! (But I am not the person to help you set it up!!)

Please get in touch on the *Comment* email address comment.magazine@gmail.com for more details.

The Editor



TRING CHARITIES (Registered Charity No 1077157)

MILLENNIUM EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Are you hoping to go to University or College in 2025, but are concerned that financial resources might not match up to the requirements? Are you under the age of 22?

Have you lived in Aldbury, Long Marston, Marsworth, Pitstone, Puttenham, Tring, Wigginton or Wilstone for at least three years?

To see if you would be eligible for a grant, apply to Tring Charities' Millennium Education Foundation for information and an application form.

Website details: www.tringcharities.co.uk/education

Telephone: Elaine Winter, Secretary to the Trustees 01442 827913 Email: info@tringcharities.co.uk

Please note that the closing date is 15 November 2024 to lodge a completed application for grants payable from Autumn 2025.



On the move



The World Methodist Conference was held in Gothenburg, Sweden, this year. We began with the hymn 'How Great Thou Art', over 1000 Methodists from

eighty countries across the world singing powerfully of God's goodness and greatness. As we continued through the hymn, people were invited to sing the chorus in their own language. It was a spine-tingling moment, as different nations, different languages came together in worship.

It was a moment that for me came to sum up the World Methodist Conference that I was privileged to attend as a representative of our Methodist District of Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire. Most of the Conference was conducted in English, but every day we said the Lord's Prayer in 'the language of our hearts' and there were moments when songs were sung and prayers were said in Swedish, Korean, French and other languages. At workshops we were often asked to form groups to talk about particular questions. I remember one group included someone from Samoa, New Zealand and Ghana and it was not unusual to have a similar variety of people. I particularly loved the fact that there was no sense of one nation being superior to another. There was a real

sense of people coming together humbly, wanting to learn, to listen to each other. There was no sense of 'We're a richer or bigger nation so we have a louder voice', but more a sense of 'Oh, you come from there, tell me about it, what can I learn from you?'

The Conference was titled 'On the Move' and took the themes of Migration, Pilgrimage and Guiding Lights. The preacher in the opening worship spoke about how God's people have always been on the move. She told the story of two churches she had led that had made big moves – the first when the church building had burnt down (the fire started on Pentecost!) and the congregation moved to worshipping in a tent, a time when they found their ministry flourishing; the second when the church building became in need of so much repair that it became sensible to rebuild. The church and its homeless mission were hosted by other churches while a 49-storey tower block with church was built!

The sessions on migration were challenging. One quote I noted down said, 'The migrant crisis is a crisis of welcoming'. What does it mean to truly welcome migrants? I attended a session



called 'A Hybrid Christianity?' looking at the gift and the challenge of different traditions meeting in worship. Those who have been Methodists in other countries will often go to Methodist churches in the new country, but find it difficult when the worship and culture is so different from what they have known. How do we create a space which allows us all to worship together?

The sermon on pilgrimage came from a bishop from Singapore and was structured as a conversation between a lion and a cow (Isaiah 11:6) and spoke of being pilgrims on the path of peace. It included the story 'The Grass Eater' by Trevor Dennis, a story which speaks of justice and the gospel from the perspective of a pride of lions. Worth a read if you can find it! Other speakers during the sessions spoke about ecumenism, justice and peace, church development in a post-modern era and

St Olav's Well, a pilgrimage site in Norway, a place of refreshment. There was a wealth of sessions available.

We then moved into Guiding Lights: what lights does God give to guide us? There were discussions about challenges and opportunities in the post-modern era, about Africa's contribution to Christianity across the world. I attended a session entitled 'Jacob as a guiding light', a Bible study on what Jacob wrestling with the mysterious man might say to us and how it has been interpreted down through the centuries.

The Methodist Peace Award was presented during the Conference. In the past it has been presented to people such as Gordon Wilson, Kofi Annan and Nelson Mandela. The awards for 2023 and 2024 were presented to Bishop Christian Alsted in recognition for his visits and work in Ukraine since the war, and Deaconess Norma P. Dollaga who has advocated for the poor in the Philippines, documenting violence and murder of those who are seen as worthless, both of them risking their lives in the work they have done. It was humbling to hear their stories.

The Conference was held at the same time as the Conference of the Uniting Church in Sweden (formed by a merger of the Methodist, Baptist and the Mission Covenant churches) and the Sunday morning was an ordination service. Three thousand of us gathered together

for a powerful service as twenty deacons and ten pastors were ordained. The service also included dancing and an African choir. Communion for 3000, served to us by the newly ordained, was not easy logistically, but as we went forward together, there was a real sense of community and celebration as we received from God.

During the Saturday evening, we had sung together the song 'The Blessing' and it felt as though we were singing it, not just to those gathered in the room, but to each of the eighty nations represented, a memorable moment. The Sunday morning service and the Conference ended as it began, with the hymn 'How Great Thou Art', singing our praises to our God who brought us together. I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to attend. It was a time of fellowship, learning and worship and a reminder that we are part of a global church, not just as Methodists but as Christians, each of us



World Methodist Conference | Sweden 2024



bringing our worship and service to God, singing his glory.

Rachael Hawkins
St Martha's Methodist Church



Each country brought an item to represent their presence at the Conference



Those three magic words



I am a mediocre singer (poor at both pitching notes and controlling my breathing) but was allowed to sing in the church choir for a number of years. One of the occasional pleasures was to sing for weddings, helping couples to mark their day of dedication and celebration. Frank Mercurio was the rector for much of my time in the choir, and one of his wedding homilies was about the value of what he termed 'those three magic words'; the expectation was that he would refer to 'I love you' (which is magical, of course) but the surprise was that he was meaning 'I'm really sorry'. He would explain the importance of being

'really sorry' when a partner is hurt, and its key role in building and sustaining a marriage.

There are very few uses of the word 'sorry' in the Bible, at least in more traditional translations, and many more uses of the related and perhaps more weighty word 'repentance'. Being truly sorry carries with it a sincere intention to change and so avoid a repeat of the offence, whatever it was. Sadly, 'Sorry' has become a rather devalued phrase, often little more than a recognition that a harm has been done without any aspiration to do better. All too frequently it is just a kind of social emollient, even said before the verbal or non-verbal harassment (how often do I say sorry before I push past people on a pavement or path who have the temerity to walk more slowly than me...).

It's actually quite hard to say sorry to

somebody and truly mean it. I worry that I find it easier to confess my sins in the semi-privacy of a church service, where I say sorry to God for the harms I've inflicted on other people, not least those nearest and supposedly dearest to me. It seems to let me off the hard task of saying sorry to those people, and meaning it. So, my resolution is to be more sparing in saying sorry, to be sure that I do really mean it and am thinking of ways I can do better next time. I might also be a bit braver in challenging people who say sorry to me also to say what they will do differently next time. Does that seem a good idea to you?

What do you feel about those three magic words?

