



COWLEY ST JOHN  
TWO CHURCHES  
ONE COMMUNITY

# COWLEY ST JOHN PARISH MAGAZINE

£1

*November 2017*



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**Websites for Cowley St. John Parish:**

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

**Church Street Addresses:**

- **St. Mary & St. John Church**, Cowley Road, OX4 1UR
- **St Alban the Martyr**, Charles Street, Oxford, OX4 3AH
- **Bartlemas Chapel**, Cowley Road, Oxford, (turn down the lane next to the vicarage at 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ, and you will reach the chapel at the heart of Bartlemas Village).

**Parish Postal Address (Vicarage):** 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ

## REGULAR SERVICES

### Sunday:

- **8:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **9:30am** 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 Friday:

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

### Wednesday:

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

### Thursday:

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

### Friday:

- **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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.cowleystjohn.co.uk) or visit the church.*

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# THE REIGN OF GOD

**By Fr. Phil**

The period from Pentecost to Advent Sunday can feel like an awful lot of Green Sundays as if Ordinary Time goes on forever! The reality is that this season of the Church's year, like all good narratives, is textured; It has dramatic points of change and challenge as well as periods of 'everydayness'. Ordinary Time ends with a celebration of the reign of Christ in earth and in heaven which stretches from All Saints Day to the feast of Christ the King. In the past people have made the mistake of thinking that 'The Church' and 'The Reign of God' are one and the same thing, as if our only task is to make everyone join the Church where God's Kingdom is already present!

Thankfully, more recently there has been a re-emphasis of the *distinction* between the Kingdom of God and the Church, the idea that the church is not the kingdom, but is at the service of the kingdom. It seems obvious but Christians clearly recognise the action of the Spirit outside the Church. Increasingly Christians are seeing that God's Kingdom exists wherever Gospel values are lived: The Reign of God is a universal reality which extends far beyond the bounds of the Church. The Church is the sacrament and sign of the Reign of God in the world and we celebrate the joy and peace of that Kingdom wherever we find it.

So in this season we re-commit ourselves to the Church as the sign of God's coming Kingdom and seek to live that truth in all our relationships.

May you have a happy and blessed 'Kingdom season' celebrating the signs of the reign of God wherever you find them.

# TRUTH, LOVE, FREEDOM AND THE HOLY CROSS

**By Gabriele Hock**

The other day I found myself in a spontaneous and unexpected dialogue with an elderly friend of mine. Intending to be well meaning I asked her: "And how is your relationship to your God these days?" The reply was immediate and effortless, flowing out of her like a bubbling spring - so much so that I couldn't help scribbling it down:

*My relationship to God is loving energy. This loving energy is split into three: Truth, Love and Freedom. All three are inseparable. All three have to be combined. If you have Truth without Love it can turn into Licence. Love and Freedom without Truth is not a good idea, it has often something dishonest about it. Truth without Freedom is puritanical. Freedom and Truth without Love turns into Egoism.*

*Nowadays society as a whole is suffering from a loss of community that the churches used to give. There are now so many strange temptations that take people away. We live in an age of individualism which has turned us into an egomaniac society where you can do and say what you like however much it hurts, without any sense of caring for other people. In a way this would not have been allowed in a close-knit community like the church. And this is our current problem: Freedom without Love. The community was a place that gave you a sense of parameter based on Responsibility and Love. But now we are run by the 'clever, clever, clever'.*

*I like the symbol of the cross: it has two arms, one vertical and one horizontal. The horizontal stretches out without end and is measurable. It is science, building work, the phenomenological world. The vertical*

*line relates to the three immeasurables: Truth, Love and Freedom which is God. The vertical and the horizontal line cross at the point comparable with the mathematical concept of zero. And it is from that point of intersection that human creativity springs. Human creativity at its highest we can see in the great masters like Mozart or a VanGogh.*

*The horizontal stuff is threatening to take over now. It has to have Truth in it or Love and Freedom will be endangered, as they are.*

At this point in the conversation I share with Deborah how I have an equal love of the cross, not just as a Christian but as a universal symbol of wholeness and unity. I find it a useful exercise for example to cross myself while praying, not just at the beginning and the end but continuously. Saying a prayer in this way, gives the Our Father for example a complete new meaning depending on which part of your body you tap while saying a particular word or line. I also vary the speed when I find I'm going into autopilot or my mind drifts off (as it invariably does). When I'm in a public place like a train station or on the bus, I might repeat a prayer word while crossing myself in my imagination. It works just as well.

In the field of neuroscience, there are many studies nowadays that show that tapping the body while saying a prayer, a positive word or loving affirmation is effective in reprogramming our lopsided brains. Certain therapies for PTSD and trauma recovery for example swear by bi-lateral stimulation as an integral part of their healing methods. But it is also something that can be used on a daily basis for simple re-attunement and mental hygiene. So I was thinking, why stay on the horizontal when we can make the job more complete? And so indeed: in Catholicism prayer is tapped into the body, made flesh so to speak, by way of tapping, notably first into the forehead and the belly on the vertical and then into the left and right shoulders on the horizontal. That way all the four directions are covered, including heaven and earth with the zero point (Christ) in the centre of the human heart. I love its

symbolism and deeply feel that if all of this doesn't qualify for sacred science, I don't know what does. I could go on, but coming back to Deborah's inspired words which sparked off these reflections in the first place.....I am not sure now how we got from Truth, Love, Freedom and God to the holy cross, but if crossing myself brings me into greater harmony and balance with myself, it must be a good thing.

