



COWLEY ST JOHN
TWO CHURCHES
ONE COMMUNITY

COWLEY ST JOHN PARISH MAGAZINE

£1

August 2017



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- **Main website:** www.cowleystjohn.co.uk
- **Facebook Group:**
<https://www.facebook.com/cowleystjohn.parish/>
- **St. Mary & St. John Churchyard Project:**
www.ssmjchurchyard.org.uk
- **‘Home’, an experimental Christian Community in Oxford:**
www.home-online.org
- **Magazine issues:** <http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/parish-magazine>

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- **St Alban the Martyr**, Charles Street, Oxford, OX4 3AH
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Parish Postal Address (Vicarage): 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ

REGULAR SERVICES

Sunday:

- **8:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **9:15am** Sung Eucharist at St. Alban
- **10:45am** Sung Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **6:15pm** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Monday to Thursday:

- **8:00am** Morning Prayer at St. Mary & St. John
- **5:00pm** Evening Prayer at St. Mary & St. John

Wednesday:

- **12:00pm** Silence and Stillness at Bartlemas Chapel, (during colder months at Bethlehem Chapel, All Saints Convent*).

Thursday:

- **10:30am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Friday:

- **8:30am** Morning Prayer at St. Alban
- **9:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Alban

* All Saints 15A Magdalen Road Oxford OX4 4EN (<http://allsaintssistersofthepoor.co.uk/>)

If for any reason you are unable to get to church but would like a visit from one of our clergy, please contact us. We could bring Holy Communion or simply come and pray with you.

SOME REGULAR EVENTS IN RICHARD BENSON HALL (Next to St. Mary & St. John Church)

Alice's Mad Hatter Tea Parties:

Held on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, 3-4:30pm, a friendly place where people who have experienced mental health issues in their lives can relax and just enjoy a cuppa, cake and a chat.

A Place to Be:

Held on the 4th Tuesday of every month, 12-2pm, a friendly monthly lunch for people with dementia, their family, carers and friends.

Marhaba:

Held on the last Tuesday of the month, 7pm, a collaboration between various Oxford groups that sets up a platform for sharing music between communities.

To find out about other events, see the notices section in this magazine, visit the Parish website www.cowleystjohn.co.uk or visit the church.

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THE SEVEN LAMPS

By Father Phil

In the last week of July, we began rehangng the seven lamps which traditionally have hung in the sanctuary at St Mary & St John Church. They are beautiful lamps, filled with 'Eastern promise' so someone said to me! Getting the lamps all hung and working properly may take some time, but it is wonderful to see them returning to their rightful place. Peter McCullough has done a great job polishing the lamps - the Aladdin of Divinity Road (This could all degenerate into a very poor story with Genies and 'wishes' for the future of the church etc. so I'll stop there).

During the Autumn, we are going to have seven Sundays looking at what we might call the seven lamps of our parish community. I hope these services and the sermons are going to provide us with a chance to think a bit more deeply about who we are and where we are heading. Below is an outline of the seven lamps or themes which reflect our parish and our hopes for the future - as I see them:

Lamp 1: Christ at our Heart through Worship, Prayer and

Contemplation: All that we do flows from our relationship with Jesus Christ, who is at the heart of our life together. Our devotion is expressed through our regular celebration of the Eucharist and the Daily Office but also in personal prayer and contemplation.

Lamp 2: Sharing the Good News of Jesus: We are blessed with the task of witnessing for Jesus Christ by sharing the Good News that he brought us. We are passionate about an evangelisation which endeavours to bring people to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist.

Lamp 3: Hospitality and Fellowship: We welcome the challenge of living with the breadth and diversity of authentic Christian community.

We are called to love everyone, as Jesus did, even when that is difficult due to the fragmented society we live in, where we often feel distant and different from one another. Such Christ-like love brings about fellowship, that is, nurturing and taking care of one another, where both tears and laughter are welcome.

Lamp 4: Discipleship and Exploring Christianity: We seek to be alongside people as they explore what it means to know, love and follow Jesus. A deepening of our relationship with Jesus brings us to discipleship, to a call to individual and collective transformation in all that we think, say and do, by walking in the footsteps of the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus. We believe in a church which teaches and learns the faith.

Lamp 5: Care for Others and for Creation: Jesus called his followers to show compassion for those around them, and we take seriously his call, recognising that compassion is not abstract and sentimental but relational and practical. Thus, we do all we can to serve and be in solidarity with those who are in need, whether close by or far away. We also recognise that ecological action is one of the greatest imperatives of our time of climate crisis, as we have a responsibility both for creation and those for whom ecological disaster brings great harm. The church is also called to be prophetic, to not just alleviate suffering but also to prevent it from happening in the present and future, and this includes heeding the call to simplicity of life and rejecting greed.

Lamp 6: Health and Healing: Jesus said that he came to bring us life in all its fullness. Yet there are many today whose lives are far from whole due to illness, emotional trauma, addictions, and isolation. We believe we are called to share in the ministry of bringing God's healing and wholeness to those who suffer. We aim to do this through prayer with and for those in such need.

Lamp 7: Interfaith: Dialogue and Proclamation: We in 21st-century Britain live in a pluralistic society. We may think ourselves unique, but throughout Jesus' ministry, he entered into conversation with the many belief systems in the pluralistic Roman Empire, both religious and secular. We wish to follow his lead and enter dialogue with faith and non-faith groups in our locality so that we might better proclaim the Good News that he entrusted us with.

