



ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALTON-ON-THAMES

NEWSLETTER

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*"A song was heard at Christmas to wake the midnight sky:
A saviour's birth, and peace on earth, and praise to God on high.
The angels sang at Christmas with all the hosts above,
And still we sing the newborn King His glory and his love."*

Timothy Dudley-Smith ("A Song was Heard at Christmas")



Dear friends



From The Manse

December 2020

*(written before the
Government's latest
announcements)*

"Christmas is coming - the geese are getting fat" - and at the time of writing we're in another period of lockdown. The Prime Minister tells us that it will end in early December but at the time of writing we don't really know what is going to happen after that. What will be allowed this Christmas? What will be possible? What will not be possible? Thankfully Nicola Sturgeon has assured Scottish children that Father Christmas will still be allowed to visit because he's regarded as being a key worker and I rather hope that might apply across the UK. I'm still hanging my stocking up in hope.

I'm finding it quite difficult to plan for Christmas this year, be it professionally or personally. It's difficult to focus the mind and professionally I am thinking that it's probably better to plan less "building reliant" celebrations and to take a lead from other faiths who mark their major festivals in the home. One thing that does strike me as being quite ironic, though, is that the very thing that we've complained about for years, namely the commercialisation and secularisation of Christmas, may well work to our favour this year. I was somewhat amused when I read about the pressure that's currently being brought to bear on the Government to save Christmas. It may be my warped sense of humour but I always thought that Christmas was actually all about it saving us, rather than about us saving Christmas!

The Christmas story begins in the Garden of Eden with the story of our fall. Our depravity manifests itself time and time again. We are trapped by our nature and there's nothing we can do to save/stop ourselves. Remember the John Lewis Christmas advert last year and the story of poor, little excitable Edgar the dragon? Edgar couldn't stop his dragon nature spoiling things.

So, God sent his Son into the world, to be born in Bethlehem, taking human form, and ultimately then to take our sins upon himself and upon the Cross - the story of our redemption. Again, remember the little girl in the JL advert who became the way forward for poor, little Edgar. "Christmas" and "saving" most certainly go together. It's just that it's supposed to be about Christmas saving us, not us saving Christmas!

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you well this Christmas and for 2021. 2020 has been a very hard year for us all and I thank you for the friendship and support you've given me. I hope that together we have faced everything we've had to. I hope that we've cheered, encouraged and cared for each other to the best of our ability. I'm glad that we've been able to laugh together on occasions and that we've also been able to share little stories to interest and to keep spirits up. Christmas greetings to you all.

Bing Crosby famously dreamed of a White Christmas. Who knows what's going to happen here this year but whatever happens, God - Immanuel - is with us and the Holy Spirit is most definitely a key worker too.

Michael

Christmas Services in the Pastorate

"It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air."

W T Ellis



By now I'd normally be able to you a full list of our Christmas services with all the details nicely organised. Would that I had that luxury this year!

The hope is that most of our usual services will still be happening. It's likely that everything will be available on Zoom and, for the first time, two services will also be available on our Websites for people to be able to share at times that suit them. (They would also have the potential to attract a much wider congregation.)

What we've still got to decide is how many services we'll have with a "live" congregation option. That's quite a dilemma but the joint Elders' will be meeting on 1st December to try and make some decisions. Perhaps a little unsatisfactorily, all I can say at this point is to listen out for details. This is "where we're at" at the moment though:

6th and 13th December will definitely be "online" only and I am really, really pleased to say that 13th December will be an online Parade Service – another first for us and which could be really exciting.

3rd January will also be "online" only.

As for **20th, 24th and 25th December** my hope is that we'll be able to make a decision about what's happening at the Joint Elders' meeting.

Private Prayer

Weybridge URC will be open for private prayer on **Wednesday 2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd December from 10.00am – 11.00am** (closed on 30th December) and on **Wednesday 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th January**.

Memorial Carol Service

You may remember that last year we were asked to organise and host a Memorial Carol Service by Fredrick Chitty & Son's Funeral Directors. It was well received and we've been asked to do it again this year, using Zoom. It will be at 7.00 pm on Monday 14th December and anyone is invited to come. Its focus will be for those recently bereaved and facing their first Christmas without a loved one.

If you'd like to come then let Michael know and he will let you have the code. Those who have been dealing with Chitty's during the year will automatically receive an invitation.

ELDERS' DEVOTIONS

Each month the Elders take it turns to start our Elders' meeting with a devotion. We thought you might all like to read these and from now on we will be including the Elders' devotions in the Newsletter. In the month of November, it was Carol Lee's turn and we hope you find the following piece to be thought-provoking.