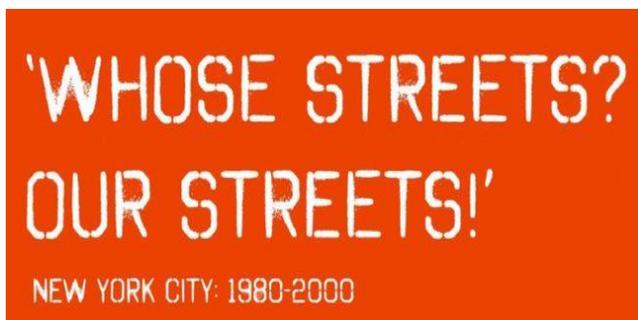
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## WHOSE FATHER? OUR FATHER!

By Kuriakose L

*"We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable."* (Step One, Alcoholics Anonymous, emphasis added)

*"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:1-2, RSV)



During the heady days of student unrest in London during the government's higher education reforms back in 2010-2011, I participated in a

string of protests against the hiking of tuition fees and various other policies we activists deemed unjust. One of the chants that often rang out during the street demonstrations, especially when automobile traffic

or police got into our way, was a classic call-and-response. One person, often armed with a loud-hailer, would shout, “Whose streets?” The rest of us would chime in resoundingly, “Our streets!”

I was reminded of this protest chant during my ongoing “recovery road trip” around the United States. I have attended a few 12-step meetings which, as per tradition, finished with us participants gathering in a circle, holding hands, and praying the Our Father a.k.a. the Lord’s Prayer together. In the meetings I’d attended back in England, the person leading us would always begin, as a minister would do in a church, by just saying the first two words of the prayer, with the rest of us joining in for the remainder. In the USA, however, I have encountered a wonderful variation. The person given the task of closing us out would exclaim, “Whose Father?”, to which the whole room would answer in one voice, “Our Father! Who art in heaven...”

In a short piece in a collection of essays on the Twelve Steps from a Christian perspective, Dale and Juanita Ryan state that, “The first word of Step One implies that healing takes place in community, not in isolation” (*Recovering Faith: Words from the Way*, ed. Kelly Hall, p. 10). It is apt, then, that the final prayer in a Twelve-Step meeting is often one emphasising this corporate aspect of recovery. Some 12-step groups which are less comfortable with the Our Father due to a plurality of religious and spiritual views represented among their number choose to use for this concluding part of the meeting the Serenity Prayer “in the ‘we’ form”:

*God, grant us the serenity,*

*To accept the things we cannot change,*

*The courage to change the things we can,*

*And the wisdom to know the difference.*

This prayer would have already been said in the more famous “I’ form” at the beginning of the meeting, but praying it in both forms underscores the fact that recovery has both personal and collective dimensions. We cannot make it on our own, but neither can we simply rely on others without taking a certain degree of responsibility for our own spiritual journey beyond our addictions into what the Big Book of AA calls “the sunlight of the Spirit.”

My personal experience has made me convinced that without the community of recovery, I am a lost loner; and yet, without my daily decision to surrender my life to the care of God, all the goodwill, wisdom, strength and hope of those around me cannot penetrate my shell of self-will and self-obsession. In other words, I am nothing without the we; but the we is nothing if I am simply stuck in I. The God that calls me out of my place of darkness places me in fellowship with others, and it is only in life together with them that I am able to hear His voice and walk in the path He has laid out for me and for many. For this reason, when I hear the call, “Whose Father?”, I cannot but join in the company of voices crying out in response, “Our Father!”

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## **A CONVERSATION WITH BOB**

This month, Bob Morris very kindly agreed to share some of his thoughts and experiences. I met him one morning in late October over coffee in his Cricket Road house, a house he was born in on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1934. Bob attended St. Mary & St. John church from the 1940s, attended Sunday School in Temple Cowley, and went to St. Mary & St. John School. Bob’s late wife Geraldine was Roman Catholic, so once they were married, he attended Roman Catholic mass with her. Their daughter Elizabeth wasn’t so keen on the Roman Catholic mass, because in those days it was in Latin, so Bob and his family eventually

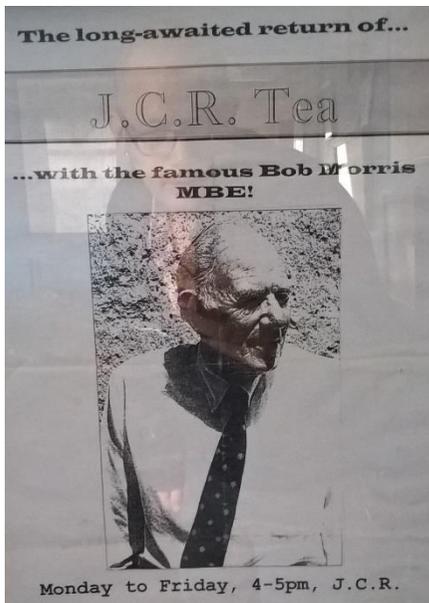


*Bob on a family holiday with his late wife Geraldine and her nephew*

decided to come back to St. Mary & St. John Church. As a Roman Catholic, Geraldine could take communion without any problem in St. Mary & St. John Church, but one day Father Michael Brotherton, the vicar back in the 1970s, asked Bob why he didn't take communion. He had been baptised as a child but never confirmed, so he was duly confirmed. Bob told me that the biggest change he's seen over the years has been the falling congregation numbers. In the 1940s the church was completely packed.