The Seven Lamps in Seven Words

Pray Worship - with God through Jesus

Share Evangelisation

Belong Hospitality and Fellowship - care for those we meet

Grow Discipleship - Growing together in the love of God in Christ and seeking ways to share it

Care Compassion - for creation and for our community

Heal Healing - agents and signs of God's will for the wellbeing of all people

Converse Conversation - with other denominations, other traditions, other faiths and those of no faith

HOWARD RECEIVES A CERTIFICATE OF HONOUR

Together with several others, Howard has recently received a 'Certificate of Honour' from the Lord Mayor, to recognise his involvement with The Archway Foundation for over 30 years - almost from its inception (see photograph on the front cover and below). The purpose of the charity, in the words of founder Paul S. Hawgood is: *'...to be alongside those who feel hurt by loneliness, to serve by offering support, friendship and a listening ear.'*

Howard has been a very committed volunteer for almost the whole of the charity's life, giving at least 5 hours a week to his role. He has supported the charity's Friends (service users) in social groups on Monday evenings and at the Wednesday Welcome day-time call-in cafe. He has acted as Transport Coordinator as well as acting as a driver and providing lifts for Friends to social groups as well as to outings and social events. Many of these Friends would not have been able to benefit from Archway's service without Howard's personal care and attention. He has also helped in many Fundraising events. He has helped so many Friends going through periods of isolation and loneliness. Many congratulations to Howard for his wonderful work! In due course,



we hope his arm can be twisted further and we can find out more about his life, his work and his faith by having 'A Conversation with Howard'. Watch this space...

National Lottery support for East Oxford's First World War 'Hidden Heritage' at St Stephen's House

St Stephen's House, a theological College and part of The University of Oxford, announced on 5/6/17 that it has received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to undertake a project about the First World War heritage of the former monastic site on which it is based.

Made possible by National Lottery players through HLF's First World War 'then and now' programme, the project – 'Wartime at an Oxfordshire Monastery' – will focus on key figures within the local community, and the role that they played in wartime Oxford.

Marking the Centenary of the First World War, it will involve local schoolchildren and the wider community around the College's East Oxford site in exploring and uncovering the rich history associated with the former monastery.

SJE Arts, the College's concert and arts venue based in the College church on the Iffley Road, will form the hub for the project, hosting an Open Day on Sunday 10th September (1 – 5pm) to encourage people to share photographs, newspaper clippings, documents, letters and photos of keepsakes, as well as family tales passed down to help them build a clear picture of what life was really like.

With help from professionals, the information gathered will be digitally recorded and an online interactive archive will be created where everyone can access and contribute information. The project will also result in a self-guided tour of a series of paintings in SJE Arts, which were commissioned to commemorate the end of the First World War.

St Stephen's House Director of Development, Rachel Makari, will oversee the project, with academics Dr Annie Skinner and Dr

Serenhedd James leading the research. It is hoped that volunteers from across Oxford and the wider area will also be involved, leading their own ‘micro research projects’.

Rachel Makari commented: “The support from the Heritage Lottery Fund is a real boost to the on-going work of preserving this magnificent site and opening it up to be enjoyed in new ways by the local and wider community. Many people already know and visit the concert venue SJE Arts here at the College, which hosts over 100 concerts each year now, but many are not aware of the full depth of history associated with the site. Through this project, we hope to change that.”

Open Day: *An Open Day will take place on Sunday 10th September 2017 between 1 – 5pm at SJE Arts, 109a Iffley Road, Oxford, OX4 1EH. All welcome.*

Take part: *If you would like to participate in the project, or would like more information, please contact: Rachel Makari, Director of Development, St Stephen’s House, Rachel.Makari@ssho.ox.ac.uk / Tel: +44 (0)1865 610489*

*

THE RICHARD BENSON WALL HANGING

In the Richard Benson Hall is the Richard Benson wall hanging, a banner comprising squares made by twenty different people from the parish and from the community (see the photograph overleaf which shows Betty Purves (left) and John Purves (right) with the wall hanging). The inspiration for this community project came from a chance conversation between Alice Hicks and Betty Purves in the church office one day. Alice asked Betty: “you stitch don’t you?” “Yes,” replied Betty. “Why don’t we do a wall hanging?” Fr. Phil and the ministry team were highly enthusiastic, and the rest is history.



The title of the project is, “The Church and The Community”, and the images in each square include the local mosque (created by Betty), the Cowley Road Carnival, an angel, a chalice and even some horses and a haystack contributed by Elaine Tilley’s daughter, Sarah Tilley, who loves harvest festivals.

Betty was clear from the start that in running the project she wouldn’t tell people what they should contribute, because then it wouldn’t be a community project, but would be her project. Given a completely blank canvas was

difficult for some contributors. It can be daunting to create something from absolutely nothing, but Betty was always on hand to offer support and encouragement, and the result is an authentic and beautiful expression of the community. Given that the Richard Benson Hall is rather new decorations wise, the wall hanging is particularly nice.

The youngest contributor to the hanging was a ten-year-old girl who worked with Janet McCrae to sew on buttons. The oldest contributor was a ninety-four year old lady, Alma Brown, who when she contributed her square wrote to Betty:

“As promised here is the canvas work to put with the others for the wall hanging – not my best effort I’m afraid but at ninety-four fingers and ideas not what they were. I have tried to show the South Porch of St. Mary & St. John Church where [my husband] Bernard Brown stood to shake hands with members of the congregation after he’d celebrated mass on June 19th 1988 the day before he died of a heart attack. His ashes are buried

under the chestnut tree on the left of the picture. He loved St. Mary & St. John Church and assisted there for eight years when his role was Diocesan Pastoral Secretary.

