

COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



What's on in February in Tring Church

Services at Tring Church

Sunday 4th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Communion with craft activity **
6.30pm Choral Evensong for Candlemas

Sunday 11th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language**
10am Worship for all
3pm Piano and More concert

Ash Wednesday 14th February

10am Holy Communion**
7.30pm Holy Communion

Sunday 18th February

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

Sunday 25th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am 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 February 11th



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.

Living out the Christian faith



Churches often get labelled for their styles. An Anglo Catholic church might be described for its 'smells and bells' or a Charismatic church might be described as 'happy clappy'. We rarely use incense in St Peter & St Paul's – the feast of Epiphany and then Good Friday evening / Easter dawn are the only occasions it is used regularly (and I had to go running to Corpus Christi one year when we discovered we had run out of charcoal for the thurible). I believe there is a sanctus bell in the vestry cupboard but don't know that anyone has used it in decades. So, I don't think we are a 'smells and bells' church (but I do love the lingering smell of incense in the church which helps me access the mystery which is God). We are, however, as a church, quite partial to an interactive hymn: musical instruments might be given out and we even have a clap hands Gloria. That said, no one who knows me would ever accuse me of being happy clappy! It is a shame that labels can often be used to divide.

Another term often used to describe what kind of Christian a person is, is

'born again'. Often it is used to mean that the person has had a life-changing conversion experience. They are a 'born-again Christian' because they can locate the particular moment when the change came about. In our Advent Bible study, looking at John's Gospel, we saw how John uses this term for all who are baptised. As an Anglican church we will continue to study John in Lent. We will look at the farewell discourse in which Jesus promises to the disciples that he will send the gift of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth. It is the Spirit who enables us to live the risen life.

As someone who cannot locate any single conversion experience in my journey of faith, I am unlikely to call myself a born-again Christian. However, it strikes me as being vitally important that when we come to Ash Wednesday (14 February this year) we should all try to reflect on what it is for us to be born again. For me, this will mean studying the Bible again so I can reflect on what it means for me today. Do I actually try to live out this meaning? This is something which needs to be done afresh again and again as the Spirit continues to lead us forwards into the truth.

Huw Bellis
Tring Team

A surprise Christmas visitor!

Christmas morning, 25 December 2023, and who should peep around the door of St Peter & St Paul's for the 8.00am service? Is Rudolf lost? Who can it be?

Thank you to Linzi James for supplying the image and sending it to Comment.

The Editor



High Street Baptist Church, Tring is hosting a

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- Makaton use for every day
- Makaton Christian vocabulary
- Signing in church



Date - Saturday 3 February 2024

Time - 9:45am – 4:30pm (bring your own lunch)

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Where - High Street Baptist Church, Tring (HP23 4AB)

To book - contact: Ruth@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk
(booking is essential as places are limited)



Equipping churches in key word signing to be welcoming and accessible to adults with learning disabilities so that they can know Jesus and grow in their faith.

God has good purposes ahead!



It was so encouraging that the White Christmas service in December last year, which was the first of this nature at New Mill, went so well.

Many people found its focus supportive in their grief journey. I loved working with Joe and Ruth Egan from High Street Baptist Church to put this together.

On 17 December, we had a wonderfully full church for our carols by candlelight. The old church lends itself to being decorated with real candles, and our old organ, played so beautifully, made for a great place for visitors and our regular congregations to listen to the story of Christmas and enjoy a great sing! The mulled wine and home-made mince pies were, of course, a welcome treat afterwards.

One week later, our quieter Christmas Eve communion set us up ready for our short Christmas Day service. The welcoming glass of bubbles and choice of chocolates welcomed all who came along, so that we could welcome the arrival of the baby Jesus.

Now, as we are in 2024, we will be refocusing on what the core truths are of what the 'good news' is all about.

So, for the first six weeks of the year, we will have the Alpha course videos in our Sunday services, and then time to write down questions, so that I can try to answer them. Everyone is welcome.

During January our Thursday Café is taking a break, but will resume in February. We open from 11.30 - 1.30 with a range of lunch options. It's a donation-only café, so all can enjoy a lovely meal with good company. We hope to see more people join us as we move through this new year. God has good purposes ahead.

Jackie Buie
New Mill Baptist Church



Where have all the Psalms gone?



When I was a small girl of about 11, I had a pious period and attended church, morning and evening, every Sunday for a year. I joined the choir (two old gentlemen and four slightly younger ladies). Of course, we used The Book of Common Prayer and sang the psalms set for regular use like Jubilate Deo (No 100) in the morning and Cantate Domine (No 67) in the evening, plus a psalm appointed for each day. Indeed the 150 psalms supposedly written by King David were an integral part of every service and set for use over a period of thirty days.

Many younger members of our churches may never have used The Book of Common Prayer, let alone sung psalms from one. No more the filling in of boring moments during the sermon by finding the date of Easter in the year 2050, looking up who you could not marry, and who knows what a Communion is? There is a great deal in the Prayer Book that is obscure, dated and hardly relevant to us today. Yet the inclusion of the Psalms of David in their entirety meant that they were a very definite part of the pattern of worship, serving both as an obligation and a source of inspiration.

How did it happen that the psalms, once so important a part of the liturgy of the Church of England, are now so peripheral? Would we want to bring them back into every service? Such a question involves a consideration of the background to their use in Christian worship and to decisions on the format of our present use of the service of 'Common Worship.'

Pursuing the origin, translations, revisions, interpretations and controversies surrounding changes to The Book of Common Prayer, and inclusion of the psalms as part of the liturgy of the Church of England, is to go not just down a rabbit hole but a whole warren. Suffice to say here, that the introduction of Common Worship as an alternative to the Book of Common Prayer in 2000 whilst including The Psalter (collection of Psalms) separated from the liturgy made set psalms for each service no longer obligatory.

Two points can be explored in explanation of the decline of psalm singing: difficulties in execution and in interpretation.

The psalms were written as songs, and the Church of England experimented over centuries in methods of singing them. One answer was to turn them into hymns. Milton wrote 'Let us with a gladsome mind, Praise the Lord for he is kind', based on psalm 136 at the age of 15. This course was followed by Tate and Brady, Wesley and notably Isaac Watts who wrote over 600 and said that the psalms were 'too Jewish, too miserable and too difficult'. His aim was to turn them into more cheerful songs that the congregation could join in, not metrical puzzles. He had an enormous influence on the spread of singing psalms as hymns, especially amongst non-conformists. Perhaps his most famous transition is Psalm 90 to 'Oh God our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come'. Psalm 98 'Oh sing unto the Lord a new song' becomes by a stretch of the imagination 'Joy to the world the Saviour comes'.

A reaction came in the 19th century and a swing back to metrical chanting came with the growth of high church sentiments; in 1854, The Cathedral Psalter, 'Pointed for chanting and containing appropriate chants' was published. An example of metrical guidance from Psalm 81 illustrates the system of 'pointing' to fit the chant.

'Sing we merrily unto / God our / strength: make a cheerful noise / unto the / God of Jacob'

This was a method of singing psalms suitable for cathedral choirs when the result could, as Milton says, 'dissolve you into ecstasies'. For small choirs and congregations, stumbling to match the words with the metre of the chant, it was dire. And that was me as a small girl.

However poor or inspiring the singing, what matters is the meaning. Are the psalms, as Richard Hooper maintained, important because... 'What is there

necessary for man to know that the psalms cannot teach?' They cover praise, prayer, kingship, mercy, thanks, nature, history, the law, and the coming of the Messiah. There are also what are called 'precatory psalms' that propose judgement, calamity and chaos on ones enemies. Analysis and guidance abound. C S Lewis, for example, devotes a whole book to 'Reflections on the Psalms' (Fontana 1961). Chapter by chapter, he deals with 'the difficulties I have met and the lights I have gained when reading the psalms'.

So, 'Where have all the psalms gone?' Perhaps not very far. We are still aware of them through occasional use and the few that are a part of Common Worship; BCP services are still used on occasion and we regularly sing hymns based on them. They are, of course, to be found in the Bible and there have been impressive and poetic translations that have received praise for retaining the poetry of the original, notably the Hebrew Bible of Robert Alter and The Jerusalem Bible where Tolkien was one of the translators.

St Paul says 'Speak to each other with psalms, hymns and songs' (Ephesians 3:19). It is a long time since that little girl sang the psalms each week from her Cathedral Psalter, but she does miss them! Maybe we could find some innovative ways to include the psalms as a spiritual resource in both our regular worship and occasional study groups?

Caroline Ellwood
St John the Baptist, Aldbury

So much for the Anglican churches and the psalms – what do our friends in the other denominations do? Are they still sung elsewhere? Ed.

Welcome to Tom Copperwheat!

Tom joined Akeman Street Baptist Church as full-time pastor in 2024 having previously served at Limes Avenue Baptist Church in Aylesbury for over ten years. He is married to Abi and they have two young children.

Tom's desire for the church is that people see Akeman Street not as an institution, but as a supernatural family of men, women and young people shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ, who are seeking to serve him and live for him.

In his spare time, Tom enjoys early morning gym sessions, good coffee, and reading anything by J.R.R Tolkien.

John Heasman
Akeman Street Baptist Church



The most unlikely places

As a schoolgirl I was amazed that each year I wondered at the fragile, blazing white snowdrops bursting through the tarmac outside the headmistress's office. Now, isn't this a miracle! I have always thought so.

Flowers grow in the most unlikely places, hence the illustration of the rubbish dump. Beauty can be found amongst all that filth. On that note, one of my granddaughters found this quotation which I felt depicts what I wanted to share: 'If everything around you seems dark, look again. You may be the light'.

Jean Baker





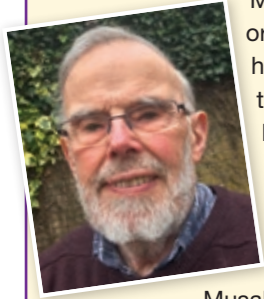
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The groaning spirit – a vision of lament



'Musalaha' is an organisation that has for thirty-two years been building grassroots relationships across divided communities in Israel/Palestine.

Musalaha's leaders experienced the same trauma as their communities and nations following 7 October last year. Their experience as they met over the next weeks is vividly described by Maaïke Machiels, their Organisation Development Officer.

'Firstly, the entire Musalaha team focused on lamentation, allowing us openly to discuss our feelings of grief, anger, sadness, fear and shame. What Musalaha has been warning Israelis and Palestinians about for years has played out in the most gruesome manner. By openly sharing our emotions and advising one another on how to prioritise self-care through prayer, introspection and reflection, we succeeded to reclaim our humanity in the midst of anguish and despair.'

December's *Comment* published their carefully worded lament, which included: 'We at Musalaha lament the devastation and unfolding tragedies in Gaza and Southern Israel. We stand firmly against the embrace, use and justification of violence against civilian populations in the name of justice, vengeance and liberation. We are

distressed and overwhelmed, never having seen this scale of inhumanity, anguish, rage and hatred before.'



Various conversations have developed since then on how to affirm and confirm the work of their reconciliation groups and training, remembering the great pressure each community exerts on those relating to the 'other'. It is likely, when the war ends, that the international community will make resources available for some form of rebuilding. But investing in relationship-building and reconciliation is crucial to the future. Could grants from nations and other bodies have an agreed section for relationship-building? Could any UK contribution include specific reference to relationship-building? Such an exploration is being initiated with UK MPs.

Please pray for all groups and people of goodwill seeking to build reconciling relationships. We occasionally see such groups on the news – and our encouragement is life blood for them. I had never previously seen lament as a way of prayer. However, these circumstances make it different. A few hours before I wrote this article, I heard a teacher talk on the groaning in Romans 8 – the groaning of creation, our own inward groaning and the groaning of the Spirit, embodied into history by Gethsemane, by the cry of dereliction from the cross, by Mary's experience and by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke, saying to Jesus about Jesus, 'We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel...'

Here are two quotations that I found helpful from the talk: '... our vocation... is to stand in prayer when the world is in pain so that God's own Spirit may be present and intercede right there.'

'The Spirit inhabits that pain and calls out to the Father from within its darkest depths, by means of God's people being in prayer, Spirit-inspired prayer, at that very place.'