This year would obviously win the prize as the most bizarre year we've ever seen. The ever present Covid pandemic has impacted on everything we do and continues to shape our lives. Yet throughout it all, we have continued to mark our festivals and adapt as much we could.

Remembrance Day is another national event where we pause to think about those who serve their countries and those who were/are forever affected by that service. This year marked the 75th Anniversary since Peace was declared in the Second World War.

One thing which struck me was the different ways in which the end of the wars in Europe and the Far East were celebrated. From our own congregations, we heard about street parties, dancing and general relief which marked VE Day.

But the stories around VJ were more muted - marked by horrific suffering and tales of people who returned forever marked by their experiences. There doesn't seem to have been the public outpouring of joy and relief for the end of the war with Japan. I don't know why that was: in the months between May and August 1945 perhaps the scale of the destruction at home and abroad became clear, news of concentration camps came out and the millions of displaced peoples became more visible.

The world is still conflicted and now news of these wars is beamed into our living rooms in real time and we see the impact on those serving their countries and on the civilians made homeless. During wars we see the worst and best of people. Ingenuity, creativity and compassion come to fore. Before the start of the Second World War, Britain opened its arms to Jewish children sent by parents longing for their children's safety. After the war, the world was in turmoil with whole nations displaced as refugees seeking shelter.

Wars are still continuing and so too is the refugee crisis as we can see from the people seeking to come to Britain in sealed containers and small boats. This year as we remember those who have served and continue to serve their country let's also remember those refugees fleeing real or imagined peril. Let's think about what we can live up to high bar set by those wartime Britons who opened their hearts and homes to the dispossessed.

Let us pray:

Dear Father

This Remembrance we acknowledge all those who served their countries in the past and today.

We remember those whose lives were/are forever changed by conflict.

We pray for peace.

We pray for your compassion and understanding to open our hearts to today's refugees.

We pray that our actions will show you love and peace.

Make me a channel of Your peace

Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love

Where there is injury, Your pardon Lord

And where there's doubt, true faith in You. Amen.



A CHRISTMAS IDEA ...

I've a feeling that Christmas decorations will be going up early this year. Everyone wants something a bit cheerful and I know that some of you are very creative so how about decorating one of your windows specifically to be viewed by people outside?

How about creating a nativity scene – or some other aspect of the Christmas story in/on your window? We may not be able to hold large Christmas services this year but there are other ways to get the message out there. It could be very effective and I know that some of you have really creative streaks! Just an outreach idea. Take a photo of your window and we'll be able to share it in some of our services.

Michael Hodgson

From: HM Government/DoE

GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN ISSUED FOR SCHOOL NATIVITY PLAYS

Please note that in order to ensure children follow Covid safety procedures -

1. The Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem will NOT be mentioned, and neither will snide remarks be made about Dominic Cummings, eye tests or Barnard Castle.
2. The 'No room at the inn' sign will be replaced with, 'accommodation is limited because of strict adherence to social distancing regulations.'
3. A maximum of THREE shepherds will be abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.
4. Whilst 'a multitude of the heavenly host' may be permitted in heaven, it would be advisable to state that only 'a quintet of the heavenly host' are permitted in the vicinity of Bethlehem.
5. The shepherds visiting the stable must wear masks, use hand sanitising gel on arrival and must depart before the wise men appear.
6. In respect of the wise men, references to 'the East' are wholly unacceptable, as are allusions to camels.
7. It must be clearly stated that the wise men have observed a period of quarantine before visiting the Infant Jesus.
8. The wise men should therefore arrive in a traditional manner, but strictly one at a time: specifically (i) one in a taxi (ii) one in a car (iii) one on a scooter, blowing his hooter.
9. They should also wear masks and practise hand hygiene on arrival.
10. Gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh must NOT be brought into the stable. Instead, the wise men will email a QR code to Joseph, so that their gifts can be collected from the nearest Amazon locker.

BUDDING ARTISTS - READ ON!

An invitation from one of our Hall users

WALTON ART CLUB (WAC) was founded in 1960. Its aim was to enable people to enjoy art in a friendly and sociable atmosphere on a weekly basis. Whether you are interested in acrylics, watercolours, oils, pen or pencils, why not come along and give it a try? There is a wide range of skills and mediums used by members. There is always someone on hand to help and give advice.



WAC is more than an art club; it is also a social club with a welcoming environment created by its many and varied members. There is no vetting so anyone can join as long as they have an interest in art. We usually

meet in the main hall every Thursday evening from 7pm until 9.30pm and have an active membership of some 50 members. Attendance varies from 25 to 35 members. We are sure you will enjoy the evenings and come back for more.