Bob's father was a local milkman, and once he'd left school, Bob started out working with him in a dairy in Cowley. His father was particularly busy during the war because he was also an air raid warden. Oxford wasn't bombed particularly badly, but Bob told me how each house was provided with a big iron table in the front room. In the event of bombing, they were all told to hide under the table. Evacuees from London were also staying in East Oxford and attending St. Mary & St. John School.

Bob's brother worked as a buttery boy at University College, and when he was seconded to the RAF, Bob was asked by the then master, Revd. J.H.S. Wild, if he wanted to work there. He said yes. He was initially there on probation for six months, but ended up staying for 58 years! In 1999 Bob was awarded an MBE for this long and devoted service to the college. The Junior Common Room was also named the 'Robert Morris Room' in honour of him. As buttery boy, his first job in the morning in the late 1940s was to go around the college staircases banging with a mallet to wake the students up. This tradition was eventually done away with. Apparently, according to college fellow Giles Alington, the problem wasn't the rude awakening from the mallet banging, but the fact that Bob was always whistling the same tune while he was doing it! As well as getting the students up, another of Bob's roles was to check that they were in their beds. If not, then he had to put in a chit at the Dean's office (he also had to put in a chit at the Dean's office if he found a student in bed with a woman!).



Bob, with the three others in the buttery team, had to lay the tables for breakfast and wash up afterwards. They then had to polish the cutlery, all solid silver. They had to do the same for lunch and for dinner. They had a few breaks during the day, but finished at 8:00pm most days. This was seven days a week with a half day on Saturday. Despite these long days, Bob still found time to play on the college servant's rowing team and he also played cricket. Back then, they worked hard and they played hard.

Bob has met plenty of famous people during his time at the college. He saw Sir Winston Churchill, and when Clement Attlee came to college on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1956, for the conferment of the honorary freedom of the City of Oxford, Bob met him and served him drinks. Bob was there when the student Bob Hawke (who would later become the Prime Minister of Australia from 1983-1991), famously won a traditional drinking competition known as sconcing. Hawke set a college record that evening for his ability to take his ale.

Bob also helped to look after President Bill Clinton when he visited University College. Although Bob has seen many things, and has on occasion been pursued by the press for information about famous people, he always refuses to break confidentiality. 'I will take my secrets to the grave' he told me.

In addition to the many visitors to the college, Bob has also met the college ghost. One evening there was a particularly late dinner and Bob was working in the college at 11pm. They had locked up the cellar, and then heard loud footsteps on the cellar steps. It was impossible that anyone could have been there...

In the 1950s, Bob got to know Geraldine, a lady who worked for the TUC and was visiting the college. They got on well, but for many years he assumed she was married. With an Indian mother, Bob described her as his 'Indian Princess'. Eventually, after some discussions with Geraldine's best friend, he asked her out, and in 1966 they were married. Geraldine was passionate about the East Oxford community, and about St. Mary & St. John's School, which both Bob and their daughter Elizabeth had attended. Sadly, Geraldine passed away in 1983. The engravings in the doors at the back of St. Mary & St. John church are dedicated to Geraldine. Two candlesticks are also dedicated to her.

Many thanks to Bob for sharing!



*The patterns on the glass doors at the back of the church are in memory of Geraldine Morris. They were designed by Margaret Cullen, who is photographed with them (see also the brass plaque behind the font).*

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## THE CHURCH ATTENDANCE CRISIS

**By Martin Coombs**

In the September edition of the Parish magazine our editor ended an excellent article (Beyond Bums on Pews) with the words, ‘Do you have thoughts on Britain’s church attendance ‘Crisis’? Don’t be shy! Write an article!’ Here is mine!

The desertion of the church by many in recent years is very sad, but this is sending out a clear message about the way it operates. Writing in the Catholic journal ‘The Tablet’ recently, Olivier Roy (a

French protestant academic) says there is now, especially in Catholicism, a current disconnect between religion and the dominant Western culture. The new Pope arrived and said, ‘our universal vocation is to love... our vocation is not about rules.’ He said very clearly that ‘imposing norms does not work.’ But Olivier Roy does not see faith as fading away. ‘Religion,’ he says, ‘will not disappear. I think religions will either ‘sanctuarise’ like a sect, or ‘respiritualise’.

I remember as a curate seeing a regular member of our South London congregation in her place of choice near the front of the church; but she never came forward to receive communion. I asked the vicar about this – perhaps she was not confirmed? He told me she had married a divorced man and so was not, in our church, allowed to receive communion. I was very shocked by this, but the vicar was adamant. Thank God that views about the divorced in church have changed, but there are still battles to be won over other matters. Many of the people who have stepped out of the church do not see it as a loving body, but as one which imposes on us norms and ideas, to be maintained at all costs.

