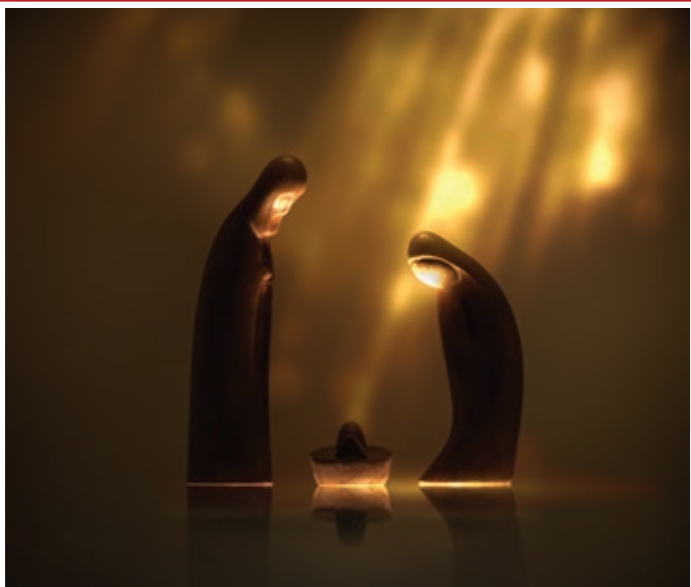


DECEMBER 2022 / JANUARY 2023 £1.50

# COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



# What's on in December in Tring Church

## Services at Tring Church

### Sunday 4th December

**8am** Holy Communion traditional language  
**10am** Communion with Children's Activities \*\*  
**3pm** Christingle service for all ages

### Sunday 11th December

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

### Sunday 18th December

**8am** Holy Communion traditional language  
**10am** Communion with Children's Activities \*\*  
**4pm** Candlelit carol service followed by mince pies and mulled wine/beer etc

### Wednesday 21st December

**6pm** Carols in the churchyard with Tring Brewery bar. Come dressed for the weather.

### Christmas Eve 24th December

**2pm and 4pm** Crib services for all ages  
(2pm is quieter and suitable for younger children)  
**11.30pm** Midnight Mass

### Christmas Day 25th December

**8am** Holy Communion traditional language  
**10am** Christmas Communion for all ages \*\*

\*\* Streamed service on our website and YouTube

### Mid-week Services in Tring

**9.15am Tuesdays (except 27th December)**  
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

### Tuesdays

**10am - 12noon**  
Baby/toddler/carer drop-in for chat, a cuppa and toys for the little ones.



**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 December 11th**



**3pm** for an hour's concert of music followed by refreshments  
Free but collection for church and piano expenses

### Food Bank

Monday to Friday  
**10am - 12noon.**  
Drop-off donations and collect food



## What's the best adventure you've been on?



My wife and I had the most amazing adventure on our honeymoon. We went on an afternoon where we went ziplining through a forest, before kayaking through a mangrove river out into the sea on a small island in the Caribbean. We then snorkelled around a small reef, seeing all sorts of wonderful sea life, followed by some great food and drink on the beach. For me this is my favourite adventure memory. But of course, life is full of adventures, some of which are planned and some unplanned.

This festive season can be a bit of an adventure too. Things like shopping, parties, visiting places like Ashridge to see the Christmas light trails, and of course, visiting or hosting friends and family, can be a whirlwind adventure (this is certainly the case in my family!). Perhaps some of you will choose to make new year resolutions to do something

adventurous and step outside of your comfort zone in 2023? But I'd like to encourage you to consider seeking adventure beyond the surface level.

Underneath all the busyness, the gift-giving and receiving, the food and the time with family and friends (and of course, the new year blues), there is so much more to this season. If, when I went snorkelling with Ruth, I only stayed with my head above water and never looked deeper, I would've missed the exquisitely beautiful world of life that thrives just below the surface.

This season is filled with opportunity to live a deeper and fuller life in the love that God invites us into because of the greatest adventure of all time! 'The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.' (John 1:14, The Message).

Jesus, in his great adventure on earth, broke down barriers to reveal to us the beauty and abundance of his life, love and grace. Through his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, he has made a way for God to be with us and us to be with God, now and for ever, and this is

truly the best adventure of all.

Perhaps though, there have been things for you that have happened this last year that have clouded and confused somewhat, disconnecting or distracting you from the adventure of purposefully living in God's presence? When snorkelling with Ruth, I soon realised that, although we started snorkelling together, the natural tide (and sometimes my desire to observe something a little more closely) meant we drifted apart; and we had to swim back towards each other to remain safe and enjoy our adventure together. And so, as you journey through Advent and into the new year, my prayer for all who read this is that you will be watchful, attentive, and aware of the presence of Christ dwelling in your midst. And in so doing, you will go on the greatest adventure of journeying in faith with God each and every day.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all. God bless you.  
**Joe Egan**  
High Street Baptist Church

## Feedback



Once again, a huge thank you to the *Comment* team for producing such a wonderful church magazine for this year. The articles have been very interesting and well worth the read.

Last month we sadly learned of the passing of Dorothy Howells. My parents were great friends with Donald and Dorothy and when my mother passed away, I kept in touch with Dorothy, especially about the Mothers' Union. When Dorothy moved away from Tring, she kindly gave me some Mothers' Union books and I am now using them here in our Biggleswade meetings!

We also learned of the passing of Christine Lockhart. When I lived in Tring, we were both part of the Vitaset Youth Club.

All being well my husband, Ian, should now receive a seventy-year award for being in a church choir on Advent Sunday. He started as a 7-year-old in St Oswald's, Croxley Green, spent some of that time in the bass section in Tring Church Choir under Roland Stevens, Colin Stevens and Keith Pearce and went on to sing in Biggleswade. So: seventy years singing in the St Albans Diocese!

We wish you all a peaceful festive season.

**Rosamund Drakes**  
formerly St Peter & St Paul



## Our doors are open



**Tuesdays 10.30am - 12 Noon**  
**Wednesdays 2 - 4pm**

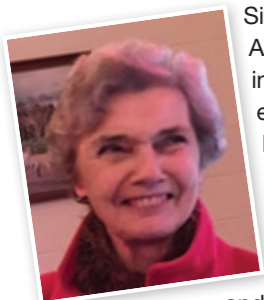
A warm welcome and hot drinks available

High Street Baptist Church  
89 High Street, Tring HP23 4AB  
(opposite Tring library)



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

# How do you view the Bible?



Since reading Annette's article in the September edition of *Comment* I have thought about her discussion points (which came from the 'Living in Love and Faith' book), some

with interest and some realising that I am not completely up-to-date with modern life. Personally, I feel that there is far more important guidance in all the sixty-six books of the Bible.

As I am one who does not like change, I have always read the Authorised Version but recently admit that I find some of the writings and stories more comprehensible in the New Revised Version. I was brought up to believe the stories of the Bible and live by its honest guidance but now realise that I need to spend many more hours reading the Bible to answer questions about my identity, sex and relationships before agreeing or accepting all the text.

Jesus's message was that we are all created in the image of God. We have the same capacity to create and to love; God redeems and saves us from our sin and vanity. This comes with the giving and acceptance of grace, recognizing that our petty divisions are of our own making and that we are united both in our capacity for sin and our being loved unconditionally. As Luke writes in chapter 6 verse 22: 'Blessed are you

when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile and defame you on account of the son of man'.

I have not tried to read the whole Bible and if I did try, I am not sure how far I would reach and how much I would fully comprehend. At various stages from school to several Bible Study Groups, I have discussed the different Gospels. Now, I am not sure that I want to study all the questions of identity, sex and relationships. Studying oneself so introvertly can make one question one's own identity. I believe in following the Ten Commandments and appreciate the reading of all ten at Holy Communion followed by the Creed.

When it was first agreed that the Anglican church should accept women

being ordained, I know there were those who found it very difficult to accept. Where would the church be now without their valuable contribution? But it is not my priority in life to consider same sex marriage in church – sorry, but I belong to the old school and cannot think what it would take for me to change my opinion. I have not found any text in either the old or New Testament that has swayed my opinion.

I am a great believer in everyone being welcomed to the House of God, but on what terms?

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

**Judith Orrell**  
formerly St Peter & St Paul

**FAURE REQUIEM**  
**CHORAL WORKSHOP**  
**MONDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2023**

Want to sing?  
Ever wondered what it might be like to sing with a large choir?  
Come and sing Faure's Requiem with Tring Choral Society at an Open Rehearsal.  
All welcome.  
No experience required.  
Free admission, music copies provided.

Come and join us at  
8pm – 9.45pm  
Akeman Street Baptist Church, Tring

If interested, please call Margaret on 07426 771226  
or email [membership@tringchoral.org.uk](mailto:membership@tringchoral.org.uk)

# Faith and politics



Well, after the departure of Liz Truss, we have another new prime minister. Of course, what stands out about Rishi Sunak is both his youth (at 42 he is the youngest prime minister since Pitt the Younger) and his faith (Rishi is a Hindu). I wonder if either of those will be relevant in his term of office? Since Peter Mandelson's famous phrase 'We don't do God', those in government seem to be reticent about

being open about their faith. From the outside it has been hard to know what part Christianity played in Tony Blair or Boris Johnson's life. But in recent years we have had an Anglican and Church of Scotland prime minister. Both Teresa May and Gordon Brown are active in their churches. Gordon Brown has said that he should have been more open about the way in which his religious beliefs motivated him while he was prime minister. He said 'To expect those of us with strong beliefs to leave them at the door of the House of Commons or No 10 is to require us to bring an incomplete version of ourselves

into the public arena... If the values that matter most to me are the values that I speak about least, then I am, at least in part, in denial of who I really am.'

I am guilty of not knowing all that much about Hinduism. I do not know what his faith will bring to being prime minister, but I hope to learn about both. It is important that we open our eyes to a more diverse world and I am always confident that in doing so, it will deepen our relationship with God and our understanding of who God is.

**Huw Bellis**  
Tring Team

# Creation care



As a trustee and former Chair of the Christian climate charity, Operation Noah, I was delighted when I heard that the house groups associated with

St Peter & St Paul's were going to use our small group study material. We relaunched 'Tenants of the King' in early October 2022, having realised that in the few short years since its release, things had moved on considerably. In mid-October Huw Bellis invited me to talk to some of the house group leaders and participants and provide a brief introduction to Operation Noah and the study material. What follows is a summary of what I shared with these groups.

Operation Noah is the UK's only Christian charity with a sole focus on climate change; it works with the church – of all denominations – to encourage action on the issue and it takes as its strapline Faith-motivated; Science-informed; Hope-inspired. We aim to resource and challenge the church – denominational leadership, local congregations and individual Christians – to get involved in a wide variety of ways. Alongside the production of resources, we run a campaign called 'Bright Now' which calls on the church to divest from fossil-fuel corporations, ie to remove church funds from these businesses and to invest instead in clean energy or other ethical funds. Bright Now has also started looking at the use of church land and at nature-based solutions to counteract rising levels of atmospheric greenhouse gases.

'Tenants of the King' consists of four sessions, which can each be spread over more than one meeting if necessary. The sessions are designed to provide a Christian perspective on the environment – on God's good creation – and on the climate crisis in particular. They also help people to identify the implications for daily life. The studies are Bible-based and each has an accompanying video presentation. The four speakers are: Bishop Graham Tomlin (former Bishop of Kensington and now leader of the Centre for Cultural Witness); Revd Mark Melliush (Mission Enabler at the diocese

of Hereford and a director of New Wine); Dr Ruth Valerio (theologian and a director at Tearfund); and Dr Justin Thacker (theologian at St Hild College, Yorkshire and former medical doctor).

In addition to a Bible passage and the video, each session includes an opening ice-breaker, a set of discussion questions, suggestions for reflection and prayer, and ideas for putting your learning into practice. Following on from the four sessions (My Property?; Creation Groans; Do Not Fear!; Speak Up) there are additional sections in the study booklet that each participant will have. One covers eight common questions raised by those who may still be sceptical about the scale, urgency or existence of the climate crisis. Another provides an extensive list of resources to help you find out more: a reading list; links to organisations; a list of films and videos; and a selection of worship songs. There are then ideas for action – these are grouped under headings that include travel, home and habits, buildings, and church. For a congregation that is registered with A Rocha's Eco Church scheme, some of these will be especially helpful as you look to make progress beyond a Bronze award. Finally, there is a section of quotations from across the centuries, showing how Christians down the ages have acknowledged the importance of caring for creation.

As the record-breaking temperatures in the UK this year, the appalling floods in Pakistan that have left over 2 million people homeless, and the wildfires that ravaged areas of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa have



all demonstrated, no one is immune from the effects of climate change. The scale of human suffering that it is already causing – and which looks set to worsen massively in the coming decades – surely means that, if we are to follow Christ's teaching and love our neighbours, then we must act to try to prevent the worst effects of rising global temperatures. I do hope that you find 'Tenants' a useful way to find out more and get involved.

**Nicky Bull**  
High Street Baptist Church

# Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus,  
Master of both the light and the darkness,  
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do  
seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things  
look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways  
long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy  
seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people,  
walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.  
To you we say, 'Come Lord Jesus!'

**Fr. Henri Nouwen**



# Reflections from visiting at Stoke Mandeville Hospital



There are some fortunate people who have rarely needed to see the inside of a hospital, whether as a patient or as a visitor. Others may feel that they have spent far too long there!

In my role as a Chaplaincy Visitor at Stoke Mandeville, I have been able to meet many who come into the latter category, some spending many months in the hospital's National Spinal Injuries Centre which is one of the largest specialist spinal units in the world. These patients are undergoing therapy to help their recovery to achieve rehabilitation who through accident or illness have been rendered paralysed. The individual medical programmes for each patient is quite intensive and often my visit is cut short as the next occupational therapy session or spinal exercise is due.



I have been intrigued to see how people have responded in different ways to the enforced rest brought about through such a fundamental change in their circumstances. I wonder how I would react in similar circumstances and I have seen those for whom time hangs heavy because they have not found an interest to occupy themselves. I have also given thanks for those who have been able to be motivated to pursue an existing interest or develop a new one. One lady was inspirational as she discovered a skill in drawing beautiful sketches of dogs from a photograph, albeit with very limited manual dexterity. She generated quite a revenue stream for an animal charity by producing delicately drawn images which seemed so alive. All the more incredible was that she had developed this wonderful skill following her realisation that she was otherwise going to have many weeks staring at the walls! And very sadly, some just do not have the motivation to do otherwise and for them, time hangs very heavily.