Colin Briant
High Street Baptist Church

For up-to-date information:
<https://musalaha.uk>
<https://musalaha.org>

News from the bell tower

Tring Tower had a very special occasion to celebrate recently: seventy-five years of ringing by Howard Collings, the tower secretary. A quarter peal was rung: that's 1,260 changes of bob doubles with three tenor covers rung in fifty minutes. Howard conducted the quarter accompanied by old friends, tower officers and three family members: his daughter, son-in-law and grandson.

We were busy in December with Christmas ringing for various carol services, crib service, normal Sunday ringing, Christmas Eve and midnight mass.

We welcome anyone who may have wondered what bell-ringing is like, or who have thought about giving it a try. Lessons are free any Tuesday evening

*'Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.'*

*'Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and light
Ring in the common love of good.'*

*'Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.'*

Alfred Lord Tennyson

at 7.30. Come along to the bell tower door, opposite the Marks & Spencer car park. Someone will meet you at the door (search Tring Bells).

On New Year's Eve we continued the tradition of hundreds of years by ringing out the old year and ringing in the new, when on the stroke of midnight, the loud, joyful bells rang out over the town, marking the inevitable march of time, calling all to pause for a moment's reflection on the year past, and to look with hope to the New Year and all that it may bring.

Johanna Morgan
Tring bell tower

Atheism: the beginning of the journey of faith



I miss the parish book group, which has been on sabbatical, as it were, since the summer. I miss the challenge of reading a book that otherwise I

would not choose to; I miss the discipline of reading it in time for the book group session each month. I miss hearing contrasting views of the book, especially when I don't (at least initially) agree with them. And I miss the fun and fellowship of each of the sessions.

I still feel the need for reading books that might improve me, as opposed to those which reconfirm my prejudices about the world or enable my brain to switch off at bed time. So, I was intrigued to see (in the November 2023 edition of *Comment*) an article by Jon Reynolds about a new book called 'Coming to Faith Through Dawkins: 12 Essays on the Pathway From New Atheism to Christianity'. The general theme of the essays is that Richard Dawkins was a brilliant biologist, as demonstrated in his 1976 book 'The Selfish Gene', but an inadequate philosopher and theologian when he published 'The God Delusion' in 2006. Ironically I remember reading Dawkins' book in about 2007 as a member of what was then the Aldbury Book Group, a precursor to the parish book group set up by Didier Jacquet in 2011.

Jon kindly lent me his copy of the book of essays, giving me the healthy

feeling that I ought to get on with reading it sooner rather than later. And I again wish that I had the benefit of a group of other people reading the same book, not least to help me understand some of the essays, which are really quite challenging to my aged intellect. Jon selects the essay by Peter Byrom for special mention, and Byrom's references to the contributions from William Lane Craig, who has convincingly demolished the logic of Dawkins polemics, and whom Dawkins has always apparently refused to meet in debate. See <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/> but beware, it is quite American, and asks for money straight away. In their own words 'Reasonable Faith provides an articulate, intelligent, yet gracious defense of the Christian faith in the public arena'.



I was intrigued by the essay from Louise Mabilie, 'The God Delusion and probability', although I had to read it several times to begin to make sense of it. I've always struggled a bit with

probability because it is, at times, not at all intuitive (at least to me). I liked her discussion of the Boeing 747 jumbo jet story from the astronomer Fred Hoyle (I spent too much of my working life on 747s, which started flying as I graduated in the early 1970s). In the words of Hoyle from 1982: 'A junkyard contains all the bits and pieces of a Boeing 747, dismembered and in disarray. A whirlwind happens to blow through the yard. What is the chance that after its passage a fully assembled 747, ready to fly, will be found standing there?'

Mabilie quotes Dawkins as asserting that 'a God capable of creating the universe would have to be so complex as to be statistically improbable.' It might be improbable, but our existence proves that it is possible – it happened. As Mabilie concludes, 'Natural selection tells us a lot about what happened within the primordial soup can, but it tells us nothing about the probability or improbability of there being a primordial soup can in the first place'.

One of the other essayists, Johan Erasmus, concludes: 'At one stage, many Christians considered the New Atheism as the biggest threat to the church. They were wrong. Atheism is not the problem: apathy is. For quite a few, atheism is the beginning of the journey of faith.'

I was pleased to see that the works of C S Lewis featured in several of the essays about progressing from Dawkins. And I'm hopeful that a book group of some form will be recreated before too long. Meanwhile, keep giving me your suggestions for improving books.

John Whiteman, Tring Team

Introducing a new Church Administrator



My name is Eleni and I recently started a new role of Church Administrator at Tring High Street Baptist Church.

I was born in Tring, so was lucky enough to grow up in the area, attending school here before leaving for travelling with my husband. I very much love to travel, and this has shaped who I am in a big way. However, even after all the beautiful parts of the world I have seen, Tring has always felt like home.

I was very excited to be offered this position last year, and to be returning to work after having some time off with my little girl, who was born in June 2022. Before I had my daughter, I ran my own personal assistant company, working for local small businesses.

When returning to work, it was very important for me to feel that my next position involved working for and being part of a community, where my efforts had meaning that was close to my own morals. There is a real sense of 'family' at the church, which instantly created a working environment where I felt safe, heard and valued.

I have been attending High Street

Baptist Church since November 2019 and have always enjoyed the services with my family.

I love people, being creative, giving back to the community where I can, and being part of a church. So, I am very excited to see what is to come over the next few months as I continue to learn and grow into my role here at Tring High Street Baptist Church.

I very much look forward to meeting some of you this year.

Blessings,
Eleni Chapman
High Street Baptist Church

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Keeping fit



After my husband Roy had his bypass, he had six lessons of exercise over a six-week period. Well, to cut a long story short, after the course finished, he decided to carry on with an exercise class once a week with, as it happens, one of the instructors that had run the course. Now, at the time I thought it was an excellent idea and decided, if it was allowed, I'd go too, because I knew in the long run it would do me good. I must confess, I don't like exercise... dancing, when I was younger, yes please. Movement to music, great stuff - it just carries you on, doesn't it? It does me.

It so happened that I could go with Roy and, feeling very self-righteous, I went along, but there was no music, and a repeat of the same routine every week. Yes, I got bored, and grumbled (and still do) every Monday, but somehow, I'm still doing it. We exercise for an hour then meditate for ten minutes at the end of the session.

This brings me to the point of this article: while going to my special place in my mind's eye, a green and lush field with a river, this time it had sand martins making nests in the riverbank. I think a deep memory had flashed to the surface: Grassington, in Yorkshire came to my mind. I probably haven't been there for forty-odd years, maybe fifty, but it was so clear, and such a wonderful memory.

In that space, while meditating, I thought about a sermon and a hymn that we recently had in church. It left a question. What are you doing as a Christian, to show your faith?

I posed that question to myself in that quiet place. You see, I often talk to my parents or to God in that meditative time and this was no different. I had done my exercise and relaxed my body and now my mind had become rested and quiet. But I didn't quite know what I should be doing to answer it. Even with twenty-one people around me, I heard nothing but the sound of a babbling river and the birds that flew in and out of the nests. In the stillness, an answer came to me. It went something like this.

'Just because you feel you are doing

nothing, it doesn't necessarily mean that that is the reality. Think of yourself as a pebble dropped in a pool. Your plunge has made ripples all around you and they are making their way to the edges of it, eventually touching the solid ground.'

Without being conscious of it, we all touch others. A smile, a hug, sympathising with someone's struggle, opening a door, carrying a bag, making a cup of tea, or dropping something into the box for DENs.

It's important to be kind, to be generous with your time, to embrace what gifts you have, and to share. That was the message and I wanted to share it. (In fact, I was told to share it.) It was a special moment, and you never know - I might stop grumbling about the class (but don't put money on it!).

Brenda Hurley
St Peter & St Paul

A first hospital Christmas



In summer 1963 we were lined up for interview on chairs along the top corridor of Westminster Medical School. As each interview completed, we edged closer to the boardroom door. The panel, chaired by Sir Richard Bayliss, was welcoming but asked probing questions about motivation for medicine and background knowledge outside the A-level curriculum. 'What was all that laughter?' asked the next candidate as I crept out. A mis-speak had turned out to be hilarious, and I was 'in'. But it was in 1968 that I arrived at SW1 to complete my clinical training, having had a surprise offer at Oxford.

The practical and book-learning clinical training were our daily fodder for the next two and a half years. Why did this toddler have a fever? Was this pregnant lady going to need special

help for the birth? Is it safe to give this medication to a person with sickle-cell disease? And so on and so on. This in an era where computers were absent, and calculators were a novelty. It was a mixture of graft leavened by occasional excitement.

Jump forward to Christmas 1970, when we were newly qualified and let loose on the wards under supervision. In the 70s medicine was run as 'Firms' and ours had a junior registrar, a senior registrar and two consultants, with me as the newly qualified House Physician (HP). The nursing staff, domestics and cleaners reported to our delightful ward sister. These 'angels' did the decoration of the wards, and themselves on the festive days.

In early December, being a bit green, I wondered why I was prescribing so much Mackeson, sherry and brandy, but it transpired that this bolstered a stockpile in sister's office that fortified 'the festive period' for patients and staff.

A further unexpected duty was an

instruction to schedule certain patients for a Christmas 'review'. What? At Christmas! But then I discovered that it was intended to relieve their loneliness rather than adjust treatment. Thus, there was a mixture of quite poorly people and relatively well folk who were guests of the NHS at Christmas. The festivities were enlivened with carols on Christmas Eve by Westminster choristers, and next day our boss bringing his very young daughters to entrance the older patients as he carved the turkey.

The mixture of humanity, and by common consent, relaxation of rules, created a happy atmosphere for everyone, without detriment to the delivery of care. Staff who were unable to join their families at Christmas became part of another very happy new family.

Michael Sherratt
Sacred Heart, Berkhamsted

Re-wilding my soul



My classroom

What is my classroom? This was a question that came to me during a retreat at Turvey Abbey in October last year. It was a day of nature,

thought-provoking talks and fellowship entitled 'Re-wilding Your Soul'. Brother John led us through reflections on how nature can be (re)wilded and how this might be applicable to our soul as well as our relationships. I imagine that the twenty people on the retreat came away with twenty different messages and learning points from the day.

Our classroom can be literal: a place where we sit, listen, make notes and respond – maybe via an essay or exam. If you have children or grandchildren at a local school, you may be familiar with the motto Live to learn, learn to live, which I think is a pretty good aspiration for a school. Yes, our school days are full of learning which we hope will prepare for the life beyond. Recently I've been faced with the lament 'why should I learn about...?', as a disgruntled teen tells me they really don't need to know about osmosis/Pythagoras/erosion. I've responded with some reasoning,

then resorted to 'Just get through these exams, as they will give you options for your future'. But if we carry through the school motto, our learning will continue far beyond our school days, and hopefully be central to our existence. I've recently had the pleasure of attending university open days with my son. As part of the day, you can attend taster lectures, which, for me, are the most interesting part. Sitting in a huge lecture theatre hearing a snippet from a university course on International Relations has been exhilarating and made me hungry to learn more. But of course, this is not the only way to learn.

Our classroom can be places: a forest; a beach; a special place; sitting or walking. In fact, if you have been to Wendover Woods recently, you will find teaching points along the way and maybe even learn a new word. Have you heard of Komorebi? Literally 'sunlight leaking through trees' in Japanese, this word describes the beauty and wonder of rays of light dappling through overhead leaves, casting dancing shadows on the forest floor – a wonderful mini-lesson on my recent walk.

Our classroom can be people. This last year I have learned a great deal from my children as I've watched them learn. One has created healthy study routines and effective revision techniques – apparently learned from YouTubers. The other has exited



from social media and rarely uses his phone in order to be more productive with his time – apparently learned from observing others (me?!). Whether our children, a friend, church member or colleague, we all know people who offer nuggets of wisdom or appropriate words when we most need them, or offer counsel when the options seem overwhelming. Having our eyes and ears open to 'hear' them is part of our learning.