Betty has always loved art, and as a child was always painting. With some encouragement from a friend, Betty took a G.C.E. in art at what was then the College of Technology, Art and Commerce on the Cowley Road. She even remembers John Brookes (after whom Brookes University is named) saying in a speech: "Welcome young ladies and gentlemen. If you succeed, we will succeed! If you fail, we will fail!"

Betty worked in a fundraising team at Helen House, and then worked there for some years as a nursing assistant with terminally ill children and their families. She and John also raised three children and four foster children. It was when injury prevented her from continuing nursing that Betty decided to return to her art, and did a degree in fine art and art history at what was then the Oxford Polytechnic. Following this degree Betty combined her artistic flare with her experience and *métier* in the caring professions to become a person-centred art therapist. Her work included with Elder Stubbs and cruise bereavement. She described to me how people can often express through art what they can't express through words or in any other way. People can be initially very hesitant about doing art, maybe thinking they don't have the skill or talent, but Betty told me how satisfying it is to encourage people in their journey of expression. If they said "I can't even draw a straight line," Betty would reply, "Neither can I. Let's have a go anyway and make a start."

We are indeed lucky that Betty and all the contributors have brought their talents to bear in the creation of the Richard Benson Wall Hanging: 'The Church and The Community'. Do attend one of the events in the Richard Benson Hall (see page 5) and appreciate this wonderful community creation first hand.

Contributors to the wall hanging (in no particular order) are: Emma Pratt (Stained Glass Design), Alice Hicks / Ruth Waddle (Alice's Mad Hatter Tea Parties), Mary-Ann Sinclair (Water and Fire), Janet McCrae (Buttons and Patchwork Design), Ruth Waddle (St. Mary & St. John Church Garden), Father Ben (Community and Cross), Father Philip (Chalice), Eileen Mann / Margaret Cullen (Angel), Janet Proudman (Candle), Sarah Tilley (Harvest), Alma Brown (South Porch), Angela Thomas (Interlocking), Petronella Spivey (Oxford), Kate Prinsep (Community Heart), Rosy Hancock (Chasuble) and Betty & John Purves (Community and Diversity).

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ANCIENT AND MODERN

By Edward Walker



During a brief holiday in France a couple of months ago I visited the famous chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp, not far from the border with Germany (see photo on the left).

The chapel was designed by Le Corbusier with the encouragement of the influential Dominican priest, Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier, one of a group of reformers within the Church who wanted to make it relevant to the modern world and who (says Wikipedia) “looked to renew its spirit by embracing modern art and architecture as representative concepts.” The chapel is built of concrete, utterly unlike any conception of what a church should look like, and yet for me, and for the thousands who visit it each year, it is a

holy place, a building which speaks the language not of the past, but of our own troubled present. It was consecrated in 1954, and is now one of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.



of the red telephone box!) was laid by Edward VII in 1904. Like our own church of St. Mary and St. John, it is built in the Gothic manner – stone, pointed arches, pillars, stained glass, all in the mediaeval style (see photo above).

Liverpool's two cathedrals are stark representations in Britain of two contrasting expressions of Christian belief. The foundation stone of the massive Anglican cathedral, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott (designer



The Roman Catholic cathedral (left), celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, was designed by Frederick Gibberd (designer of Didcot Power Station!). Like the chapel at Ronchamp it is mostly built of concrete, and has forsaken the usual Gothic pattern of long nave and side aisles in

favour of a spacious circular design focused on the altar.

I came away from Ronchamp (and from Liverpool's Roman Catholic cathedral) deeply moved, and since then have found myself musing about the face Christianity presents to the contemporary world, wondering whether its failure to engage with the large majority of people under fifty today might perhaps have something to do with the perception (from its buildings, hymns etc.) that it belongs not to the world of Heathrow's terminal 5, or the Shard, but to the world of antimacassars and heavy dark-oak wardrobes. A similar distinction can be seen in the utterly different styles of Nuffield College and Wolfson College here in Oxford.

There is no need, however, to go to France to see an inspirational modern church building. The new chapel at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, is only 5 or 6 miles away. Its architect was Niall McLaughlan (2013), and it immediately received many prestigious architectural awards. The architect's brief was for a chapel "designed to touch the transcendent, moving believer and non-believer alike to wonder and awe", and judging from the reactions of believers and unbelievers I have taken there it has wonderfully succeeded in its aim. (It is open to visitors on weekdays, but first ring Vanda Wilkinson on 01865-877404.)

I am moved by these beautiful modern Christian buildings, as I am by the great cathedrals of the past. But then, as I contemplate the vast investment the Church has put into its buildings, I find myself musing on the words of Jesus to his disciples as they commented on the magnificence of the Temple ("Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings"); "Do you see these great buildings?" Jesus replied. "There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." (Mark 13:1-2)

Meanwhile, we live with the legacy Fr. Benson has left us. What (I wonder) would Fr. Couturier want to say to us? And Jesus?

*

A TREASURE IN OUR MIDST

By John Hammock

I think of retreats as something that one should do far away, in some quiet, secluded place, far from normal life. So, I was just blown away by my short but very restorative stay at the guesthouse of our very own, All Saints Sisters of the Poor—the home of the nuns dressed in blue that worship with us.