When I first started as a chaplaincy

visitor, it was still in the final months of Covid-19 restrictions. Think for a moment what it must have been like to have had no family visitors, in some cases for over a year: the chaplaincy team provided the opportunity for patients to interact with someone outside of the medical and physio teams on the wards. These visits were a life-line in very testing circumstances. When I applied to join the chaplaincy team, I learnt that pre-Covid, there had been more than thirty visitors. By the time I started, the team had shrunk to about ten, including permanent chaplains. Consequently, visiting was

necessarily restricted to those who had requested a visit, rather than being able to offer a pastoral presence on every ward in the hospital... patient numbers are around 650: an impossibility for regular visiting.

As a priest, I have been asked to lead occasional services which have been attended by patients who are able to use wheelchairs to come to the chapel. I am also regularly taking Communion to those on the wards who have requested it. It has been a privilege to have this time with individuals when they can talk about their faith and especially how that has helped to maintain their resolve to work toward their rehabilitation. Part of their recovery has been whether there is an acceptance of what that rehabilitation might mean in terms of their future mobility. 'Will I be able to walk again?' is a question most ask and must then come to terms with

the possible answer 'no'.

I have found particular encouragement through the faith of those who have accepted the probability of immobility. For some this will be paraplegia with paralysis below the waist. For some it may mean quadriplegia including the upper limbs. To accept such a life change with equanimity is a very challenging and humbling thing to see, all the more when the individual has no belief in God.

Presently on the spinal unit are two theologians with whom I have been able to hold interesting conversations. One, 'Mike' was the author of the course I took to test out my calling prior to offering myself for training and the second 'Anne' has written books which featured on the reading list during my formal training course. It has been a privilege to meet them and I hope I have been an outlet for their own reflections on how they have come to be there and an assurance that God is leading their way.

It is equally humbling to meet the 19-year-old who is facing life in a wheelchair following a car accident and is determined to prove he will walk again!

The time spent on these visits is a precious and special opportunity to take stock of one's own condition: it helps to put in perspective those occasions when one feels disappointed by a minor incident which upsets one's plans: perhaps sharing my experience visiting patients on the wards at Stoke Mandeville will help us to be thankful for the blessings which God has granted us and to take nothing for granted, except the grace of God.

**Paul Boddam-Whetham**  
**Tring Team**

## Parish registers

### Funerals

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

**Phillip Gordon Lawrence 87**

# Autumn in bee-friendly Tring



As I write autumn is proving to be very mild. It's 4.30pm in late October and my phone is showing a temperature of 17 degrees!

Although it is still mild for the time of year, we are recovering now from the high summer temperatures and the drought. The unseasonable weather has certainly resulted in some bizarre effects in the countryside. In September while walking down Station Road, Tring, we noticed new flowers and leaves on a Horse Chestnut tree. Normally the Horse Chestnut flowers in April or May and the first one to flower that we noticed this year was on 17 April in the Drayton Beauchamp area. On a ramble elsewhere in Hertfordshire in September we even saw Blackthorn in flower! This autumn has also been an exceptional one for the Sweet Chestnut crop in Ashridge. We can't remember such a good year before.

Members of the Justice & Peace Group have been busy again this autumn in raking up the cut grass in the former allotment area near New Mill. This year we had the help of the Tring Air Training Corps who meet nearby. Many hands made light work and we finished raking the whole site in record time. Raking the mown grass prevents it rotting down and enriching the soil, which would encourage the faster growing grasses and nettles to 'swamp' the wild flowers and cut off their light.

We were pleased to see Lady's Bedstraw, a wildflower, growing this year in Miswell Park in the area where we had last year, with the help of local residents, raked up the mown grass on this former school playing field. So this is proof that keeping the long grass down, and raking it up when it is mown, does help the wildflowers to grow.

On 2 October the Friends of Tring Station organised a working party to clear up some of the grounds and plant flowers so do have a look next time you are at the station. The planters in front of

the station have been freshly planted as has a bank behind the ticket office, and an area by the approach to the station. I understand they have put in plants like buddleia, lavender and catmint, and have sown seed of pollinator-friendly plants as well. So the areas available for bees and other insects are continuing to be improved in Tring.

We have continued in the Justice & Peace Group to promote Bee Friendly Tring this autumn during Tring's Own Apple Fayre with a photographic exhibition in Tring Library and participation in the Apple Parade along Tring High Street.

**Michael Demidecki**  
**Justice & Peace Group**  
[www.justiceandpeacetring.org](http://www.justiceandpeacetring.org)



# A Christmas miracle in China



It was the greatest miracle that ever happened to Brother Duan, and he would not have experienced it had his bus not broken down.

Travelling from a northern to a southern province of China, one chilly December day, he happened to be passing through Henan Province when the engine of the bus expired in its futile battle with the cold. On a whim, Duan trudged off through the fields leaving the other passengers huddled inside the bus. He was a house-church leader in northern China. Now, 77 years old, he still had no home to call his own. The truth is, he was deeply depressed. He was on his way to mediate a dispute among church leaders and was weary of all the infighting that seemed to be harming the house churches. And he was lonely.

As he crossed the frozen field, Duan thought lovingly of his beloved wife who had died years earlier. And then the thought of his little son came into his tired mind, and an even darker cloud settled over his heart.

He found a little village and knocked on a door. A little cross was notched on the doorpost, 'Is there anyone here who loves the Lord?' he asked. 'I would love some fellowship tonight.' The door was opened by a man in his 50s and Duan was warmly welcomed inside. His feet were washed in a basin – the custom of welcoming a stranger to their home – and he was fed with a hot meal. He noticed that the family members were excited. It turned out they would be travelling to a neighbouring town to hear a dynamic preacher. 'What's his name?' asked Duan. 'Brother Wang,' they replied.

As they made their way to the meeting, they told Duan stories about this mysterious Brother Wang. It was clear they loved him dearly and they explained why. 'We once held a training seminar here and heard the police were coming to arrest us. Brother Wang helped everyone to escape, except our main pastor. When the police arrived, Wang dared to bargain with them. He offered to go to prison if our pastor, whose wife was eight months' pregnant, would be allowed to go free. The officers accepted his terms and Brother Wang spent the next three years in prison.' 'How old is Brother Wang?' Duan asked. When he was told he was in his early 40s, he showed great pain. 'I once had a son for

two months. He's dead now, but if he lived he would have been 42 today. My wife called him the Christmas child as he was born at Christmas time. I called him Isaac because we had so long despaired of having a child.'

There was silence as they rode in an open cart under the stars. Brother Duan told them the incredible story of how he and his wife had been evangelists in the 1930s. They refused to join the government-approved Three-Self Church and an unbeliever named Wu kept accusing them of political and criminal offences. It was only a matter of time before they were imprisoned or killed. But what would happen to their baby boy?

One night Duan's wife heard a strong voice in a vision saying, 'Give your son to your enemy'. Knowing nothing about this, Duan was reading Genesis 22:2 the following morning. 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.' Sharing their impressions, the couple decided on a course of action that had caused Duan to wince in pain every day since. They gave their boy to Wu and his wife – even as Wu arranged for the couple's arrest.

It wasn't until 1978, when Duan was released from prison, that he learned what had happened to his wife and son. She had died in the terrible famine of 1958 and his son had disappeared along with the Wu family under the rubble of a devastating earthquake in 1975. Said Duan, as the rickety cart approached the meeting place, 'God judged me for being irresponsible with my little son'.

As they arrived at the place where the evangelist was to speak, a crowd of 200 people was already packed into the house. Like many others, Duan had to sit in the courtyard and listen to the teacher through an open window. When Brother Wang began preaching, Duan felt a terrible shock. It was like hearing himself. He began to tremble with fear. Even the phrases the teacher used sounded familiar. Confused, he staggered up to the window to see the preacher, causing a commotion as he fell over people. The preacher stopped and there was a moment of shocked silence as the two stared at each other. The crowd was hushed as they realized the amazing physical likeness between the two men.

'I'm sorry for interrupting your excellent message,' Duan began. 'You see, I had a son who would be your age right now. If he had lived he would have looked and sounded just like you.'

Brother Wang began to tremble violently. His knees buckled beneath him and he had to be caught before he fell to the floor. Clutching his pounding chest, he sobbed, 'Are you Daddy Duan?' Everyone wept as father and son were reunited. The preacher told him how he had indeed been brought up by Wu who was so impressed by Duan's selfless act that he had become a strong Christian.

'I'm not your father,' Wu used to say to him, 'your real father is a great man of God, full of grace and love. He gave you to me and I give you all my love and encouragement to put God first, just like your real Dad would have done.'

Wang's adopted parents had moved away from the earthquake zone before the tragedy, but both had died of cancer in their 60s. Wang became an evangelist and tried to find his real father, but Duan had changed his name so many times to avoid arrest that he proved untraceable.

As father and son continued to hug and weep, the elder of the church stood up and declared, 'It's December. We have SEEN our sermon tonight. Christ came into the world to save sinners – that is the essence of Christmas. Just as Duan handed his only son into the hands of his enemy, so God handed over his own son to us sinners. Let us rejoice in their reconciliation and ours, too.'

**John Young**  
**Akeman Street Baptist Church**

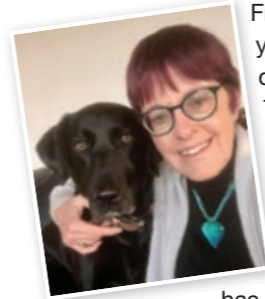
## Whose mug?

Due to lack of space, we were unable to use this photo sent earlier in the year in an article about the coronation. So, how much of *Comment* do you read? Who can remember who wrote about this in *Comment* – without the photo included?

**The Editor**



# Letter from Orkney – five years and counting!



Five years! Five years since we decamped from Tring and moved to this remote Scottish island on the 59<sup>th</sup> parallel. I can't believe how quickly time has passed (sign of

increasing age, I believe) and looking back, 2017 seems to have been a more innocent time. I pondered on how, or if, Orkney has changed in those five years. It has indeed changed; change is a fact of life. There are many more houses being built, especially around the city of Kirkwall and small town of Stromness.



Apparently there is council approval to build 350 new homes here over the next five years. At present there are around 11,500 houses in the county. There are many more 'incomers', as we non-Orcadians are called and some estimates suggest we now outnumber the natives. I'm not sure how they feel about that...

On our recent visit to Tring, it was quite a shock to see how many new houses have been or are being built, or are being planned around the town. I guess when one visits an area after a period away, the changes are more obvious, but as long as the community spirit remains, all will be well.

People change, as well as places. Orkney has changed me – who'd have thought I'd have attempted to draw or paint, albeit with a struggle, create a piece of stained glass, do lots of cake baking and sometimes just sit and stare at the landscape and breathe in fresh sea air.

On investigating what has happened in the last five years, it made for pretty depressing reading. Five British Prime Ministers (so far), accelerating climate change, Covid-19 lockdowns and the continuing effects of the disease, the war in Ukraine as well as other less publicised conflicts, escalating



cost of living increases: it goes on and on. I thought I'd try to find some positive news. Vaccination programmes – Covid-19 and malaria vaccines are good news indeed. I am encouraged by stories of people rallying to help each other when there are floods or other disasters. Small acts of kindness that can be seen every day are positive proof that all is not lost. The best news of all though, is apparently there is almost no evidence to show that cheese causes weight gain. Bring on the stilton this Christmas!

**Carrie Dodge**  
**Milestone Community Church, Dounby**

## Help in desperate need

As the cost of living continues to rise, more people than ever are forced to turn to the Foodbank for emergency provisions. Thanks to supporters like you, and the power of the local community, the Trussell Trust are able to continue delivering a vital service to local individuals and families struggling to cope during these difficult times.

Rachel (not her real name) first started using the Foodbank six years ago after her husband tragically took his own life, and having three young children to look after meant she could no longer work. Through her Housing Support Officer, Rachel was made aware of the Foodbank, where she turned when her financial situation

became too difficult.

When initially using the Foodbank, Rachel was apprehensive and felt she had let herself and her family down, but the Foodbank was her only option so they could eat. She said her first visit was 'like the feeling of a hug. The staff took away any stigma and it felt okay to be there'.

Rachel has found the recent rising cost of living a financial challenge – enduring the constant battle between heating and eating. With three children to feed, this struggle is even harder during the school holidays, and she has reached out to the Foodbank more because of this.

Rachel and her children are

delighted with the food parcels and the occasional extra treats that are sometimes inside. She said, 'It's not just baked beans and tinned stuff like people think,' with parcels containing fresh food, as well as dietary specific items if required.

Rachel's children are now older, which has meant she is able to work more. However, with unexpected bills and the continuing rise in energy and food costs, Rachel is grateful that the Foodbank is available when she is in desperate need.

**Sarah Bennett**  
**Foodbank Worker**

# An exciting new Community Hub for the People of Tring!



Tring Town Council has been looking at ways to improve or replace the much-loved Nora Grace Hall, Tring's major Community Hall at Pond Close in the centre of the Town.

It is an important venue for Tring and was originally built by the Red Cross in 1972 on land given to the Town Council. After reverting to the Town Council years ago, it was renamed the Nora Grace Hall and continued in active use under the care of Tring Together, a council-supported community organisation.

The building is now fifty years old and is showing its age and, with ever more expensive repairs, it does not appear viable to carry on. Tring Town Council is looking at a modern replacement building with sustainability at its heart,



to ensure that Tring has a centrally located community hub to serve the next generation.

The council launched a Public Consultation on 11 November to run for six weeks, giving the community an opportunity to have their say on the hub, the adjacent park.

The proposed new Community Hall could deliver a range of new and improved facilities including:

- A Café, with views over the Park & Play Area
- Multi-purpose rooms e.g. for:
  - o Community Groups
  - o Health, Wellness or Support Groups
  - o Businesses, including Start-Ups
- Facilities for Commercial Hire or Public Events
- Gallery Space for local artists
- Improved Car parking
- Level Access into the building
- Improvements to the adjacent green space/children's playground (known as 'Spider Park')

The decision on whether or how to proceed with the replacement of the Community Hall depends on a number of factors, including the consultation

findings, final costings, availability of funding and planning consent.

The Tring Town Mayor, Cllr Christopher Townsend said: 'To make this project a success we really need community engagement – and that means you! So please do fill in the questionnaire, share your thoughts and consider volunteering for the working party. Let's make this happen: it's a very exciting project for the town'.

## Consultation Event 11 December

Come to this event to find out more about the proposals on 11 December, 12.00 midday – 3.00pm at the Nora Grace Hall, Faversham Close, Tring HP23 5BA. Join us for the main event where the architect will be speaking about the building and there will be an opportunity to see the plans and the 3D model. Councillors will be on hand to answer any questions. Refreshments will be provided.