I think the common theme of these places and people is a shift in our thinking. Having the appropriate attitude to gain knowledge and taking time to reflect and apply, or to coin another trending phrase, to have a 'growth mindset'.

Re-wilding your soul

I went along to my re-wilding retreat day with my notebook and pen, ready to be a good student and listen to words of wisdom to put into practice. I was ready to learn. But this was not a university taster lecture! The talk lacked a clear structure. Brother John went off at tangents, and sometimes seemed to forget something he'd mentioned a few minutes before. The talks felt wild. I shifted my mindset from passive note-taker to active listening. When I noticed a repetition, I listened more carefully. Maybe this was not a point he'd forgotten he'd already made, maybe this was a point that I needed to hear – again. The talks at times felt like a stream of consciousness.

The stories continued with blurring analogies – wilding a garden or patch of land, followed by a comparison to an approach to parenting – 'stand back and observe' in both cases. Brother John

reminded about his early days as a new monk at Turvey when he was put in charge of growing tomatoes in the greenhouses. Dom Gregory's approach was very much 'let the monk grow or wither'. Don't tell the monks how to live/garden/what to do; let them try it out for themselves. This sink-or-swim approach is not easy to put into practice. Have you seen a toddler in a playground trying out the climbing equipment and stopped yourself shouting 'watch out', 'be careful there...' and instead just let the scene play out? Have you had a teenage child do very little to prepare for an exam and stopped yourself stepping in with a suggestion for a revision plan? It's not easy to step back and just watch. Of course, there are risks. The risks might be a fall, a failed exam – or something more serious. But the learning will probably be greater!

It was a wonderful experience to spend a day stopping, learning and reflecting. Even so, my action-plan-focused mind found it very hard to refrain from making lists. Here is my list of words that popped out from the day: be attentive; observe; notice; allow; leave alone; wait.

There was also a good dollop of 'compromise' in the message of being wild: we don't let the child run into a road to discover how dangerous cars are. There is a constant tussle with leaving alone and intervening. Again, apply this to gardening, to nature, parenting,



teaching... and yes, our spiritual life.

What does this mean spiritually? For me, the take-away was making time in my day to allow wilding to take place. Create space to listen to God, notice, listen and be still. During our day we had a time of quiet. I found a bench in the Autumn (Komorebi) sun in the walled garden. I wasn't sure what I was doing – so I closed my eyes and listened. I sat up straight and noticed. I focused on breathing in and out, deeply and slowly. When I felt myself thinking, list-making or planning, I tried to return to my breathing and just noticing my body in the space. I felt the sun on me, the leaves rustling in the breeze, an insect buzz near me, then drift away. Then I had a very clear picture



of the words: 'Kindly close (the) gate.'

I had entered the garden through a gorgeous old door, with this instruction. The picture of the words felt more meaningful than literally to shut the gate. They felt like an instruction to shut out the distractions and focus on the here and now. It was also a reminder of the famous adage 'when one door closes, another one opens.' This, too, resonated with me as I had only a few days before finishing my role as administrator at High Street Baptist Church and was beginning a new role with A Rocha.

This was my first experience of meditating on my own. I didn't know what I was supposed to do but it felt profound and meaningful. It felt energising yet restful at the same time. I am sure there are lots of texts about 'how to meditate' for me to explore, but this seemed like a good start.

The re-wilding day for me was a wonderful learning experience. It caused me to reflect on my own spiritual growth and learning. As in the best classrooms, I was challenged. My brief moment of meditation has prompted me to integrate more noticing and 'leave alone' time; to close the door on the noise, lists, obligations and create more space for being attentive. Walking (without listening to a book or music) and noticing. Maybe I will seek out books to read about meditation, or podcasts to listen to, to learn how to do it in order to deepen my faith. Or maybe I'll just have a go – and be wild!

Polly Eaton
High Street Baptist Church



Another blended family



Our Advent in 2023 was a rather different one from usual. Instead of attending house groups and singing Advent hymns, we found ourselves preparing for a different kind of adventure, a trip to South Africa for the celebration of our eldest son Tom's marriage to the lovely Ana in a stunning place called Villiersdorp just over the Franschhoek Pass. The weather here had just become appropriately freezing; we arrived in warm sunshine with blue skies nearly twelve hours later.

Regular *Comment* readers may remember that, in fact, Tom and Ana married in March the same year, with little warning, without all the fuss and celebration we might expect: because they live in southern Spain, Tom is British and Ana is Ecuadorian, families are scattered all over South America, the US, Spain and the UK. It was a little more complicated than the average wedding to organise. They were engaged in 2019 and their wedding was one of those postponed because of lockdown restrictions. They suddenly upped and married in Gibraltar and we watched it from our dining room on Zoom.



wanted it to be (except it rained on the day!).

It took place at the end of a week in South Africa with close friends and family staying together in one amazing house on a 'farm' so we all met and got to know each other quite well, sharing mealtimes, washing up, playing snooker and taking walks (and five of them even joined a Parkrun early the next morning after the wedding!). Tom's close friends are nearly all pilots and there is no doubt that they are like brothers to him and have been a huge support to him over the last ten years. The bond between them was palpable. Ana's family, whose first language is Spanish, were easy to get to know and embraced us as family, literally and metaphorically, from the very beginning. As family, there was lots of sharing, mucking in, and characteristically last-minute changes to plans which everyone fell in with! Ana walked down the 'aisle' to the Guns and Roses' song 'Sweet Child of Mine' and rose petals were thrown over bride and groom. All the siblings, Tom's three

brothers and Ana's two brothers, gave speeches (some in two languages) which brought tears to the eyes as did the two dads (I am still not sure why none of the women gave a speech...). There was a first dance by Tom and Ana after the dinner followed by my first-ever dance

with my son, while Ana danced with her father. There was a live rock band playing music afterwards and Tom was coerced into taking the lead guitar and playing his signature tune, 'Sweet Child of Mine' for us – he was amazing!

We came away from that time with wonderful memories, funny stories, lots of photos and new relationships forged. We now have family in Spain, Ecuador and Washington DC. One of Ana's brothers is

married to an American and the other to a Brazilian.

None of this would have happened if we hadn't suffered the trauma of childlessness in our 20s and 30s. The adoption of that 7-week-old baby Tom into our lives in 1988 changed everything, for ever.

Annette Reynolds
St Peter & St Paul

I am sure other Comment readers have families who are spread over the world or who have married partners from other countries or cultures. Do write in with your stories! Ed.

Parish registers

Weddings

We offer our congratulations and prayers to this couple as they begin their married life together.

Thomas Christopher Whitehead
& Abigail Elizabeth Webb

Funerals

We thank God for the life of the departed and pray for comfort for those who mourn.

Eileen Lilian Rose Parcell 102
Michael James Pearse 77
Sheila Ann Nicholls 80
Jill Johnson 85
Clifford Richard Critoph 90
Neville Terrence 'John' Barker 84
Gerald Webber 88
Rosemary Carpenter 90
Pauline Cavanagh 88
John William Rotheroe 88



The 'wedding' was therefore in keeping with everything else we know about our very special adventurer son – our youngest son, Ben, once said 'Don't bother to tell me about Tom's plans, they will have changed in two weeks' time!' It was different; it was unconventional (yet some of it was very much the same); plans on the day changed three times!; it was fun and heart-warming; the groom's mother cried; it was just the way they

Anskar, Archbishop of Hamburg, 3 February



Although generally I am not fond of the long dark nights of winter, I do love those sharp, clear nights when all the stars are visible. I can name only one or two, but

I find the steadfastness of the constellations immensely reassuring. This constancy, of course, is an illusion, created by the fact that the stars are very far away from us; they move, but this is not perceptible over one person's lifespan on earth.

In 1935 the International Astronomical Union approved the name Ansgarius for a crater on the moon. It was named in honour of St Ansgar (or Anskar, or Anschar) who, when he died over 1,000 years earlier, thought his life and mission had been a failure.

Anskar was born in Picardy, in France, in 801. He was educated at Corbie Abbey and then entered the monastery as a monk. In 826 King Harald of Denmark was baptised and Anskar led a group of missionaries to that country. After three fruitless years in Denmark, he transferred his mission to Sweden where he is

credited with building the first Christian church there. He laboured at missionary work to Scandinavian countries for most of his life, seeing much of what he had achieved being destroyed as the countries lapsed back into paganism. In 857 he was recalled by his monastery to become Archbishop of Hamburg.

He had hoped to die a martyr's death, but having devoted his life to the poor and the sick, and having entreated the Danish king to cease slave-trading, he died peacefully in Bremen, Germany in 865. It would be another 740 years before Galileo would first describe craters on the moon, and a further 300 years until one would be named for the man who, despite his own perceived failure, is now the Patron Saint of Denmark.

Linzi James
St Peter & St Paul



6th century pectoral cross which shows personifications of the sun and moon in the oval medallions.

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Poem of the month



Here is a sonnet which expresses a contemporary message about the story of the massacre of the innocents, the last of the Christmas events described

by St Matthew. Painfully relevant at the beginning of this New Year of 2024, the theme is simple, the rhymes are clear and the poem solemnly concludes with the inescapable idea of the final judgment on all Herods.

Ayodeji ('second joy') Malcolm Guite is a contemporary writer, poet, academic, song-writer and Anglican priest. He was born in 1957 in Nigeria, where his father was a university lecturer and Methodist lay-preacher. When he was 10, his parents moved to Canada and Malcolm was sent to boarding school in England. He

won a scholarship to Cambridge, where he began writing poetry, and afterwards spent some years teaching. He then returned to academic life and researched for a Ph.D at Durham. Ordained in 1991, he served as a curate in a Huntingdon parish, followed by nearly twenty years as chaplain to Girton College, Cambridge. (He married our niece, Dr Sarah Reynolds! Ed)

He retired to Norfolk in 2020. His particular research interests cover the 'intersection of religion and the arts' and his aim in writing poetry is

Refugee

*We think of him as safe beneath the steeple,
Or cosy in a crib beside the font,
But he is with a million displaced people
On the long road of weariness and want.
For even as we sing our final carol
His family is up and on that road,
Fleeing the wrath of someone else's quarrel,
Glancing behind and shouldering their load.
Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled.
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,
And death squads spread their curse across the world.
But every Herod dies, and comes alone
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne.*

Malcolm Guite
from 'Sounding the Seasons', Canterbury Press, 2012

'to be profound without ceasing to be beautiful'. He is much in demand as a speaker, writer and leader of retreats.

Kate Banister
St Julian's, St Albans

Are humans the crowning glory of creation?



In my last article, I answered part of Edmund Booth's questions about how the science of Canon Nicholas Copernicus has changed the view of Christians

on the place of the human race in the universe. I said that the idea of the human race being at the centre of creation is not found in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament but really came from the Greeks. This idea came into the Christian tradition with Thomas Aquinas who tried to harmonise the best of Greek philosophy and science with Christian thought. It also might be said, that with naked-eye observation, a geocentric view appears to make sense.

In this article I will look at Edmund's next point: 'The second challenge is specifically one for Christians, and I find it a lot more unsettling. Before Darwin, humans were naturally regarded as the crowning and ultimate glory of creation, granted a special place by God in his creation. Darwin's theory of evolution and so much science since then, necessitates at least a radical rethink of this view; humans, we now understand, are just one step in an evolutionary chain, a step that might indeed be terminated, perhaps soon, because of our foolish actions.'

The same point needs to be made as with geo-centrism, the idea that the Earth is at the centre of the universe, for nowhere in the Bible does it say that humans are the crowning and ultimate glory of creation; but Edmund is right in saying that humans were often portrayed as such in many, but not all, books and sermons. The Bible and Christian theology give a more complex picture.

On the radio recently, I heard a scientist ask Rowan Williams if he had a problem with evolution, first put forward by Darwin in 1859. He said he didn't, with the tone of a man thinking, 'Why are you even asking this question?' The first Archbishop of Canterbury to accept evolution was Frederick Temple who, in 1884, wrote a book supporting evolution while one of the Oxford science professors had still not agreed with Darwin, much to Darwin's distress.

The classic place to find a high view of the human race is in Psalm 8 where we find:

'When I consider your heavens, the

work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour.'