A book I am reading at the moment – *Twilight of the Money Gods*, by John Rapley – has a subtitle, ‘Economics as a Religion and How it all went wrong.’ He sees the decline of the institutional church as the result of changes over the centuries: the Reformation which gave new authorities and new powers to society at large; the dissolution of church courts; the rise of nationalism; overseas explorations which opened up new avenues for trade in the wider world and new scientific explorations. The nation states provided new services: the police, schools, hospitals and members of parliament. “People were not necessarily less religious,” John Rapley writes, “but the nation state was a wholly different god from that of the Bible. It was one that men themselves created and controlled.”

The story that John Rapley has to tell is both historical but deeply relevant to today’s world. In our day, everyone, in the cities and

the countryside, is talking economics. But the money gods, he says, have fallen. Now economists must find “practical solutions to the problems that the public square has asked them to solve.”

Has the acquisition of money taken the place of God in our lives? This (among others) is a big and difficult question which the churches need to debate and discuss urgently. Thank-you, Danny, for starting it for us.

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## **PRACTICAL ACTION**

**By Edward Walker**

You may have heard a few weeks ago one Sunday morning Simon Reeves’ appeal for the charity ‘Practical Action’. The inspiration for the charity was the German-born Fritz Schumacher, of “Small is Beautiful” fame. He was a Rhodes Scholar here in Oxford in the 1930s, and when war was declared decided to stay in Britain. Being German, he was immediately interned, and spent some time in an internment camp in the Isle of Man. Influential friends managed to get him released, and he came back to England to work as a farm labourer. After the war he worked as a senior economist at the National Coal Board, before being invited to Burma to study its problems. “Small is Beautiful” was a result of that visit, and it was then that he came up with the idea of “Intermediate Technology”, simple, low-cost ways of meeting developing countries’ needs.

So Practical Action was born. Examples of the kind of projects it undertakes are:

- Working with communities to develop renewable energy, using natural resources such as water, wind, sun and waste.

- Working with communities to get clean water for drinking, washing, cooking and agriculture.
- Reducing vulnerability to disasters. Rather than emergency relief after the event, Practical Action works with communities to help them prepare for, cope with and adapt to future hazards.

In their latest report Practical Action describes a scheme it has developed for mountainous places like Nepal using ropeways and the force of gravity to take heavy weights up and down, saving back-breaking human labour. It also reports on the building of plinths to raise houses above flood levels, a massive help to flood-prone places like Bangladesh.

The emphasis in all their projects is the use of simple, low-cost technology to enable communities to help themselves.

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## A CONVERSATION WITH BRIDGET



It was during the November floods in Oxford in 2012 that Bridget's husband Mike fell into the river. Fortunately, he was rescued, and wished to give thanks to God that he didn't drown. Bridget and Mike

therefore went along to St. Mary & St. John Church one Sunday. They liked it, continued attending, and in 2013 at the age of 71, Mike was baptised and confirmed into the Anglican Church by the Bishop of Oxford.

Bridget was brought up in the Church of England, but never felt comfortable with certain aspects of the faith, such as the doctrine of original sin. Every child is valuable, and the idea that non-Christian children are somehow excluded in some lesser spiritual hierarchy never sat well with her. She met Mike at Liverpool University where he was studying Philosophy, and it was at about this time they both started attending Quaker meetings. She and Mike liked the Quakers for their liberalism, and their commitment to social justice. Consequently, they brought up their children as Quakers, letting them make their own mind up about religious belief. In returning to Anglican worship at St. Mary & St. John Church, Bridget told me how much she likes the structure of the service, and the ritual, which is a poignant contrast to Quaker worship. She also very much likes the liberal ethos at St. Mary & St. John Church.

In 2011, Bridget's husband Mike was diagnosed with dementia. Bridget told me about some of the challenges people with dementia and their families face. People often feel a lot of pity when someone they know is affected by dementia. They want to help, but they can't, and they often don't know what to say or do. This is understandable, but it can leave the people affected feeling quite lonely and isolated. This was a part of the inspiration for the successful dementia lunches 'A Place to Be', which takes place every fourth Tuesday of the month in the Richard Benson Hall 12-2pm. These lunches are an opportunity for people affected by dementia to get together and make friends with people on similar journeys. It can be difficult just going out for a meal when you are affected by dementia, but at the dementia lunch you don't have to explain or apologise. You can just relax and enjoy a lunch together without feeling ashamed, frightened or embarrassed. You can

also share information and experiences and sometimes have a giggle and a laugh.

Many thanks to Bridget for sharing, and why not come along to a dementia lunch ('a place to be')! (see page 5 for details).

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## **A VISIT TO JORDAN**

**By Hilary Caldicott**

The inspiration for a trip to Jordan came from a conversation with Trevor Mostyn, an Oxford-based academic and writer who teaches courses on Islam in the modern world for the Oxford University Dept. of Continuing Education. Trevor lived in the Middle East for many years and is fluent in Arabic. He recommended Jordan as a peaceful and welcoming country, an oasis in a conflict-ridden area (its borders are with Iraq, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and it has accepted many refugees in recent years, including Iraqi Christians).