## Have your say!

Further information and an online questionnaire are available on the Tring Town Council website and paper versions can be collected from the Information Office in Akeman Street and on request to [info@tring.gov.uk](mailto:info@tring.gov.uk) or to 01442 823347.

**Tring Town Council**

## Bucket List



I never knew what a bucket list was until I saw the movie.

Ah! The innocence of babes and old ladies. Recently I saw an item on Facebook that jogged my memory of my bucket

with only one entry in it.

I'm reluctant to say, but I was rather envious at my cousin Simon's trip with his wife to the Holy Land and their itinerary that took them to the Sea of Galilee. I first saw this peaceful place years ago on a documentary and it's been on my bucket list ever since. Not that I think I will ever get there now but it's good to have a dream.

The documentary, of course, showed the lake at its most placid. The landscape of purple-blue hills framing the lake on one side and the pebble

shore the other, giving a sense of peace between the land and water. It was early morning and apart from the odd sound of a bird, only the lapping of the water broke the silence. I can't remember the narrator, but I do remember him sitting by the shore drinking in the peace.

I could imagine our Lord walking by the shore and being at peace in his father's creation, hearing the cries of the birds. Did he ever imagine their conversation? Were they warning each other about the man in their territory or waiting for the fisherman to bring their catch in, so they might feed on the bits the fisherman threw to one side?

I imagine simple hard-working men, willing to work in all weathers, fighting the squalls and being wet through and cold, as their hands worked the rough nets, fighting the elements for food. I wonder if fisherman still work under those conditions or has the 21<sup>st</sup> century totally invaded that place too? More

people, more mouths to feed? Oh yes, and the tourists.

But my dream is of a mill-pond lake, under an azure blue sky and the herons watching for movements in the water; Jesus enjoying his humanity, paddling at the water's edge, the cold, cold water cooling his feet. Perhaps he stops for a few minutes to absorb the world his father has loaned to man, admiring its beauty, listening to the music and the song of the water, feeling the rapture of the rhythm of life all around him. But life, like a sharp pebble under the foot, can bring anyone back to the moment: a reminder that, regardless of the beauty, life is seldom easy. Nevertheless when we feel the warmth of the sun on our faces and the elements are kind, we can feel the peace of God in our hearts. And we are blessed.

So that's my dream: my bucket list with one item on it.

**Brenda Hurley, St Peter & St Paul**

## Life with Tring Red Cross

*Do you recognise anyone here?  
Nora Grace is in the middle of the front row.*



Not long after we moved to Tring with our two little boys, sixty years ago, there was a knock on the door. It was Nora Grace, whom I had not met before, to tell me that the Red Cross were running a First Aid course and would I be interested? Since that very week the baby had nearly choked in his high chair, we thought it would be a very good idea – so off I went to enrol.

The Red Cross was on Monday evenings at the Temperance Hall in Christchurch Road. The Commandant was Miss Phyllis Wright who lived with her sister at Westcroft, nearly opposite in Western Road. I think Nora at that time was Nursing Officer and was living at Miswell Farm. She had managed to recruit some twenty nursing mums, both Tring people and Incomers (us) for the course. There were members of all ages. Some had been in the Red Cross during the war and had nursed at Drayton Manor, which was at that time a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. One member had driven an ambulance all through the Blitz, bringing injured soldiers from London. I found it very interesting to meet such a wide range of people with so many stories, and soon began to make friends and feel part of Tring as I got to know more local people.

The First Aid course was really useful as I had not learnt it before, although I had worked in a hospital. Each week we had a different topic, breathing, bleeding, fractures, burns



and scalds, choking, convulsions etc. Then we did practical work, leading on to whatever we had done in the first half. We often used to go over to Miss Wright's house for this.

One evening, we were coming back when one of the older ladies fell over in the street right in front of us! We pulled ourselves together and tried to remember what we had been taught and coped fairly well, only to find they had staged it for our benefit. It was a good test though! All of it was very useful and I have had to deal with nearly everything in the book whilst bringing up our four boys. I remember being told: 'It's as much knowing what NOT to do, sometimes.'

At the end of the course, horror of horrors, we were to have an exam by a local doctor! However, this turned out to be not as bad as we had feared, as it was only verbal, not written, and we had to demonstrate our newfound skills, stopping bleeding, recovery position, bandaging etc. I can't tell you what a lot I gained from the course. It enabled me to keep calm when the inevitable

happened with our four and it has been very useful over the years. I also made lots of new friends.

Well, we thought that was it, but 'NO!' said Nora. 'After Christmas we are going to do the Home Nursing course. Who would like to sign up for that?' So we all did.

Meanwhile it was Red Cross Carol Singing next Monday, meeting outside the church with torches and warm clothes, but before that we were to have a meeting at Miss Wright's to practise the carols so we all knew the words. We went all over the town, into most of the pubs, some of the bigger houses in Station Road, where we were often invited in, and then on to Victoria Hall, down a dark passage and to my horror, on to the stage to sing in front of a hall full of people while the Red Cross boxes were passed around.

We finished off at Mr and Mrs Goodliffe's shop in Frogmore Street for mince pies, sherry and a big box of biscuits.

**Erica Guy  
St Peter & St Paul**

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*Stephen Hearn*  
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# How many shopping days to Christmas?



St Augustine once wrote that he knew what time was until he wanted to explain it and then found he did not know! What, indeed, is time? We all live by it and regulate it. We have diaries, calendars, clocks and so on, yet it remains a puzzle. St Augustine was trying to explain time and eternity and how God is beyond time. For us time is a matter of minutes, hours, days which we use to regulate our lives. We cannot say how time begins or ends but we know we cannot manage without it. The Book of Ecclesiastes famously lists a lot of 'times', starting with 'a time to be born, and a time to die'. Indeed, after our name, nowadays our most significant mark of identification is our date of birth. Name and date of birth are what we are asked for at surgeries, clinics and the like. So, with this importance given to that mark in time, it is surprising that we do not know the date of the most important birth in history, namely that of Jesus.

The Bible is keen on time, on chronology, but not in the sense we use it. Look at Matthew's genealogy in chapter 1 where chronology is based on the number of generations based on fourteens – twice seven being special but which does not fit historical dates. Then, elsewhere, there are significant forties – years in the wilderness for Moses, days in the desert for Jesus and there are other forties in our Church calendar. Clearly, we must remind ourselves that what really matters is not the date but the fact. We have become used to 25 December 'in the bleak midwinter' as the date of Jesus's birth, but some Christians celebrate it on 6 January.

We are at the beginning of a new church's year at Advent, aware that there

are many other ideas as to when a new year starts: the academic year, financial year, Jewish New Year and others start at different times. But for readers of *Comment* Advent starts the year by making us think of our need to prepare again to celebrate the coming of Jesus. Only two Gospels feel the need to tell us about the birth of Jesus: Mark feels the time that matters is the start of his ministry and John takes us out of time to tell us 'In the beginning was the Word'. There is also the tradition which suggests we think not so much of the coming of Jesus as a baby but rather his coming at the end of time.

In the creed we assert not only our belief 'He came down from heaven' but also 'He will come again'. Advent has been regarded as a time to think about the Second Coming and so about the Four Last Things, namely Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven. These are not the subjects most of us dwell on in the run up to the Christmas festivities, or, indeed, at any other time! But perhaps it does us no harm to remember our time will come! One of the schools I attended had a Latin motto meaning 'Praise the End'. As schoolboys we took it to mean 'I am glad when the bell goes'; but presumably the idea was to praise the accomplishment, the finishing of a task, the end of the endeavour – we were not to give up!

Advent reminds us to be ready for the end in that we are not only to celebrate the Coming of Jesus to Bethlehem, but the Coming of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead. Interestingly the Creed goes on to remind us 'His kingdom will have no end'. With this mention of that End, we are back to St Augustine and time, as he tries to explain that God is outside time; he is, indeed, its creator. Some serious thoughts as we start to prepare for Christmas and the New Year. The Church's calendar is a reminder

of what we need to know about God's revealing of himself in Christ. It does so in a slightly strange way in that the actual life of Jesus is covered in under half a year from Birth to Ascension. The calendar is also complicated by the fact that the date of Easter depends on the lunar calendar, but that of Christmas on the solar calendar. Of course, we have 'tamed' time to the extent that we have diaries and calendars to help us. There is also the complication that nowadays, like the commercial world, the Church's observance of Christmas is mostly before Christmas Day – Carol Services, Nativity Plays and so on take place before the day itself. Personally, when in a parish, I tried to hold Carol Services after Christmas Day when people were less busy. Another issue is the best time for Christmas services – is it midnight? How we use our time and what is the best time are matters for consideration. But what really matters is that we give time to remember what Advent and Christmas are all about. Time rules our lives but times change and fewer know the real meaning of Christmas.

If we really want a jolt to make us think about this, look at the Common Worship Collects for the four Sundays of Advent. On the first Sunday the reference is to Christ's coming to judge the living and the dead; the second refers to our being hindered by our sins and wickedness; the third prays that the heart of the disobedient may turn to the wisdom of the just; and, finally, we pray that we may be ready to greet Christ when he comes again as our judge.

What an antidote to what the advertisers tell us we need! Let us use our time not only in giving presents and cards, eating and drinking festive food, but in stopping to remember what Christmas is all about.

**Martin Banister**  
*St Albans Cathedral*

**Quiet Place** **Need space to contemplate?**

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**St Martha's Methodist Church**  
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(circumstances may cause variations in times)



# Postcard from Sydney

Where has the year gone? It's some time since we wrote for *Comment*, 2022 having been a particularly busy and eventful year. So, we thought we'd send an update on our year for anyone who remembers us.

2022 was, amongst other things, the year of two house moves. Last year, our landlord sold up, near what turned out to be the peak of the Sydney property market, and the new owners planned to take up residence, so we knew that we would have to move out when our lease ended in March. The timing of this was unfortunate, as we were waiting on the Australian Department of Home Affairs to make a decision on our application for permanent residency. The rental market in Greater Sydney is extremely tight, with vacancy rates close to record lows, so we decided that we didn't want to take any risks and started hunting for a new home late last year. We found a place we liked in Blaxland, in the lower Blue Mountains. Although a good deal more expensive than our previous rental, it was in good condition and had a lovely bushland outlook. So, we signed up and moved in early January. Less than three weeks later, the decision came through from the immigration folks: we were now Permanent Residents of Australia! Amongst other advantages, this would allow us to buy a house without incurring astronomical extra stamp duty charges levied on non-Australians. (Purchasers on temporary visas pay about three times the going rate for citizens or permanent residents, so on a \$1 million house, around \$120,000 as opposed to about \$40,000). By now less than three weeks into a new lease, we originally intended to stay put in the new rental for the whole of 2022, but a series of complications altered our plans. The air con system – a

must in the Australian climate – failed within a couple of days of moving in. Owing to supply chain issues and an installation company with a lifetime subscription to the Australian Tradies Manual of Implausible Excuses, it eventually took four months to install another. It was fortunate, in hindsight, that we didn't really have a summer (New South Wales has just recorded its rainiest year on record). Another feature of the house that we liked was its garden hot tub – but this also broke down and took several months to repair. However, the pièce de résistance was the Neighbour from Hell (techno music four nights a week, anyone?; emanating from a man-cave just a few feet from our bedroom?). So, we started hunting for a property to buy sooner than originally planned.

Long story short, in September we settled on a lovely property in Faulconbridge, a little further into the Blue Mountains, just a five-minute drive from Springwood, a charming town that in many respects reminds us of Tring (albeit without the 15<sup>th</sup> century church). It's a little scary buying into a rapidly falling market, but the upside is that we have been able to purchase – albeit with a large mortgage – a house with a swimming pool, which even three months earlier would have been beyond our budget. We are on a steep learning curve as regards pool maintenance and fighting a war of attrition with some local ducks who appear to be under the impression that the pool is an avian toilet facility.

Faulconbridge is home to the Norman Lindsay Gallery, the former home of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sydney artist of that name, who combined painting somewhat risqué nudes with authorship of 'The Magic Pudding', an illustrated storybook that every Australian of a certain age read in their childhood and is now keen to share with their grandchildren. Many of the village's streets (though sadly, not ours) are named



after characters in 'The Magic Pudding', giving the option of living at such addresses as Patrick O'Possum Place or Watkin Wombat Way. Check out the Wikipedia entry on Faulconbridge, and you will learn that the word contains exactly half the letters of the alphabet, none of them repeated, including all the vowels. Frankly, once you know this, who could possibly rest content with living anywhere else?



In July, Sylvie's value to the university was recognised by the offer of a new role as Deputy Head of the School of Arts and Sciences, which also turned her part-time job into a full-time role. The timing of this was fortunate in that it makes our rising mortgage payments easier to handle. Meanwhile, John's Institute has in recent months appreciated being able to host visiting speakers on campus rather than just on Zoom, after a lengthy period of international border closures. John recently visited our university's other main campus in Fremantle, Western Australia, for the first time (WA closed its borders to the rest of the country for almost two years). When we taught at the University of Hertfordshire, a trip between



campuses was a ten-minute walk or a five-minute bus ride. Here, it's a distance of about 3300km; a 4–5-hour flight; and – depending on the time of year – either

and bringing back her mom Gisela, who had been hoping to visit for two years. Gisela had a great holiday here, including being taken by Sylvie on a whistle-stop

a two- or three-hour time difference. Sylvie was able to return to Europe in June, combining a visit to family in Germany with a conference in Amsterdam,

tour of Tasmania. We both hope to visit the UK next (northern hemisphere) summer, where Tring will – of course – be one of the places to which we plan to return. It will be our first time back in blighty since we left in February 2020. We hope to catch up with some old friends from church then: meanwhile, we wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The turn of the year should see us on a summer holiday in New Zealand, so we should get a sneak preview of 2023 a full twelve hours before you do! Our best wishes to everyone back in Tring.

**John Lippitt and Sylvie Magerstädt**  
**St David's Anglican Church, Blaxland/**  
**Uniting Church, Springwood [that's**  
**another story...]**  
**Formerly St Peter & St Paul**

## Why I am still an Anglican



This sounds like a good topic for discussion in general, but is also the title of the book selected by the parish Book Group for its session in October. I

must admit I was a bit dubious about the choice, as the book was compiled in 2006, and I wondered how timely it would seem in 2022. My doubts proved unfounded as I read the book; yet again I am pleased to have been cajoled into reading a book that I wouldn't otherwise have considered, or even known about. The book could have been written this year.