Why blown away? Well, I have walked by the Convent on Magdalen St. hundreds of times but I had no idea what to expect—except for the very friendly reception of the Sisters. So here is why. The space. The rooms are comfortable and quiet. The kitchen is modern, convenient and well stocked. And the gardens are magnificent. There are places to sit to reflect, pray or just watch the world go by—and yes in peace and quiet even in the middle of East Oxford.

But I think I was also surprised by how much I could actually get away. If you want to be in silence, no problem. There may be other guests, as there were when I was there, but they are either on retreat or very understanding of what you want. Of course, to really get away (as anywhere) you need to leave your computer and phone at home—though the phone reception and WIFI is excellent (if needed).

I was only at the Convent for 3 nights—a very restorative 3 nights. I joined the Sisters for two worship services in their simple yet stunning chapel during the stay and enjoyed a wonderful Sunday dinner with the Sisters with a lively conversation.

Many of us may not be aware that right down from our Church is a guest house oasis—open to all, as the Sisters' say, "individuals are welcome for short stays or as alongsiders." All one has to do is contact Sister Jane at guestsister@socallss.co.uk

Someone will no doubt ask—well, but how much does this oasis in our midst cost per night.

“Oh, if you wish, just leave a donation, please.”

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ECONOMIC FORECAST

By W.R.Hughes

When we've pulled down the Stock Exchange
To build a second St. Paul's,
England will never need again
Wooden or iron walls.

When men shall lead down Lombard Street
Mammon upon a chain,
The merry fields of England
Shall sing with corn again.

When all men marry poverty
There shall be no more poor,
But every table shall be full
And open every door.

GLEANINGS: A gathering of random thoughts from various sources

By John Purves

“One finds in the calm of truth-tried love joys that her stormy raptures never yield.”

Robert Southey

*

*“The future let us not permit
To choke us in its shadows clasp.
It cannot touch us, nor we it;
The present moment’s in our grasp.”*

William Allingham

*

*“Many sweating, ploughing and threshing
And the chaff for payment receiving,
A few, idly owning, and they the wheat
Continually claiming.”*

Walt Whitman, “Leaves of Grass”

*

“Our rendezvous is fitly appointed, God will be there and wait till we come.”

Walt Whitman

*

“Jesus, the true word, teach us to bring all scripture under your judgement.”

John Henson

*

“Old age should be a time of high civilisation and spirituality .”

Anon

*

“Compassion is more important than truth.”

Rabbi Jacky Mason

*

*“That best portion of a good man’s life
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.”*

W. Wordsworth. “Tintern Abbey”

*“Greed for ownership has taken such a hold on us that we seem to be
possessed by wealth rather than to possess it.”*

Pliny the Younger

*

“Suffering has its limits but apprehension has none.”

Pliny the Younger

*

*“Keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for that
shall bring a man peace at the last.”*

Psalms 37v38

A CONVERSATION WITH ALICE



For this month's edition, Alice Hicks very kindly agreed to share some thoughts. Alice initiated and runs the highly successful 'Mad Hatter Tea Parties' held on the second Tuesday of every month in the Richard Benson Hall. These are a friendly place where people who have experienced mental health issues in their lives can relax and enjoy a cuppa, cake and a chat together. Alice is closely involved in many other areas of mental health in Oxford.

We met in Costa on the Cowley Road one morning in late June, and during the conversation, Alice told me something about her perspective on faith. Alice was brought up mostly by her maternal grandmother, who was a Christian Scientist. Christian Science was developed in the nineteenth century by Mary Baker Eddy, who argued in her book 'Science and Health (1875)' that sickness is an illusion that can be corrected by prayer alone.' This book, along with the bible, are the central scriptures of this religion. Even as a child, Alice questioned this notion. If there is no disease, sin or death, why do we need Jesus?

Alice's paternal grandfather was an Anglo Catholic rector who had baptised her. Among his ancestors were Jansensists, a Catholic theological movement originating in France, which emphasised original sin, the necessity for divine grace and predestination.

Years later, Alice married in Headington Quarry Church, and had to be confirmed Anglican in order for this to happen. From this time onwards, Alice had a stronger connection with the Church of England, and spoke to me about her fondness for the ritual and the symbolism, and also her love of old churches (something which we share).

When Alice was in her forties she had a massive mental breakdown and was subsequently diagnosed as bipolar. We all have moods which fluctuate, but with bipolar the mood cycles from extremely happy to extremely depressed. At their extremes, these moods have what psychiatrists call 'psychotic ideation', which means that the person loses contact with the reality which most people experience. For Alice these mood swings happened about every six months, going from a high to low and then on to the level for a while. Most people with serious mental illness have experienced trauma of one form or another during their childhood, and Alice told me that she had a difficult time as a child.

Alice described to me how her illness took on a strongly religious nature and that during certain phases she felt connected to God and to Christ in an extremely powerful way. Her highs generally happened around Christmas and Easter time. A psychiatrist may label these phases as psychotic, but Alice made an extremely interesting point: who's to say it isn't real? Surely reality is how each individual perceives the world, and just because one person perceives the world differently from the majority, it doesn't necessarily mean that the majority are right, and the one person has a problem. Indeed, perhaps the problem with mental illness isn't so much the person with mental illness, but the way in which society treats mental illness. Apparently, the shamans of the African Dagara tribe see mental illness as the 'birth

of a healer', a spiritual crisis/ emergency arising when energies from the spiritual realm enter a person. The tribe helps the person to reconcile the energy of this world with the energy of the spiritual realm, and become the healer they are destined to be (this is an interesting site about the Dagara tribe: <http://malidoma.com/main/>)

Alice struggled for years with her bipolar condition, and although this condition at times could be inspirational, Alice told me how she learned to watch her moods very carefully and control them. She referred to this as 'keeping her eye on the ball'. This is necessary, because detachment from ordinary reality can also be problematic and dangerous in certain circumstances. Fortunately, over time, Alice has become much more stable and has been able to use her experiences to inform others by becoming a mental health researcher and trainer and activist for improvement in mental health services.