While many Christians have traditionally had a high view of the Bible, one of the principles you are taught when studying theology is that you should not extrapolate or derive your teaching from just one section of scripture. In contrast to Psalm 8, elsewhere in the Bible, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, the human race is described in more earthy terms. Our kinship with animals is celebrated and humans are instructed to learn from the animal kingdom such as in Proverbs 6:6-9: 'Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest.'

A similar approach is found in the Book of Job 12:7-10 in which animals are declared even to have a knowledge of God, in contradiction of the view held by some Christians that the life of the world to come is for humans only: 'But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.'

Now, this could be seen as the use of a lot of poetic licence and not to be taken literally, but it illustrates a view which is positive about the animal kingdom. John Wesley, the Anglican priest who was one of the founders of Methodism, taught that animals had a part in the life of heaven. He argued that the God of love and justice, shown supremely in Jesus of Nazareth, would not ignore the suffering caused to animals, often by humans.

Most of the Church of England came quite quickly to make the change from a point of view that saw humans as the pinnacle of creation, partly looking afresh at the Bible and partly reconsidering some teaching from the Eastern church. Many people read into the Bible ideas that are absent, but use the poetic parts of the Bible to support a view of humanity that is not really there.

Are humans the crowning glory of creation? I think not; they are part of



nature but just a part of it. Humans have given us literature, music and science, but also weapons which can kill a whole town, humans, animals and plants, at the press of a button.

Let's end with a quote from the poet Thomas Hardy who, in a state of depression at a year's end, went out for a walk and heard a 'Darkling Thrush' singing as if it were the height of summer: 'So little cause for carolings / Of such ecstatic sound / Was written on terrestrial things / Afar or nigh around, / That I could think there trembled through / His happy good-night air / Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware.'

Jon Reynolds
Tring Team

'People don't come to faith through arguments. They come to faith because they find that they like religion – the stories, the songs, the art, the speech-forms, the culture. They might also like the intellectual side of religion, but this is mixed in with everything else. For example, I might be intellectually persuaded by something that a theologian says, but this is tied up with my wider appreciation, which is more aesthetic or emotional than rational, of the core Christian themes that he or she develops. Most apologetics overlooks this wider embedding and overstates the role of abstract rationality, and makes theology look brittle and little.'

Theo Hobson
The Spectator, 27 December 2023

Does anyone care to respond to this?
Ed

Bliadhna mhath ur!



That's Happy New Year from us Hermits of the North. By that I sincerely wish God grant you all peace and some contentment in your lives this coming year.

Well, it's all over here now (almost) as life sluggishly begins to resume. Kids went back to school Monday 8 Jan and many shops and cafés started to open. Contrary to England, the holiday period is centred around the new year (Hogmanay) whilst Christmas itself is much more the reserve of Christian worship. There is a two or three-day break across the 25 December and many kirk services and celebrations took place in Milestone Kirk. The beginning of the new year is the time it really kicks off, hence, the sluggish start. It was a joy to see so many folk braving the appalling conditions to turn up for the Christmas services. My favourite was Christmas Eve, starting with mulled wine and mince pies and the general melee of chat, then an informal Carols and Lessons in the Kirk culminating in the 'Nightwatch' service, taking us over to Christmas Day.

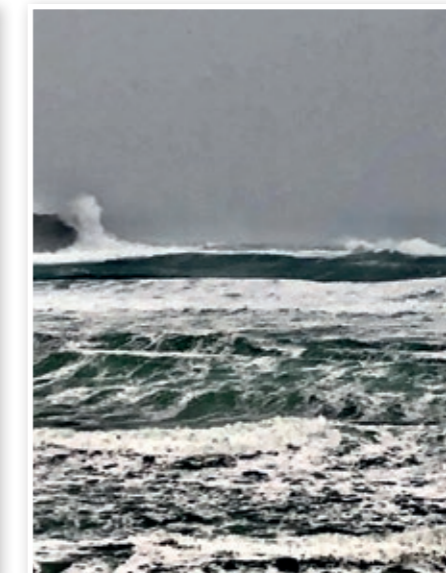
Now, here's a thing. The Rev Preb. Edward Mason retired from Bath, who is our resident sheep-farming vicar who has become a good friend, has gone into cheese and Orkney butter-making. Not to be outdone, 'yours truly' thought 'If he can do it, so can I.' We now have a superb garlic and chive cheese and a couple of pounds of butter. It's now become a bit of a needle match to see who can get the best flavours. I shall



try Apricot and Ginger next. I do draw the line at sheep farming, although one is always welcome in my freezer. On the cooking issue, I have acquired a sausage-making machine (domestic) and am slowly churning out lamb sausages and burgers plus game burgers with Christmas leftovers. How good is that! Your hermit scribe is very proud of himself and also VERY fat.

As you are all well aware, the weather has been pretty awful of late, worse than in the past. I am thankful there appears to be no flooding of property on Orkney but plenty of liquid fields. I feel so sorry for the folk who are put out of their homes time and time again. They suffer both from material damage but also their very soul. Just imagine fitting a new kitchen or new decoration, with all the hard work that entails, only to see your lovely home destroyed; and to make matters worse, you cannot re-insure or cannot afford to, knowing it is all going to happen again. Why do successive governments dither over climate change?

On a more positive note, the New Year has started, the long nights are



getting shorter, the Spring is on its way, and with it The Orkney Folk Festival. But before that, we have Burns Night. The most important thing to look forward to is mowing the grass, all ¾ acre of it. I am really looking forward to planting this year's crops in the Polycrub. It's the only place anything will grow, except grass. Good job it's built to withstand winds up to 129mph otherwise it would be in Denmark by now.

One of my more personal pleasures is sampling the Golden Nectar produced in this part of the UK, Western Isles Whiskies being my preferred choice and Islay Whiskies being my favourite, although I have to admit, we distil a pretty good dram here at Highland Park. It is a real effort to limit my intake, especially when my doctor is a fan of the same tittle. However, fortunately the price is a very good brake.

Well, our guests have gone, leaving us with the memories of joy and happiness around the festive board, the decorations are down making the house look cold and bare (only for a short while) and the Postie is getting back to normal. The rhythm of life is stabilising once more, until the next time.

Until then, may God be kind and bless you all, especially those of you less fortunate and struggling with life today.

Mac Dodge,
Milestone Kirk, Orkney

In the eye of the storm...



A view of the changes and challenges of the last seventy years from the calm centre of our community – the Historic Church of St Peter & St Paul at the heart of Tring.

Firstly, I must confess to being a relative newcomer, having moved to Tring in the mid-70s, so I can only write first-hand about the past fifty years. However, one thing I was privileged to do in the 1980s was to write a complete Guide Book to the marvellous medieval building in the heart of our town, followed by a series of some fifteen detailed leaflets about different aspects of our built heritage. These ranged from the celebrated 'Tring Tiles' to the stained-glass windows and our war memorial – the first of its kind in the country to be erected. As a result of those tasks, I spent many fascinated hours studying the NADFAS archive and other records and was eventually able to fill in all the gaps.

This whole project was part of the work we did to launch 'The Friends of Tring Church Heritage' as an independent charity in the late 1980s. 'FOTCH' was designed to create a capital fund to be available when need might arise and the church community does not have the necessary wherewithal. All far into the future! That was 35 years ago this year, as I write this article. That future is fast arriving. Like so many Christian churches, the Church of England has suffered a radical decline in public support and membership. That attrition shows little sign of slowing. There is a book published in 2016 called 'That Was the Church That Was' (Brown/Woodhead) which charts the full story of 'How the Church of England Lost the English People'. It makes fascinating reading. Of course, historic trends are not always irreversible and the future has a way of making the wise seem foolish for their certainties. We simply have to try to be prepared for all eventualities.

There is only one Tring...

There is a saying frequently repeated hereabouts 'There are tens of Londons and dozens of Parises; but there is only

ONE Tring!' It is indeed true – or at least was when I wrote this! However, the saying is not just about the uniqueness of the name but also about the individual and very special character of Tring itself.

A very special place with a rich history

In 2005 we wrote and performed a Pageant in St Peter & St Paul's which was called 'Tales of Old Tring'. This followed on from a similar project we created a couple of years earlier called 'If these Stones could Talk'. Both of these productions involved a large cast – mainly drawn from the local schools, a wonderful group of singers from Tring Choral Society and a specially assembled orchestra. Both shows were delivered via two sell-out performances. Both of them covered the changes and challenges that have happened here in 'Little Old Tring' over some ten centuries. They really did demonstrate the many unique events and characters that have made Tring so special. It is a common saying around here that 'once you have found Tring you never want to leave'. My wife and I, like so many people here, often affirm that. 'We're glad we moved in – and we're never moving out!' A recent survey in 2023 confirmed that Tring was now officially 'The Best Place to Live in Hertfordshire'.

The green heart of Tring

It is often said in Christian circles that 'the church is not just the building, it is the community within'. That is very true. It is also true that the building is not just a church. It is much more than that for a much wider group of people than simply those who worship there. This is particularly the case with a building like St Peter & St Paul which sits in an open green space that is very much the living, beating heart of the town. When we launched the Friends (FOTCH) our proposition was 'What would you do if our town lost its heart?' and that remains our core proposition today. It struck a chord then and it strikes home today. So many people in our town use the church building for everything from Jubilee celebrations to Coronation Parties; from formal celebrations of Remembrance Day to scores of different concerts every year that range from sublime classical performances to intimate Jazz from

the Blues Bar. We even have fashion shows. The building is also the setting for countless school celebrations, the occasional Big Issue debate and every year on the second Saturday in May we have Family Fun Day which has become a solid family favourite over years. It sees each year the largest number of people thronging together in that ancient space and celebrating life together in Tring.

Over the past few years, we have changed our gardening regime so that it is much more environmentally friendly and, slowly but surely, nature is regaining its share of the space. The churchyard is such an historic space with so many stories to tell; and, of course, it is not just the one churchyard inside the walls, but three which stretch out into the car parks and behind the church into Sutton Place. The whole place vibrates with a rich history and many, many stories to tell.

Historic medieval buildings are very greedy...

St Peter & St Paul is no exception to this rule. Over the past seventy years, the whole structure of the Church of England has changed enormously and society itself has also shifted and shuddered. Seventy years ago, in the post-war period of stability and increasing prosperity, the Church of England still enjoyed a level of popular support and a position of influence within our national estate that was largely unquestioned. Today the C of E support is a mere shadow of its former self and its relevance to national life is very much questioned. Some would argue that it is rather out of step with the national realpolitik and its place at the top table on major matters of national importance is very much questioned. Christianity itself can no longer assume its primacy in areas such as education and moral/cultural debates.

Our own church leaders question the relevance of their position to the majority of citizens. The time when the church was rich enough to pay for everything to do with the maintenance of its many glorious heritage assets is long gone. It seems it can no longer pay for its own operating costs without ever-increasing calls on the wallets of its declining congregational membership. Costs are ever-increasing and revenues are declining. Mr Micawber would indeed be shocked.

It was in such a climate in the late 80s

that a full review of the parish finances and the parish structure took place. Over time, that review led to the formation of Tring Team Parish as a single structure formed from the five parishes of Tring, Aldbury, Wilstone, Long Marston and Puttenham. It also led to a revised financial structure and the creation of The Team Scheme which managed the revenues and budgets of all five churches in the parish. It was at this time of change and review, as we struggled to 'future-proof' the enterprise, that The Friends

of Tring Church Heritage – 'FOTCH' – was born. It was created with the simple proposition of appealing to all the residents of our town (not just the churchgoers) to express their evaluation of the church as an important part of what they treasured about Tring and support it. It worked.

Over the intervening years FOTCH has organised fundraising appeals and events (often with partners like Tring Choral Society and many generous individuals) and paid for renovation and

improvements. These include the reconstruction of the North Wall, the protection of the priceless stained glass, the making safe of the staircases in the tower, new sound, lighting and projection systems to make the church a flexible and professional-standard performance and event space, the cleaning and renovation of the celebrated Gore Memorial, improved churchyard lighting and, in the last year, the complete survey, repair and reconstruction of the ground works and drainage system (which

after so many centuries had become completely dysfunctional). Over a third of a million pounds has been invested in these works and it is marvellous to recall just how many generous hearts have empowered the enterprise over the years.