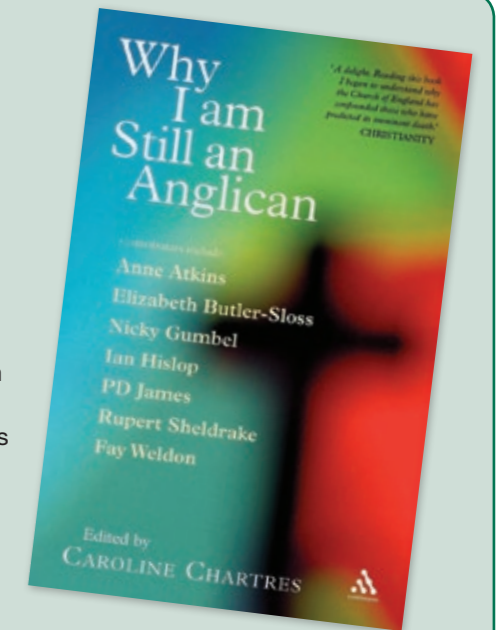
It contains fifteen reflections, and they range from John Stott (conservative author of many books about Christianity) who stays in the Anglican church in order to correct the mistakes the church makes; while at the other extreme (if that's the word) is Ian Hislop, who describes himself as an atheist with doubts, and for whom Christianity is the basis of his moral crusades as editor of 'Private Eye'. In between there is P D James who values 'respect for learning, tolerance, and inclusiveness', but loves the liturgy, the hymns, the buildings; also Frank Field, Liverpool MP and campaigner for the under-privileged, for whom being Anglican is about scripture, tradition, and conscience. It was for me a revelation (pun intended) and an

inspiration to read of Hugh Montefiore's conversion experience as a teenager, and to read his heart-felt cry for us to take climate change seriously; writing in 2005 (he died that year) he was truly prophetic.

Mostly the contributors have been brought up as Anglicans, hence the 'still' in the title; by contrast Fay Weldon was converted by reading Paul's epistles (especially Corinthians) and was confirmed at the age of 69.

The Book Group members liked this book, even if we did not share some of the opinions expressed in it, especially on human sexuality. However, we are pleased to be members of a church which can encompass a wide range of views. Mostly we are Anglicans from childhood, and we appreciate the sense of belonging to a parish. While we value the heritage of traditional language, we can also enjoy simpler and more modern expressions of faith. We are impatient for the church to change, but sad that we are so preoccupied with and divided about sexuality.

To conclude, here is a quotation from John Stott: 'It is the historical church of the English. It has a sound biblical, theological basis. It is entrusted with a national mission. And it has in its liturgy a worthy vehicle for the praise of Almighty God'. Also one from Ian Hislop: '... how can the Anglican Church be exercised about homosexuality and women when, for almost its entire history it's been run by homosexuals and attended by women.'



The Parish Book Group meets on the fourth Sunday of the month; sometimes in winter we meet on Zoom. Our next session is on 22 January 2023. Get in touch to find out more.

**John Whiteman, Tring Team**

*If anyone wants to write about 'Why I am still a Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Salvation Army, Quaker or A N Other' worshipper, Comment readers would be delighted to read it! Or for that matter, an Anglican – since if there are 500 locals Anglicans, I bet there are 505 different opinions! (No, I am not a mathematician...) And if you are reading this and you have changed from one denomination to another – would you write about why? The next deadline is 31 December for the February edition.*

**The Editor**



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4.30pm Christingle service  
11.30pm Midnight Communion service

**Christmas Day**  
10am Christmas celebration service (also via Zoom)

Join us for our special events and celebrations

# What's on the heart of God?



As we sing this Christmas about Mary, Joseph – and the baby Jesus in the manger – let's think about the holy family.

Mary gets massive credit for her role as Jesus' mother (with all the whispers and snide remarks about how she got pregnant). But Joseph deserves massive credit too. Jesus was adopted. Because of his supernatural conception by the Holy Spirit, he wouldn't have had a father in his life if Joseph hadn't agreed to adopt him. For adopting Jesus, bringing him up, and loving him as his own son, Joseph is the unsung hero in the Nativity.

And then, going back a bit further in the biblical story, Moses was also adopted. The Moses who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt in the story of the Passover and the Exodus, he was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter.

Theologically, Moses was what we call a 'type' or a 'picture' of Christ. In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses said 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.' The technical word is that Moses 'prefigured' Jesus.

A.W. Pink wrote a book in which he went through seventy-five different ways in which Moses was this 'type' or 'picture' of Jesus — and one of those was being adopted. We see throughout the Bible story that God is a Father who adopts us as his people, who welcomes us into his family, and who delights in us becoming like him and imitating him.

Deuteronomy 10:18 says 'God defends the cause of the fatherless and

the widow, and he loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.' That's a great verse to encourage those of us who are imitating God by welcoming and caring for refugees.

Psalms 68 says 'A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.' God sets the lonely in families ... and because that's who God is, and what he does, that's why Psalm 82 tells us to: 'Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.'

And then last but not least, James, the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the Early Church in Jerusalem, 'The religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.'

Do you see a pattern here? Fostering and adoption are on the heart of God. Fostering and adoption is a characteristic of who God is and what he's like and what he cares about. It is demonstrated by God having fostered and adopted US.

So we, too, should be like him in this world. In John 8:29, Jesus said 'I always do what pleases him.' In 2 Corinthians 5:9, Paul says: 'We have as our ambition, we make it our goal, to be pleasing to him.' We do the stuff that pleases him; we do the stuff that makes us more and more like him.

Not everybody is called to foster and adopt. But everyone is called to be like our heavenly Father: to be like the kind of loving heavenly Father those Bible verses were talking about; to be people who are like that, because God is like that, defending the cause of the fatherless and the widow; loving the foreigner residing among us, giving them food and clothing, helping to set the lonely in families and

looking after orphans and widows in their distress.

For some of us, God may well be calling us to foster and adopt; and for those of us who aren't called to foster and adopt ourselves, we are called to love and support and serve those who are, because that's how WE imitate Jesus; that's how we do what pleases him and become like our 'fostering and adopting God'. And we do it by making it a team game. You've probably heard that African proverb: 'It takes a village to raise a child'. Well, we, the church, are that village!

**Steve Burnhope**  
**Aylesbury Vineyard**

Galatians 4: 'When the right time came, God sent his Son... so that he could adopt us as his very own children.'

John 1: 'To all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God.'

Romans 8: 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. That isn't the nature of our relationship with him. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are also his heirs.'

2 Corinthians 6: 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'

## Crossword

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|    | 1  |  |    | 2  |  | 3  |    | 4  |    | 5  |  |
| 6  |    |  | 7  |    |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |
|    |    |  |    |    |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |
| 8  |    |  |    | 9  |  | 10 |    | 11 |    |    |  |
|    |    |  | 12 |    |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |
| 13 | 14 |  |    |    |  |    |    | 15 |    |    |  |
|    |    |  | 16 |    |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |
| 17 |    |  |    |    |  |    |    |    |    | 18 |  |
|    |    |  | 19 |    |  |    | 20 |    | 21 |    |  |
| 22 |    |  |    |    |  | 23 |    |    |    | 24 |  |
|    |    |  |    | 25 |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |
| 26 |    |  |    |    |  |    |    |    |    |    |  |

### ACROSS

- 12 days from Dec 25<sup>th</sup> (9) (4)
- Stretch (5) (2)
- Sobbing (5)
- Ghastly feelings (7)
- Large Australian bird (3)
- Coral reef (5)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Book of the Bible (7)
- Farewell (5)
- Question (3)
- Memorials (7)
- Drunk (5)
- Man's hat (7)
- Good wishes (1) (5) (3) (4)

### DOWN

- Ancient 'you' (4)
- Dusty (5)
- One part of an atlas (3)
- Bears witness (7)
- Green gems (8)
- Small measure (4)
- Truthfulness (7)
- Clergymen (7)
- One being taught (7)
- In the '(8)' clear, - Carol (8)
- Talkers (7)
- Last degree (5)
- Don't go (4)
- Spoken, not written (4)
- Look (3)

Answers on page 34

## TRING CHARITIES

(Registered Charity No 207805)

# ALMSHOUSES IN TRING

From time to time, one and two-bedroom bungalows become available to let, for people who currently live in Aldbury, Long Marston, Marsworth, Pitstone, Puttenham, Tring, Wigginton or Wilstone.

Applicants, one of whom must be aged 55 or over, must not own their own home or have significant savings.

Applicants will be asked to supply personal financial information to prove their beneficial status.

The average weekly maintenance contribution (equivalent to "rent" for housing benefit purposes) is £107 for a one bedroom property and £126 for a two bedroom property.

If you would like to be considered for the Waiting List, please telephone Elaine Winter, Secretary to the Trustees, on **01442 827913** (weekday office hours only), for an application form or email [info@tringcharities.co.uk](mailto:info@tringcharities.co.uk)

# A guide to Hertfordshire by an old inhabitant



No, not me – this is the title of a book in the reference library of Tring and District Local History and Museum Society. I have been a volunteer steward there for a couple of years and sometimes

have the opportunity to look through the books. This particular volume does not name the author, but inside the front cover is a dedication: 'To my son, F.(?) Crawley from his father G.(?) Crawley, the author of this book.'

'A Guide to Hertfordshire' was published in January 1880 and the introduction says 'The author ventures to place what he has done before the Public, hoping his labours may meet with a favourable reception, and be found to supply a want which he believes has been felt by many Inhabitants and Visitors to the County. Each section starts from a given place or point, from which a journey may be conveniently made by either Railway or Road – previous guides used the old division of Hundreds or Wapertakes'.



For obvious reasons I picked out five villages – Aldbury, Wigginton, Wilstone, Long Marston, and Puttenham, and the town of Tring – and have edited the entries. In every case the main point of interest is the church and then the manor house/s and the adjacent parkland. As far as the villages are concerned, there is no mention of housing, trades, farming or social conditions. For anyone venturing to a part of the county that was new to



them, just like visitors today, they wanted to see the 'tourist' sights and the local wheelwrights did not count!

Aldbury is included in the tour that starts in Abbots Langley, then travels on to Kings Langley, Chipperfield, Apsley, Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead, Leverstock Green, Great Gaddesden, Nettleden, Little Gaddesden, Ashridge and finally Aldbury. The village is accorded 38 lines in the book. 'It has a population of 854 and covers an acreage of 2071. There is a pretty church, renovated in 1867, in excellent condition. Made of flint, with a parapet and tower. The interior has ancient tombs, including that of Sir John Verney and his wife, also the Anderson, Duncombe, and Harcourt families, some of whom held the manor of Pendley. It is said that many relics formerly in the chapel at Ashridge were removed to this church when the monastery at that place ceased to be. The living of the church is in the gift of the Earl Brownlow, value £450. On the village green there is a remarkably fine old tree and a memento to the 'good old days', the village stocks. Tring Station is in the same ecclesiastical parish, as it was built on the site of the original manor house (Pendley).'

The other four villages feature in a separate tour, starting at Sarratt, then Flaunden, Bovingdon, Greater Berkhamstead, Northchurch, Wigginton, Tring, Wilstone, Long Marston, and Puttenham.

Wigginton gets 16 lines and the church receives many compliments. 'It is a neat building of flint, faced with stone. Pointed arch, nave and chancel, and a turret and bell. The church is dedicated

to St Bartholomew and the living, worth £360, is in the gift of Ralph Balpy Esq. of Wigginton Lodge. The village has a population of 661 and covers 1800 acres.' There is also mention of the manor at Champneys.

Wilstone only gets 7 lines in the book. It is recorded in 1875 as having a population of 537, within an acreage of 690. 'The ecclesiastical district includes Little Tring. There is a good National School which serves as a chapel. Services alternate with Long Marston'.



Long Marston is described as being partly in Bucks, with a population of 502, and an acreage of 2138. The village gets 20 lines in the guide, much of which is devoted to the church. 'A small ancient church/chapel dedicated to All Saints. There is a nave, chancel and tower. The timber roof is flat, the walls are brick and flint. The interior is plain and dark, with small windows, a pulpit of carved oak, a font, and remains of an oak screen. There are drawings on the walls, possibly of St Christopher. The seats are massive and the building has an air of dim antiquity. There is a small organ, removed from Tring Church. A notice in the church relates to a benefaction of £50 left to the poor by James Green'.

Puttenham is accorded more space, 32 lines, once again mainly devoted to the church. 'The village is named from the family who formerly possessed it. A curious old church in Early English style, with a handsome tower of flint and stone, battlements, pinnacles and three bells'. There follows a detailed complimentary description of the interior of the church and a quote from an earlier historian: 'In this church is very good carved work'. 'There is a window in Puttenham church containing a broken quarry bearing a shield, charged with a ship in full sail, on a chief – the arms of King's College Cambridge. This may have reference to the fact that the living is in the patronage of that college. There is a good school adjoining the churchyard. The population is 123, acres 690'.



Tring merits 97 lines in the guide book, 71 of which are devoted to the church! It is described as 'a town of great antiquity. In 1148 Tring was given by King Stephen to the Abbey of Faversham; after the Dissolution it came to Sir Richard Lee who exchanged it with Edward 6<sup>th</sup> for land near his other possessions at St Albans. Queen Mary then gave the

town to Henry Peckham and the manor ultimately passed to Sir William Gore, (the Lord Mayor of London), Sir Drummond Smith and finally to the current owner, Nathaniel Rothschild'.

The church of St Peter & St Paul is described as 'large and handsome, in the perpendicular style, built about 1450. A fine interior, with handsome windows and a beautiful reredos. Imposing but with a curious timber roof, with carved figures at the ends of the cross beams, some not appropriate to a religious building'. There is much about the superb monument to Sir William Gore and his wife, and the memorials to the Anderson and Guy families. The living is £300. The author concludes 'This fine church is a very interesting specimen of ancient architecture, and well deserving a visit.

Several excellent dissenting chapels in Tring, belonging to the Baptists and other denominations'.

Unlike the villages, the rest of the town does get a mention. Employment includes the Silk Mill, and the straw plait industry, and also the Grand Junction Canal and reservoirs. 'The town is well supplied with water, on a high elevation, and the situation is very salubrious. It is clean and neat with a

market on Fridays. A Coal Fund assists the poor in winter. Several public charities in Tring together produce as much as £152 pa. A good Mechanics Institute and Reading Room and excellent National Schools. Population of the town was 3280 in 1871, acreage 7390'.

When discussing Tring, the church is obviously centre stage but the interesting



statistic is that the living of Tring is £300, less than Wigginton (£360) and Aldbury (£450). The Coal Fund and several other 'public charities' were still in operation in 1917 and are listed, with the amount of money donated to each, in the Parish Magazine of November that year.