Alice told me how much she feels at home in the parish of Cowley St. John. We're all on a journey to God / adventure in faith, and there's a feeling in the parish that we are all free to explore our faith in our own way.

Alice's mental illness has informed her faith, and remains an important dimension of her faith. The lesson I took away from my conversation with her is that although mental illness raises many difficulties and challenges, to label it simply as a 'bad' thing, is to grossly underestimate a multicoloured and multifaceted dimension of human experience.

Many thanks to Alice for sharing her thoughts and feelings. If you want to be interviewed, let Daniel know!

A CONVERSATION WITH DARREN



Darren Dalton is studying to be a vicar at Ripon College Cuddesdon. He is currently on a placement in the parish of Cowley St. John as a part of his course, so I took the opportunity to catch up with him over a coffee and ask him about his life, faith and thoughts on church.

Darren is from an evangelical Anglican background, but is passionately against labelling, and the idea of ‘them and us’.

We are all God’s children, and are all worshipping God, so that’s all that should count in the end. Darren said he had come across many stereotypes of evangelicals. For example, some people assume that all evangelicals advocate the egg-analogy of the trinity. This suggests that the shell is like the father, the yolk like the son, and the white like the Holy Spirit, and has, to put it charitably, many critics. Some people also assume that evangelicals are anti LGBTIQ+ rights, which is simply not true. Division can be about people thinking they are better than others, and about making judgements. The wounds of division can only be healed by dialogue and by respect. Darren said he had a vision for the church as a place which was ‘catholic’ with a small ‘c’: a catholic (all-embracing) church.

The reason Darren wanted to do his placement in an Anglo-Catholic parish was precisely because he wanted to broaden his experience of church, and expose himself to a worship culture which he wasn’t used to. Throughout his studies, he has been doing this, for example by joining rosary groups and learning about Mary and the saints. Darren described to me how beautiful he found the Anglo-Catholic worship at Cowley St. John, though as a server, he also confessed to sometimes being worried about making the wrong moves! He said there is a certain comfort in having things happening

predictably though. In more evangelical forms of worship, there can sometimes be less predictability, such as when the music director decides to sing the same bridge thirty times because he is moved to do so on the spur of the moment.

When I asked Darren about how he became a Christian, he related to me his extraordinary conversion story. Fourteen years ago he hated church. He felt he was a good person so he didn't need any religion in his life thank-you very much. He thought religion was just a means to control people using the fear of hell and Satan. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, he happened to be living opposite a church in Weymouth, and regularly complained about all the noise.

One night he was about to go to sleep when he described to me a downpouring of peace. He felt his heart opening to this peace, and he heard the words 'Go Spread My Word, My Word is Love'. Darren's father suffers from schizophrenia, so his first concern was that it was running in the family and he was beginning to show symptoms. In all other aspects of his life his functioning was normal however. The words came back on two more occasions, so that in the end he couldn't ignore them. He crossed the road to the church which had annoyed him so much before, and told the vicar of his experience. She unfortunately was rushing to another service, so Darren told his story to Tony, a churchman who would become like an adopted grandfather to Darren. Darren only later related his story to the vicar and she recommended that he start coming to church, but not do anything else. In a way, this was difficult. Darren's message was 'Go Spread My Word, My Word is Love' and he was ready to get on a soapbox and shout this message to the world, though he didn't know what he would say exactly.

Nevertheless, Darren did as the vicar recommended. He began leading a children's group and found that talking to kids was a good place to start. Darren's community was rife with many problems, and he felt a deep love for this community, and a deep feeling of wanting to do something to help; to bring the love of God to the community. He

became a family and children's outreach visitor for the church, and liaised with social workers and doctors and other professionals in helping people. Despite a profound feeling of vocation, it would be ten years however before Darren began to study for ordained ministry. Darren said this was partly a feeling of 'I am not worthy'. He was also not used to formal study, though he did undertake a course in Christian Ethics at a local college in Weymouth and got a B grade.

As well as a father with schizophrenia, Darren's mother suffers from manic depression, which has been a great challenge, but Darren's faith has been central to him having the strength to deal with these challenges. When his first wife left him, despite the obvious potential feelings of anger and betrayal, Darren made sure he treated her with love and sympathy, and gave a good example to his children. He succeeded thanks to love and strength from God. Indeed, when they were divorced, the judge was amazed how amicably they were behaving towards each other. Usually such couples are ready to murder one another. Fortunately, sometime later, Darren would meet his current wife Steph at a New Wine Church where they were both worshipping.

Darren's vision for church is as a place which is about the community. It isn't about the altar, or the church, or the vicar, but about everyone being Christ's presence wherever they are, whether it be the coffee shop, the supermarket or the bus. The church essentially is our world. Everyone has their calling, and everyone contributes. The Church of England measures church attendance, but there is a danger of this being seen as a measure of a church's success, when the work of a parish stretches far beyond 'bums on seats'. Work in schools, colleges and community events, outreach work and online communications all play an important role in the mission of the church, and yet these sometimes fall outside the radar.