John Whiteman
Tring Team

What does a Papaver mean to us today?



'Papaver' is the Latin name for the poppy family. Papaver rhoeas is the red poppy and Arctomecon merriamii is the white poppy. Both are well known to farmers and gardeners all over the world, but in the UK we know them for different reasons – we connect them instantly to questions of war, death and remembrance.

Red poppies

The red poppy first became a symbol towards the end of World War I. On the battlefields of the Somme, where so many men of several armies were slaughtered, the disturbed soil spontaneously brought forth swathes of red poppies. In 1915 the poem 'In Flanders Fields' was published by John McCrae with the opening lines

*...In Flanders fields, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row...*

This symbolism captured the public imagination, and the poppy was soon being used widely in Britain and the United States both to commemorate their fallen soldiers and also to raise funds for injured veterans. The symbolic meaning was clear then as being commemoration of the dead soldiers of the British and allied armies, and support for those armies. In fact, one of the lines of 'In Flanders fields' says '...Take up our quarrel with the foe: ...' That symbolic meaning still remains. The Royal British Legion (RBL) today says these poppies are 'worn to commemorate the sacrifices of our Armed Forces and to show support to those still serving today.' Money raised from the sale of red poppies goes to the RBL which says it 'is here to help members of the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force, veterans and their families... We support serving and ex-serving personnel all year round, every day of the week.'

White poppies

In 1926, the No More War Movement proposed that the red poppies should have the words 'No more war' printed in their centre – but this idea was rejected by the RBL. Then in 1933, white poppies were produced for the first time by the

Co-operative Women's Guild (groups of women, most of whom had lost family and friends in World War I). This was in response to what they saw as 'the growing militarisation of remembrance events'. The Guild's General Secretary, Eleanor Barton, called for renewed commitment 'to that "Never Again" spirit that was strong in 1918, but seems to grow weaker as years go on.' Today, white poppies are produced and distributed by the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), and wreaths of white poppies are laid at many remembrance ceremonies in the UK. People who wear white poppies may hold a variety of political views and opinions, but they all share a common desire to:

- remember ALL the victims of war, both military and civilian
- challenge any attempts to glamorise or celebrate war
- stand up for peace

White poppies are not a generic peace symbol – they are specifically a symbol of remembrance for all victims of war, both civilians and combatants, of all nationalities. They have been worn on Remembrance Day for over eighty-five years, for almost as long as red poppies.



Symbolism and controversy

It is sometimes inaccurately stated that the white poppy is political and the red poppy is not. Both the white poppy and the red poppy represent distinct values and perspectives so in that sense they are both political symbols. For example, choosing to commemorate only the soldiers of UK and allied armies is just as political as choosing to remember all victims of war. The British Legion state that red poppies show 'support for the armed forces'. Whether or not you agree with this position, it is clearly a political position, just as making a commitment to peace is political. If one approach is dominant, this does not mean it is apolitical and beyond criticism. The red poppy has attracted its share of controversy over recent years:

- In 2006 Channel 4 newsreader Jon Snow described the pressure to wear a poppy as 'poppy fascism'
- In 2010, a group of British Army veterans issued an open letter complaining that the Poppy Appeal had become excessive and garish, that it was being used to marshal support behind British military interventions, and that people were being pressured into wearing poppies
- In 2014, the same group protested by holding an alternative remembrance service: they walked to The Cenotaph under the banner 'Never Again' with a wreath of white poppies to acknowledge civilians killed in war. Their tops bore the message 'War is Organised Murder', a quote from Harry Patch, one of the last surviving veterans of World War I.

The wearing of poppies in Northern Ireland is also controversial as it is seen by many as a symbol of Britishness, representing support for the British Army. The poppy has long been the preserve of the unionist/loyalist community. Loyalist paramilitaries (such as the UVF and UDA) have also used poppies to commemorate their own members who were killed in The Troubles. Most Irish nationalists and republicans choose not to wear poppies; they regard the Poppy Appeal as supporting soldiers who killed civilians (for example on Bloody Sunday) or colluded with illegal loyalist paramilitaries (for example, the Glenanne gang) during The Troubles. Irish nationalist groups, and victims' groups, have urged the

BBC to end its policy that all presenters must wear poppies. They argue that it breaches impartiality and points out that political symbols are banned in workplaces in Northern Ireland. They also say that the BBC, as a publicly funded body, should broadly reflect the whole community.

Support for veterans and people affected by war

There may be some who argue that buying a white poppy deprives wounded veterans of the support that the RBL provides via the sale of red poppies, but of course there is nothing to stop someone wearing a white poppy while also donating to a charity to help those wounded in war. When white poppies were launched in the 1930s by the Women's Co-operative Guild, their General Secretary Eleanor Barton insisted that, 'The Guild was most anxious that nothing should be done that would prejudice the help given to disabled soldiers.' The PPU is today in favour of decent support for all people affected by war, including veterans but they believe that such people should be able to turn to a well-funded welfare state rather than having to rely on charity. Surely an achievable goal for the UK that remains one of the largest economies in the world, despite our economic travails of the past decade?

Red and/or white?

In 2006, a spokesman for the RBL stated 'What you wear is a matter of choice, the Legion doesn't have a problem whether you wear a red one or a white one, both or none at all. It is up to you. We don't comment on matters spiritual, poppies are there for the benefit of the living.'

Perhaps these recent words from the author Michael Morpurgo are something we can all contemplate: 'Wearing the red poppy for me is not simply a ritual, not worn as a politically correct nod towards public expectation. It is in honour of them, in respect and in gratitude for all they did for us. But I wear a white poppy alongside my red one, because I know they fought and so many died for my peace, our peace. And I wear both side by side because I believe the

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nature of remembrance is changing, and will change, as the decades pass since those two world wars.'

Peter Dobson
Justice & Peace Group

Art At Wingrave 2024

Art At Wingrave 2024 is just around the corner... a joyful and professional pre-Christmas Art Event featuring the enthusiasm and talent of seventeen participating artists and makers all gathering at Field

View this November. By the time we open our doors at 10.30am on 22-24 November, every corner of the house will be brimming with wonderful art on display, with even more pieces in the garage and garden.

Look forward to seeing new artists and new work: Ceramics, Ceramic and Paper Sculptures, Print Making, Textiles and Felt, Glass Art, Designer

Lamps, Pencil and Pastel Portraiture, Furniture Design, Painted Wood Design, Hand-turned Wood, Mixed Media Paintings and the captivating art of 'Riveting Welds'.

And there's more: Julie Pugh's lovely studio at nearby Home Farm, also in Castle Street, will be open to showcase her unique 'One of One' Jewellery.

So this is the perfect opportunity

for some enjoyable browsing; mark the dates, bring a friend, head down Castle Street and pay us a visit at Field View. A warm welcome awaits along with mulled wine and cakes (refreshment proceeds supporting Cancer Research.) Don't miss out on this festive celebration of art and creativity.