As we write this, the struggle continues and we are trying to face up to further changes and re-organisation in the way we develop this marvellous resource to be always friendly and welcoming to all who come through our doors. That road goes ever on...

A calm refuge in a storm...

Over the past seventy years (indeed, for much longer), Tring and the whole world has changed around us and the pace of change goes ever faster. Yet our mission remains the same as it was from the very beginning when this church was first built; and the same through all the changing seasons of the centuries since.

This sacred space in the heart of Tring has one clear and unchanging purpose. We are here to be open and welcoming for all who pass our way and who enter; seeking comfort, peace and refreshment from the storms and turmoil of a busy bustling ever-changing world. We are here for everyone.

'Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend to man'

In that sense, of course, nothing has changed over the past seventy years – we just have to keep how we offer that welcome in tune with the times.

Grahame Senior, Tring Team Parish President, Friends of Tring Church Heritage



Watchful waiting



at that time is waiting, and I found myself looking at that in a different way in 2023. I spent a lot of time waiting for medical results, for phone calls and appointments, and sitting in waiting rooms. I waited with others and on my own. There is even an

Advent, the 24 days leading up to Christmas are about preparation for the Incarnation, a time for rethinking and re-evaluating. The word also frequently used

approach in medicine called 'watchful waiting' whereby one waits to see what develops before medical intervention. It can be intensely frustrating and it can also lull you into a strange place of time standing still.

For some, the feeling of not being in control can be very difficult, but it can show that you have had the privilege of being in charge before that, which not everyone does have in their everyday life. It can be a time when other people tell you how to deal with it, or how all will be well, and that is one of the aspects that I found most difficult, when the experience is mine.

'I wish it could be Christmas every day'

No, I don't; or the other answer is, it is. But what I don't want every day is excess and stress, of trying to give the right present, and to receive the wrong present with the right expression. What I DO want every day is to know that God is one of us, has lived as one of us, understands what our lives are like and is always with us.

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.'

**Jane Banister
Tring Team**

'I am the resurrection'



Of all the sayings in John's Gospel, this is the most difficult one to grasp, or it would be if it were not so familiar.

All the other sayings refer to things within

our experience. We know what is meant by bread, or light, or a gate, or a shepherd, or a vine and we experience life and know about ways, whether the way to Tring or how to wash up. We know about truth and we can distinguish between fact and fiction. But what about resurrection? We think we know what it means – but what is it?

The statement that Jesus is the resurrection comes in the context of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, that is, rising again to this life, a return from death to continue in this world. Similarly, Jesus, we remember, raised the son of the widow of Nain. We know no more except that Jesus restored a dead man to continue life with his mother. Interestingly, Lazarus, we recall, is the name of a poor beggar in a parable (not real life) which only Luke reports – just a name in story – but in John he is one of Jesus' close associates, a friend and disciple like Martha and Mary. In John 11 we read of how Christ restored Lazarus to life after he had talked to Martha about resurrection. After Martha asserts that she knows Lazarus will rise again on the Last Day, Our Lord proclaims 'I am the resurrection and the life' and goes on to say everyone who believes in him will never die. Martha replies that she believes this by asserting Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world, showing that, in a sense, she has not fully understood Jesus' words. Jesus shows a deeper truth, that he is the resurrection and the life, here and now. He does this by shouting 'Come out, Lazarus'. The details of this miracle are not dwelt upon. What matters is that in giving back physical life, he shows he has the power to give eternal life. So, Lazarus comes out of the tomb at Jesus's word but to this life. We know no more from the New Testament about the rest of his life or when he died 'again'. Legend has him surviving a journey with

his sister in a leaking boat and ending up as bishop in Cyprus! An even later legend has him as bishop of Marseilles and later dying a martyr's death. But, while this miracle is not dwelt on in the Gospel, it fuels the determination of the Pharisees and the authorities to get rid of Jesus permanently.

So far, the 'I am' sayings considered could be described as similes. Jesus is like a shepherd, or a door and so on. He is like something familiar to our senses and understanding. Now, it is an identification of himself which Martha understands will happen at the end, namely a rising to new life, a final and lasting resurrection. In fact, Jesus makes the future present in himself. The resurrection on the Last Day is now shown to be something of the present; it is in Christ. New Life is here and now. It is a great paradox for the Christian that we hope for life eternal in the future, but are already sharers in that life through our faith in him. We are in Christ and he is the resurrection. It is particularly emphasised in John's Gospel that in Christ the new life begins, and has begun here and now. Scholars have coined a phrase 'realised eschatology', meaning that the last things, the eschata, have happened here and now. He is the resurrection and so the new life is in the present, not just a future hope.

There is, of course, a huge tension between what, in fact, we are and what we shall be. The new risen life is hardly shown, sadly, by how many Christians have lived or indeed live now. This tension between the here and now and the future is interestingly expressed for Anglicans in the Holy Communion Service. The words of the Absolution in the Book of Common Prayer say 'and bring you to everlasting life': in Common Worship the words used are 'keep you in life eternal'.

So, 'I am the resurrection' is a title which reminds us that in Christ

and here and now we share in the new life through our faith. Of course, there is more to all this than we can understand. 'We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' as the Nicene Creed puts it, or the 'resurrection of the body' as the Apostles' creed expresses it more simply. Yet we have to live with the tension between the new life in Christ that we share through baptism and the realities of our actual daily life with all its trials and weaknesses.

We may enjoy the picture of resurrection, as Ezekiel describes it, in the vision of the valley of the dry bones, where bones reassemble and are covered with flesh and sinews; or perhaps we think of the many artists, like Stanley Spencer, who have depicted bodies rising out of their graves in the churchyard. These are physical restorations to this life. In fact, we are to think that to us, as Christians, life is never extinguished. We hope to pass through the grave and gate of death to God's nearer presence.

There is one final difficulty – when we talk of the future life, and when we read the Scriptures, we must remember that neither John nor Paul discuss or contemplate the future life of those who are not 'in Christ'. The assurance of life here and hereafter in John's Gospel is for the believer; and in John 11, no others are apparently in view. All who are 'in Christ' are one with him who is the resurrection. Jesus brought about the resurrection of Lazarus to this life, but he shares his own triumph over death with all who are with him, now and for eternity.

Martin Banister
St Albans Cathedral

Jane Ducklin
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Taking a closer look at St John's Gospel in Lent With Canon Martin Banister

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Does the Church of England have lots of money? Part 1



I am always intrigued to read the letters' pages of the broadsheet newspapers, if only to see the range of views expressed, and the strength of feeling of those who take the trouble to write to their respective editors. One recurrent theme in The Daily Telegraph is the struggle of small parishes to make their 'voluntary' contributions to their Diocesan funds, and the contrast with 'the billions possessed by the Church of England'. This perspective was repeated recently by a parishioner, which prompted me to try to investigate the facts and figures behind the story. In this article I'll focus on the wealth, or otherwise, of The Church Commissioners, who manage the assets for the Church of England centrally. One day soon I hope to look at the Diocesan level (St Albans, in the case of Tring Team Parish), and then the parish itself. If you'd like to jump further in the story, and not depend on my dodgy analysis, you can look at <https://www.savetheparish.com/>, although as the name implies, the organisation has a particular viewpoint.

It's correct to suppose that the church (in the guise of the Church Commissioners) has billions, some £10 billion in assets at the end of 2022. Nearly all of that is invested in shares or bonds, with a little bit of direct property ownership. The portfolio generated a return of about 5% in 2022, implying a shrinkage in real value after allowing for the 10% inflation suffered last year. The Commissioners provided nearly £200 million in support to the Church of England in 2022. The largest single element (nearly £120 million) was grants to dioceses in support of parish projects; there are almost twenty different grant programmes, including the Low Income Community Fund, the Energy Cost Fund, and several funds with 'Strategic' or 'Sustainable' in their titles. To give an example from the annual report, there was a £250,000 grant to our diocese for a project called 'Alban Way' and described as 'Developing young leaders through spiritual formation in order to develop spiritually healthy, resilient and holistic leaders'. The next element of spending,

some £50 million, is paying the costs of the archbishops and bishops, including their pay, housing, pension contributions. The Church Commissioners are responsible for paying clergy pensions accrued up to 1997 (from 1998 there is a separate Church of England Pension Fund). They also carry out admin tasks, such as operating the payroll for all clergy and other church employees and supervising parish reorganisations and the disposal of closed churches. Grants are provided to cathedrals e.g. to pay for the dean or for a canon. Very little of the funding is directed toward the repair or maintenance of parish church buildings.

So, what could we do differently? The Church Commissioners are a statutory body, and a registered charity, with a plethora of trusts, boards, and committees. But imagine we could wave a magic wand and ignore or abolish all the institutional hurdles. There are some 12,500 parishes across England, and so a simple distribution of the Church Commissioners' money would provide each with £800,000 in endowment. Some would have to be kept aside for the pre-1998 pension liabilities, so let's suppose that £600,000 is available; if we also (optimistically) assume that the Tring Team would be regarded as five parishes rather than one, we'd have a fund of some £3 million. That sounds quite helpful, but we'd need to decide whether to spend it, or to keep it as an Endowment Fund and just spend the income. That income might amount to 3% of the fund, or say £90,000 per annum, almost half of the Team's current parish share and a quarter of our annual spending (excluding major

repairs).

This division of the spoils would raise quite a number of ethical questions: is it right to share it among existing parishes, essentially a backward-looking basis of distribution? Should some be devoted to other good causes: those in desperate need in this country or across the globe? Maybe just parcel it out and let each parish decide what to do ('taking back control...'), relying on the Charity Commission to limit the number of swimming pools being built?

And what would we do about bishops, who are unfunded in this scenario? That leads on to the next set of questions, regarding the finances of each individual diocese. A topic for another time soon, perhaps. In the meantime, what would you do? Less waste is always a good idea, but remember that £1 million saved nationally is £80 for each parish, so think big in your austerity.

Letters to the editor are always welcome...

John Whiteman, Tring Team



14th February Holy Communion

with imposition of ashes

10.00 am St Peter and St Paul Tring
(this service will be streamed)

7.30 pm St Peter and St Paul Tring



Saints



Who were the original saints, and who are saints now? The answer is complex, and I may be wrong in my conclusions!

The original saints were considered to be the eleven apostles (not including Judas). The meaning of the word saint is 'holy' and the apostles were holy because they had been personally called by Christ. The eleven apostles were never canonised, they were always considered saints, as was Paul.

Saints are created by the process of canonization – defined by Wikipedia, 'Canonization is the declaration of a deceased person as an officially recognized saint, specifically, the official act of a Christian communion declaring a person worthy of public veneration and entering their name in the canon catalogue of saints, or authorized list of that communion's recognized saints.'

Prior to AD993 there was no hard and fast rule about who was a saint. Until around 500 AD, a saint was made by public acclaim or the 'vox populi, vox Dei' (voice of the people, voice of God). After around AD500 the local populace made a petition to their bishop who investigated the person before elevating them to be a saint, but such a saint did not have status outside that bishop's see. Only the pope could declare a saint recognised by the whole church and, around the end of the 10th century, the system changed to a bishop collecting eyewitness testimony as to miracles carried out by the person being proposed for sainthood and these were forwarded to the pope. Pope John XV was the first pope to declare a saint to be venerated by the whole Western church – Saint Udalric, Bishop of Augsburg in AD993.

Towards the end of the 11th century, councils were set up to examine a claim to sainthood before passing on the final decision to the pope. This system still exists in the Catholic Church. In 1917 the Catholic Church promulgated the universal Code of Canon Law which remained in effect until the 1983 Code of Canon Law, and this deals with canonisation. The Anglican Church's attitude to the creation of new saints

varies across the Anglican Communion – for example, in the American Episcopal Church, new saints can be included in the official calendar of saints which is called 'Lesser Feasts and Fasts'. Every three years, new names can be added. The Anglican Ninth Lambeth Conference held in 1958 clarified the commemoration of Saints and Heroes of the Christian Church in the Anglican Communion. Resolution 79 stated:

- In the case of scriptural saints, care should be taken to commemorate men or women in terms which are in strict accord with the facts made known in Holy Scripture.
- In the case of other names, the calendar should be limited to those whose historical character and devotion are beyond doubt.
- In the choice of new names economy should be observed and controversial names should not be inserted until they can be seen in the perspective of history.
- The addition of a new name should normally result from a widespread desire expressed in the region concerned over a reasonable period of time.