We first used the main hall at St Andrew's in February this year and immediately felt it was to be our new home for many years. We held three evenings there before the first lockdown and have been back just once in September before the latest closure. The atmosphere in September was like a reunion of old friends who look forward to the time when we can use the hall again weekly.



In addition to the painting evenings, there is a monthly demonstration by experienced artists using different media. We also have an annual day workshop and normally two exhibitions in the spring and autumn where members can show their work. All pictures there are for sale and the events form the highlight of our year.



Since lockdown we have developed an active WhatsApp group giving members the opportunity to show their latest pictures. Many members are also active on Facebook and Instagram so there is a lot going on despite no meetings. Our latest venture is the development of an online sales portal that is being launched in December. You can see current pictures; they are all for sale and could make wonderful Christmas presents.

Log onto **SALES** at www.waltonartclub.co.uk site. Illustrated are samples from a few members.

We also look forward to an opportunity to use the **Gateway area**, maybe for an exhibition one Friday evening and all day on a Saturday.

David Pilkington, Chairman

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

Advent is the first season of the liturgical year- the season of preparation for the coming of Christ. The name comes from the Latin “adventus”, meaning coming or arrival. 2020 has been a weird year and one of the things we can’t do in church at the moment is sing. I know that this is something that many of you dearly miss and for some is one of the reasons why you’d rather remain at home- where you can. It’s sometimes said that the hymnbook is the prayer book of nonconformist churches and so I am putting together a small booklet for this Advent with a one or two sentence thought and a verse from a well-known, (generally) advent hymn. It will come to most of you as an email attachment and you can look at it as an attachment to save you printing it. I’ll print a few copies for those receiving the Thought for the Day by post and I hope is that it will be a simple, useful little devotional aid, drawing on very familiar material, when everything else is so odd and uncertain.

Michael Hodgson



A CHRISTMAS LEGEND

The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk names St Nicholas. It is believed he was born some time around 280AD in Patara, near Myra in modern-day Turkey. Much admired for his piety and kindness, St Nicholas became the subject of many legends. It is said he gave away all of his inherited wealth and travelled the countryside helping the poor and sick. In 1822, Clement Clarke Moore, an Episcopal minister, wrote a long Christmas poem for this three daughters entitled “An Account of a Visit from St Nicholas” more popularly known as “Twas the Night before Christmas.” Moore’s poem is largely responsible for our modern image of Santa Claus as a “right jolly old elf” with a portly figure and the supernatural ability to ascend a chimney with a mere nod of his head! Although Moore’s imagery was probably borrowed from other sources, his poem helped popularise the now-familiar image of a Santa Claus who flew from house to house on Christmas Eve in a “miniature sleigh” led by eight flying reindeer to leave presents for deserving children.



Text from the Internet - thanks to Barbara for the photograph, intended to go with her Christmas message!

Hilary has kindly contributed some links to organ music played by David Tattersall, the organist of Sefton Road URC in Morecambe, the church she used to attend when her father, Revd David Netherwood, was minister before he came to St Andrew’s. I hope you can enjoy the music!

<https://youtu.be/B1KuvLErIV4>

Toccata - Widor

<https://youtu.be/b0jvLk9Q0S0>

Trumpet Voluntary - J Stanley

<https://youtu.be/U9ilXfPYdfM>

Will o The Wisp - G Nevin

THANK YOU TO SOME OF OUR OWN KEY WORKERS



Throughout the year a band of people have been quietly working away, often under the radar, checking premises during lockdown, completing risk assessments, acting on them, getting premises able to be opened again and able to meet new regulations. At St Andrew's this list includes Alan, Anna, Moira, Jan and Paula; and at Weybridge it includes people such as Jem and Clare, Brian and Teresa who have been ensuring that the organ is played regularly to prevent damage.

On a Sunday our Zoom Services have become a key part of our life and beaver away is the tech team of Hilary, Paula and Carol. They have sorted out all sorts of issues and they have also helped us all become comfortable with using the Zoom features, encouraging us to engage more fully and showing great patience when we get things wrong.

One person has been a real backbone since lockdown began and that is Liz from Weybridge. Every week since Mothering Sunday, back in March, Liz has proofread the "Thought for the Day" and has made suggestions when she's felt that something could be put more clearly or else simply didn't make sense. Each week she has also sent out the Zoom link to the Weybridge Members, and done the "snail mailing" to those Weybridge members not on computer.

Communication is always important and Mollie and Norma have ensured that the magazines have gone out each month, even producing an August edition and sometimes probably feeling a bit like the Israelites when they were being required to make bricks without straw.