Andrew & Margaret Liversage



Christmas Day Lunch



**AT HIGH STREET BAPTIST
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A lunch for anyone and everyone; come and enjoy
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12.30pm ARRIVE

1pm LUNCH SERVED

3pm KING'S SPEECH WITH TEA/COFFEE

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Edmund Rich of Abingdon, 16 November



Tim and I have returned from a week's holiday in Burgundy in late September. While there we visited Pontigny Abbey, founded in 1114, one of the four great daughter houses of the Cistercians of Citeaux.

In our own time, being Archbishop of Canterbury has not been plain sailing but in the past, dozens were imprisoned for heresy; at least three died of plague; one was excommunicated; one was burnt at the stake; two were beheaded (both on Tower Hill, but 264 years apart); one was assassinated; and many died in exile. No fewer than three sought refuge at the monastery of Pontigny during their time: Thomas Becket, Stephen Langton and Edmund Rich.

Edmund was born around 1175 in Abingdon, where the Benedictine Abbey dominated the town, and it's possible that Edmund and his brothers began their education in the monastic school there. Edmund's mother was exceptionally pious and her ascetic and disciplined life percolated out to her family, to the point that when Edmund was sent to school in Paris, her farewell gift to him was a hair shirt! Edmund's father was

also devout and, rather unusually, he became a monk at Eynsham while Edmund's mother was still alive – leading to suggestions that monastic life was actually less strict than living with his own wife! Edmund's two sisters, Margaret and Alice, became nuns at Catesby Priory in Northamptonshire where Margaret, the elder, served as Prioress for twelve years.

After his time studying in Paris, Edmund returned to Oxford where he taught mathematics and dialectics. He is the first known Oxford Master of Arts and is said to have been the first person to teach Aristotle's logic there. The site where he lived and taught was eventually incorporated as the current college of St Edmund Hall.

For some time, Edmund resisted his mother's influence that he should study theology, but eventually, between 1205 and 1210 he studied for a doctorate in divinity and was ordained priest. Ten years later, Edmund was Treasurer of Salisbury as the 'new' cathedral was being built. In 1233 Pope Gregory IX,



having turned down three of the men chosen by the Chapter at Canterbury, appointed Edmund to the archbishopric. England was on the brink of civil war and Edmund acted as peace-broker between Henry III and his barons, but conflict and opposition took its toll and in 1240, he retired to Pontigny, dying only a few months later.

Within a year, miracles were being credited to him and, by the end of 1246, he had been canonised by Pope Innocent IX. In 1253, Richard of Chichester (Feast Day 16 June) dedicated a chapel in Dover in the name of his friend Edmund, making it the only chapel dedicated to one English saint by another.

Today, Edmund's 17th century reliquary tomb stands behind the high altar in the abbey church at Pontigny.

**Linzi James
St Peter & St Paul**



New times, new words...



One of the issues I often find myself musing on – and have written about before – is that of change. For many people, church and faith are things that

they expect to stay the same while the rest of life changes, although that has never been the case in reality.

Changes in how we use our language are fascinating. We all know that God is not male or female, and that human language cannot come close to describing God, yet we struggle with changes in gender or language about the Creator. When hearing concerns about those words, I often think of the Book of Common Prayer communion service (1662) where we pray that our monarch may 'truly and indifferently administer justice'. These days we use indifferent to mean uncaring, yet the meaning here is to be impartial or fair. Those of us who have attended church for many years know this, but if you are hearing those words for the first time, it is not at all clear. We have to think about what the words mean to everyone, not just to those who are used to them.

'Safeguarding' and 'risk assessments' are not words that we used to use in church contexts, but they are vital. If we do not do all that we can to ensure people's safety, both physical and emotional, then we are not being church. They are not structures put in place to restrict us, but to enhance how we work for God's kingdom, and how we use words surrounding those issues shows that. That can be as simple as when someone starts complaining about red tape, and unnecessary rules, and we point out how the truth is the opposite of that.

'Privilege' and 'entitlement' are also words that we use much more now and with specific meanings, referring to those people who have many material benefits in life and who are not aware of that, and who also may be very unconscious of how other people have to live. Although the increased usage of these words did not come from churches but rather from greater understanding of what equality means, I find them to be very Christian ideas. We should not judge ourselves or others on wealth; we should share what we have; we should acknowledge

our flaws. Yet many find those difficult to deal with, because they mean changing our perception of ourselves. We have that particular British characteristic of saying we are not rich (cue the Monty Python 'we were so poor' sketch) when compared with most of the world, we are.

The latest of these words that we may well be seeing more of is 'intersectionality'. It is a sociological analytical framework, which recognizes that different and overlapping social identities can result in different layers of inequality. It came out of the different waves of the feminist movement which began with white women from Europe and America, and then developed as the different experiences of women from

other parts of the world began to play a part: social class, race, religion, gender, disabilities, age – all create different situations. No one woman's life is the same as another's.

We have to be open to everyone's experiences in life, and that means knowing that the voices of some in our society are heard more loudly than others, simply because of their gender or income; we also have to see what makes up our individual identities. And integrated with that, we remember that we are all made in God's image and that we are all one in Christ.

Jane Banister
Tring Team



The Children's Society

No child should feel alone

Come Together for Christingle

Services for all ages

Sunday 1st December

Aldbury Church at 10.00am

Tring Church at 3.00pm

Help children and young people hold onto hope this Christmas by Christingling with us this festive season.



Keeping memories alive



All historians, professional or amateur, love memorials.

Researching my family history, it was headstones in Long Marston churchyard that started me on the journey to discovering relatives we knew nothing about. These gravestones proved invaluable. As a family we like to have a physical remembrance of someone's life, and an unmarked family grave in Wilstone cemetery now has a headstone in place.

When my maternal grandmother died in 1974 she was laid to rest in Tring Cemetery. The grave is in traditional white marble, full sized and kerbed, with the main part available for planting. The inscription is at the foot of the grave, on a flat 'cushion' stone. In 1981 my grandfather was interred in the same grave. But white marble deteriorates, especially when it is sited under the tallest tree in the cemetery, which regularly sheds needles and pine cones, and is beloved by the pigeons as a night time roost. It is also a favourite spot for squirrels, who take great pleasure in digging up the miniature daffodil bulbs I plant every autumn, meaning the grave has to be protected with chicken wire to ensure the flowers are able to bloom. For summer, they also quite like bedding plants, but once established, begonias seem to have a fighting chance of surviving until the autumn. But bedding plants need regular watering and marble needs constant cleaning, so this grave is very much a labour of love.