The ecclesiastical parish referred to in the Wilstone entry is still reflected in today's constituency boundaries: Little Tring is part of Wilstone, along with Tring Ford and three properties at Startops End. In 2001 the population eligible to vote was 398. At the same time in Long Marston the number of voters was 574, which included 79 in Puttenham. Today the population of the villages is not markedly different from that of 1880; it is the town which has grown so much, but for many visitors today, it is still the churches which are the main point of interest. No change there then!

**Alison Cockerill**  
**St Cross, Wilstone**

## Piano and More concerts



The Piano and More series has gone from strength to strength during 2022, and it has been heartening to see audience numbers steadily rise towards the end of the year. We have had a very eclectic programme, ranging from Mozart to jazz improvisation, and many other composers in between! There have been solo concerts and performances by larger groups as well, and we hope that there is something for

everyone! All our performers give their time and talents freely, and as well as a feast of music for an hour between 3.00 and 4.00pm. There is also a feast of tea and cakes afterwards, a chance for audience and performers to mingle and chat. There is no entrance charge, but donations are welcomed, with proceeds split between the church and the maintenance of the piano.

The 2023 concerts are already shaping up, and we are introducing an occasional Young Artists series, which will begin on 8 January with Alice Dilley, who is studying clarinet at the Royal Academy of Music, and will also include

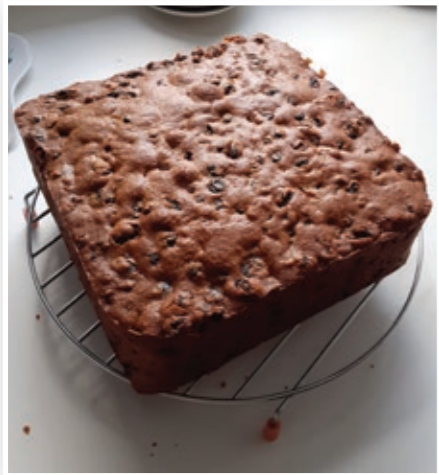
local cellist Madeleine Murray who is in Year 11 at Berkhamsted School, as well as a return visit by Tring School music students later in the year. For more details of these, and other concerts, please visit our website [www.piano-and-more.org.uk](http://www.piano-and-more.org.uk) where you can also find details of previous concerts and see some photographs as well! If you would like to sign up to our mailing list, please contact Trish Dowden, the Parish Administrator.

My continuing and heartfelt thanks go to the wardening team and the tea team. We couldn't do it without you!  
**Anna Le Hair, St Peter & St Paul**

## Keeping going



I made the Christmas cake on 29 October. It has been a tradition in our house since the children were at school to make the cake during the half-term holiday. Our daughter made her Christmas cake too. Christmases are different now that the children have their own families, but it is good to know that the half-term Christmas cake tradition carries on and continued through the lockdown-years of Covid. It made me think about what keeps us going when times change or are challenging. I suppose tradition is one of them.



Recently Michelle Grace began a sermon by asking us to imagine sitting around a table with a group of people, some of them very challenging, maybe people

we struggled to get on with. It took me back to the classroom and my teaching days. The whole of life would be in that room; clever, hard-working students, but also some with challenging behaviour, some with their own personal challenges such as autism or a disability or a different ethnic background. I hope my faith supported me as I tried to teach mathematics to them. I used to paste a hymn in front of my mark book each year. One of my favourites was 'Be still, for the presence of the lord is shining in this place... no work too hard for him'. It was amazing to bring the Lord into my place of work and know that I was not alone in doing the work. That kept me going through the teaching years, and I hope some of God's love shone through to the youngsters.

There are challenges in life, such as the time one of our grandchildren, born prematurely, was very ill. We didn't know if he would survive. I remember praying for him to live because I wanted him to see what a beautiful world we have. I wanted him to feel the wind in his face and see the hills and sky which I so much love. He has survived but has his challenges and would be one of the special children in my classroom if I were teaching now. God always walks closely with us, but it doesn't stop our hearts hurting.

I remember my heart hurting when we took our eldest child to university and left him in a concrete hall of residence to fend for himself. You must have faith in these matters. Way back in the dark ages when I was a member of the National Childbirth

Trust, one of their newsletters had the poem by C Day Lewis 'Walking away'. I still have that that newsletter dated 1979. The poem is about Day Lewis watching his young son turn to walk back to school after playing a football game. The last verse speaks volumes to me:

*I have had worse partings, but none that so gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly saying what God alone could perfectly show – How selfhood begins with a walking away, And love is proved in the letting go.*

I think about Joseph and Mary keeping going on the road to Bethlehem. I think of their hearts hurting when they could not find their son because he had stayed behind to talk to the teachers in the temple. I think how Mary's heart must have hurt to see her son on the cross. It must have been hard for them to 'let their son go'. Hearts hurt because we love.

What keeps me going? Traditions, passing the baton onto a new generation by letting them 'walk away', knowing that God walks beside us all (whether we see him or not), the love that we share with family and friends, God's love. As we approach another year and the challenges it may bring, I pray that the love we have for one another, and God's love, will support and guide us: 'no work too hard for him'. May we keep going in his love.

**Jill Smith**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Bethlehem Down



This Nativity poem was put to music by Peter Warlock and has become part of many a choir's repertoire for Christmas. Sung unaccompanied, the flowing harmonies of the music echo the gentle and almost melancholic words and give it the character of a soothing lullaby. Do find it on the internet and listen – there are several versions on YouTube and watch out for it at Christmas.

Bruce Blunt (George Henry Bruce), 1899-1957, was a poet, journalist, music critic and bon viveur, who often collaborated with the composer, Peter Warlock. Apparently they were hard up one Christmas and decided to submit this carol in the annual Daily Telegraph Carol competition. They won and spent the proceeds on a very festive celebration.  
**Kate Banister**  
**St Julian's, St Albans**

*"When He is King we will give him the King's gifts  
Myrrh for its sweetness, and gold for a crown,  
Beautiful robes" said the young girl to Joseph  
Fair with her first-born on Bethlehem Down.  
Bethlehem Down is full of the starlight  
Winds for the spices, and stars for the gold,  
Mary for sleep, and for lullaby music  
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.  
When He is King they will clothe Him in grave-sheets,  
Myrrh for embalming, and wood for a crown,  
He that lies now in the white arms of Mary  
Sleeping so lightly on Bethlehem Down.  
Here he has peace and a short while for dreaming,  
Close-huddled oxen to keep him from cold,  
Mary for love and for lullaby music  
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.  
Bruce Blunt 1927*

## A table for the nation



Recently, Barry and I joined family on a short trip including a visit to Ely Cathedral. Whilst the building itself is magnificent, featuring a wonderful octagonal tower, we first wanted to see The Table for the Nation.

In 2012 a 13m-long fossilised Black Oak log was discovered in the Fens near Ely. With no signs of a root ball or canopy, it was realised that this was a small part of an enormous tree which buried itself in the peat when it fell. It is estimated that the full oak tree would have stood 55m tall, whilst a present-day oak is usually around 20m tall.

It was called the Jubilee Oak as it was discovered in the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Given the uniqueness of the find, a team of specialist crafts and design people was formed, many privately funded, to plan how to create a table using the full length of the planks, capable of folding down and seating fifty people! The ten-year project began.

The log was so long and heavy that a loaned sawmill from Canada had to be built on site in the Fens. This resulted in ten consecutive planks being cut. These were then dried very slowly in a purpose-built kiln. In nine months, nearly 400 gallons of water were extracted from the planks, which shrank to half their thickness. Even then it took fifteen people to lift each 13m-long piece!

The sub structure was made from patinated phosphor bronze, with bronze hinges specially designed to allow the two outer planks to be lifted up and folded down. Also there are no 'legs' in the way of people sitting next to the table! In order to keep the width and beautiful graining of each plank, a river joint was created which maintains the odd shapes of each plank. Eventually just five planks were polished and used to create the table top, though they are



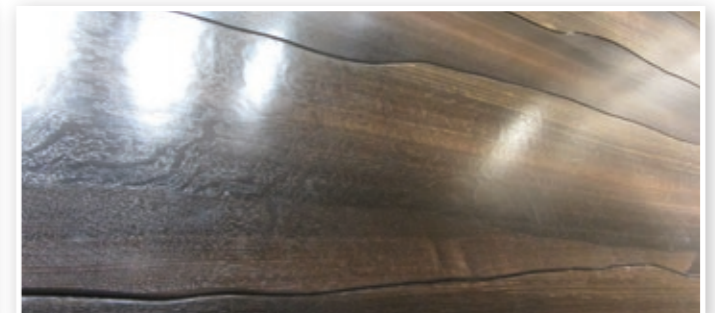
not all the same shape and width. Indeed, in one place one of the planks is extremely narrow. In a few areas, small pieces were inlaid where the wood was weakest, but once polished they mould to the grain of the whole.

It was eventually unveiled in the octagon of Ely Cathedral in May 2022, the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, by the Princess Royal. It has now been moved into a side aisle so the cathedral can continue all normal services in the nave.

It is visually stunning, the eye dazzled by the shapes and colours retained in the wood. You are encouraged to touch it – which is just as well because we had been drawn to do so! Our cameras cannot do it justice. It has to be seen to fully appreciate the thousands of hours and skills needed to create it. It is hoped to 'tour' the table, most likely in cathedrals, due to its size, but it will be at Ely until March 2023.

After our lunch, we returned to the cathedral for a very informative guided tour. Then whilst wandering around, just to enjoy the building, we met one of the clergy who stopped and talked with us. He informed us that he had been present when the table had initially been brought in and the pieces put together, saying it was most fascinating. Then he asked if we had enjoyed the cathedral and what was the oldest thing we had seen? The answer... the table – made from 5,000-year old wood, which had lain buried and hidden whilst the history of the country had continued to develop around the Fens.

There is much more information available via the Ely Cathedral website. Photo of table in octagon taken from The Fenland Black Oak Project website.  
**Barbara Anscombe, St Peter & St Paul**



# Children's Summer Camps



*In the last two months I wrote in Comment about Musalaha, a Jerusalem-based charity that builds grassroots relationships across divided communities. This*

*month's Children's Summer Camps follows Encounters in the Jordan Desert and the Women's Groups.*

Musalaha in Jerusalem runs an annual summer camp that brings together hundreds of children from Israel and Palestine. Children from different ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds make new friends as they engage together in arts, crafts, water games, competitions and sports.

Teaching on reconciliation helps to break down stereotypes of the 'other'. This teaching is based on lives such as Joseph and Jonah – biblical characters accessible to all three faiths. However last year, in 2021, the background was the Covid-19 pandemic and the war between Gaza and Israel.

The trust of parents towards Musalaha was such that eighty campers from Jewish, Christian and Muslim backgrounds came. The camp offered an alternative culture, attitude and teachings that counter the mainstream culture of fear and hatred.

All activities were in Arabic and Hebrew. Each child learned how to write their own name in their 'other' language

(and script!). They learned new phrases and songs in the two languages. All children shared cabins with those from the other side – and some became good friends. The overall theme was Jonah's life and his attitude to people who were different from him. The leaders, counsellors and volunteers included many young adults who had attended as children in previous years.

As it turned out, Musalaha was the only organisation to run a five-day camp for children in Israel and Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) in 2021. As you can imagine, achieving this in this particular year demanded a very special effort – transport across the dividing wall in private cars, training one of the staff in Covid-19 testing, and carefully fulfilling every government regulation.

Afterwards several phone calls expressed positive feedback from parents, who were surprised their children had made friends with children with Jewish or Arabic names.

In some years, young adults from churches in the UK and the States have come as helpers. They could come from Tring in future years, perhaps as part of a gap-year programme?

**Colin Briant, High Street Baptist Church**



See also <https://musalaha.org/summer-camps>  
 YouTube Musalaha Summer Camp 2021: <https://youtu.be/lymmweDwsY4>  
 Musalaha's Jerusalem website: <https://musalaha.org>  
 and then "OUR PROGRAMS"  
 then Children UK Based Website <https://musalaha.uk>  
 For further information go to the websites or contact  
 Colin or Janet Briant [colin.briant@hotmail.com](mailto:colin.briant@hotmail.com).

## Piano & more series

*An hour of music on Sunday afternoons*

### A concert for Advent

A line-up of local musicians - of all ages! - from families around the parish will perform a varied programme of music with a mainly seasonal theme.

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December**

at 3pm

Tring Parish Church HP23 5A

*followed by tea and refreshments*

Free admission; donations welcomed

*For further details, see:*

[piano-and-more.org.uk](https://piano-and-more.org.uk)  
 or Google "Piano and more, Tring"



CELEBRATE AT ST CROSS

### CHRISTMAS CONCERT

WITH RICHARD GRYLLS &  
 THE RIDGEWAY CHORALE

WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER  
 AT 8.00PM.

SEASONAL MUSIC + REFRESHMENTS

FREE ADMISSION

RETIRING COLLECTION FOR  
**WILSTONE CHURCH**

## Silence



We live in a world where there is very little silence. Either we are with other people, or travelling; we turn on radios and televisions; most young people walk around with

ear phones in listening to music or podcasts. Even on those rare occasions when you think you can hear nothing, there is traffic, birdsong, or the odd household noises such as grumbling boilers, or washing machines.

Silence has also been a part of worship and prayer for hundreds of years: for the Quakers it is a fundamental part of their meetings, and there are religious communities who spend most of their time in silence. Meditation and mindfulness have also become more popular over the last few years, and emphasise the importance of focusing on the moment, and of doing one thing at a time: for example if you are walking, don't have the phone plugged in but look at the world around. Some schools have seen the importance of silence, and try to include that into collective worship, but

one of the interesting things about silence is that it requires practice and time.

Many people find it unnerving, and others are put off because they find their minds are full of wandering thoughts and it is distracting. I was always taught that you just go with the thoughts and don't try to stop them, as you have to let them run their course. But this is why it takes time and practice, as you need to do this regularly for your mind to move on to the stage of silence. Being silent with other people is also something that not everyone is used to, but I find it far easier to be silent with others than on my own – there is a sense of support and community, and a rigour that I cannot achieve alone.

Then after the thoughts calm down, my mind moves to a point where time does not seem to flow, and where there is a stillness. It does not happen every time, but with regular practice, it is usually there.

In my first parish, there was a Julian group (named after Julian of Norwich) who would meet regularly for an hour. There would be a short reading and then silence. I am very grateful to have had that experience, but what it also showed me is that for me there are good

moments for silence in the day and bad, and after lunch is definitely bad for me, as I fall asleep.