On a similar line, Grant has had to rebuild the Weybridge website and although it is a work in progress the new one is up and running, thanks to him and Alistair.

At Weybridge, a new neighbour, Dean, has voluntarily been keeping an eye on the place and has done a number of odd jobs around the grounds. This has been a great help. At St Andrew's, Johnston and his merry band, including James and Annie, have kept the garden going, including a lot of watering during the hot weather. The grounds have been a place to lift downcast spirits and are appreciated by the community.

Throughout lockdown, Anne from St Andrew's has kept in touch with the Messy Church families, sending them things to do online and, when we came to produce a new Church Directory, Anne and Keith worked hard with Norma and others to bring it to print.

I am always cautious about naming names in this sort of article. It is asking for trouble. I've probably made a glaring omission and if so I apologise for that, but I did want to acknowledge and thank some of those who have been our own "key workers" since the March lockdown began. I, for one, appreciate it very much and can't help thinking that things would have been a lot more difficult without your labours. So, a heart-felt thank you and a round of applause for you all.

Michael



"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ("Christmas Bells")

A REMINDER OF THE WAY WE WERE AND HOW WE'LL BE AGAIN...



From your Editor, **Norma**

A Very Happy Christmas to all our readers and the best of optimistic wishes for 2021 when, hopefully, you will be able to look forward to and enjoy some of the things that have had to be put on hold this year.

I have hugely appreciated your contributions to the Newsletter and look forward to your continued support in the year ahead!



Netta Philip wishes everyone in St Andrew's a very Happy Christmas and all the best for a brighter New Year

Roy Bones sends Christmas Greetings to everyone and best wishes for the New Year

Eva Ramage wishes her friends at St Andrew's a blessed and Happy Christmas

Mary Taylor wishes all her friends a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year

Valerie and Keith would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We are looking forward to a better and brighter year ahead

Wishing everyone a Happy and Peaceful Christmas with love and best wishes
Anne and Keith Fitzgerald

Ghislaine Stevenson would like to send warmest wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all her friends at St Andrew's



HAPPY
NEW YEAR



To Michael, the Elders,
members & friends of St Andrew's
Wishing you all a Happy
& Peaceful Christmas
With our thanks for your welcome
at the Zoom Services and
in your lovely building.
Jane & Malcolm Bryant

Seasonal greetings from
**Susan and Johnston
Simpson** to all our
friends at St Andrew's.
(Donation in lieu of cards
to be sent to ArtPeace)

To all readers of this Newsletter
Alan and Anna wish everyone the
joy and peace that
Christmas time brings.

I would like to wish all my friends in
St Andrew's a Very Happy Christmas
and a Virus-free New Year!
Nancy Hampton

Fiona, Vic, Katie and Tom
would like to thank
Michael and everyone at
St Andrew's for their kindness
this year. We wish you all a
very Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year - here's to
brighter days ahead in 2021.

As we come to the end of what has been a year unlike
any other most of us have ever known let us be
thankful for the good things in our lives especially
family and friends. I hope you are able to have a
peaceful Christmas and able to share it with loved
ones. May 2021 be a happier and better one for
everyone. With all good wishes. **Barbara Rodgers**





FRIENDS REMEMBERED



Mary Smith Dow ('May')

A Service of Thanksgiving 'Remembering May' was held on Zoom on Monday 9 November. May's family have contributed just a few gems from a store of wonderful memories of a mother, grandmother, aunt, great aunt and great great aunt.

May was born on 23 May 1924 in Glasgow, the first child of Wallace and Kate Brackenridge. Her father was chauffeur to Bishop Edward Reid, the Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway. Aged five, she moved with her family to Auchterarder when the Bishop was appointed Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane. Her little sister, Elsie, tragically died of pneumonia at the age of two but happiness returned to the family on Christmas Day 1931 with the arrival of a baby brother – aptly named Noel. May attended the local school in Auchterarder moving on to Perth Academy where she did well, showing an aptitude for languages. When the outbreak of war coincided with her leaving school, May started work with the Inland Revenue in Stirling.

May's father – Grandpa Brackenridge - was called up in 1939 and sent to fight in France. At that time many of the younger members of the town were called up, including one David (Dave) Dow. Grandpa Brackenridge and Dave fought together and were both taken prisoner at St Valery in 1940. When the War ended, May was still working at the Inland Revenue in Stirling. Grandpa Brackenridge came home along with the other Auchterarder men, including her future husband, Dave Dow. Grandpa Brackenridge started working for Dave Dow after the war and romance blossomed between May and Dave. They were married at St Andrew's & West Church in Auchterarder on 3 January 1953, with a short honeymoon in Edinburgh.