About twenty years ago, the grave was professionally cleaned and re-lettered but it now needs doing again. Much as I love history in all its guises, keeping this grave in its original condition was going to be expensive and time consuming. So a family discussion ensued, ranging around whether we had the right to alter what our grandparents had chosen. It took some time – two years – but in the end we decided that for practical reasons we needed to make a change. So we have opted for a simple headstone, in light granite, with exactly the same inscription, and a small planting area in front. The pigeons will have a much

smaller target to aim for, and the granite should resist their offerings. A mixed planting of spring bulbs, very deeply buried, and low growing lavender should look good all year round. As a bonus, squirrels don't like to eat lavender and I won't need to water it every other day in summer. The headstone is still in the making, but there is great relief in having made the decision, and that is maybe what tells you it was the right thing to do.

But static memorials are not the only memorials we have of our family; we have some 'green' ones too. I really enjoy gardening but am not the most successful person in this area. However, I seem to be really good with houseplants and currently have over twenty African Violets on the kitchen windowsill, after my neighbour told me, many years ago, that they thrive on a north-facing aspect. Indeed they do. Streptocarpus, which were Mum's, are supposed to live in the front porch but in summer the sun is too much for them and they have to be moved into the dining room. Winter flowering cyclamen, re-potted each year, are now several years old. They were also Mum's, and love the front porch during the colder months. Various cacti and succulents, all quite old, seem able to live virtually anywhere. But three plants stand out from the rest.

Many years ago, I was given a Peace Lily, and it has been divided and re-potted numerous times. Sometimes the offspring are given to raise money for a good cause, sometimes they are put on the front drive with a 'Free, please help yourself' notice. Peace Lilies are very forgiving plants, easy to care for, and also highly rated for air purification. But however old the Peace Lily is, it cannot compete with a Grape Ivy and an Aspidistra, which are both of ancient lineage.

The Grape Ivy belonged to my maternal grandparents, who lived in Tring, and with whom I spent a huge amount of time. I adored them. My granddad bought the plant in Woolworths for 6d. I remember it in their hall, before my grandma passed away in 1974, so it is more than fifty years old. It is a sizeable plant but is still growing really well and lives in one of the spare bedrooms, where its size doesn't impede traffic flow. I cannot divide it, so it gets re-potted every other year on



Boat Race Sunday – that way I don't forget to do it.

The Aspidistra is even older. My mum had several very close friends throughout her life, all stemming from her school days. Jean had inherited the Aspidistra from her mother, who had been given it by her cleaning lady. (The Antiques Roadshow would love the provenance). So, basic maths would suggest it is now about 100 years old. But Jean didn't like this plant and about fifteen years ago, when I offered to take it, she handed it over with much glee. It too has been divided, although not as often as the Peace Lily, because it is very slow growing, and sulks for about six months after it has been re-potted. One offspring now sits in the front window of a neighbour's house. My cousin has another, and is very proud of her ancient plant. At one time, Aspidistras were very fashionable, and were priced per leaf, but today they are quite hard to find. I am very fond of these old plants; they are tangible living memories of their previous owners and watching them continue to thrive is a joy.

But if anyone would like an Aspidistra or a Peace Lily, I have one of each that needs a new home – just let me know.

Alison Cockerill
St Cross, Wilstone

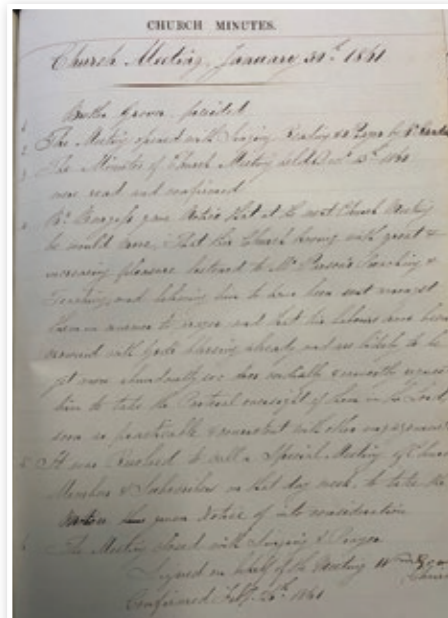
Keep on growing!



Over recent weeks I've been delving into the old books I found that show the history of New Mill Baptist Church. The oldest minutes go back to 1774. Whilst the beautiful writing may now be a little hard to read as it's faded, I've enjoyed taking some time to read of the various events and ups and downs for the church.



Across the pages the writers have written about the importance of the Scriptures being taught and the expectations that the congregation will act in ways that bring honour to God. The devout life of the follower of God was expected in regular attendance, in Baptism, in the giving of finance, in bringing children to Sunday School, as well as attendance at



prayer gatherings and spending time in caring for the people inside and outside the church.

I do wonder what those people would make of the life of the church today if they could visit us. Would they believe us to be disrespectful because we don't do things the same way? I wouldn't be surprised if they did. But I wonder if they would have enjoyed watching the life of Jesus on a film (not that they would even know what that would mean!).

Over the last eight weeks, our small groups that meet during the daytime and evening have been watching episodes of a film series called 'The Chosen'. (It's free to download for anyone who wants to watch, and I'd highly recommend it. Just look for 'The Chosen' App or you can find Series 1 on YouTube.)

Now over half of our congregation have been attending and finding they are getting wonderful insight into the life of Jesus, how he spoke, and what challenges he and his disciples faced as they lived in that period of history. Observing the sorts of interplay that would have been occurring between Jesus and the Romans who ruled in Israel at the time, and the rule-bound teachers of the Jewish law, brings a new depth to our understanding.

Watching the impact of the miracles Jesus performed, and how people were liberated to believe in God's love for them, is proving deeply moving.

After watching each episode, we then follow this up by reading the stories in the Gospel that we have just watched and take time to talk about what is impacting us. I'm observing a renewed excitement in many people's faith and also a greater desire to walk close to God within their ordinary lives.

Whilst those who worshipped at New Mill centuries ago would no doubt be mystified by our

culture, and our ways at church, I believe we are held together by the ongoing truth of the good news that Jesus taught and would be pleased we are growing in our walk with him now.

As the tablet above our pulpit reads, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He goes on changing lives today as he did over all those years past.

Jackie Buie
New Mill Baptist Church



Community Café

OPEN ON THURSDAYS
11.30-1.15

New Mill Baptist Church

Cafe Serving:
Coffee, tea
soup, lunch options,
dessert and cakes



No set prices, just donations

Who is the greatest?



Do you remember the account in Mark's Gospel where the disciples were discussing among themselves who was the greatest among them? Jesus called them out and tried to turn on its head their idea about how best to follow him.

'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all,' Jesus said. Then he brought a small child into the assembled group, lifted him up into his arms and said: 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

Our social conventions about children are so radically different from those of antiquity that we do not react with the surprise it would have caused in ancient times at the special attention given to a child. Then in Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures, children were regarded as 'non-people'.

There was affection within families, but according to the conventions of the time, a child should really have been with the women, not near the male teacher or his important disciples. Nevertheless, Jesus picked up a child and used him as an example. Much pointless speculation has taken place as to whose child it was – one of Peter's children? or St Ignatius who was later Bishop of Antioch?