In All Saints, Long Marston, at 6.00pm on the second Sunday of each month, there is a Celtic Evening Prayer service. It last between 30 and 40 minutes, and the liturgy is Celtic inspired, hence the name, but part of the service is to listen to a piece of music, then sit in silence for 10 minutes. There are also deliberate moments of silence through the intercessions. During lockdown, this was one of the services that we held on Zoom, and were able to sit in silence together on the screen as we did in person. Ten minutes is not very long, but for those who go, it is an opportunity to stop, to re-centre and to re-focus.

The crucial point of this is that the silence is in our minds – at All Saints you can hear birds, cars, cyclists, and the building creaking – but the removal of words gives us a time of renewal that is invaluable.

In this noisy and busy world, we should all remember the words from Ecclesiastes chapter 3 – there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

**Jane Banister**  
 Tring Team

## Community Carol Singing

### Tuesday 13th December



Come and join us singing carols together at Roman Park, the new estate on the western edge of Tring. We'll be carolling for about an hour from 6pm.

Brass players and other instrumentalists very welcome!

For more details contact:  
[musicalanna@annalehair.co.uk](mailto:musicalanna@annalehair.co.uk)  
 07753 567704



## Our local trailblazer!

On 28 November, Youth Concern was proud to launch Aylesbury's first ever Youth Food Bank, tackling food poverty among younger people.

Youth Concern has been distributing food and care parcels to vulnerable 13-25 year olds from across Aylesbury Vale for the last few years. Thanks to the support of Buckinghamshire Council, Helping Hands, Aylesbury Foodbank and other funders, they can now scale up their offer to meet growing need.

So what is vulnerable? This might include young people who receive support from health and/or social care services, are financially vulnerable, have emerging or diagnosed mental health needs, are homeless or at risk of homelessness, are young carers, are 'looked after' or have a child protection plan, have Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs), are affected by domestic or sexual violence or abuse, have parents with mental health problems, alcohol or drug addictions. As a foster carer on the other side of this issue, I believe passionately in helping those in need before they find themselves

'beyond coping', helping to be part of the prevention rather than dealing with any of the later fall out.

This may be Bucks rather than our own Herts, but we know it's just up the road from us. Faith (I hope) knows no county boundaries! Aylesbury Vale experiences the most deprivation of Buckinghamshire's four districts with twice as many violent crimes, sexual assaults and drug crimes as the national average. Aylesbury Vale has almost twice the amount of anti-social behaviour as the national average; higher levels of mental health issues are reported in Aylesbury's most disadvantaged wards, and three Aylesbury wards have higher levels of drug crime than the national average. In 2021, Aylesbury's food banks provided 35,000 food parcels – a huge increase on 2019's 13,000 food parcels. 13% of children in Aylesbury Vale live in poverty, increasing to 34% in Quarrendon. Aylesbury Vale has 22% more young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness than the national average.

Our own Hannah Asquith (of High

Street Baptist Church) is the CEO of Youth Concern and has written about the charity in previous editions of Comment. What she failed to tell us was that she was the winner of the first Buckinghamshire Women in Charity Awards as the Trailblazer in the Charity Sector award! This was awarded to an individual who had stepped up and personally achieved or contributed to huge impact and results, through enterprising, innovative and ground-breaking initiatives.

Hannah was over the moon! She said: 'I am so proud to work for Youth Concern. This award recognises the whole team at Youth Concern and the efforts my paid and unpaid colleagues have made to reach vulnerable 13-25 year olds when our charity was most needed.'

Congratulations to Hannah and her team! I am sure she will update us again in the February edition but meanwhile financial donations are always welcome and hugely appreciated to support this invaluable charity.

**The Editor**

## Memories of Christmas in times past



Thinking about Christmas and carol singing took my thoughts back to how we did it when I was in my teens. Our church youth group went carol singing on

Christmas Eve. We started about 10.00-10.30pm and visited those homes who had requested us to call. Sometimes the people had retired for the night, particularly if they were elderly, but they would turn a light on to let us know that they were listening. Other people would have stayed up and would invite us in for mince pies and refreshments. We usually finished around 2.00-2.30am on Christmas morning, and I have fond memories of walking through the town, all quiet and peaceful, on my way home.

Like many students at the time, I became a temporary postman between coming home from university and Christmas Eve. The first year I did it I was given a round starting about one mile from the town centre. I was transported

to the start of the round, with other students, by van, as my bag was heavy; and walked back to the sorting office at the end when the bag was virtually empty. One day, I got out of the van and went round to the rear door to collect my bag and the van drove off before I could open the door. This was, of course, before the days of mobile phones, so I had to find the nearest phone box and telephone the sorting office. After a wait of half an hour, my bag was delivered so I could start my round.

In the following years, I was given the town centre round, close to where I lived. One year, I remember, my watch strap was disintegrating, and I tried to purchase a new one when I was delivering post to a jeweller. When I called later in the day to collect it, I was told I could have it as a Christmas present.

As my family did not have a car, I had to travel to and from university by public transport. This involved catching a bus to Leeds, a train to Manchester and a bus



to Levenshulme where I was initially in digs and subsequently in a house with a number of other students. As I had quite a lot to bring home at the end of the Christmas term, I used to make a quick 48-hour trip, the weekend before, which enabled me to attend the Sunday School party, a major event on the calendar.

**Ted Oram**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Science: Lighting up our universe

What do a vet, a pharmacist and a mathematician do for a night out? They go to a science show!

If it comes around again next year, we thoroughly recommend a trip to St Albans Abbey to see the October half term light show. This year, the theme was 'Science: Lighting up our Universe' and it was stunning.

Outside, all was very well organised with very clear queuing for different timed tickets. All ages of people were in a queue as it snaked towards the entrance and then, after a quick scan of our tickets, we were in. We came into the Lady Chapel, where suddenly everyone went quiet as they took in the lights and the music. This first stop featured a huge projection on to the window, with the periodic table and names of all the elements, viewed as

if through a kaleidoscope. We must have stood there for ten minutes as the equations rolled over and around us. And then, just like the cinema of the past, we recognised 'this is where we came in' and we moved on.

We sat for quite a while in the North Transept as the story of anatomy was revealed. Starting with a single cell, dividing, and dividing again and again. This was where the beautiful colours came into their own, ending with the DNA double helix. And then we moved on again.

In the South Transept the focus moved to women of science. This was Kate's favourite part. Zoey's favourite element was looking at how the production was done and wondering how we could recreate it in Tring(!). The highlight for me was the main nave,



with all the chairs removed so that the crowds could sit on the floor. We were part of a truly immersive experience as the history of science whirled around our heads, and the musical soundtrack made the floor shake.

As a science fan, I appreciated the comment on the front of the programme 'A common misunderstanding is that faith and science are in conflict, but the reality is far from this'. Hear, hear!  
**Vivianne Child, Kate Stratford and Zoey Child, St Peter & St Paul**

## Women in Science

The introduction on the event guide welcome page hoped it would inspire us to value the achievements of women and men of science today. In the North Transept, along with the lighting display of images of anatomy, panels gave brief details of some women of science. Two were easily recognisable: Mary Seacole and Marie Curie; and two others caught my attention: Tu Youyou and Sarah Gilbert.

All four of the women scientists made significant contributions to medicine and healing.

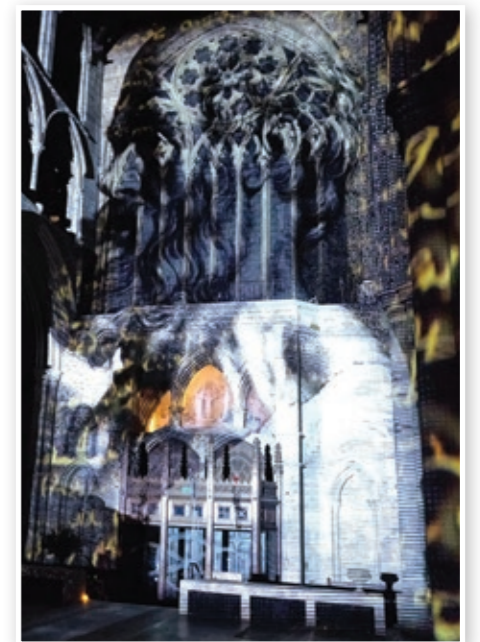
- Mary Seacole was a pioneering nurse during the Crimean war.
- Not only did Marie Curie discover radioactive elements, she put them to practical use. During the First World War Marie and her daughter Irene ran mobile X-ray units to help field surgeons find shrapnel in wounded soldiers.
- In the fight against Covid-19 Prof Sarah Gilbert led the development of a coronavirus vaccine at Oxford University.
- Tu Youyou discovered a new malaria treatment which has saved millions of lives.

Inspired to discover more about Sarah Gilbert and Tu Youyou, I spent a couple of interesting lunch-times with

Google. Did you know, not only was Prof Gilbert made a Dame (DBE) in the 2021 Birthday honours for services to science and public health in Covid-19 vaccine development but also as a role model (a Barbie Shero) she had a Barbie doll made in her honour?

It is thirty years since I worked as a pharmacist and studied pharmacognosy (the study of medicinal plants and other natural substances as sources of drugs), but I was fascinated by Tu Youyou's discovery of Artemisinin. She studied traditional Chinese and Herbal Medicine and found references in ancient medical text to using Sweet Wormwood to treat intermittent fevers, a symptom of malaria. With her research team she was able to extract a malaria-inhibiting substance from the plant *Artemisia annua*.

**Kate Stratford**  
**St Peter & St Paul**



# 100 years of the BBC



In 1940s and 50s, Radio Children's Hour had Uncle Mac. We sat quietly to listen, but to me, Uncle Mac did not seem a friendly uncle. He often corrected children, in a non-

friendly way.

A friend asked me if Petula Clark started her career with her popular song 'Downtown'. The friend was most surprised that she was on the radio during the Second World War, reading messages to people fighting abroad from their children here in England. Then I remembered her own television show which started with her singing 'If I knew you were coming I would have baked a cake' with her accompanist, Tony Hatch. The show was very popular in the 1950s. When I look back, I think it was rather twee. Much later Tony Hatch wrote the theme tune for the Australian soap 'Neighbours'. 'Downtown' was a breakaway from her usual style.

Richard Dimbleby was always the commentator for many important occasions, and very good he was too, giving viewers much information. The research that had been undertaken was excellent. The events we have had lately, well yes, good, but I like to have names. I am thinking of the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Who were the royals walking behind the coffin? Most were named, but there was one who did not get a mention. I looked, stared, got closer to the TV, and we came to the conclusion that it was the Duke of Gloucester. Yes, we were right, reading this information in the newspaper several days later. Were we not told because Buckingham Palace does not give out this information until the event is over for security reasons? We often say 'Richard Dimbleby would have known'.

One of the programmes, which has been a highlight with all of our family over many years is 'Blue Peter'. We have seen many different presenters, all bringing their own personalities, but all accepting daring exploits. Also pets came and went. We were always shown how to make a tortoise comfortable for hibernation. Many laughed when a baby elephant dragged his keeper across the mess on the floor that the animal had left. Some presenters have gone on to do other programmes. At the time of writing we watch Matt Baker on his family's farm in the Dales; also 'Countryfile' etc. In the 1970s, Blue Peter was very popular.

The next day after the programme had been shown, our children went to school looking forward to talking to friends about what had happened, just like many now do for 'Strictly Come Dancing'. Malcolm, our son, is a Blue Peter badge holder.

The 1970s was also the time for electricity blackouts. To make it extra horrible, it always happened at teatime, 'Blue Peter' time. Children in our area were not happy. I cooked with gas so that wasn't a problem. At that time we lived about 5 minutes' walk from a railway station. Railway stations did not have power cuts. I do not know why, but a few houses were connected for electricity to the station. We were one of them, so we did not lose our power. It was a little embarrassing, but we got round this by inviting our children's friends to come to watch 'Blue Peter', and so they did (including Rachel, the present Bishop of Gloucester). This went on for several weeks (well, it seemed like that).

'Blue Peter' again was very important in the 1980s. Two of our children, Duncan and Sue, had birthdays in the same month. Could they have a party between them? Of course 'Blue Peter' to the rescue. Again that group of children did not miss the programme if at all possible. So Sue's friends came for fun with games for one and a half hours. Duncan's friends arrived and they all sat down together to have tea. Not a sound out of them: cold sausages, cheese, various sandwiches being consumed. Tea and 'Blue Peter' having ended with the tune 'Barnacle Bill', Sue's friends went home, and Duncan's arrived. Of course, many were siblings. It was then time for fun with Duncan's friends for one and a half hours. So 'Blue Peter' played a big part in our family.

Have you time for an advert for a local

shop? I will tell you anyway. I bought a jacket, not an expensive one (you need a mortgage for some of them) but the buttons were very uninteresting, making the jacket looking cheap. My seamstress mother unfortunately did not pass on her dressmaking skills to me, but did explain many cheat ways to improve a clothing item, one being to make an item of clothing look more expensive than it is by changing the buttons to something interesting. Oh yes, I can sew on buttons, and darn, and knit, and embroider (just showing off) so I had better get on with it. Where to buy buttons? I knew Grace's, yes in Tring High Street, was doing some different things. I went in and, goodness me, buttons and buttons and even more. There I found something a little different. I am now pleased with the jacket.

One last bit, something personal, I'd like to share. Sue now lives in Sydney with her partner, Peter. They were coming here for a couple of weeks. Conveniently, Tring Garden Centre were starting serving Christmas dinners (another advert). Australia, of course, has a barbie on the beach for Christmas, so turkey with the trimmings and Christmas pudding was very yummy, as we would not see them at Christmas. Then a huge surprise, the next day, as they would also miss my birthday, they arrived with a birthday tea including cake and balloons. Wonderful! Two days later our other daughter and her partner, Mark, were getting married, which is really why Sue and Peter came. The day went very well, so it was another wonderful time.

How lucky was I? Christmas, birthday, and a wedding in five days.

**Pam Russell**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Tweet of the month



Last month I mentioned a Great Grey Shrike that took up residence in the Shetland garden linked to the cottage I stayed in.

Because the bird favoured the garden, this allowed my friend and me quite a few opportunities to photograph it and on one occasion we were able to get very close to it when the light was good – they aren't normally this co-operative!