After a few years, Valerie was born and then Fiona to complete the family unit of four. They ended up happily settled in Tullibardine Crescent, Auchterarder, the family home until May moved south in 1995. The girls grew up. Valerie spread her wings and went to Kuwait and Fiona moved to London. May had worked as a receptionist in the local health centre in Auchterarder for many years but when Dave retired, she decided that would also be a good time for her to give up work, too, so that they could both enjoy some well-deserved leisure time. They visited Valerie in Kuwait and Cyprus and made regular trips to London to stay with Fiona. Life was good.

Sadly, Dave died in June 1994 and, after much thought, May decided she would like to move south - a brave decision at her age. Being in the London area made it easier for her to visit Valerie in Kuwait ... but the main incentive for moving was her granddaughter, Katie. May loved being a granny and stepped seamlessly into that role; taking Katie to and from nursery and then later, to and from school. She thought nothing of entertaining a houseful of children during the school holidays.

Although very sad to leave Auchterarder, her home for almost 70 years and where she had many loyal friends and wonderful neighbours, in late 1995 she moved south, to Swan Walk in Shepperton - the start of a new chapter. Where neighbours were concerned, she definitely hit the jackpot twice – after the wonderful Miller family in Auchterarder more equally wonderful neighbours in Swan Walk. Always an active member of the church in Auchterarder, it didn't take long to find a new church, St Andrew's, on her doorstep. What a welcome she received from the congregation! She often spoke of the happy times she spent with her close friends from St Andrew's: church coffee mornings, lunches, days out, theatre trips, concerts and even day trips to France – and not forgetting those delicious monthly Weybridge lunches that were always a highlight.

"Our mother had a long and wonderful life. What a legacy she leaves behind - a whole treasure trove of wonderful memories and the way she touched our lives will stay with us for ever."

Valerie and Fiona

Katie has her own special memories of May.

"Grandma was so involved in all aspects of my childhood – she was really a second Mum to me. We were partners in crime, a true double act with a very unique and lasting bond. It started when I was five. Granny and Mum went to an afternoon end of term concert at my school and when they arrived, they were greeted by me and all 16 of my classmates running across the playground all shouting, "Granny! Granny!" My Granny was everybody's Granny in those days and even the other mums called her Granny May. When Granny broke her elbow and had a spell in hospital, everyone in my class made a get-well card for her – 17 individual get-well cards, all addressed to Granny and all from different children – that amused the entire hospital ward for days! She loved people, loved helping and she made a point of looking after the 'older ladies' (many of whom were younger than she was at the time). She gave them lifts to church, coffee mornings, afternoon teas, hospital appointments and sometimes just took them to visit their friends.

I know you all considered my Granny to be a paragon of virtue and beyond reproach but she did have a run in with the law down here. She was taking one of her friends to a hospital appointment at St Peter's, when she suddenly noticed a police car behind her. The blue light came on and the police car waved her over. She had been stopped for speeding! Being Grandma, she managed to talk her way out of any further action and was let off with a warning!

By the age of 91, I think it's fair to say that Granny was really quite bionic. We renamed her Metal Mary – she was so full of pins, wires and mechanical parts. You can just imagine the fun we had at airport security when we took her to Barcelona and Prague! Her latest addition was a new elbow. It was quite remarkable to undergo this type of surgery at her age – and the operation itself lasted six hours. The surgeon told us he was amazed that, when she woke up, the first thing **she** said to **him** was, "How are you? Are you feeling ok? It's an awfully long time for you to be standing!" And that just summed Granny up, always thinking about everyone else's wellbeing, putting others before herself,

The last four years of her life were more challenging for her health-wise, but she never lost her spirit, her determination or her sense of humour. She was happy and content till the end. She felt fortunate to have been active for so many years, to have been pain free; she felt blessed to have had all of you as friends. Even though, in the last few years her legs had stopped working so well, there was never, **ever**, anything wrong with her tongue and she held court until the end, chatting, laughing and joking. Seeing all of you today is a reminder of how many lives my Grandma was able to touch and also why she felt so lucky to have had such amazing friends. I will be eternally grateful for the time we shared together – she is and always will be my best friend. "



Katie and May in Barcelona

These additional, individual memories of May are in keeping with the kindness, caring and fun she shared with so many of us.