Now a child has no influence at all; a child cannot advance a man's career nor enhance his prestige; a child cannot

give us things. It is the other way round. A child needs things; a child must have things done for him. So Jesus says in effect, 'If a man welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence and no wealth and no power, the people who need things done for them, he is welcoming me. More than that, he is welcoming God.' The child is typical of the person who needs support.

It is easy to cultivate the friendship of the person who can do things for us, and whose influence can be useful to us. And it is equally easy to avoid the society of the person who inconveniently needs our help. It is easy to curry favour with the influential and the great, and to neglect the simple, humble, ordinary folk. It is easy at some function to seek the society and the notice of some distinguished person and to avoid the poor relation.

I once went with a friend to the annual clergy dinner at a posh London Club. My friend (not I) was the member of this club. I am not complaining. The club does the best mixed grill in London. We chatted to the lead speaker at the event whom I knew from elsewhere. After he moved on, I asked my friend what he thought of the guy. He said he was constantly looking over our shoulders to see if there was anyone more important with whom he should be talking. This uncharitable assessment by my friend was entirely accurate.

Jesus says that we ought to seek out not those who can do things for us, but those for whom we can do things: in this way we are seeking the society of Jesus himself. This is another way of saying what we find in Matthew's Gospel 'If

you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Jesus' love for children is obvious from the well-known passage in Mark chapter 10: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.'

Now, as a former teacher, father of four and foster father of twelve, I do not have a naïve, sentimental view of children; I know they can be right little whatsits at times. But I think what Jesus is saying is that the true disciple achieves greatness not by holding great offices or positions, but by doing services to insignificant people such as children. The word for child should not be taken just to mean little children, but insignificant people. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth said that the concept of 'other' is the basis of Christian ethics 'to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him [or her] on this assumption.'

As Jesus goes to the cross, turning upside-down everything his disciples have imagined, he is still trying to turn upside-down what his followers think. His followers then were confused. Which of our ideas today need turning upside-down?

Jon Reynolds
Tring Team

Fixing fashion

The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. It takes 3,781 litres of water to make a pair of jeans, 2,700 for a T-shirt. Of the total fibre input used for clothing, 87% is incinerated or disposed of in a landfill.

But we seem to be addicted to fast fashion:

- 45% of the UK population buy a new item of clothing at least once a month
- the average person today buys 60% more clothing than in 2000
- around 30% of those items sit in wardrobes unworn for at least a year

Doubling the life of a garment from one to two years reduces its carbon footprint by 24%.

Mending is great but visible mending is great fun, resulting in a truly unique garment which you can wear with pride. All you need is a needle, thread and some imagination.

Deborah Aubrey



Ambo, pulpit and lectern

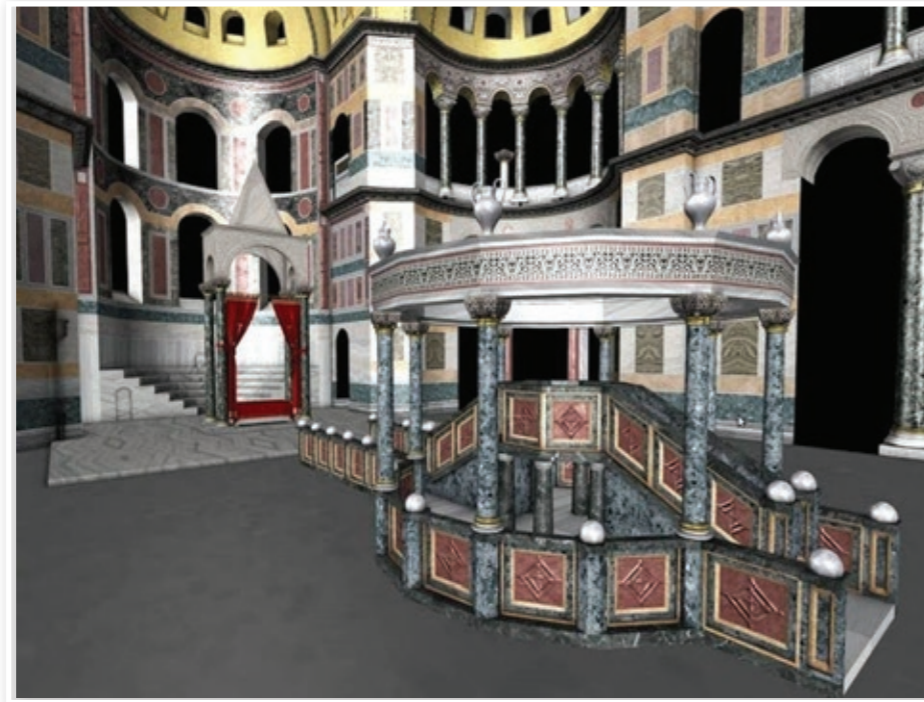


These are all names for the parts of a church where someone speaks to the congregation. The speech may consist of a reading, a homily or sermon, or prayers.

In the earliest churches there was a raised area, or ambo from which the priest spoke. It was raised so that the priest was more visible. Ambo comes from the Greek and means 'step' or 'elevation'. In the early church the service was in two parts – the Word and the Eucharist. The Word was read and preached from the ambo and the Eucharist was performed at the altar. This was common from the 4th century. In some larger churches there were two ambos, one at the East side for the Epistle reading, and one on the West side for the Gospel reading. A few very grand churches had tiered ambos where the Epistle was delivered from the lower level and the Gospel from the upper.

The origin of the ambo is thought to be twofold. The ambo was derived from the Jewish synagogue raised platform from which the scriptures were read. It was also considered to be derived from two biblical hills – Mount Sinai where the twelve commandments were delivered and the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

By the 14th century ambos were disappearing and were being replaced by a pulpit. Pulpit derives from the Latin



pulpitum – the stage of a theatre. The pulpit was a raised-up area in the nave where the congregation stood. This was used by the priest to deliver homilies or sermons. Pulpitum is also an architectural term used to describe the screen of wood or stone separating the nave from the choir. Very muddling!

At the time of the Reformation, the pulpit became an important central feature in the Protestant church as it was used to deliver the sermons. It became much less important in the Catholic church where it was replaced by a moveable lectern brought out for the sermon, readings and Responsorial Psalm. A permanent lectern was a feature of many Protestant churches for readings. More recently some modern

Catholic churches have had a fixed ambo for the homily in addition to a moveable lectern, and many Protestant churches have removed the fixed pulpit and replaced with a lectern.

Churches in Tring have a mixture of ambos, lecterns and pulpits and the sermon or homily can sometimes be delivered from a freestanding area without lectern or pulpit, or even on the move! The Eucharist is normally performed at an altar or table (fixed or moveable).

Next time you visit an old church or cathedral, you might like to identify the ambos, pulpits and lecterns.