There is, however, no formal method of canonising someone in the Anglican Church.

In the Methodist Church, saints are admired, but not venerated. There is no system of canonisation but some individuals such as Martin Luther King have been named 'modern day martyrs'.

The Baptist Union had a one-day conference at Regent's Park College on 22 November 2014 on the theme 'Baptists and the Communion of Saints', which was a ground-breaking attempt to re-think Baptist theology and doctrine of the church from the perspective of communion with all saints, living and dead. I can't find any formal action taken as a result. As far as I can see, Grace Baptists would consider that all



their members could be regarded as saints – as indeed does the Church of Latter Day Saints, or Mormon Church.

Saints seem to have a different meaning in each denomination, and I have found it very difficult to tease out some of the details – so I hope you will forgive me if I have got anything wrong!

John Allan
High Street Baptist Church

As Editor, I sometimes 'cheat' and respond to articles before others see them – because I DO see them first. So please forgive me for adding a bit here.

John says above that Grace Baptists might consider all their members as saints. I don't think I would be welcome as a Grace Baptist as I am an Anglican and would once have happily called myself an evangelical before our American friends gave that term a bad name. But I agree with them. The apostle (or Saint!) Paul refers to those believers he writes to in the epistles as saints. This is not something they, or we, have attained by ourselves or because of what we have done; all Christian believers are given the status of 'holy' before God because of what Jesus has done for us – not because we are of ourselves without sin or fault. As Christians, we try to live lives that reflect God's holiness; we are set apart for God's purposes in the world and the Holy Spirit lives in us, transforming our lives.

I didn't realise this was an uncommon view till I read John's article – but as I understand the New Testament, all of us are saints if we accept what Jesus has done for us on the cross and allow him to work in our lives. Ed.

Tweet of the month



So here we are in 2024 and I have just finalized the itinerary of a return visit to Colombia. In January 2020 I spent eight days in Colombia, during which time I saw

360 species of bird, fifty-seven of which were species I had never seen before. There are still seventy-one Colombian Endemics included in a staggering 716 bird species that I have never seen before. Now I am retired I will be able to do tours I didn't do last time and also a couple of extensions – one of which didn't exist in 2020.

Thirty-eight new species of hummingbird are possible on my next trip and, as you may remember, I focused on them when I last wrote about Colombia. This time I won't do that as Colombia has more than just hummingbirds to offer. So, it is time to introduce the tanagers, which are similar to hummingbirds in that most are found in South and Central

America, with a few species found in North America.

There are currently 392 species recognised as belonging to the tanager family, but this is constantly changing as people study and reallocate birds to different families as genetics are used to determine a bird's true affinities. The first tanagers that I ever saw, in 1986 in Canada, Scarlet Tanager and Summer Tanager, are no longer thought to be tanagers at all but are cardinals – a family closely related to tanagers. Fortunately, the English names weren't changed or that really would be confusing! It is a good job birds don't worry about what we call them or they really would have identity crises. So, as well as having birds called tanagers that are not in the tanager family, we have birds that are in the tanager family but are not called tanagers!



Of the 392 species of tanager in the world, 179 are found in Colombia and I have seen 134 already. One of my favourites is the Blue-winged Mountain Tanager. This species is found from Venezuela to Bolivia, mainly in the Andean cloud forests with an isolated population along the coast of Venezuela. It is found from 3,900 to 8,200 feet above sea level and is a true montane species. I have been fortunate to see it in both Ecuador and Colombia in cloud forests and look forward to seeing it again in 2024.

So why pick this bird to mention? I do have pictures of endemic Colombian birds but some are plain brown birds, others are hummingbirds and the rest were doing a good job of hiding in vegetation. So, I picked this one because it is beautiful and a fine representative of God's creation and, sometimes, we just need to be reminded of the beauty all over this world, despite the dark times we seem to be living in.

Roy Hargreaves
St Peter & St Paul

Crossword

1		2		3		4		5		6		7
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ACROSS

- Brownish colour (5)
- Title of Pope (7)
- Floor coverings (7)
- Sports ground (5)
- Release (4)
- In favour of (3)
- Smear (4)
- Opposite of next clue (4)
- Virtuous Father (4)
- Solo song (4)
- Attempt (3)
- List of those on duty (4)
- Stupid (5)
- John, the '.....' (7)
- Postal address for one of the N.T. letters (7)
- Position marked (5)

DOWN

- First words of a fable (4) (4) (1) (4)
- King, when Jesus was born (5)
- Biblical garden (4)
- Church minister (6)
- Close (4)
- Very close to England (7)
- Absolutely amazed (13)
- Edge (3)
- Offspring (3)
- Message on a tomb (7)
- Groups of people of the past (6)
- Vegetable (5)
- God (4)
- Gem (4)

Answers page 30

The World Day of Prayer



'I beg you, bear with one another in love'

The Christian women of Palestine are calling us to connect with the land from where Jesus came; where he was born, ministered and died – and from where our faith began and is rooted. Despite living in an area of the world where there is ongoing conflict and the future is uncertain, the women of Palestine are sharing with love a reminder that they are there, and they want to give hope to everyone. The theme of the service in 2024, 'bear with one another in love', seems very appropriate for these women who will not give up witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ.

The World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation led by women which enables us to hear the thoughts of those women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns and prayers. The preparation for the day is vast. An international committee is based in New York and there are national committees in each participating country. Regional conferences meet to consider the service and then local groups make their plans. Finally, at a church near you on Friday 1 March 2024 people will gather to celebrate the service prepared by the women of Palestine.

The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 146 countries. It begins in Samoa and prayer in native languages travels throughout the world – through Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas before finishing in American Samoa some thirty-eight hours later.

For further information and resources, together with details of services in your area, see the WDP website: wwdp.org.uk.

Will you come and join with members from the churches in Tring at St Peter & St Paul's Church on Friday 1 March to pray with the rest of the world, sending words of encouragement and love to the Christians in Palestine?

We look forward to seeing you! The time of the service will be announced on posters in your churches nearer to the date. Everyone is welcome.

Jill Smith
WDP local organising committee

Being ready

Having just celebrated the coming of Jesus into the world when the world was not ready, we can think of his Second Coming. Will the world be ready?

The men of old had left God out; the world was in a mess. They broke God's law, so greatly suffered, causing much distress. God loved each one and had a plan – a Messiah he would send to bring them back to him, save their souls and be their friend.

BUT WERE THEY READY?

To Abraham a promise – his descendants would be blessed: to Israel a New Covenant if his son they would profess. The prophets thundered out the news: 'Unto us a son is born'. They knew not when or where; some treated it with scorn.

SO, WERE THEY READY?

When the time had fully come, Galatians chapter four, verse four God sent Jesus, born of a woman, and laid in a manger's straw. As a baby, like each one of us, he entered the world of sin. The shepherds and the wise men came to a stable in an inn.

WERE GOD'S PEOPLE READY?

With Roman armies everywhere and all nations speaking Greek, the Jews hoped for a conqueror, not one so mild and meek. But Jesus healed the sick and spoke with great authority. The Jewish leaders were confounded – to kill him, their priority!

WAS THE WORLD READY?

He'd come to die for us and take the punishment for sin. The 'Suffering Servant' so all to heaven could enter in. 2,000 years this Gospel message to the world has been made known and still, today, challenges us – this Saviour to make our own.

ARE WE READY?

Death was conquered as Jesus rose and returned to his father in heaven. He'd promised to return for all whose sins are now forgiven. We know not when or where he'll come; the signs of the times are warnings. Accept him as your Saviour now – prepare for eternity dawning.

BE READY

John Young, Akeman Street Baptist Church

COMMENT

The magazine of the Churches in Tring

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

Aim for 400 or 800 words and please send a head and shoulders colour photo or jpg and any other photos in high resolution.

Contact comment.magazine@gmail.com



New Mill Cubs, the early days



The earliest date in the log book is September 1939 when the pack closed for a few weeks at the outbreak of WWII – but they soon went back. The parents had to give consent for their sons to do so.

On 20 February, they welcomed a new helper, Miss Haddon, to be known as Ricki. In June 1940, Akela was called up for service, but the Cubs declared ‘We will carry on!’ In July, Mr Reed at Marshcroft Farm allowed them to use his fields, possibly for games. In November, the Cubs had a supper, and that night thirty boys turned up. Numbers fluctuated between twenty-two and forty-five, owing to the coming and going of the evacuees. In December 1940, the Home Guard used the Social Centre on Tuesdays for training, so the Cubs met on a Saturday morning for a while. In January and February 1941, there was very bad weather, so the Cubs did not meet.

On 8 January 1941, the Chief Scout, Lord Baden Powell, died. He was known as ‘Our Chief’. The Pack attended a Memorial Service at Tring Scout HO, led by Mr Dando, who was the Pastor at New Mill Baptist Church. A memorial fund was started to try to raise £1 for every Scout, which they did.

In May 1941, it was National Savings week, and there was a march through the town. In December 1941, the Cubs had their Christmas party, and Kaa was called up for the Forces. In 1942, there was a Uniform Wedding when Pastor Dando married the Cubmaster from Aldbury to a lady from Zurich.

During 1942, there were football games, Parents’ Evenings, and a new six, the Whites, made up of evacuees, was formed. In August, ten of the older boys camped in Mr Ayres’ field, and the 1st Tring lent them their equipment. It was very wet, but they had a wonderful time and vowed it wouldn’t be their last camp. Two Sixers moved up to 1st Tring Scouts, where Mr Haddon was the Scoutmaster. The Cubs hiked to Cholesbury, had a sausage supper, and raised £36.36 with a Rummage Sale. In April, it was the St George’s Day Parade led by Flight Lt PE Berryman and Rev CCT Wood, at St Peter & St Paul’s. Tring, Aldbury and New Mill Cubs attended and the New Mill

Colours were dedicated. In May, twelve new boys turned up aged between 5 and 8 and four were admitted; the others were too young. On 20 June 1943, a Memorial Service was held in the church for Lord Baden Powell. Gladys Hull then joined the Pack.

In May 1945 there was a Peace Parade – the war was over!

New Mill Cubs 1965

In December 1965, there were six boys, quickly joined by eight more, with Akela and Ricki in charge. I think Akela was Evelyn Barber, who has recently died, as the transport to the Carol Concert was Ted Barber.

In February 1966, Akela and Ricki were invested and another helper Jill, Stan’s daughter, came. Twelve Cubs attended the St George’s Day Parade at Berkhamsted on 24 April. On 19 May there was a Cub outing to London Zoo with twenty Cubs, Akela, Kaa and Ricki and two Scouts. Fifty years of Cubs in Tring was celebrated on 4 June. There was a Cub Jubilee in St Albans on 30 October and a new helper, Rosemary Keen joined as Jacala.

November saw ‘One year of Cubs in New Mill’, so they must have started again.

Another new helper joined on 11 January 1967, Mary Croft, as Baloo. St George’s Day was celebrated again on 23 April and other activities included a coach and boat outing to Windsor, sports at Gilwell Park. In December Cubs and Brownies sang carols for New Mill’s WI. On 15 March 1968 my son Ian was invested. The Pack had five helpers by 20 March. Mrs Mcallister was Kaa, Mrs Jones was Ricki. Peter Harrowell was Group Scout Leader. On 11 May the Pack went to the log cabin at Ashridge where Mr Hummer organized games. On 22 June there was a Big Meet at Watford Stadium. Nine thousand came from all over Hertfordshire. Later that month Mr Harrowell presented my son Ian with his bronze arrow. A Jumble Sale raised £27 for funds. In November the Pack took part in the Remembrance Day Service.