"May became such a good friend. I really enjoyed her company when I took her to a local Garden Centre for Coffee - which usually became also Lunch and Tea! - I finally took her home about 4 pm. She was such good company. I felt really at home with her as if I was back in my beloved Scotland. May was so like my great aunt from Paisley, a beautifully dressed little lady with a great sense of humour and kindness. I will miss May very much but will always have happy memories of my time with her."

"I just loved May."

"She was full of life and light ...laughter and mischief"

"You could always be sure of a compliment from May that would cheer you however glum you were feeling."

"She always wanted to know how YOU were."

"She was at her happiest when she was in the kitchen in the hall, just making the coffee!"

And, often heard from May herself, "Don't go to any trouble just for me!"

REMEMBRANCE 2020

Our united Remembrance Sunday service, with the parade and dipping of colours wasn't possible this year but our Zoom service somewhat "evolved" on the day into something simple and yet very deeply moving. With our service not starting until 11.30 am, we were able to share in that national Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph on radio or TV before logging on or dialling in to our own service. We were joined by members and leaders of some of our uniformed organisations who told us about the Scouting idea to paint pebbles and to lay them at their nearest War Memorial. We saw pictures of some of those done by 4th Weybridge and some of the youngsters held those they'd done up to their cameras for us to look at. A simple yet incredibly effective idea which touched us all. You can see a collage below. I know that a number of the congregation have now walked past the War Memorials in this area and seen them "in situ".



*Remembrance at
Weybridge URC*



Hersham War Memorial

On 11th November at 11.00 am, I kept the two minute silence at the War Memorial in Weybridge URC and read the list of the fallen from Weybridge, St Andrew's and Hersham. On the shelf below the Memorial were the vases from Hersham, a picture of the memorial in St Andrew's and one of the stones from 4th Weybridge. Others were able to share in this moment as they concluded their private devotions in the church that morning. I took a picture of our memorials and posted it on a couple of Facebook sites that morning and they have received a number of "likes" and some appreciative comments.



So, like everyone, we marked Remembrance 2020 in a simpler way this year but what we did was no less sincere. I suspect that the memory of the children's hands holding out the pebbles they'd painted in respect of the fallen is one we'll not easily forget.

Michael Hodgson





A HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Carols were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago, but these were not Christmas Carols. They were pagan songs, sung at the Winter Solstice celebrations as people danced round stone circles. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year, usually taking place around 22nd December. The word 'carol' actually means dance or a song of praise and joy. Carols used to be written and sung during all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing them at Christmas has really survived.

Early Christians took over the pagan solstice celebrations for Christmas and gave people Christian songs to sing instead of pagan ones. In 129, a Roman Bishop said that a song called "Angel's Hymn" should be sung at a Christmas service in Rome. Another famous early Christmas Hymn was written in 760, by Comas of Jerusalem, for the Greek Orthodox Church. Soon after this many composers all over Europe started to write 'Christmas carols'. However, not many people liked them as they were all written and sung in Latin, a language that the normal people couldn't understand. By the time of the Middle Ages (the 1200s), most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas altogether.

This was changed by St Francis of Assisi when, in 1223, he started his Nativity Plays in Italy. The people in the plays sang songs or 'canticles' that told the story during the plays. Sometimes, the choruses of these new carols were in Latin; but normally they were all in a language that the people watching the play could understand and join in! The new carols spread to France, Spain, Germany and other European countries.

The earliest carol, like this, was written in 1410. Sadly only a very small fragment of it still exists. The carol was about Mary and Jesus meeting different people in Bethlehem. Most carols from this time and the Elizabethan period are untrue stories, very loosely based on the Christmas story about the Holy Family and were seen as entertaining rather than religious songs. They were usually sung in homes rather than in churches! Travelling singers or Minstrels started singing these carols and the words were changed for the local people wherever they were travelling. One carol that changed like this is '*I Saw Three Ships*'.

When the Puritans came to power in England in the 1640s, the celebration of Christmas and singing carols was stopped. However, the carols survived as people still sang them in secret. Carols remained mainly unsung until Victorian times, when two men called William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England.

Before carol singing in public became popular, there were sometimes official carol singers called 'Waits'. These were bands of people led by important local leaders (such as council leaders) who had the only power in the towns and villages to take money from the public (if others did this, they were sometimes charged as beggars!). They were called 'Waits' because they only sang on Christmas Eve (this was sometimes known as 'watchnight' or 'waitnight' because of the shepherds who were watching their sheep when the angels appeared to them), when the Christmas celebrations began.

Also, at this time, many orchestras and choirs were being set up in the cities of England and people wanted Christmas songs to sing, so carols once again became popular. Many new carols, such as '*Good King Wenceslas*', were also written in the Victorian period.