One thing I didn't mention was that this bird is thought to be of the homeyeri subspecies of Great Grey Shrike and, while several other possibilities have been seen in Britain, this may well be the first to be accepted as such. A subspecies is basically a geographical variation of a species – some of which are obviously different in appearance and others are more subtle. A good example is the (Common) Starling which has thirteen subspecies that were originally spread across Eurasia but have now been introduced over most of the world. The specific scientific name for Starling is *Sturnus vulgaris*; *Sturnus* is the family/generic name and *vulgaris* is the specific name. This is known as the binomial name (two-part name). When a species has subspecies then these are identified using a trinomial, a three-part name. In the case of the Starling, most of Britain's Starlings are the *Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris* subspecies. Because

the specific name and subspecific name are the same, i.e. *vulgaris*, this is known as the nominate subspecies and is usually found in the area from which the species was first described. On Shetland, there is, however, a different subspecies, *Sturnus vulgaris zetlandicus*, and it is fair to say the differences between *zetlandicus* and *vulgaris* are fairly subtle.

When humans started to describe species in scientific terms, there were no subspecies.

In Europe most animals were formally described by Carolus Linnaeus in 1758. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, global travel became easier and so collectors/scientists would travel the world finding new birds and describing them in scientific terms. During this time people noticed differences between birds that had been thought to be the same, so a lot of new species were described. Subsequently people realised that some of these new species were just geographical variations of an already existing species, so at this point the concept of subspecies was used to explain these variations. This led to birds with subspecies being given trinomial scientific names. As knowledge has improved, some subspecies have been



merged and others have been found to be sufficiently different enough to be separate species; this is still very much an ongoing process resulting in new species regularly being announced.

Great Grey Shrike's specific scientific name is *Lanius excubitor* and Homeyer's [Great] Grey Shrike's full scientific name is *Lanius excubitor homeyeri*. This subspecies was described in 1873 by Jean Cabanis, a German ornithologist and named after Eugen Ferdinand von Homeyer – another 19<sup>th</sup> century German ornithologist. It has a more southerly distribution than *Lanius excubitor* and is found from Romania, NE through Ukraine and Russia, to the southern Urals and western Siberia. It differs from nominate *excubitor* in being paler grey on the back, having a white forehead, a longer broader wing-stripe, whitish rump and uppertail-coverts and more white on the tail feathers. I would say it was obviously different but others would no doubt disagree.

Subspecies are like different denominations of Christians or different types of Anglican: some seem very different, others are subtly different, but they are all basically the same thing – Christians.

**Roy Hargreaves**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Staying warm!



Many people are concerned about the winter and the rise in heating costs. On 6 December in Tring library there is a 'swap your slippers' event where you

can get a new pair of slippers, but you can also get advice and help on keeping cosy and coping this winter from Dacorum council and Age UK. And remember that whenever the library is open, anyone is welcome to stay for as long as you want to, whether you want to borrow a book or not.

One great way of keeping warm is being in a room with other people – sadly this is another issue where extroverts seem to be better off than introverts – so it can be good to find an event to go to where others are. There are lots of coffee mornings going on through the week in churches throughout Tring and the villages. Tuesday seems to be the most popular day at the moment but at the time of writing, these are all happening. And remember, moving also keeps the body temperature up so feel free to volunteer to help!

Please contact the churches for more information.

**Remembering loved ones**

All welcome to this service  
Sunday 11 December at 4pm  
High Street Baptist Church, Tring, HP23 4AB

**Tuesday morning** – St Peter & St Paul's after the 9.15am service  
Wilstone Church after the 10am service  
Aldbury Church  
High Street Baptist  
St Martha's is open for a large part of the day and serving light refreshments

**Wednesday afternoon** – Games afternoon at High Street Baptist

**Thursday morning** – St Peter & St Paul's after the 10.00am service  
Friday and Saturday morning – St Peter & St Paul's

# Totally in tune: perfect harmony in Tring



## A wealth of musical talent meets a wonderful venue

Our historic church of St Peter & St Paul in the heart of our town is a wonderful heritage asset for all the people who live here and is rightly cherished by those who worship there as a sacred space – a place of spiritual refreshment, reflection and a refuge in times of trouble. But its importance is more than that for many of those who do not worship there but value its resource as a marvellous space for great events. From town celebrations of Jubilees, Coronations and national events to a wonderful variety of concerts, pageants and performances, this building resonates with life in all its fullness.

## A house of marvellous music

Tring is a very musical town with a long tradition of top-class performances and a wide variety of groups, choirs and orchestras all needing a great place in which to deliver their best works. Whether it's Ma Bessie and the Blues, Tring Choral Society or Tring Park School for the Performing Arts; whether it's the Ridgeway Singers, Anna Le Hair with Piano & More or Chiltern Chorale – they all agree on one thing: St Peter & St Paul's has great acoustics and these days also good sound, lighting and projection systems. (Thank you FOTCH supporters).

We are all very much blessed with the variety, quality and engagement of so many talented musicians making the most of the facilities. Of course, Cliff Brown, our Choir Director and the Church Choir members and the Music Group are the stalwarts who inspire us in regular worship every week of the year.

We are also much blessed with the support many and various organisations give in return for the use of the building. This is not just with donations and a ready response to various appeals for improvements, but also with their generous approach to putting on fundraisers and other ways of replenishing the coffers.

In October we had another jam-packed, jumping evening with Ma Bessie and the Blues Bar: Tring Supporters delivering a Friday night to remember and an excellent contribution of over £1000 to Church Funds. Once again we are hugely grateful to Richard and Jane Shardlow and the Tring Brewery gang for their fantastic support.

## Great beer & great music!

Tring is much blessed with great beer as well as great music!

But it's not all just fun and games... there is a great contribution made by our talented Tring musicians to more serious musical occasions. Tring Choral Society concerts led by Colin Stevens are always a highlight of the season. They are also another wonderfully generous supporter of the church with so many different initiatives over the years.

The list and range of concert

performances this current year is very impressive (Chiltern Sinfonietta, Piano & More, Tring Choral Society, Tring Music Partnership, Ridgeway Chorale, Saints and Sinners, Hesperos Choir, Ma Bessie & her Pig Foot Band) and they all make a great contribution to the wellbeing of the church as well as the cultural richness of the town. Hugely enjoyed and hugely valued.

The thanks of all involved in the church are due to all the varied talents who do so much to entertain and stimulate us as well as keeping the roof and walls and fabric safe and secure.

## An upcoming event

On the back cover of this edition you will see the poster for the special Candlemas service on 5 February 2023 in St Peter & St Paul's. Once again, after a break during the lockdown period, this very moving service in the dark days of winter is being organised and directed by Richard Grylls, another celebrated pillar of our musical community.

The retiring collection is being dedicated to FOTCH and the Church Organ Fund and yet again the talent and energy of our musical heroes is being willingly harnessed in support of our ever cash-hungry physical assets.

On behalf of FOTCH and the Team Ministry, I salute them! Thank you, All!  
**Grahame Senior,  
FOTCH & Tring Team**



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## Prayer of Confession for Advent

Inspired by Luke 3:4, Isaiah 40:3, John 1:23, Mark 1:3

The voice of one comes crying out in the wilderness ... prepare the way of the Lord.

A messenger prepares the way, transforming us like the refiner's fire ... calling us to account.

For the prophets of old have spoken, announcing the breaking open of the dawn ... guiding our feet in the way of peace.

Merciful God forgive us...  
Forgive us when we are quick to point the finger at someone else.

Forgive us when we put our heads down and ignore the cries of injustice.  
Forgive us when we presume to understand the complexity of issues that divide and distract the peoples of the land your feet once walked.

Merciful God...  
forgive us, heal us,  
encourage us and speak through us,  
that we may be transformed through the refiner's fire,  
and the offerings of our hands and our hearts may prepare the way for the Christ child to be welcomed among us in peace.

Originally posted on the Monthly Prayers page (now Weekly Worship) of the Christian Aid website.  
[www.christianaid.org.uk/churches/weekly-worship](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/churches/weekly-worship)

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# St Petersburg



This article is part 2 of an article begun in the November edition of Comment.

After sunny Moscow, it unfortunately

rained most of the time we were in St Petersburg! Suitably attired, we set off on a city tour at 8.00am the day after our arrival.

It's a beautiful city with wide streets and glorious buildings on all sides painted cream, yellow, pink and turquoise, with colonnades picked out in white. Originally the homes of aristocrats, most are now apartment buildings and office blocks. The main street is Nevsky Prospekt, which is several miles long with lovely shops all along it.

We were given various items of information, such as that Putin took English lessons so he could speak directly to Bush and Blair. He was also told to smile a lot, as that would win him women voters! Our guide was Ilyona, whose five-year-old son had a cat called Tony Blair and whose mother was horrified that Pushkin's favourite restaurant is now a Kentucky Fried Chicken!

The town was founded in 1703 and named after St Peter the Apostle. In 1914 the German name was changed to Petrograd and so it remained until 1924, when Lenin died and it was renamed Leningrad. Ilyona explained that she had to give her place of birth as Leningrad; if she said St Petersburg, she'd either be too old – pre 1914 – or too young – post 1991 when, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it reverted, by the people's wish, to St Petersburg. However, the region is still called Leningrad.

St Petersburg was the capital for 206 years from 1712 to 1918, when it switched to Moscow which is more central and away from invading armies. It has sixty-eight rivers and canals, forty-two islands and 533 bridges and is known as the Venice of the North. From May to July daylight lasts until 11.45pm, the time known as the White Nights, but in December it's only light between 9.45am and 4.00pm and the temperature goes down to -42°. The Neva is the main river and has twenty-one bridges over it. It's fifty miles long and flows into the Baltic, but is not tidal. St Petersburg has the deepest Metro in the world since it needs to go under the rivers and canals.

It was a surprise to learn that Peter the Great had lived in Greenwich for a while and was multi-talented, practising dentistry, carpentry and other skills. There's a collection in the Hermitage of the teeth he extracted! His main aim in life was to acquire access to the Baltic, the naval base for the Baltic fleet, and he fought Sweden for twenty-one years to achieve this. And some hundred years later, Catherine the Great waged war with Turkey to gain access to the Black Sea!

The Peter and Paul fortress was the first building at St Petersburg, founded 27 May 1703, and the first house was Peter's log cabin on Petrograd Island. We arrived at 11.59am and were treated to the deafening midday cannon. Both Peter and Catherine the Great are buried here, as are the last of the Romanovs after their remains had been recovered. There's a chapel for the assassinated family with their pictures on the walls and a ceremony is held on 17 July each year. Their chambermaid, cook and other servants shot with them, are also buried there. The Romanov dynasty had lasted for 305 years. Catherine I was Peter's wife and Catherine the Great his granddaughter-in-law, whom he never met.

And so to the Hermitage, the tour of which was exhausting. We were told that if we'd spent one minute in front of each of the exhibits, it would have taken us eight years to go round! We started in the Winter Palace, where there are 179 staircases, and saw Catherine the Great's Coronation coach, which she used only once, and dozens of highly ornate rooms including the Malachite Room, where the pillars were encased in the stone.

That evening we went to another hotel to see a display of Russian folk dancing. It was a brilliant show, with fantastic costumes, sword fights, thigh-slapping and dancing on hands, and each dance seemed to tell a story.

The following morning the coach left at 9.30 bound for Peterhof. The temperature was 11°C and, of course, it was raining hard! All the buildings we passed were either post-war or reconstructed, the 1950s' buildings being in Stalinist architecture. This area, being near the 'Front line', had been badly damaged during the war. We again passed the statue to Lenin nicknamed The Hitchhiker, one of the twenty-six statues of him in St Petersburg.

The German name Peterhof was changed to Petrodvorets during the war. Both words mean Peter's Palace and it

was built because Peter the Great wanted to create something like Versailles, which he'd visited, and in fact it's known as the Russian Versailles. There are forty fountains in the grounds. We also passed Constantine's Palace, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was vandalised by the Nazis who occupied it from 1941-1944. It was restored at a cost of £200 million in just eighteen months.

There are six palaces here, including Mon Plaisir, The Hermitage, the Presidential Palace and Catherine's Wing. The Presidential Palace belongs to the government, but some of the others are available for people to stay in. Paul McCartney stayed at the Palace of Congress for his birthday one year at a cost of about £3,000 a night and the Big Eight Summit was held there in 2003. Mon Plaisir was Peter's private palace down by the Baltic, which is at the end of the garden; originally it was possible to sail right up to the Palace. All the palaces and mansions were nationalised during Soviet times, and a lot are now museums.

As we left the coach, a band, having established our nationality, greeted us with God Save the Queen and Auld Lang Syne! Below us was the Lower Park, with gold statues and fountains. Because of winter temperatures, most of the buildings have floor-to-ceiling stoves in Dutch delft blue and white, but not the Summer Palace as it was only used from May to October.

In the dining room of the Gala Room Suite was the Wedgwood dinner service belonging to Catherine the Great, which had been sent to Siberia during the war for safety. There were plate-warmers beneath each plate to be filled with hot water, since Russians don't warm plates. Banquets lasted five or six hours and had 300 courses.

Grigory Orlov, who was Catherine's secret lover, had his own suite of rooms. He presented her with the Orlov diamond, the size of a hen's egg. Catherine enjoyed playing cards with a pocket of loose diamonds! Peter the Great, on the other hand, had forbidden cards, and in his time everyone had to play chess.

We then went on to Catherine Palace and had to battle our way across a courtyard in a torrential hail storm. Again, as at Peterhof, we had to wear canvas shoes over our own, which made things very slippery underfoot. The women on guard in each room are not volunteers; they can't afford to be. They earn only 100 roubles a month, compared with

Yeltzin's 2,000. There are no pensions and no free medicine in Russia, about which Ilyona felt very strongly.

The famous Amber Room is 'the eighth wonder of the world'. All the décor is made from amber, which is pine resin 55 million years old. This one room cost £8 million to build.

This whole area was occupied during the war and as we drove home we passed the Front Line, marked by a war memorial on the left and two cannons on the right.

That evening was the last of the holiday and we had a special dinner followed by a boat trip where there was

free champagne, vodka and triangles of bread topped with caviar. There was also 'entertainment' in the form of singing and dancing in national costume, with the dreaded audience anticipation.

Having reread these articles, I can't help wondering how all the people we met – our guides and drivers, hotel staff, and so on – are faring now. In 2004 Putin didn't appear to be nearly as powerful as he is now, and generally seemed to be viewed in a less than favourable light. As I mentioned, Ilyona was openly critical, particularly with regard to the lack of pensions and free medicines. She even went so far as to say, 'Wait for

the next Revolution!'. And although, as I read in the Moscow Times, a newspaper editor had been sacked for criticising the government, I imagine that these days he'd have been at least sent to prison. It's sobering to think how the people of Russia have been consistently deceived about the war in Ukraine, though with the conscription and continual lack of progress, they must surely be beginning to doubt the propaganda. One can only hope that eventually they will be able to come together and put an end to it.