Trevor's theories about the underlying reasons for Jordan's stability also shed light on the mixed fortunes of other Islamic countries affected by the Arab Spring of 2011. First, countries rich in oil, which Jordan is not, tend to be inherently conflict-ridden and a target for other states. Second, Trevor believes that Islamic monarchies have generally done better than republics, partly because dynasties tend to be reasonably stable but also because they have tended to encourage a more open relationship with the world's press. The popular Hashemite royal family of Jordan are largely British-educated and very happy to give interviews to magazines like Hello; at least we know what's going on in their palaces, unlike many presidential homes.

So off we went for an action-packed week at the start of October. Tourist numbers have dropped dramatically throughout the Middle East since 2011, and many wonderful historical sites, such as Petra and Jerash, remain relatively empty. The country is worth visiting for the warmth and hospitality of its people alone, but there is also much of particular interest to Christians. Bethany Beyond the Jordan claims to be the site of the baptism of Christ, and is a desert oasis full of churches; the Jordan itself, in a country chronically short of water, can hardly be described as a river, but there is a border point at which it widens into a pool, where pastors leading groups on the Israeli side could be seen enthusiastically encouraging whole-body immersion (we just soaked our feet). Standing on Mount Nebo, where Moses is said to have been granted a view of the Promised Land, and looking out over the shimmering Dead Sea to Jericho on the West Bank, I felt transported back in time. This area is rich in mosaics, including one in a church in Madaba which purports to be the oldest map of the Holy Land; I was baffled by it until I realised that East was at the top rather than North.

Jordan is surprisingly liberal in some sexual matters; homosexuality is legal, although civil partnerships and same-sex marriages are not. Jordanian men are extraordinarily affectionate with each other in public, even when having rows; the handshaking, backslapping and kissing seem to go on for ever, although women are expected to keep their hands to themselves, and dress modestly, although there is no requirement to cover your head. Some aspects of the culture remain firmly patriarchal but many prominent women, including members of the royal family, are speaking out against so-called “honour killings”, better described as murder.

The country is working hard to maintain good relations with its neighbours, particularly Israel, and to continue to welcome refugees despite the pressures they bring. We came home resolutely pro-Jordan and would encourage others to visit; it’s a wonderful place.

## REPORT FROM THE CHURCHYARD

We held a bulb-planting day on the 30th of September and we've continued to plant daffodils, grape hyacinths, crocuses and more, every Wednesday since then. The team is growing: one week we had eleven people helping – planting, cutting back climbers, digging out leaf mould, mulching the flower beds in the front of the church, raking leaves, and tidying the butterfly garden and the Garden of Remembrance and Thanksgiving. Three of the team attended a 'Churchyards and Spirituality' Away Day workshop in Charlbury which gave us many useful ideas, some of which are described as follows:

### **Away Day: Churchyards and Spirituality**

Daphne Jefferies, Janet McCrae and Ruth Waddle recently attended a workshop on Churchyards and Spirituality held at St Mary's Charlbury. A range of ideas about ways in which churchyards represent opportunities for the community were discussed. A book entitled 'The Nature of God's Acre' led us to consider the churchyard as a combination of natural history, including the varieties of trees and other vegetation, and historical record, with information about the community preserved in the grave headstones. Churchyards evoke personal memories as well as those of the community past and present, and a sense of the continuum of life and death. One church decided to ask people how they felt walking through their churchyard, and produced a graphic diagram showing the numbers of people who had experienced particular feelings. Their responses included feelings of peacefulness, connectedness, timeless safety, beauty, sadness, nature, history, reverence, memories, meditateness and fearfulness.

I wonder what we might find if we asked some of the hundreds of people who pass through our churchyard at Saint Mary and Saint John on their way to and from the Cowley Road? Or perhaps if we asked children from nearby schools? The churchyard may be the nearest many people will get to the church building itself. Perhaps a churchyard

can provide a connectedness as yet untapped. Can God speak to us through the beauty of nature?

The churchyard transports a fragment of countryside into our built-up concrete and tarmac city, bringing a reminder of God's creation a little nearer to hand. Jeremiah could see God's hand in nature: '*It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens* (Jer 10, 12). To grasp a little of what he means one has only to gaze up at the immensity of our solar system, or peer down at the detailed structure of a flower, in wonder and humility at the evolution of such beauty and complexity.

Dr Sally Welch, Vicar at St Mary Charlbury and author of '*Outdoor Church*', emphasised how 'understanding nature can help us find God'. She likened the churchyard to a more accessible area around the church building – less restrictive, less overpowering, less threatening for people who may be unfamiliar with church practices and be apprehensive of entering the church building itself. She described how she found ways of involving young children and their parents in activities in the churchyard, pointing out some of the barriers at a practical level for parents, if not for children – for example getting wet and cold, stung by nettles, pricked by thorns, muddy, or even lost. In SMJ churchyard there may be other concerns of health and safety, but the space around the labyrinth in the front of the church could be a start, with the porch as refuge in bad weather. The challenge is all the greater for today's children as many are unused to playing outside or in wild spaces. Sally's experience has been that all of this can be overcome with enough enthusiasm.