New carol services were created and became popular, as did the custom of singing carols in the streets. Both of these customs are still popular today! One of the most popular types of carol services are Carols by Candlelight services. At this service, the church is only lit by candlelight, giving it a Christmas feel. Carols by Candlelight services are held in countries all over the world.

The most famous type of Carol Service might be a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, where carols and Bible readings tell the Christmas Story. Let's hope we can enjoy singing them again next year!

Taken from whychristmas.com

A WALK IN THE PARK - PAINSHILL



A landscape garden near Wisley, is perfect for walk, long or short. Dog friendly and a café open even now, with covered space to sit. The autumn colours have been splendid. Booking required for non members.

By email: info@painshill.co.uk **By phone:** 01932 86811
Portsmouth Road,
Cobham,
Surrey, KT11 1JE

Painshill 18th century landscape garden was created between 1738 and 1773, by the Hon. Charles Hamilton. Inspired by Renaissance art and his Grand Tours, Hamilton went on to create a sequence of breath taking and surprising vistas at Painshill. The landscapes form living works of art into which Hamilton placed follies for dramatic effect.

Thanks to Anna Crawford for this contribution. Local walks could become a regular feature in the Newsletter. Please (if you are willing to share!) do send in details of your favourite walk so that we can get to know the area and enjoy hearing about nearby places where we can go to lift the spirits! Ed

ERRATUM

Our article 'Autumn at Wisley Gardens' in the November issue, stated that "Sir Thomas Hanbury gifted the gardens to the National Trust outright in 1903." We would like to clarify that, in fact, in 1903 Sir Thomas Hanbury presented the Wisley estate in trust to the *Royal Horticultural Society* for its perpetual use and not to the National Trust which is, of course, a different charity.



PEOPLE WHO LUNCH IS BACK!

FRIDAY 11 DECEMBER AT 12.30 PM
SAVE THE DATE!

There will be a ZOOM People who Lunch on Friday 11th December at 12.30 pm. Eat your lunch at your computer and chat to your friends. People Who Lunch is normally soup and a dessert so if people wish to stick to that then they can - or really, whatever you wish!
The Zoom code will go out on the letter or email with the service code for 13 December.

HEALTH WALKS

Caroline Baker, Sport and Health Development Officer of Elmbridge Borough Council, has sent these details to interested parties of what sounds like a new attraction for those of us who are keen to keep fit. Get in touch with Caroline if you would like to be included for future mailings.

“As someone who has previously expressed interest in our Health Walks programme, I am writing to update you on a new area on our Council Health Walks Webpage. We have started a Self-guided Walks section. There are now four downloadable routes displayed to help you explore the local area at whatever time suits you. Each route has detailed walking instructions and a map allowing you confidently to take on, potentially a new part of the borough to you. They can be found at:

<https://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/sports-and-health/healthy-walks-and-cycle-rides/>

All routes are approximately 45 minutes to an hour, largely over flat ground and designed to be suitable for reasonably fit, occasional walkers. Two of the routes have optional shorter routes for beginners.

If you follow one of the routes, please let me know what you think. In addition, if there are areas of the borough you would like a route for, please get in touch as we would like to expand the library of walks if there is demand.

Our usual program of led Healthy Walks is pencilled in to return on the 7th December (subject to relevant permissions by the government). These are another great way to learn some great places to walk whilst having a friendly chat with other local people. Healthy Walks operate under safe Covid restrictions and a booking system is in place (details on the link above). When the booking system reopens, we will be taking bookings for both December and January walks. I will advise when the information is released. If you don't want to receive this update, or any future emails about our local Health Walks please let me know and I will remove you from my email list.

Kind regards
Caroline”

Caroline Baker
Sport and Health Development Officer
Elmbridge Borough Council, Civic Centre, High Street, Esher, Surrey KT10 9SD

Direct Line: 01372 474583
Email: cbaker@elmbridge.gov.uk

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

HARVEST CHEER: Marlow URC came up trumps again early in November with a generous donation from their Harvest collection. This sum was sent immediately to the group who were overjoyed as life is proving so tough not helped by Covid 19. This congregation, like Toller URC in Kettering along with several good-hearted folk across the country have really taken ArtPeace to their hearts. The money was quickly spent on food and other essentials to keep body and soul together. The thought of a bleak Christmas only a few weeks away is always at the back of their minds.