On 15 February 1969 the FIRST Social Evening was organised by the newly formed ‘Mums’ Group’. The New Mill Scout’s Supporters Association was started to raise money for the new HQ. Four boys went up to Scouts at Tring because as yet there were no Scouts at New Mill. On 26 March, the boys took

part in a Road Safety Quiz at Dundale School and came 4th. In June Akela (Mrs Barber) left, and Jakala came back. My son Peter joined, just in time to go to the Log Cabin. The boys really loved going there. On 28 July the Pack went to the Science Museum. This was the first time some of the boys had been to London and caused great excitement. In the Autumn parents helped with an outing to the Log Cabin and on 16 December the Cubs sang carols for the New Mill WI Christmas party.

In 1970 the ‘Bob-a-job’ week raised £19.07 as funds for the Pack. Mike Smith came to help and my son Andrew joined the Pack. The boys are recorded as going tracking and the Mums’ Group made £20 with their Jumble sale. From this point there was a name change: the Cubs were now to be called Cub Scouts (and not Wolf Cubs) and the uniform was changed to a dark green jumper, with coloured plastic woggles and subs would now be one shilling a week. On 31 May the Pack went to Well End Cub Activity Centre, and my son Peter got his bronze arrow. A new Six, the Blues, was started, owing to the growing numbers. Now there were thirty Cubs at New Mill. On 14 October, sons John and Ian got their Gold Arrows and went up to Scouts at Tring. Peter got his One Year Star. Baloo left, and Brian Flanders started. Kevin Mcallister was helping Mr Smith and Mr Flanders at this time. Mr Smith and Mr Guy took eight Cubs to a Big Meet at Berkhamsted where there were 170 Cubs. In December, the Cubs sang again for New Mill WI, and they also sang carols in St Peter & St Paul’s accompanied by Mr Smith, Kaa and Jacala.

On 14 April 1971, Mr Smith was now Akala, Mr Flanders was Baloo and Mrs Adams was Bagheera. On 26 April 26 there was a grand St George’s Day Parade, with 500 members from all over the area. On 1 May 1971 there was an Activity Day at Phasels Wood. On 29 May the Cubs formed a Guard of Honour for Jacala (Rosemary Keen) when she married Brian Duck, at New Mill Baptist Church. On 14 November the Remembrance Day Service was held at St Peter & St Paul’s attended by Akala, Kaa, Jacala, Baloo, Bagheera and twenty-nine Cubs.

Erica Guy
St Peter & St Paul

If you or someone in your family is named in these articles about the Cubs or this brings back memories, please do write in to tell us about it. This is part of Tring’s history and the part played by all those dedicated people who gave up their time to take care of the young people of Tring fifty and more years ago should not be

forgotten. If (like me) you are less familiar with all the names mentioned here, they are based on Kipling’s ‘The Jungle Book’. New Mill called their leaders after Akela, the leader of the wolf pack, Baloo, the bear who taught Mowgli the law of the jungle, Bagheera, the black panther who mentored and protected Mowgli, Ricki, a

mongoose who bravely fights to protect his adopted family, Kaa, the python who befriended and mentored Mowgli and Jacala, the crocodile who fought Mowgli (why this one, I wonder!). If you are still none the wiser, I recommend reading ‘The Jungle Book’ and all will become clear! **Ed.**

Seven years of Piano & More!



Piano & More had an excellent year in 2023.

We began our occasional Young Artists concerts, which have been a great success, and we will be continuing with these

in the future.

We’ve had concerts for quartets, trios and duos as well as solos.

Tring School ‘A’ level students came and performed to us, and in December we had our biggest Advent family concert yet, with no fewer than twenty-eight performers, all local, and involving several family groups, either performing on their own or as part of the ensemble we put together for the occasion, and in

some cases, both! Ages ranged from 6 to well beyond 60!

There is plenty to look forward to already in 2024. Each concert is publicised around the parish during the weeks before it happens, but all the concerts we have so far booked can be found on our website, piano-and-more.org.uk, where you can also find details of past concerts and much more. To whet your appetite, we have a return visit from the brilliant young Berkhamsted cellist, Madeleine Murray, this time joined by her violinist sister Beatrice, as well as a performance of the Coleridge-Taylor Nonet by the Icknield Ensemble – a very beautiful piece, not often heard in the concert hall. There are many other goodies in store too!

These concerts are free to attend

and are followed by tea, cake and fellowship – a chance to meet the performers as well as to chat to other members of the audience. The performers give freely of their time and talents and always appreciate the warmth of the welcome in St Peter & St Paul. Donations, which are split between the general upkeep of the piano and the church, are welcomed, but not obligatory. Concerts usually, with a couple of exceptions (third Sundays in April and July), take place on the second Sunday of each month.

We look forward to seeing you as we embark on the eighth year of the concerts!

Anna Le Hair
St Peter & St Paul
Musical Director, Piano & More

A forgotten decoration?



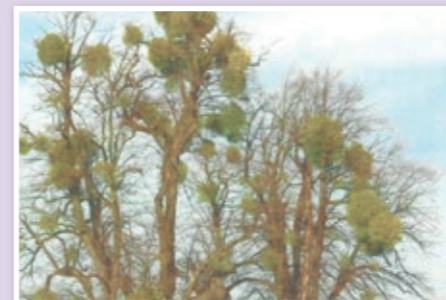
The pretty, delicate leaves of the mistletoe show themselves when branches of broadleaf trees rest awhile. Many people have not seen them, or don’t know where to look.

Its small, white flowers are made up of four tiny petals and form in clusters of three to five, with male and female growing on the same plants. How clever is that? The seeds have a sticky substance which sticks to the beaks of birds feeding on the fruit.

They can be difficult to find so many people miss them. A good location in Tring is opposite Tring School in Mortimer Hill. Face the school and look to the left. In the parkland by the barrier, several feet up, are many mistletoes. You can see many plants hanging there, often mistaken for crows’ nests. Now you can see the white flower of the broadleaf trees.

Beware: mistletoe may be an important habitat for wildlife but the leaves, stems and berries are all poisonous to us.

Pam Russell
St Peter & St Paul



Piano & more series

An hour of music on Sunday afternoons

Alice Bishop *Soprano*
David Elwin *Piano*

On Wings of Song

A tour of European songs by Clara Schumann, Rossini, Granados, Fauré, R. Strauss and others

Sunday 11th February
at 3pm

Tring Parish Church HP23 5AE

followed by tea and refreshments

Free admission, with retiring collection

For further details see:

piano-and-more.org.uk
or Google “Piano and more, Tring”



Complaints to the rector...



I think the clergy have a particular speciality in upsetting people, but it is rare to manage it to such an extent that those who have been upset write to me. I have done this twice recently and, on both occasions, it related to praying for the people of Gaza.

I am aware, therefore, that this is a subject which raises high passions, and so it is with nervous trepidation that I write this article. It comes from the result of a conversation with my eldest daughter, driving back to Sheffield University. She, too, had been in an argument with someone who accused her of having little idea of the history of Israel – always red rag to a bull to Eliza, a history graduate!

We challenged ourselves: what did we actually know? With decent biblical historical knowledge, we could describe that there were diverse tribes worshipping a variety of gods which eventually become united under a single god, YHWH. Of course, within this narrative is much pre-history, with little archaeological support, and there is a strong story of identity about a people gaining that identity by being freed from captivity. This nomadic, desert people, through violent conquest, occupy the land. The warlike YHWH wins against the agrarian Baal.

Much of the Old Testament tells us of the two Israelite kingdoms Judah and Israel and the founding of Jerusalem,

At the start of the First World War, Palestine formed part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. But following that Empire's collapse in 1922, Britain assumed responsibility for administering Palestine as a 'Mandated Territory', and this was endorsed by the League of Nations (the UN's predecessor). The British Mandate was specifically intended to be temporary, with power to be transferred locally as soon as it was judged that the necessary local capacity to govern existed. And indeed the British did end their Mandate officially, withdrawing all its troops in May 1948, and David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, formally declared the state's establishment. The new country was admitted to the UN in 1949.

with the Philistines as their southern neighbours. The Bible also goes on to tell us of the continuing history of conflict. We are well aware of the Assyrian conquest, and then the Babylonian conquest. We are less aware of the Persian domination of the area, but those who read the books of Maccabees will be more aware of this. Finally, we are aware of the Roman annexation of the land as it is the constant backdrop to the New Testament.

What we were more sketchy on was what happened after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 until the First World War. And when does one refer to Palestine rather than Israel? From Wikipedia, I discover that Herodotus used the term Palestine to describe the whole area and the word is derived from Philistines. I suspect if the Romans referred to the area as Syria Palestina that is why we have become used to describing Jesus as a 'Palestinian Jew'. A little diversion (as normally happens when one is in Wikipedia) reveals that Gaza is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world.

As the Roman Empire became Christianised, so too did Palestine / Israel. There was a period from the 4th century to the 7th century when it was a largely Christian centre: obvious really, but I hadn't stopped to think about that too much. From the 7th century onwards, the history of conquest continues, but this time it is the Islamic conquest by various ruling dynasties, which brings us back to some history which we are familiar with – the Crusaders who set up a kingdom of Jerusalem; and then we

However, the end of the Mandate was effectively forced on the British (who had become very unpopular with both Arabs and Jews) by a bloody civil war in the preceding months, leading to great loss of life and hardship. The land claimed by Israel for the new state comprised around 80% of the British Mandate area, with Egypt taking responsibility for the Gaza strip, Jordan for the West Bank and part of Jerusalem and Syria for the Golan Heights. All three of these areas were subsequently occupied, in the case of Golan only partially, by Israel in the 1967 war, although only Jerusalem was then fully incorporated into the state.

The 1948 establishment of Israel saw the exodus of 700,000 Arabs from

hear the area was once more dominated by the Egyptians and then became part of the Ottoman Empire. I have to admit that my knowledge of the history of the area from 13th to 20th century is, at best, limited. I could not tell you anything about Christianity or Judaism in the Holy Land for those 700 years.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it all comes back to familiar history, the British occupation after the First World War and the Balfour declaration. Then we have the formation of the State of Palestine and the State of Israel after the Second World War. It isn't a straightforward history after then until now, but it is all much more familiar. *[For a brief history of the area over the past century, see the box below.]*

I suspect I am fascinated by how little I know and what shapes an area which is the meeting point of so many cultures. In Britain, we still haven't quite let go of being invaded by the French in 1066. The war memorial at Bayeaux reads: 'We, once conquered by William, have now set free the Conqueror's native land.' If a country with so little history of occupation can still be hung up on it, how much deeper are the questions of identity when there is so much history of conquest and occupation.

At the end of the car journey, I came to the conclusion I had much to learn. But where to start? Well, it had better not be Wikipedia. But where will I find a good, unbiased history? Or doesn't that exist? But where will I find a good, unbiased history? Or doesn't that exist?

Huw Bellis
Tring Team

the new state (something Arabs refer to as the Nakba or Catastrophe). And as we know so well, the post-1948 situation in the area has continued to be very turbulent, with many violent, bloody eruptions of conflict. Glimmers of hope arose after the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Israel signed the Camp David accords in 1978, but these hopes have sadly been dashed by subsequent events.

An excellent series of talks available on BBC iPlayer (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gnb2wy>) puts a bit more flesh on this highly complex, seemingly intractable and deeply depressing story.

Edmund Booth
St Peter & St Paul

In memory of Rev'd Canon John Andrew Somerset Payne-Cook 1943-2023



I will always regard John with grateful affection as the man who opened the gate for me and welcomed me in... We first met in 1985 when John and Mary and their young family came to Tring when he took over as Team Rector from Donald Howells. He was charismatic and energetic and with Mary and their lively youngsters, Esther, Daniel, Naomi and Hannah, they seemed exactly the shot-in-the-arm our parish needed; fresh new blood to add vitality and modern thinking and energy to our community.

These were challenging times (as ever) and the hot topic which fuelled many a debate then was the upcoming Ordination of Women. Much like the current debates on gender fluidity and inclusion we experienced in 'Living in Love & Faith', this whole subject was both exciting and divisive. Tring Team Parish had a wonderful group of resources just waiting for the gates to be opened (not to mention some who were trying to keep them closed!).