Spending some time in a churchyard can provide an opportunity for parents to 'chill out' and pause for reflection when otherwise their busy lives give them little opportunity to do so. An opportunity also to acquire a little knowledge of the beautiful side of the natural world while confronted in an unthreatening way by the broader issues of life

and death, seen as a natural cycle of growth and decline. Close up familiarity with the hard reality of a grave may even help in some way to come to terms with the all too human fears of death and loss.

During the rest of the Away Day we shared and discussed many ways that other churches have introduced spiritual discussions, thoughts and activities through their respective churchyards – from placing pots of flowers on graves, or planting them with flowers, to making the environment more welcoming, holding a Saturday picnic with a family quiz, making wooden plaques inscribed with text to inspire reflection, or creating a quiet space or garden for remembrance. A full list of the ideas that were discussed at the workshop is available. Your thoughts on suitable ideas for us to take forward at St Mary and St John would be very welcome.

## Features of the churchyard (cont'd)

In the last issue we wrote about the grave of the Cowley fathers. In this issue it's the **Garden of Remembrance and Thanksgiving**. Some seventeen years ago, when the churchyard was cleared, it was closed to any further burials other than those in family graves. In the plan the Garden of Remembrance and Thanksgiving was created as a peaceful spot for reflection, and a place for burying the ashes of people recently cremated. Relatives are encouraged to plant little wild cyclamen on the spot, so in time the area around the slate paving and seats will be covered in pink, red and white flowers every September and October. The area was originally planted with shade-loving ferns, hellebores, violets, woodruff and iris, because of the many trees in the area near the Leopold street entrance. Subsequently one of the trees died which has allowed more sunlight to get through, enabling other plants to flourish. As a result many of the ferns and hellebores have been crowded out despite best efforts to prevent that. For instance, a patch of *Petistites* has invaded the area, and it has to be weeded out by the churchyard team to prevent it taking over the whole churchyard! To make weeding easier it

was decided to encourage clumps of iris and fern, and eliminate other plants. Stepping stones were placed so children could safely explore the patch, though it is still rather too overgrown to entice them in. Recently our volunteer strimmers have reduced the vegetation around the clumps of plants that we do want to keep, and that has opened up the area and enabled the planting of more bulbs between the stones. They should make a fine display in the spring.

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## **ON WHICH DAY SHOULD YOU OPEN THE FIRST DOOR ON YOUR ADVENT CALENDAR?**

**By Ian Fergusson**

Advent usually starts in November, not on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

In the Western Christian tradition, Advent begins on Advent Sunday, the fourth Sunday before Christmas, which also begins the Church's year. This can occur on any day between 27<sup>th</sup> November and 3<sup>rd</sup> December, so there is only a one in seven chance of it falling on 1<sup>st</sup> December. As a result, Advent varies in length from twenty-two to twenty-eight days.

Not that anyone seems to care. Despite their name "Advent" calendars are now firmly established as a secular custom and the first door is opened (or the first chocolate consumed) on December 1<sup>st</sup>, a date whose main function is to remind us that there are only twenty-four shopping days to Christmas. In the United Kingdom a quarter of all personal spending for the year takes place in December.

Counting down the days to Christmas started in the early nineteenth century among German Lutherans. Originally, they lit a candle every day, or would cross off the days on a blackboard. Then in the 1850's German children started to make their own Advent calendars. In 1908 Gerhard Lang of the Bavarian publishers Reichhold & Lang produced a commercial version comprising of a piece of card and a packet of twenty-four small illustrations that could be stuck on for each day of the season. However, it was not practical to make a different number of stickers each year, and this was when Advent became a standard twenty-four days long, and the tradition of starting the calendar on December 1<sup>st</sup> began. In 1920 Lang had introduced doors that opened. This was called the Munich Christmas Calendar.

The first Advent Calendars containing chocolate were not produced until 1958 by Cadbury's.

Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "arrival" and it was meant to be a season of fasting and contemplation, in preparation for the feast of Christmas.

\*

## THE POPPY

**By Ian Fergusson**

In late Autumn leaves have fallen from the trees providing a carpet of subdued colour. As the days grow shorter, few flowers are prepared to brave the approach of winter, yet it is at this time of year that we associate with one of the most famous blooms of all. By November the poppies have disappeared from our meadows and fields, however the black seed pods have fallen to the ground where they can lie dormant for decades. Each seed pod can contain thousands of tiny black seeds, very often used as a topping for bagels or bread. The pods remain beneath the earth and rely on the soil being disturbed to break them up.

During the First World War, countless trenches and graves were dug, disturbing thousands upon thousands of poppy seeds, and subsequently the flowers bloomed. These inspired Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae of the Canadian Army (1872 -1918) to write the famous poem – In Flanders Fields. This poem did much to establish the poppy as a symbol of remembrance to all who fell.

John McCrae sadly did not survive World War 1, dying from pneumonia whilst on active service in 1918.