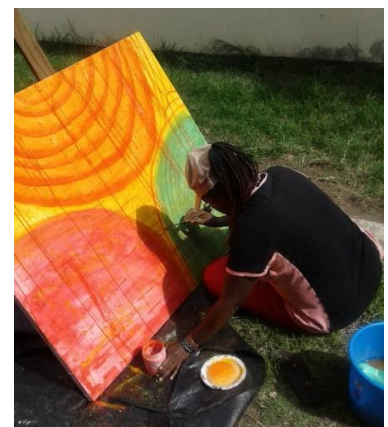


Photo showing their joy on receiving Marlow's donation. The church's spirits were also lifted.

MY WISH FOR CHRISTMAS - from artist Christine. 'Before the lock down, public health was an option but now it is harder to seek help in an emergency. Money talks but the people have no money. We used to celebrate Christmas with 'rice and chicken' and new clothes, but it is very doubtful this year, Christmas will be an ordinary day for us. If schools open fully, we must try to keep something aside to negotiate our children's return to school. I wish for Christmas, the return of basic human dignity. A man must fend for his family without extending his begging bowl. He must clothe his children and send them to school without dreading the announcement of the school opening dates because he will be penniless. This applies to us single parents as well. We need to work and receive what our work is worth. We need to provide for our children and our extended families as we have always been called to do. The downside of poverty is that people begin to assess what and who is important such that the village that used to raise a child now only raises its own if it can. That has never been our way, but economy enforces that now. So, I wish for that to change, we are always mindful of those who have nothing and give even from the little that we have. If my neighbour is poor, I am poor. I am because we are.

Christmas every year for me personally is a time of hope. I think it is divine that it coincides with the onset of the rains for our fields because Christmas like the rains for me, symbolise rebirth and regeneration. We are nothing without God and if God is Love, so should we be. If he is the God of righteousness peace and joy, so should we be.

I prepare for 2021 with a group of 11-12-year-old girls I was entrusted to tutor in art. I decided to tutor them for free and will plant a seed into our future. If I can teach a girl to love art, I teach her the freedom and healing that is art. I have no materials to start with but am confident God will find a way as He is the master of all invention and the greatest Artist ever, so I am well mentored. The children are from Tafara and their parents have nothing. This is one way I get to patch up life's broken mosaic through our painting. It will heal me, more than it heals them and bring light into the blackest of moments. It weaves a quilt from brokenness piecing together a mosaic from broken fragments that would otherwise be discarded. That is also the gift of God. We who are created in His image must be givers of this gift also. (Psalms 139).





Happy thanksgiving! Happy new year! May this Christmas remind us all, of how our lives, no matter how painful, are a gift to be shared with everyone. God bless you all and on behalf of the artists thank you our friends in the UK for being a gift to Artpeace.'

Once Broken (collage left) made with broken pieces of stone left over when I worked at Dominic Benhura's Studio. Basically, it was about making something beautiful from broken pieces. The only thing I manipulated is the face which I carved in the feature. The shape of stones are as I found them and mounted into an old drawer I found. **Christine Ndoro**

PRAYER FOR RAIN! ArtPeace are desperate for rain to start sowing maize to feed their families - each year the rains get later. By mid-day the temperature reaches 30°C with humidity in the sixties. Artist Coster said – 'The ground has been parched for many months. The boy in the photo below is 8-



year-old Samuel who lives near me. He carries dry maize stems for cooking

from a nearby field. Many families find it hard to get firewood to cook.' Artist Lovemore's Apostolic church of 60 members who meet in the open (as they have no premises), pray daily for rain. Above photo shows a few of the congregation including Lovemore standing behind the man holding a staff.



CHRISTMAS CHEER: I feared ArtPeace would have a miserable Christmas, but cavalry arrived in the form of a generous gift from a Maidenhead URC couple plus a lady from Marlow URC and Edinburgh. Thanks again to all who donate regularly – the artists are in for a lovely surprise 😊. Artist Fortune said: 'Over the year, my friends across the UK have made life possible for me thanks to their donations. This enabled me to buy vital medication and put food on the table for my family and all of AP and friends. If it were not for you, I and others would have surely died.'



Finally, what better way to end this article by showing some Nativity scenes made by Luke Saidi. Hopefully, next year, couriers will again be able to bring over their lovely work for sale at the URC and in the Southwark Cathedral shop. With every best wish for Christmas. **Johnston Simpson**



ST ANDREW'S URC, WALTON-ON-THAMES

For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2, vv 11-14

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We are at present holding holding services every Sunday with Zoom at 11.30 am.
A weekly "Thought for the Day" and a prayer are also available by post or email.
Please contact the Minister for inclusion and also for the latest developments.

Anyone who wishes to take part in the Zoom service should contact the minister, who will be able to send them a link to enable easy participation.
You are all most welcome to join us!