John Allan
High Street Baptist Church

News from the Bell Tower



In this season of mellow fruitfulness, I am reminded that schools returned to work in September. I wonder if you know any teenagers among your family and

friends? Are there any you could encourage to give bellringing a try? Are these young contacts of yours searching for a D of E (Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme) skill to

adopt? Or do they just need something other than homework to do one evening a week? You can come along with them and give it a try too!

Recently I heard one of our learners say they'd been thinking of having a go for years before they had made contact and become part of the team. They wish that they had made the effort sooner now they know what is involved, and enjoy the sense of achievement they have as they improve.

The bells of St Peter & St Paul ring every Tuesday evening for practice

at 19.30; before that at 19.00 there is teaching for newcomers; and every Sunday before the morning service, they ring as they have since the 15th century. We have eight bells but fewer than eight ringers on a Sunday morning – what a shame!

Come and join us and you could be ringing in the merry band for Christmas and New Year.

Johanna Morgan
Tring Bell Tower

Tring's Christmas Festival



Christmas is coming – the goose is getting fat. OK, maybe we won't have any geese but there will be reindeer!

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, let me tell you, it takes an awful lot of wonderful volunteers to help Tring Together organise the Tring Christmas Festival. From car park assistants to road closure people, counters on Memorial Garden and in the Victoria Hall, sound technicians on the three stages, litter pickers and many other roles that make up this wonderful festival. Our community is full to bursting with lovely people who give their time freely.

This year it is on Saturday 30 November from 3.30-8.30pm. We will have the usual High Street full of stalls, the fun fair, Christmas stalls in the Victoria Hall, plus there will be mulled wine and other goodies.

Walk into the enchanting Memorial Garden where you will find Father and

Mother Christmas sitting in their grotto (with their sleigh) to welcome all the good little children. Nearby will be two of Father Christmas' reindeer, which you can stroke and then you can admire the fantastic lights around the Memorial Garden pond.

'Design a Light' is back and you can see the winning choice on stage in Church Square.

Once again, we will have three music stages which are full of local musicians, dancers and singers. Tring is blessed with a lot of talent. Whether you are listening to choirs and the rock choruses in St Peter & St Paul's Church or catching up with local bands on the Radley Stage in Akeman Street, the choice is amazing!

Church Square main stage will be full of dancing groups – Tring Performing Arts



School, Tring School Swing Band and Tring Music Partnership's Phoenix Big Band. Tring's well-known Elasticats will have a presence on the stage also.

So, soak up the atmosphere, shop local and treat yourself to dinner at one of our fabulous Tring restaurants. We hope the weather will be kind, but it doesn't really dampen the spirit.

Let the festivities begin!

Trish Dowden
Tring Together





Everything Happens in the Heritage Heart of Tring!



Preserving the Heart of Tring
for Everyone's Future



For further information please contact the Secretary at info@fotch.co.uk

There is only one Tring!



When did you last visit Tring's Local History Museum? If the answer is 'Can't remember' then now might be a good time to put that right...

Tring's Local History Museum in the old Auctioneer's Offices in the market place off Brook Street is something of a triumph of local initiative and enthusiasm but sometimes gets overshadowed by its Big Brother, Tring Museum at the end of Akeman Street.

However, despite the undoubted appeal of the Rothschild collections, which make the big museum such a magnet for weekend and half-term family visits from all over the place, the Local History Museum has something even more intriguing for, well, 'locals'. That's you and me and just about everybody who reads *Comment* – aka Tring-ers!

If Tring's your thing, then there's a special graphic display in place right now which you might like to see, as it helps to position the 'Heritage Heart of Tring' in its special place in history.

about the setting up of the Local History Museum took place and many of our members are also actively engaged in that excellent venture. Earlier this year, Shelley Savage asked me to contribute to an archive they are producing about the way different institutions have changed (or not) over the past seventy years; I wrote a piece called 'In the Eye of the Storm'. This describes how, despite the huge changes in society itself and Tring as a community, the historic church of St Peter & St Paul remains the heart of our town – and strives to be open, warm and welcoming to all.

Tring's heritage heart

As a result of this piece, Shelley asked us to put together a graphic display to go into the museum to demonstrate the ways in which we are the heritage heart of Tring and the place where so much has happened over the years and where so much continues to happen in the annual rhythm of Tring Life.

Accordingly, we produced a display consisting of four panels which demonstrate the different ways in which St Peter & St Paul, in its splendid green setting, fulfils that role.

One of these was featured on the back cover of the last *Comment* magazine and you can now see all of them life-size, in situ, in the museum. We were greatly helped in realising this by our graphic designer Andy Hall and the Head of Facilities at the museum, Ernesto Jaconelli.

Some superstar objects come to town

You will also be able to see, from 1 November, two original examples of the celebrated Tring Tiles which are on loan from the Victoria & Albert Museum. These artefacts are a rare example of the mediaeval artform, sgraffito, which is a method of working designs into the wet slip on the surface of the tile. This technique results in a startling vitality and freshness of imagery.

These tiles were not placed on the floor but were originally displayed on the walls of the chancel and thus look as fresh and bright today as when they were made. They have been described as masterpieces of early mediaeval art and are unique in England, having been created in the 1330s.

There is a display of replicas of these tiles in the museum and leaflets detailing their history and provenance – as well as the story of their mysterious disappearance and rediscovery in a junk shop – are available in St Peter & St Paul's.

These splendid artefacts are just one more reason why the familiar heritage building at the heart of our town can truly be described as 'The Heritage Heart of Tring'. Tring is a town full of interesting places and things to see and do. A visit to both the museum and the church is very definitely a great way of starting to see the town we live in from a fresh perspective – and rediscover just how unique it really is.

There is only one Tring!

Grahame Senior
The Friends of Tring Church Heritage

The Friends of Tring Church Heritage

Thirty-five years ago, a group of Tring enthusiasts, who were concerned for the long-term well-being of the glorious mediaeval building at the heart of our town, got together to create a new charity – The Friends of Tring Church Heritage (sometimes known as FOTCH). Over the years this group has written booklets and pamphlets about the history and heritage, put on pageants and concerts and exhibitions and invested many thousands of pounds in ensuring the stability and accessibility of the church and churchyard for all – residents and visitors alike. The essence of their work has been to make FUNdraising FUN – and communicate just how loved and valued this historic gem is by the WHOLE community of Tring.

We were involved and supportive when discussions



Meet Fr John Byrne, the new parish priest of Corpus Christi



I met with Fr John to find out a little more about him as he settles into his new role of parish priest of Corpus Christi, Tring.

Where were you born?

I was born in Carlow, one of the smallest, if not THE smallest, county in Ireland. My home was right on the border of three counties, Carlow, Kildare and Wicklow. I walked over the fields to school in County Kildare.

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

I am the youngest of six children, four boys and two girls. My brother Charlie is the parish priest in Naas, Co. Kildare, not far from where we were reared. My sister, Rosario, is the Mother Abbess of a Poor Clares' Convent.