### IN FLANDERS FIELDS

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow*

*Between the crosses, row on row*

*That mark our place; and in the sky*

*The larks, still bravely singing, fly*

*Scarce heard amid the guns below*

*We are the Dead, Short days ago*

*We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,*

*Loved and were loved, and we lie*

*In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:*

*To you from failing hands we throw*

*The torch; be yours to hold it high,  
 If ye break faith with us who die  
 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
 In Flanders fields.*

\*

## **ECCLESIASTICAL ETHEL**

### *Agony Aunt and General Fount of Wisdom*

Hello Dears!

My name is Ethel Harbottle. Many of you won't know me, but I've been attending the early mass at St. Alban's church for many a year. The other day, I was quietly saying my prayers and lighting my candles as I always do, when that lovely young man Daniel approached me and asked me if I'd like to be agony aunt for our parish magazine! My first response was absolutely not! After all, what can an old woman of one hundred and two offer? Then I thought, hold your horses! I've lived through two world wars. I've brought up four children and now have seven lovely grandchildren and six great-grandchildren (bless their cotton socks). With over a century of life experience, I have everything to offer!

The thing is dears, when there's something that's bothering you, when there's that worry niggling at you, the best thing is to talk to someone about it. A trouble shared is a trouble halved. The ministry team are a bunch of absolute darlings, so it's best to approach them first, especially if it's something urgent or serious. If you want to write to

Auntie Ethel though, I'd be happy to give my two farthings' worth. You don't get to one hundred and two without accumulating some wisdom!

So, here's how it will work. If you have a question, a problem or a dilemma, write to the editor Daniel, anonymously if you wish (see page 38 for details). He will forward your letter to me and I will write a response for the magazine. Your letter (which may be edited) will then be anonymously published together with my response. If a response isn't enough to help you, I'll certainly point you in the direction of someone who can help.

And remember dears, don't be shy or embarrassed! Everyone has problems, and you are never alone. A big Harbottle hug from me to you!

God Bless,

Mrs. E. Harbottle, OBE DipEd

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## **GLEANINGS: A gathering of random thoughts from various sources**

**By John Purves**

*"Experience brings us wisdom where learning does not."*

Brian Keenan

*"Tell us not of banks and tariffs -  
Cease your paltry pedler cries,  
Shall the good state sink her honour*

*That your gambling stocks may rise?  
Weighed against your lying ledgers  
Must our statehood kick the poor?"*

John Greenleaf Whittier 1846

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*"O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shades lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then, Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

Book of Common Prayer

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*"There is nothing so good and lovely as when man and wife, in their home, dwell together in unity of mind and spirit."*

Homer

\*

*"What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man. All things are connected."*

Chief Seathl of the Suquamish. 1853

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*"No matter how barren the past may have been, 'tis enough for us now that the leaves are green."*

J.R. Lowell

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*“You may extract honey from everything; Do not go gathering after gall.”*

Charles Lamb

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*“Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashionable.”*

G.K. Chesterton

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*“Don’t die before you’re dead.”*

Billy Connolly

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## **A BLAST FROM THE PAST: 1979**



While chatting with Bob Morris (see page 12), he produced a copy of the Parish Magazine from February 1979, and this made for such fascinating reading, I couldn't resist writing about it. Some things in this magazine are quite different to the magazine these days. The script was typed out on a typewriter, and lovingly collated, stapled and distributed by a Miss Joan Eltenton. Sadly, Miss Eltenton had had a fall before Christmas and was in hospital, and perhaps as a consequence, the pages were all

stapled in the wrong order. In the introduction, David Campbell, Superior-General of SSJE writes:

*...a vast amount of thought and writing and debate has raged over the question whether the Church should have or not have women bishops and priests. It is obviously an important issue, and no doubt the controversy will continue, but compared to the issue ‘Can man know God’ it is of very minor significance.*

Perhaps father, unless you happen to be a woman with a vocation to the priesthood... Other things were reassuringly familiar. For example, our very own Sacristan, Verona Harris, back then was not only Sacristan, but also church treasurer! In 1979 the magazine relied on advertising, and Sylvesters at 88 Magdalen road was hailed as ‘The Store that seems to have everything.’ (see photo on right). It still does!



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## PRAYER CALENDAR: November 2017

**Daily Collect for use during October:** *Grant we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind.* (Book of Common Prayer, Trinity XXI)

<b>Sun 5</b>	<b>Trinity XXI</b>
Mon 6	William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury 1944
Tue 7	All Christian Denominations
Wed 8	The Saints and Martyrs of England

Thur 9	Pre-school provision
Fri 10	Our elected representatives in Parliament
Sat 11	Fishermen and the work of the RNLI
<b>Sun 12</b>	<b>Trinity XXII Remembrance Sunday</b>
Mon 13	The BBC
Tue 14	Mental Health Services
Wed 15	Alice's Tea Party Project
Thur 16	The deaf and those charities supporting them
Fri 17	Hilda Abbess of Whitby 680
Sat 18	Authors and Journalists
<b>Sun 19</b>	<b>Trinity XXIII</b>
Mon 20	The judiciary
Tue 21	The Police Force
Wed 22	St. Cecilia. All Choirs and Musicians
Thur 23	Clement Bishop of Rome. Martyr c.100
Fri 24	Our Bishops and Archbishops
Sat 25	Isaac Watts. Hymn writer 1748
<b>Sun 26</b>	<b>"Stir Up" Sunday</b>
Mon 27	Our Refuse Collectors
Tue 28	Our Libraries
Wed 29	Our Muslim Neighbours

Thur 30	St. Andrew the Apostle. The people of Scotland.
Fri 1	Our City and County Councils
Sat 2	Teachers and Lecturers

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## NOTICES

### **WALSINGHAM PILGRIMAGE: 13-16<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018**

Don't miss a chance to go on this delightful trip. We are now having an extra day in Walsingham! If you would like to join us, please give your name to Verona (See contacts on page 2) by the end of January 2018, as there is a great demand for places!