We were also significantly challenged on the financial front (just as we are today) and the whole structure of our 'Team' of five separate independent parishes (each with its PCC and separate financial identity) needed urgent review. In my view, John was exactly the leader we needed to bring us together, recognise our strengths and help us master our weaknesses.

It was during this period that I got to know John well. Our very different characters and skills fitted together to create a strong partnership. His luminous faith and eloquent spirituality inspired us all. My background in (sometimes gritty) strategic re-organisation came in useful in re-engineering the parish structure into the union of Tring Team Parish and a single financial entity of the Team Scheme. That whole process took some time five years or so and at least another five for it to bed in, take root and flower.

As well as taking a huge amount of time, it also took its toll on a leader as sincere, sensitive and fair-minded as John. John always saw both sides of every question.

A perfect storm

It has been often said that 'blessings come singly, but troubles come in legions' and so it proved to be during the late 80s and early 90s. The restructuring challenges within the microcosm of Tring coincided exactly with the culmination

of the sea-change of the Ordination of Women from 1985 (Deacons) to 1992 (Priests) within the macrocosm of the Anglican Church.

This took a heavy toll and proved an almost unbearable burden for John. By this time we had become firm friends and he spoke of the difficulties sometimes experienced in keeping doubts at bay and finding firm faith. He endured – and fought off – something of that 'Dark Night of the Soul' that assails many true and devout believers – so eloquently described in Barbara Brown Taylor's marvellous book 'This Preaching Life'. A further blow at this time was the loss of Martin Nathaniel, the remaining priest within the Tring Team, which meant we were severely short of ministers to take our services.

What then ensued was a blossoming of alternative forms of worship within our liturgical rota. This was made possible by a coming together of members of our community who wanted to offer their time and talents to refresh and create worship structures. A number of teams were formed to develop All Age Worship services so we were able to offer a full rota of services, which engaged and enthused new worship leaders, often including dance drama and music from all generations. The newly enfranchised women deacons and ministers were a huge source of energy in this.

All of this was generously embraced and welcomed by John who, despite his inner uncertainties, would always encourage others' involvement with faith, reflection and worship. Thus it was that he encouraged me to preach my first sermon and take my first service. This set me on a road and led me on a journey that eventually took me into ministry some twenty years later. I remember that first sermon with its simple theme 'Christianity is good for you'. That is something I learned from John, and I shall always be grateful.

The pilgrim's progress

For me, John was the constant pilgrim, always a man on a quest, searching to find the way to live his life fully in the footsteps of Christ; everything he did was inspired and guided by his deep faith. In another of those strange coincidences, we discovered that we had, in fact, met many years before he came to Tring. In the 60s he studied at the Community of Resurrection in Mirfield, West Yorkshire,

which was a few miles from my family home. We spoke of our joint experiences in later years and I was always struck by this picture of John living out his life as a pilgrim, always searching for the right way forward in everything he did.

The picture by Durer, which was originally created by the maestro to illustrate Erasmus' ideological work of 'The Handbook of The Christian Knight' for me perfectly represents that constant pilgrim – and reminds me of John's approach to life. Thus it seemed entirely in character when John, after finishing his ministry to great acclaim in Tring Team and becoming a Canon of St Albans Cathedral, took himself and Mary off on another journey. This time they joined USPG and went off to St Kitts and Nevis for three exciting years. He then returned to the familiar landscape of rural Bedfordshire to lead the team as Rector of Holwell, Ickleford and Pirton until his well-deserved retirement in 2010 after forty-two years with the C. of E. Not that he was done with pilgrimages. In 2006 he returned to the Caribbean and led a pilgrimage to Antigua along with the Bishop of St Albans.

The last peaceful lap

After retirement, John and Mary settled down in their new home in Totternhoe and embarked fully on all the excitement and adventure of family life. They were surrounded by children and grandchildren who, as they movingly testified at John's funeral and thanksgiving service in December, knew with deep certainty that they were truly loved. John's life was always lived as a prayer of Christian constancy and, no matter what doubts and difficulties assailed him, he was always a constant Christian knight. I know so many people who knew him and who, like me, are grateful for his help and guidance in finding the right road – and opening the gate.

Grahame Senior
Tring Team

In memory of David Sands

David was born on 10 February 1947 in Reddish, Stockport, the only child of Edith and Cecil Sands. He started his school life at the North Reddish Primary School. At the age of 10, his parents moved to Bramhall and he attended Pownall Green C.P School, then transferring to Moseley Hall Grammar School in Cheadle. According to his school reports he was very diligent and hardworking.

He had a happy childhood, even if it was sometimes a bit lonely. From an early age his mother took him on bus rides and country walks and the family always went on a short holiday, but never far from home. His love for walking and public transport never waned.

Like a lot of his generation, he was the first to go to university. There he made friends and enjoyed his first holidays abroad, coincidentally staying in Bad Godesberg (next to Bonn) where Marianne's father grew up. He graduated in Economics from Manchester University in 1969 and started work for the Manchester Corporation.

Outside working life, he went to youth clubs where activities included hiking and travelling. On New Year's Day 1972 he went to a dance organised by 18+, a club for young adults. There he met Marianne who, with other au pairs, went to the Wilmslow group. He and Marianne struck up a friendship and, on her day off, he took her hiking and later to concerts at the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester. That Easter they agreed a deal. If he would drive her to her hometown in the Moselle, he could stay free of charge in her house. Romance blossomed after that trip. In July that year, Marianne went back to Germany to work in Pforzheim, as in England she needed a work permit to get a job, and a job to get a work permit. Courting was done by letter and once a week over the phone. This was a phone box on David's side and the office with colleagues around on Marianne's. It also included two trips to Germany and one to England. In 1973 they got married in a Registry office in Manchester and in church a month later in Germany. The Registry was in the same building David worked in and David liked telling the story that normally he was not allowed to park in that car park. So, when he drove up on that morning, the car park attendant told him he couldn't park there, to which David replied that today he could as he was getting married.



David changed his job to work in London and a flat was rented in Wembley. They could hear the noise from the stadium, but not see anything as there was a railway line in-between.

A year later the house in Tring was bought and they moved in on 9 September 1974, with no intention to stay there that long. David looked at jobs abroad, but none materialised. Instead holidays abroad, first without the children and later with them and to visit them, were a way of seeing the world.

Barbra arrived in September 1977 and Julie in January 1979. David was a very hands-on father and enjoyed taking his girls out to playgrounds, to preserved railways and later to football matches. David liked talking about football and he followed Manchester City and Stockport's success and failures.

David loved looking after and playing with the grandchildren, first Ben and then Amy until they moved abroad. He was very happy on the few occasions he was able to visit the twins Rita and Emily and, although modern technology largely by-passed him, he loved to see them on Facetime on Marianne's iPad.

During lockdown, he and Marianne went for lots of walks and took photos of the local countryside to share in the Methodist newsletter. These walks probably hastened his osteoporosis and in July this year he had a successful hip operation and was soon back in full walking mode. David and Marianne celebrated fifty years of marriage this year, but due to his operation and having family abroad, celebrations were limited to a meal out.

David died at the end of October following a sudden illness after visiting his daughter in Belgium. He is much missed by his family and St Martha's, where he was a longstanding and faithful member.

Rachael Hawkins
St Martha's Methodist Church



In memory of Gerald Webber

Gerald Webber was born in Littlehampton, West Sussex, on the frosty night of 26 November 1935, the first child of Mark and Mabel. Mark was the foreman on a farm, and then a farmer himself so Gerald grew up in a farming environment.

Gerald wrote that life was quite pleasant growing up. One of his earliest memories was of the first time he tasted ice cream – a pleasure he was denied for much of his childhood, with the arrival of the Second World War and the rationing that imposed. He made up for it later in life, usually having ice cream at the end of every meal out (and at the New Mill Café!)

When Gerald was 8, he was sent to some friends down the road, and when he got home, he found that he had a new baby sister, Carol. He certainly remembered it as a surprise! Gerald went to school in Littlehampton and then moved on to the High School in Worthing. He never liked sport but he loved cycling – not just to school but to other places all over the county. Gerald started to develop his love for geography.

The family attended the Argyll Hall in Littlehampton which was a Plymouth Brethren Chapel. Carol remembers Gerald becoming a Christian as a young teenager and being baptised a year or so after that. He remained a committed Christian throughout his life and truly ecumenical. He later became a Baptist, then Baptist plus Anglican, then Anglican and then Baptist plus Anglican once again.

After school, the family moved to Musbury in Devon where his parents bought a farm in need of modernising. In August 1955 Gerald met Gill for the first time when she and her sister Beth were staying with their aunt in the village.

In November 1955 Gerald was called up to National Service in the RAF. He was glad to be picked to be a typist rather than a wireless operator as he felt typing was a much more transferable skill. He was posted to Germany and remained in lifelong contact with friends he made there through the church.

Gerald's passion for geography continued during National Service when breaks in training or service facilitated

hitchhiking adventures and travel around Germany. After demob Gerald trained to be a teacher and started his career in South East London in 1959. Gerald and Gill were married at Musbury Chapel in March 1961, and in 2023 they celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary. Along the way, Gerald and Gill became parents to Ian and Andrew.



From 1965 to 1970 Gerald worked for Scripture Union, training Sunday School teachers, before returning to classroom teaching. Throughout his career he would diligently keep in touch with many former colleagues and students; in more recent times he did this through social media.

Gerald taught at a variety of schools and colleges through his forty-year career. The family lived in Bexleyheath and then Bexley, and attended Trinity Baptist Church, Bexleyheath, where Gerald was a deacon for several years.

Gerald ended his career teaching geography, which had always been his favourite subject. He enjoyed being a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and would regularly attend talks at their Kensington headquarters. He also had a love for travel, with Gerald and Gill visiting over forty countries over the years.

After retirement Gerald and Gill moved to Tenterden in Kent in 2000. They

enjoyed an active retirement – Gerald in particular volunteered at the local steam railway, drove the day-centre minibus and, alongside Gill, worked at their local National Trust property. They were also active in the Tenterden Parish Church (St Mildred's). They became grandparents to Samuel and then Jack. During their time in Tenterden, Gerald and Gill celebrated their golden wedding anniversary (with celebrations held near both Tenterden and Tring).

In 2014 Gerald and Gill made the move to Tring, bringing them close to their family. Here they marked their 80th birthdays and then their diamond wedding anniversary (sadly mid-pandemic). They loved receiving a card from the Queen via Buckingham Palace for their anniversary.

Here, too, retirement remained as active as possible, with Gerald joining the local history society and volunteering at the Rennie Grove Hospice shop in Tring. He was part of the fellowship at both New Mill Baptist Church and St Peter & St Paul's, and loved to attend church activities right up until a few days before his passing. Gerald particularly enjoyed Sunday and Tuesday services, Bible studies, prayer meetings and the weekly café at New

Mill. Many have commented with fond memories of the talk and quiz he gave at the New Mill Bright Hour Christmas party early in December 2023.

Sadly, after a short illness, Gerald passed away in hospital in the early hours of 17 December 2023 at the age of 88 (or 'nearly 90' as his GP unfortunately once told him). Sprinkled throughout this biography, and therefore his life, are many references to the Christian faith he professed. At this sad time, we give thanks that we can hold on to the promise that after this long and interesting life, Gerald will 'go to glory' and be made whole with his personal Saviour Jesus Christ. We pray that we, too, may follow Gerald's example of a strong and steadfast faith, and know we shall meet again one day.

Andrew Webber, son
New Mill Baptist Church

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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 22

ACROSS

1. OCHRE
4. PONTIFF
8. CARPETS
9. ARENA
10. UNDO
11. FOR
12. DAUB
15. EVIL
16. GOOD
18. ARIA
19. TRY
20. ROTA
24. INANE
25. BAPTIST
26. EPHEBUS
27. LINED

DOWN

1. ONCE UPON A TIME
2. HEROD
3. EDEN
4. PASTOR
5. NEAR
6. IRELAND
7. FLABBERGASTED
13. RIM
14. SON
15. EPITAPH
17. TRIBES
21. ONION
22. DEUS
23. OPAL

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Revd Joe Egan

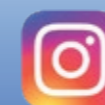
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