**Anthea Fraser**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## A universal religious symbol



Most churches have candles. Sometimes these are on the altar or communion table; sometimes they are lit for particular ceremonies: Christingle or Advent candles,

Easter candles, votive candles (also called prayer candles), memorial candles, candlelight services. I do not know of any denomination that does not at some time use candles – both the Salvation Army and Quakers use them from time to time, either as symbols or to have a candlelight service. Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus all use candles for specific occasions. So you could say that the candle is a universal religious symbol. Sometimes an oil lamp is used instead of a candle.

Candles were used in the very early church simply as a form of light for services which were held at night, but the very early Christians

also attended the synagogue where an eternal light on a six-branched candelabra was always kept burning before the Holy of Holies. The Gentile Christians would also have been used to ceremonial candles as an eternal flame was kept burning in the sanctuary of Athena Polias on the Acropolis, and in the temple of Apollo Palatinus at Rome. There is no record of ceremonial candles being used in the first 200 years of the church, but by the middle of the

third century AD, there are references to candles being used in the churches in Rome for ceremonial purposes. St Jerome, around AD 400, wrote that candles were always lit when the Gospel was to be read, to signify the gladness with which the Gospel was received. Around the same time, candles were handed to a newly ordained priest to signify their ordination.

In the Orthodox Church, members are encouraged to light a small votive candle each time they enter a church to remind them that Jesus is the 'light of the world' (John 8:12). In the Catholic Church, members often place a votive candle in front of a statue of Jesus, the Virgin Mary or a Saint when they enter; candles are also given at the time of baptism. Votive candles are also



commonplace in Anglican churches and in some Methodist churches. In Baptist and United Reformed churches, candles are sometime lit at special Remembrance services in memory of a loved one who has died: these are effectively votive candles.

Almost all churches now use advent candles in the month preceding Christmas, often in an Advent wreath or Advent crown. This started in the German Lutheran church in the

16<sup>th</sup> century, although Advent in the medieval church was a period of fasting when people's thoughts were directed to Jesus' second coming – not to Christmas!

Christingle candles were started in the Moravian church by Bishop Johannes de Watteville in 1747 in Germany. The name comes from the German 'Christkind' – Little Christ Child – but Christingle did not really spread to other churches until around 1900. In the two World Wars when oranges were not readily available, Christingle candles were put in apples or turnips. Christingle became popular in the UK in 1968 when Christingle services were used to raise funds for The Children's Society. Today the Society raises over £1 million each year through these services.

Candlemas on 2 February commemorates the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It seems to have been brought in by the Celtic Church in the 5<sup>th</sup> century to replace Imbolc, the pagan festival of fertility marking the start of Spring – another example of the early Church making use of pagan festivals.

Candles are, of course, often used in private houses to form a focus for private prayer and meditation. They are a symbol of bringing church worship into the home, forming a focus for private devotion. They are also used in many houses by non-Christians to provide a welcoming atmosphere.

How does your Church use candles?

**John Allen**  
**High Street Baptist Church**



# Attack on creation



In the previous edition of *Comment*, November 2022, there was a small article headed 'Stand up to protect nature'. This was taken from a larger

piece written on behalf of the RSPB in response to events that took place in September this year, when Liz Truss was made Prime Minister and then proceeded to launch what was described as an attack on nature as the government sought to dismantle the laws that are meant to protect our environment.

For almost thirty years, the UK has had laws in place to protect vulnerable wildlife habitats and species and, despite this, we have seen significant declines in many of our best-known and loved wildlife, and this from a country that was one of the most nature-depleted countries on the planet already. The irony of us trying to get other countries to do more to protect rainforests and other habitats that are vital to our planet's wellbeing and possibly our survival is not lost on me when I see what we have done and our still doing to our own country.

On 22 September, plans were announced to amend or remove essential environment laws. These laws include the so-called Habitat Regulations which are used to prevent development from taking place on the most important wildlife areas and, if it is to take place, then it is on land that is less important. These laws are also used to protect clean water, clean air, clean beaches and rivers so we could see direct impacts on things we like to think we can take for granted and that could directly affect our health.

On 3 September, the UK Government announced plans to create 'Investment Zones' in England where planning rules could be ignored so that housing and commercial developments could be built with little or no restriction on land that is currently protected for its importance to wildlife and the environment. Similar zones were also proposed for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

These two announcements fly in the face of this government's previous

commitments to reduce carbon emissions and to help improve biodiversity in our country and protect both our environment and the habitats and wildlife in it.

This proposed attack on nature resulted in condemnation and anger from just about everyone involved in conservation.

One result of this was that the RSPB, National Trust and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) got together to launch the 'People's Plan for Nature' in an attempt to unite all people interested in the environment to speak with one voice against these proposals, in the hope that they would be dropped before an environmental crisis, similar to the economic one that was almost inflicted upon us, became a reality.

To be clear, if any of the political parties had made these proposals, I would be objecting to them for many reasons. Obviously, the events of recent weeks may cause some of these proposals to be dropped or modified but I can't help but think that resisting them won't do any harm just in case they are still to be pursued by the government. Also, I think making it clear that there are people who care about our wildlife and environment, both locally and globally, is no bad thing.

Why should Christians care about their planet? Let's start at the beginning with Genesis 1:26 (NRSV) which says: 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."' Unfortunately verse 28 then says: 'God blessed them, and God said to them,

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" The key words in these two texts are dominion and subdue and what should they mean to us. Dominion is described as sovereignty or control. However, any good ruler should also care for the things they have control of and make sure they thrive. As for subduing the earth, I think we have done too much of that and it is time to look after it as it is the only planet we have. We should also care about our fellow humans who are already being affected by the changing climate. And, if all else fails, we need our planet to be healthy for us to survive.

St Peter & St Paul's Church is just starting to follow a four-part study course based on the 'Tenants of the King' booklet produced by Operation Noah. This study series is designed to consider what the Bible has to say about today's climate crisis. Do get hold of a copy of this booklet and join in the conversation about Earth and our future on it.

The two birds pictured here are already being impacted by climate change and our impact on the environment.

**Roy Hargreaves, St Peter & St Paul**



# A welcoming people



Reverend Hayley Young, President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) for 2022/23, has challenged churches in the BUGB with her presidential theme

to 'build a bigger table'. This theme encourages churches to provide the kind of hospitality Jesus offered, to be a more welcoming people.

Whilst we continue to explore ways of showing Christlike hospitality to our neighbours and strangers alike, one rather literal way of building a bigger table sprang to mind... a big community lunch! And not just any lunch, but the best lunch of them all: a Christmas Day lunch!

Why? Because the words on Christmas day 'Lunch is ready' are some of my favourite words! After the joys of celebrating Jesus' birth at church and opening (some) presents on Christmas Day, there is nothing better than sitting at the table surrounded by friends and family to enjoy the most indulgent meal of the year.

Yet, I'm aware, for many, for a whole variety of reasons,

Christmas Day lunch may not bring the same joy. So, this year, High Street Baptist Church is offering a Christmas Day lunch for anyone who would like to join us.

You can expect a warm welcome and some delicious food. Whether on your own, a couple or a family with children, there is great joy in sharing food and stories with one another, particularly on a day that often holds so many fond memories.

So, if you would like to join us for Christmas Day lunch, please contact

me (as places are limited to 50). We have a suggested donation of £5-10 per person to cover costs (but please don't let finance stop you from joining us). Come from 12.30pm and I will shout 'Lunch is ready!' at 1.00pm. All being well, we'll close with watching together King Charles' first Christmas speech at 3.00pm as we enjoy tea / coffee and chocolates.

To book please contact me at joe@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk or call 07521 513493.

**Joe Egan, High Street Baptist Church**

# The Apocalypse

The Book of Revelation, also called simply 'the Apocalypse', at once intrigues and intimidates its readers. This is especially due to its self-presentation as a prophetic vision, its highly allusive language, and its mysterious talk of the 'end things'.

Unlike anything else in the New Testament, it is fair to say that this book's interpretation has been marked by more confusion and controversy than any other in the Bible. This course aims to help readers break through the fog and come to see the enduringly relevant message the Book of Revelation has to offer. We will dispel common misconceptions, situate the book in its historical context, and acquire knowledge and skills to read

with greater literary and theological sophistication, so that by the end of the five weeks, each of us will have a deepened personal appreciation of the Apocalypse as Christian Scripture.

This course can be taken as part of the Certificate in Theology.

**When** | Tuesday evenings (10 January - 7 February 2023), 7.30-c.9.15pm

**Where** | Online via Zoom

**Cost** | £70

**Tutor** | Alex Rowe, Tutor in Theology

*Course information and Zoom details will be sent out prior to the course starting. If you have any questions please email studycentre@stalbanscathedral.org.*

# 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

# Useful contacts

## TRING TEAM PARISH

**Team Rector (Tring & Puttenham)**  
Rev Huw Bellis  
2 The Limes, Station Road  
01442 822170 or  
07411 483229  
huw@tringteamparish.org.uk  
(Day off Thursday)

**School Chaplaincy and Team Vicar**  
(Aldbury, Tring School)  
Rev Michelle Grace  
Aldbury Vicarage  
01442 851200  
michelle@tringteamparish.org.uk  
mgrace@tringschool.org  
(Day off Friday)

**School Chaplaincy and Team Vicar**  
(Tring School, Long Marston, Wilstone)  
Canon Jane Banister  
01442 822170  
jane@tringteamparish.org.uk  
jbanister@tringschool.org

**Diocesan Lay Minister**  
Mike Watkin  
07715 553556  
mike.watkin@btinternet.com

**Parish Co-ordinators**  
Roy Hargreaves  
01442 823624  
roy.hargreaves@btinternet.com

Vivianne Child  
01442 826092  
vivianne@tringteamparish.org.uk

**Parish Advisor**  
John Whiteman  
01442 826314  
john@tringteamparish.org.uk

**Church Wardens**  
Roy Hargreaves (Tring)  
01442 823624

Jane Brown (Aldbury)  
01442 851396

Christine Rutter (Puttenham)  
01296 668337

Canon Jane Banister  
(Wilstone)  
01442 822170  
(Day off Thursday)

Judith Weatherill  
(Long Marston)  
jweath76@gmail.com

**Tring Team Administration**  
Administrator  
Trish Dowden  
admin@tringteamparish.org.uk

Janet Goodyer  
pewsheets@tringteamparish.org.uk

**Hall Bookings**  
Janet Goodyer  
01442 824929  
jigoody@ntlworld.com  
tringparishhall@hotmail.com

**Hall Secretary**  
Barbara Ancombe  
01442 828325  
Bandb33@talktalk.net

**Safeguarding**  
Jon Reynolds  
07712 134370  
safeguarding@tringteamparish.org.uk

**ST MARTHA'S METHODIST CHURCH**  
**Minister**  
Rev Rachael Hawkins  
01442 866324  
rachael.hawkins@methodist.org.uk

**Senior Steward**  
Rosemary Berdinner  
01442 822305

**AKEMAN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**Minister**  
Vacancy

**Administrator**  
Emma Nash  
01442 827881

**CORPUS CHRISTI ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**  
**Parish Priest**  
Father Sean Thornton  
seanthornton@rcdow.org.uk

**Parish Administrator**  
Nicole Brandwood  
tring@rcdow.org.uk

**HIGH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**Ministers**  
Joe Egan 07521 513493  
joe@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
Ruth Egan 07521 513494  
ruth@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk

**Assistant Minister**  
Kevin Rogers  
km\_rogers@outlook.com

**Administration/facilities hire**  
admin@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
01442 824054

**NEW MILL BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**Minister**  
Vacancy

**Church Secretary**  
Valerie Carr  
07831 709793  
secretary@newmillbaptist.org.uk



**Hall Hire**  
Andrew Webber  
07773 148706  
treasurer@newmillbaptist.org.uk

**JUSTICE & PEACE GROUP**  
affiliated to  
Churches Together in Tring

**Secretary**  
Michael Demidecki  
07887 980004  
michaeldemidecki@gmail.com  
www.justiceandpeacetring.org

**OUR CHURCHES ONLINE**  
www.tringteamparish.org.uk  
www.tringchurchmusic.org.uk  
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www.tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
www.newmillbaptist.org.uk  
www.akemanstreet.org  
www.berkotring.org.uk

## SOCIAL NETWORKING

 Tring Parish  
 @revhuw

**COMMENT**  
**Editor**  
Annette Reynolds  
07968 312161  
comment.magazine@gmail.com

**Advertising, Distribution and Treasurer**  
Barbara Ancombe  
01442 828325  
bandb33@talktalk.net

**Design**  
Kev Holt, Ginger Promo

Please contact Barbara Ancombe if you would like to take a subscription to *Comment*: £15.00 for 10 issues each year. The magazine can be posted to you with an additional cost for postage at current rates.

Articles, photos and publicity adverts for the next edition should arrive with the Editor no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 16

| ACROSS               | DOWN         |
|----------------------|--------------|
| 6. CHRISTMAS TIME    | 1. THEE      |
| 8. REACH UP          | 2. STOUR     |
| 11. TEARS            | 3. MAP       |
| 12. HORRORS          | 4. ATTESTS   |
| 13. EMU              | 5. EMERALDS  |
| 15. ATOLL            | 7. INCH      |
| 16. GENESIS          | 9. HONESTY   |
| 17. ADIOS            | 10. PRIESTS  |
| 18. ASK              | 11. TRAINEE  |
| 19. STATUES          | 14. MIDNIGHT |
| 22. TIPSY            | 16. GOSSIPS  |
| 23. SPELLED          | 20. UTTER    |
| 26. A HAPPY NEW YEAR | 21. STAY     |
|                      | 24. ORAL     |
|                      | 25. EYE      |

# High Street Baptist Church - Tring

Growing in the message and challenge of God



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



Keep updated with midweek kids' activities

 Activities @High Street Baptist Church



**Church office**  
**Revd Joe Egan**  
**Revd Ruth Egan**

admin@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
07521 513493 or joe@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
07521 513494 or ruth@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk

www.tringbaptistchurch.co.uk



tringbaptistchurch



High Street Baptist Church

# **Festive Choral Evensong for Candlemas**

**Sunday, February 5th 2023 at 6.30pm,  
St Peter and St Paul, Tring.**

**Canticles by Richard Lloyd, a beautiful  
introit and a scrumptious anthem plus 3  
rousing hymns.**



Retiring collection/donations for FOTCH and the Church Organ Fund.

Refreshments will be provided after the service.

Further information please contact Trish Dowden at  
[trish@tringteamparish.org.uk](mailto:trish@tringteamparish.org.uk) or on 07720 836930.