Many thanks to Darren for sharing! Darren will be a vicar in Bournemouth (lucky Bournemouth!), and we wish him all the best as he completes his studies and continues his work.

A CONVERSATION WITH DANNY



In the ‘Conversation / Interview’ series, everyone has been so generous in sharing their deepest thoughts and feelings. It has truly been an honour and a privilege. Given we have some spare pages in this issue, I thought it only right that I (the editor) should ‘take my own medicine’ so to speak, and write all about my life and faith.

My mother was brought up Roman Catholic in the village of De Horst in the south east of the Netherlands. Many people think that the Netherlands is a protestant country, but it should be remembered that

from 1581 to 1714 the south of the present-day country was controlled by the Spanish. This was called the “Spanish Netherlands” and was consequently deeply Roman Catholic (in the national anthem, the Dutch still pledge allegiance to the King of Spain!)

The patriarch of my mother’s family was my grandfather, a man called Johannes Cornelis Bernadus Bögels (JCB for short). He was born in 1908, and like most of his generation was devoutly Roman Catholic. A papal knight (the order of St. Sylvester) he was incredibly knowledgeable about liturgy and church doctrine. He was also an incredibly stubborn and opinionated man. If he said something was wrong: ‘dat is fout’, then it was wrong. That was that. End of conversation. If the increasingly modern priests in his parish did things he didn’t like, he would write endless letters to the bishop about it. I remember once a priest forgot to elevate the host for the consecration, and he described it as ‘schandalig’ (scandalous). Another preached on

saving whales, and didn't last long in the parish. Despite this, he generally behaved in quite a gentle manner towards me, but I do remember him forbidding me, with a raised finger, from doing any gardening on a Sunday. JCB and family lived near the German border, so the second world war was a particularly traumatic time for them. In those days, JCB was a headmaster of a local school, and prevented some Jewish children being deported by the Nazis. He also worked undercover for the Dutch resistance, which must have taken considerable courage (although when told he 'worked undercover' during the war, some people would cheekily reply: 'on which side?'). There are several cans of worms I will not open here.

JCB's sisters were both nuns. I remember as a child visiting Tante Jo (Aunt Jo). When I knew her, she was a frail old woman, though psychologically far from it. My parents told me and my brother rather dramatically that 'she's so frail a breath of wind could blow her away'. I remember on one visit, my brother standing behind her out of sight and blowing as hard as he could against her habit to test the hypothesis! Tante Toos (Aunt Toos), was rather less austere than Tante Jo, and I remember she was great fun with us children.



JCB's great uncle was a man called Ferdinandus Hubertus Hamer (photograph on the left and overleaf), who is a catholic martyr. Born in 1840 in Nijmegen, he was one of four missionary priests and a brother from the Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae who went to inner Mongolia in 1875. Three of his colleagues, among them the congregation's leader, Father Theophiel Verbist, died quickly, but Ferdinandus would become the first bishop to have responsibility for the apostolic vicariate of Gansu. In 1889, he was sent by the pope to the apostolic vicariate of Southwest-



Mongolia, where the Chinese noted his extraordinary helpfulness and devotion. In 1899, he was caught up in the anti-Christian Boxer rebellion and in July and August 1900 the Boxers reached the area where Bishop Hamer was working. The Boxers took him to jail on 19th July, and four days later they subjected him to beatings, mockery, questioning, and torture. That same day, 23rd July, he was killed; three sticks were put together into a tripod, and an iron hook was placed at the top. The bishop was stripped and wrapped in a cotton cloth, and dunked in oil. He was then hanged by his feet from the

hook with his head hanging down. The cloth was then set on fire. A loud scream was heard, and he died. As a child, I was told that he was shot with a gun while appealing for peace, my grandparents no doubt wanting to spare me the gory details.

My grandfather brought his children up very strictly, and they were ordered to attend church well into their teenage years. Years later, the children would invent a special form of monopoly called 'Bögelopoly' (the family name is Bögels). In the square in the conventional set where the jail is located, was a picture of a priest saying, 'Go to Church!' As a teenager, my uncle (the youngest of eight children) was ordered to go to church just like the rest, and departed obediently from home, only to smoke cigarettes behind the church building. The priest apparently was in on it, gave my uncle a wink, and didn't betray him to JCB. When my aunt, and also my mother, married protestants (my Anglican father counted as a protestant), JCB was not amused, and neither were Tante Jo or Tante Toos. It's strange to think of it these days, but back then in the 1960s it was a big deal. It's also strange how quickly the Netherlands has changed. Tante Jo's convent is now a car show room. Where the old women once knelt in prayer, fresh BMWs now gleam. There are many beautiful Roman Catholic churches

in the south east of the Netherlands, but it is no exaggeration to say that the faith is dying out. Single and usually elderly priests have to manage two, three, sometimes four gigantic churches, and congregations are forced to have services without a mass or a priest, where pre-consecrated hosts are distributed by lay eucharistic ministers. It is rather sad somehow...

Unsurprisingly, all of JCB's children rebelled and lapsed from the Roman Catholic faith, my mother included. My father was a middle of the road C of E, so when my parents married, the wedding was an ecumenical service designed to appease JCB and also keep my paternal grandparents happy. I think the officiating priest must have been carefully briefed about what not to do! My parents didn't have my brother or I baptised, wanting us instead to make our own minds up when we were older. JCB did not approve, and sent my parents a long letter detailing all the graces we would be missing out on (my parents suspected he covertly baptised us when we were on holiday there one summer). I am deeply grateful to my parents for being rebellious hippies, because I did grow up free from any detrimental religious indoctrination (I was however allowed to start drinking Newcastle Brown ale at age four, but that's another story).