### **METANOIA: REPENTANCE OR TO CHANGE ONE'S MIND OR HEART - A PERFORMANCE AND DISCUSSION IN THE PREPARATION FOR ADVENT, By Alice Floyd**

The following performance was created by meeting 6 people I disagreed with the views of. Each dialog taught me something about how to encounter. After each meeting I digested my emotions and clarified the thoughts on how we encounter difference and how we judge each people who are different from us. The performance will last 45mins with a period afterwards for discussion and dialog in the group.

**Where?** St Albans Church Charles Street, OX4 3AH

**When?** 30<sup>th</sup> November 7:30pm

### **SHOUTING ANGELS & DANCING SHEPHERDS: Village Music for Christmas**

West Gallery Carols & Songs from OXFORDSHIRE HARMONY.  
Rural tunes from THE OXFORD VILLAGE BAND.

**Where?** St. Mary & St. John Church, Cowley Rd, Oxford, OX4 1UR

**When?** Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> November 7:30pm

£10.00 (includes mulled wine & mince pie)

£8.00 concessions (under 18, over 65, student or unwaged).

All proceeds to Helen & Douglas House Children's Hospice.

### **Imagining the Divine: the Art and Rise of World religions.**

Why do we think of Jesus Christ with a beard? Or Buddha as cross-legged? Today, the pictures people conjure when they think of the world's major religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism – are distinctive and immediately recognisable. But two thousand years ago that was not the case. This unprecedented exhibition showcases some of the world's oldest religious art from India to Ireland, and reveals how the exchange of ideas and objects in the first millennium influence our thinking about the Divine today. On display are the first known depiction of Christ north of the Alps, as well as some of the first surviving Qurans.

<http://www.ashmolean.org/imaginingthedivine>

**Where?** Ashmolean Museum,

**When?** 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017- 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018

**'Muslim's understanding of health and wellbeing' 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 9:30am-12:30pm at the Friends Meeting House, 42 St. Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW.**

This half day forum/conference will be addressed by Imam Monawar Hussain with the support of OHFT (Oxford Health Foundation Trust) staff and former patients. Many of you will know that as well as being chaplain to the OUH & to Eton College and Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, Monawar is committed to inter-faith dialogue and is on a number of national advisory boards and reference groups. The aim of the day is to support understanding and develop awareness of the diverse nature of Islam and the needs of Muslim patients, carers and staff.

To book a place, please email Revd. Dr. Guy Harrison at [guy.harrison@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:guy.harrison@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk) or ring him at 07786 843878 (mobile) or 01865 902760 (landline). He is the Head of Spiritual and Pastoral Care at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and is organising the conference.

**Michaelmas Programme of The Unicorn Group (An Ecumenical group founded by Prof. Nicolas Zernov in 1959)**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017: Rev. Canon Robert Wright LVO, 'Order! Order! – The Chaplain'.** Rev Wright will speak about the twelve years (1998-2010) he spent as Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, when he was also Rector of St. Margaret's (Westminster Abbey) and Sub-Dean of The Abbey. In practise, he was 'the vicar of Parliament,' caring for some 10,000 passholders from MPs to security staff.

**Friday 1st December 2017: The Symbolism of Light at Advent and Christmas.** All are invited to enjoy our Christmas spread after which we

*will discuss the various religious (and personal) candles and lights and their significance during Advent and Christmas.*

***Where?*** *The House of St. Gregory and St. Macrina, 1 Canterbury Rd. Oxford.*

***When? (The Time)*** *12:30 pm coffee and tea; 1:00 pm Talk followed by discussions; 2:00pm END*

***FREE ENTRY. NO BOOKING REQUIRED.***

***Donations to cover expenses are welcomed. For queries contact Convenors Judith Baker (07981345125), Ann Steadman (01865 559179)***

## **THE FRONT COVER**

On the front cover is a drawing by artist David Jones, a member of our congregation. More information is at <http://www.davidjonesart.me.uk/>

## **NEXT ISSUE**

The deadline for the next issue is ***Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November, Midnight.***

The deadline for submissions is always midnight on the last Sunday of the Month, and publication on the first Sunday of the month. Email Daniel Emlyn-Jones, [daniel\\_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:daniel_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk) (underscore between 'daniel' and 'ejnew'). Put handwritten submissions in the Cowley St. John Parish Magazine pigeon hole by the St. Mary & St. John back door.

***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  
(please delete as applicable)

Name:

Address:

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.