Why did you leave Ireland?

It is difficult to pinpoint the reason. I just had a strong feeling that I should come to London. When 6th formers ask me why I became a priest, I tell them that I am still working that out. I was ordained by the Diocese of Westminster at my sister's enclosed convent so that she could be present at the ceremony. My first mass was in my home parish in Ireland. Looking back, I can see God's hand at work directing my life.



Green and served there for eight years before moving to Hackney. I loved serving in the East End as it really sucks you in. From there I moved to Hemel Hempstead where I looked after four parishes and served there for thirteen years before moving to Feltham. Feltham is a massive parish of over 2,000 worshippers. Fr Joseph Okoro (currently the parish priest of Berkhamsted) was my assistant there. Coming to Tring is a big change for me, but I am very happy to be here.

What are you most looking forward to in Tring?

I am looking forward to getting to know the people of Corpus Christi on a personal level and visiting people. Tring's small size makes this possible. I like that Corpus Christi feels like a family. I am also looking forward to being involved in Churches Together and meeting other faiths. I strongly believe

in working alongside other churches to benefit the whole community.

Fr John asked me to include his telephone number for anyone who would like to talk to him: it is 07879 058732.

Margaret Donnelly
Corpus Christi Catholic Church

Tell us about the parishes you have been in since your ordination?

My first parish was Enfield Town where I was an assistant to the parish priest for five years. When I started in Enfield, I was the youngest priest in the Diocese of Westminster. I was then placed in Southall as an assistant for five years. I learnt a lot in Southall and particularly enjoyed the interaction and mutual support across the community, including the Sikh and Muslim communities. I was appointed the parish priest of Wood



DENS Sleepout

Local charity offering 'unique' FREE event to help the homeless

DENS has announced the return of its popular Sponsored Sleepout on Friday 22 November, with free places up for grabs for everyone in the community. At its prestigious new venue of Lockers Park School in Hemel Hempstead, the event will kick off with a fun-filled evening of team games and live entertainment.

There will also be a new, dedicated sleeping area for participating businesses, where they can take on a night of team building like no other.

When it's time to bed down under the stars, attendees will get to experience a small glimpse of what life is like for rough sleepers during the harsh winter months. As a thank you for giving up their bed for the night, a free breakfast will be provided for all participants at the break of dawn.

Last year's event raised a spectacular £30,000 to support DENS' life-changing work for local people facing homelessness. This year, the charity are aiming even higher with their fundraising target to help meet the

unprecedented demand for their services.

Nicky Maxwell, Community and Events Manager at DENS, said: 'We're delighted to have waived all entry fees to make the event accessible to everyone. Raise sponsorship with your friends, family or colleagues, and experience a truly unique night out for a worthy cause.'

To book your FREE places for the DENS Sponsored Sleepout, please visit www.dens.org.uk/sleepout.
Alex Copley
Communications Lead at DENS



Feedback



Ian and I were very sorry to read in *Comment* last month of the sad loss of John Hawkes. His family were in the church choir at St Peter & St Paul's at the same time as us and they sang at our wedding forty-nine years ago.

John and Ian played tennis together at Tring Tennis Club and were both Watford Town Football Club supporters. His loss will be keenly felt.

Rosamund Drakes, St Andrew's, Biggleswade
Formerly St Peter & St Paul

COMMENT

The magazine of the Churches in Tring

Please submit your article to the Editor by the 1st of the month.

Aim for 500 or 1000 words and please send a head and shoulders colour photo or jpg and any other photos in high resolution.

Contact us at: comment.magazine@gmail.com



In memory of John Hawkes

Recently my dad told me that he had lived a life that was 'blessed with good fortune'. Even in his twilight years, he remained positive about his life. And I know that it was his wish that after his death people would celebrate a life well lived.

John Hawkes, my dad, was born in Wallingford on 8 May 1929. His father was manager of the local branch of Barclays Bank and his mother was a nurse. He was the middle one of three children. His younger brother, Peter, died when aged only 7 years old. His older sister, Marjorie, shared John's sense of humour. Times they spent together were always full of raucous laughter and she and John shared a real love of life.

Dad was a keen oarsman and strong swimmer and would often tell us about his youthful exploits on the Thames. One of my favourite stories is about a bitterly cold winter's day, when after a few drinks at a local pub, a gentleman farmer bet young John that he wouldn't dare to jump off the bridge into the freezing water below. He couldn't resist the challenge and jumped into the water, much to the amusement of the crowd that had gathered to watch the shivering teenager.

His love of the Thames continued throughout his life. So, when he married Ann, the Compleat Angler on the river in Marlow was the obvious choice for the first night of their married life. And again, when the family celebrated his 90th birthday, he chose the same venue – the river always held a special place in his heart.

Dad excelled at Wallingford Grammar School and in 1943, in the midst of wartime Britain, he won one of only five scholarships to the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth. So notable was his achievement that my mum first became aware of her future husband when the entire school was given a day's holiday in recognition of Dad's great achievement.

So, aged 14, and with war raging across Europe, Dad set off to college. Though he enjoyed much of his experience there, he was not emotionally prepared for leaving his family. He became very withdrawn and eventually a Naval Doctor diagnosed him with only the twelfth-ever case of a condition called Kleine-Levin Syndrome. This very rare condition was characterised by periods of excessive sleeping and compulsive eating. Eventually he was discharged without graduating and before he saw active service. He returned to the comfort of his family home in Wallingford, and

back with his family, he started to flourish again.

John joined a firm of Estate Agents in Wallingford where he studied at night school and qualified, before ultimately becoming a Chartered Surveyor. Then with his wife expecting their first child, he made the uncharacteristically rash decision to leave the firm without another job. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of his life. He moved to Tring in 1958 to join Brown & Merry. He loved the town and his new job and became a partner in the firm. He worked long hours and made many great friends and contacts through his role. Dad enjoyed the people he worked with but had probably never realised the value of the business he had helped to create, the sale of which set him up for thirty-five years of happy retirement.

Whilst business was important, sport was his real passion, and he was a fierce competitor. He was a founder member of Wallingford Rowing Club, a stalwart of Tring Hockey Club and singles champion at Tring Tennis Club four times in the early 1970s as well as Club President. He served in most positions on the clubs' committees and was involved in many of the social activities too. He loved Watford FC. I have many special memories of our visits to Vicarage Road when I was a boy.

So, what was my dad really all about? At Dad's 90th birthday celebration he talked about the most important things in life. He called them his three Fs: friendship, family and faith.

Friendships

We have received so many lovely messages from his friends, and the common theme is his sense of humour and his laugh. He always wanted to share fun and laughter with everyone he met. Whether through his business, the church, sport, bridge, Probus or his other interests, he would always form connections and friendships wherever he went. He kept detailed records about his friends in his birthday book which included dates of surgical procedures, ordinations, marriages, divorces, vaccinations and tooth extractions and would call people to wish them a happy birthday or to remind them of the anniversary of a long-forgotten event.