Though my mother rebelled against Roman Catholicism, she was always a profoundly spiritual person, and instilled a fundamental morality in my brother and I from an early age. She could be incredibly irreverent, regularly swearing: 'four-letter-word-the-pope' with an obscene gesture. On paper this sounds awful, but it was done so innocently, it was just a part of her rebellious charm. Despite all this, she eventually began to attend a local Roman Catholic church in Oxford and joined the choir. My father followed, and I enjoyed singing and so followed him. My niece was baptised Roman Catholic, and wishing to be her godfather, I was then received into the church. There were many wonderful things about the Roman Catholic faith, but as my years advanced, certain things began to annoy me. As someone who identifies as 'gay', I found the Roman Catholic attitude to same-sex relationships

crazy. I've been blessed with highly supportive family and friends, so for me it really isn't an issue. Generally speaking, I think that sexual orientation is about as worthy of discussion as eye colour, height, or ingrowing toenails. There are plenty of more important things to discuss, such as third world famine. The problem is that conservative institutions such as the Roman Catholic church have made it into an issue. I remember one priest, a highly respected man in other areas, actually saying in a sermon that homosexuality and abortion were the "twin demons of the modern world". I found myself reaching for a hymn book to hurl. Instead of making a scene, I moved to St. Mary & St. John Church.

As a trained biologist, it is obvious to me that life should be full of variation, because our evolution by natural selection is a highly complex process. For the Roman Catholic church to ignore all this, and insist upon such a narrow view of gender and sexuality based on what I feel is a culturally and historically illiterate interpretation of scripture, seems mind-bogglingly short sighted to me. Indeed, when people ask me if I'm a lapsed catholic, I reply that it is the church which has lapsed away from me and not vice versa, and I truly mean it! Divine revelation for me includes not only a circumspect interpretation of religious scriptures, but also scientific discovery and human experience. These all cast light on our world and our place in it, and could be called 'truth'. I am also acutely aware that one should always talk openly about injustice and protest, because there are many people, especially vulnerable teenagers, who are in the psychological grip of destructive doctrines, and need to know they are not alone: a glance at the suicide statistics for gay teenagers is very sobering indeed. Some people tell me I should concentrate on the good in the Roman Catholic church, which I do try to do. The problem is, if you have a lovely friend who takes you out to dinner, buys you presents and gives you hugs, and then periodically slashes you across the face with a broken wine bottle, you tend to remember the latter gesture!

I would never say 'I believe in God,' because I don't know what this means. Who is 'God'? As far as I can see, 'God' is often assumed to have a human consciousness, and often turns into a projection of all that is deplorable in humanity, or becomes an authoritarian parental figure rather like JCB. Why should a universal force have what a tiny primate species on a speck of a planet among billions of others deigns to call 'consciousness'? I also don't know why belief is important. Surely acting with love and kindness is what is important? As the Dalai Lama says 'the only religion is kindness'. The teachings of Jesus are beautiful and wonderful, but is the person of Jesus particularly important either? He is called 'son of God' but what does this mean? 'Son' is a human relationship. Some rather more eccentric historians have even suggested that Jesus didn't exist at all, but was an invention of the Roman aristocracy to keep the masses quiet. Though the theory is not respectable, I actually don't think it would matter if Jesus hadn't existed. His words and teachings would still be powerful and important, whatever their origin, and for me that's what Jesus is about.

I remember watching my mother dying. Pneumonia is supposedly a nice death (old man's friend), but it wasn't nice to watch. She had extreme unction from a wonderful priest, and the respirator was finally turned off. For a moment, she looked out into the room, and in her eyes there was a look of amazement and joy. I genuinely think angelic beings had come to collect her. For a moment something completely indescribable happened, as if a door on another world was opened, and after all the stress and trauma of the night, I suddenly had a sense of unimaginable love and comfort. I don't know what happened, but somehow the experience has helped me. I do Reiki, a Japanese healing practice involving laying hands on people and channelling Qi (healing) energy. Often it also involves awareness of spirits and psychic phenomena. This has also given me a powerful sense that the universe is an amazing and very good place, but I think we sometimes think too much. We're not meant to constantly peek behind the scenes. We're meant to sit back and enjoy the show. Problems arise in religion when people are unable to tolerate uncertainty and unanswered questions, and

try to ‘f’ the ineffable. The ineffable isn’t meant to be ‘f-ed’ and I’m sure we couldn’t ‘f’ it even if we tried. Going down the path of defining ‘God’ too closely, is a little too much ‘f-ing’ for my liking.

I spent a few years away from church, and often spent a large chunk of my Sundays visiting a friend who was dying of motor neurone disease. We drank wine, ate takeaway and watched Game of Thrones together. When he died, my Sundays suddenly became completely desolate. I watched Big Questions on the telly on a Sunday morning, but strangely enough Nicky Campbell couldn’t fill the gap. It was then that I decided that I needed to go back to church. Cowley St. John Parish is a special place because there is space for people with a range of different perspectives. There is a mainstream orthodox theology for those who want it, but wacky people like me aren’t ‘smoked out’ so to speak.