Family

He married Ann in 1988 and they have enjoyed nearly thirty-six years of happily married life together. They travelled a lot and shared a love of sun, good food and



wine and most of all their love of their friends and families. Dad was the cement that held our merged family together for so many years. He was a kind and loving husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather. He arranged family holidays and many special family celebrations in memorable places. He loved it whenever his grandchildren chose to spend time with him.

Faith

Dad had a strong faith and a gave his time generously in support of this church. Dad was not a great theologian, nor one who would preach to others, but rather he was just a kind and generous soul who believed deeply in Christian values and the community that the church creates. He was always generous to others but had little interest in material things. Despite his achievements in business, sports and life in general, he was often very self-deprecating. He realised the importance of friendship and service. He was honest and self-effacing and would willingly admit his own mistakes and failings. He was always able to laugh at himself too, traits that not all men are able to master! Despite being old-fashioned and conservative in some aspects of his life, he was surprisingly modern and understanding about the changing world. His tolerance seems especially remarkable considering he was a man brought up by Victorian parents in wartime Britain.

Whenever our family came to leave and said 'I'm going to love you and leave you', he would say, 'Please always keep loving me but whatever you do, please never leave me'. Now it's our turn to say, 'Dad, we will always love you and in our hearts, you will never leave us'.

Mike Hawkes, son

In memory of Virginia Bly

I first saw Virginia when she came through the doorway of a crowded club room above the Derby Arms pub in Aylesbury. She wore a duffle coat which she removed to show the obligatory uniform of an art student; beautiful, long, straight, blond hair, a loose blouse, sticky-out skirt and fishnets, the most captivating girl I had ever seen. She went to the other end of the room where her arrival was greeted with much acclaim, far away from the band where I was playing drums. It was in 1961

and the girl I was with said my reaction told her that Virginia would one day be my partner for life. It did take a while, but she was right, and I can remember that evening as if it were yesterday.

Virginia had an unconventional upbringing; her father, a doctor, died when she was 6 years old leaving her mother, a nurse, without financial support to educate Virginia and her younger sister, Jane. This she did by acting as Matron in a Steiner-type school called Tylehurst in East Sussex. Virginia showed exceptional initiative and an ability to learn, and despite the lack of established school rules, she excelled in all subjects with a special aptitude for languages, science and history; her drawings of the Noble Orders of Architecture are as accurate as any. In fact, it was her ability to draw with pencil and charcoal, lino cut, and to design and create in mixed media, that saw her into the Wycombe College of Art and adopt the costume she was wearing in the Derby Arms.

Introducing Virginia to my parents was tricky as they had no previous contact with anyone remotely Bohemian, but within a few weeks, Mr and Mrs Bly would not think of having a group of friends for tea, a meal, drinks or any other excuse for a party, without saying to me, 'Now, you must get Virginia to come. We want her to meet so and so', or 'We want to introduce her to...' Such was Virginia's totally honest, open and warm personality

coupled with easy and well-informed conversation, that she soon became the adopted and adored daughter-in-law, well before our marriage in 1967.

After Art School, and to earn a living while lodging with friends in various places, Virginia took a course in shorthand and worked in a local photographic studio. Convinced she was worthy of better, my mother arranged a meeting with a London hairdresser and within a month, Virginia was main receptionist at Durae Salon



opposite Harrods. In the four years she was there, we had a wonderful time hitting the high spots in town through various trade and show-biz contacts, going to first nights, galas and dinner dances where Virginia was always the belle of the ball. In 1974, we were presented to Her Majesty the Queen, who offered me no more than her hand but had three or four exchanges with Virginia, a perfect example of Virginia's natural ease and magnetism.

Soon after our marriage, in addition to her many other qualities, it was clear that Virginia was, above all, born to be a mother, and in 1969 we had Julian and three years later, James. From

then Virginia became her true self as a remarkable and most wonderful person, fulfilled and fulfilling each of her roles to perfection and once again enjoying her artistic sides, particularly with weaving and material collages while encouraging the boys to create in whatever ways they found easy and natural.

As the boys grew up, Virginia and I travelled much of the world together in the course of my work, and she was the most loving, considerate, unassuming, supportive and all-embracing partner, wife and friend I could have had.

After a life-threatening illness, which left her with bronchiectasis, and our move to Station Road, Virginia had the opportunity to indulge in her latent passion for gardening and create an area of delight and great beauty which she opened to the public for many years to raise money for Iain Rennie and cancer research. Her mother was the second patient of the Tring Iain Rennie and passed away in our home, cared for by their nurses. The garden was also where she organised the best parties at the slightest excuse for the boys, for me or for any friend who wanted one. Here she excelled as the convivial welcoming hostess, when her affection for all around her shone through the rain as well as sunlight. And I never heard her say an unkind or critical word about anyone.

Alzheimer's and then dementia began some ten years ago and we moved to a small apartment behind the old Rose & Crown precisely where we used to play tennis – the only thing she was not good at – just in time to enable constant care.

Virginia retained her tranquil nature and personality throughout and our last three years together in our new home forged a love so strong, so unconditionally binding, and so wonderful, it was as if these were the times we had spent sixty years building towards, and they were our reward.

John Bly

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Articles, photos and publicity adverts for the next edition should arrive with the Editor no later than the 1st of the previous month.

COMMENT DEADLINES

1 January
1 February
1 March
1 April
1 May
1 June
1 August
1 September
1 October
1 November

NB There is no magazine for January or August

Crossword puzzle answers

From page 8

ACROSS	DOWN
1. SABBATH	1. SONIC
5. PADRE	2. BLOOMER
8. NAOMI	3. ABIDE
9. RELATED	4. HERESY
10. CAMPERS	5. PILGRIM
11. RIDGE	6. DATED
12. PARADE	7. ENDLESS
14. EMBERS	12. PARABLE
17. ROPES	13. DISSENT
19. REFLECT	15. ETERNAL
22. BESEECH	16. ARCHES
23. TUNED	18. PASTE
24. ELECT	20. FETCH
25. SCHOLAR	21. TUDOR

High Street Baptist Church - Tring

Growing in the message and challenge of God



For details about our services, prayer meetings and special events visit our website.



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EVERY SUNDAY
10.30AM

IN PERSON AND
ON ZOOM

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Passcode:
highstreet





Coffee for a cause
Tuesdays 10am-12 Noon



Fairtrade tea, coffee and homemade cake.
Proceeds toward BMS World Mission.

Seniors Games Afternoon

Wednesdays 2 - 4pm
High Street Baptist Church, Tring



Baby Group

Tuesdays 10.30am - 12 Noon

For new born and non-movers



Tots

Wednesdays 9.30 - 11.30am
Indoor fun for toddlers



HP23 Youth Group

Mondays 6.30 - 7.45pm
For young people in Year 7 and above



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High Street Baptist Church

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Saturday 30th November

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