I think religion is too tribal. True spirituality cannot be labelled but is everywhere and in everything. Church, with its myths and rituals, which articulate so well the ‘spiritual’ (whatever this means), is a place in my view not to be shackled by teachings or prescribed beliefs which aren’t useful, (or by petty obsessions over whether the vicar has breasts or not). It is a place to be welcomed and loved unconditionally. There are very few places in our world where this happens, and in my opinion the Parish of Cowley St. John is a paragon of this kind of welcome. Indeed, I am deeply grateful to the Parish for providing me with a place which I have been able to call a spiritual home.

Books which have inspired me:

- *The Bible*
- *‘Treasures Beneath the Hearth: Myth, Gospel and Spirituality Today’ by Edward Walker*
- *‘Religion for Atheists’ by Alain de Botton*
- *‘The God Delusion’ by Richard Dawkins.*

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PRAYER CALENDAR: August 2017

Daily Collect for use during August: *Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee. Amen*
(Book of Common Prayer, Trinity X)

Tue 1	Lammas Day. Pray for coming harvests.
Wed 2	The environment, the Soil Association and similar charities
Thur 3	Our Churchyard and those who care for it
Fri 4	Our Allotments, especially Bartlemas, East Ward and Elder Stubbs
Sat 5	Rivers and water authorities
Sun 6	Trinity VIII The Transfiguration
Mon 7	John Mason Neale. Priest, hymn writer 1866
Tue 8	Our Prisons, prisoners and prison chaplains
Wed 9	Church music, choirs and musicians
Thur 10	St. Lawrence, Martyr 258 AD
Fri 11	St. Clare of Assisi, founder of the Poor Clares, 1253
Sat 12	John Henry Newman, Priest, Tractarian. 1890
Sun 13	Trinity IX
Mon 14	Parents and Grand-parents
Tue 15	Children, especially summer schools
Wed 16	Those on holiday
Thur 17	Those unable to take a holiday

Fri 18	The elderly and infirm
Sat 19	Elder Stubbs Festival
Sun 20	Trinity X
Mon 21	Richard Benson Hall and its use
Tues 22	“The Place to Be” project
Wed 23	St. John’s Home
Thur 24	St. Bartholomew. For Bartlemas Patronal Festival
Fri 25	The “Porch Steppin-Stones” project and the homeless
Sat 26	Helen and Douglas House
Sun 27	Trinity XI
Mon 28	St. Augustine of Hippo 430 AD
Tues 29	‘Restore’ mental health charity.
Wed 30	John Bunyan spiritual writer 1688
Thur 31	Aidan Bishop of Lindisfarne 651 AD
Fri 1	St. Giles, Abbot, 710 and the forthcoming St. Giles Fair in Oxford
Sat 2	Those suffering from skin diseases

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NOTICES

- ***Hospital Chaplaincy Open Afternoon***

There is a 'Getting to Know You' opportunity coming up for local community leaders, representatives of faith groups, and those people interested in exploring volunteer roles with the chaplaincy.

If this could be you, the Hospital Chaplaincy Team warmly invite you to an Open Afternoon on Wednesday 23rd August 2017 from 4-6pm in the



League of Friends
Café, Level 2
(main entrance
level of the main
John Radcliffe
Hospital building.

- ***Mindfulness Course: an 8/9 Week Course in Headington***

Course leaders: Revd. Tim Stead and Susie Stead. Monday evenings and one Saturday morning. January – March 2018

For further details and an application form, please see Holy Trinity Headington Quarry's website: www.hthq.org.uk/mindfulness Or contact: felicity.hthq@gmail.com

- ***Ride and Stride: for Churches, 9th September 2017***

Over 500 chapels and churches in Oxfordshire will be open, including our three churches.

!!! PEOPLE ARE NEEDED TO HELP WELCOME RIDERS AND STRIDES. SEE VERONA IF INTERESTED !!!

www.rideandstrideuk.org

THE FRONT COVER

On the front cover is a photograph of Howard receiving a Certificate of Honour for a lifetime spent doing voluntary work for The Archway Foundation. (See the article on page 10, <http://archway.moonfruit.com/>)

NEXT ISSUE

Many thanks to all who contributed to and all who read this issue. Many thanks also for the work of the Parish Office, who are responsible for the effective printing and distribution of the magazine. It is to them we owe thanks for the high quality booklet we see before us every first Sunday of the month!

The deadline for the next issue is ***Sunday 27th August, Midnight***. The deadline for submissions is always midnight on the last Sunday of the Month, and publication on the first Sunday of the month. The Magazine runs twelve months a year. Electronic submissions are to me (the editor), Daniel Emlyn-Jones, daniel_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk (underscore between 'daniel' and 'ejnew'). I'm in Singapore until August 30th, and so can't check the pigeon hole again until Sunday 3rd September. However, if you have a handwritten submission you're longing to see published in the September edition, and you don't want to have to deal with computers, find a friendly person with a smartphone with a camera. They can photograph your submission and email it to me in a jiffy!

Soft copies of the Parish Magazine can be found at:

<http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/parish-magazine>

If you wish to subscribe to the magazine for a year (12 monthly editions), with the option of receiving it through the post, please fill in the form on the next page, cut it off with scissors and hand in.

COWLEY ST JOHN PARISH MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION FORM

I would like to subscribe to the Cowley St John Parish Magazine for one year.

For £6.00 / £13.00 incl. post and packaging
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Please write cheques to Cowley St. John PCC, or give cash in person to Phil Ritchie or Rosy Hancock. Cheques can be sent to: The Vicarage, 271 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 2AJ.