

+ St GILES'  St Margaret's

Joint Benefice Magazine

Winter 2024

Music and Faith

Tales from the St Giles' Choir Tour
in Perugia, Italy, and much more.



— Introducing the winter edition

of the benefice by the benefice for the benefice



Welcome to the second issue of our relaunched quarterly joint benefice magazine, put together by our benefice manager, Billy Morton.

The theme for this issue is *Music and Faith*.

Please send any feedback to Billy: manager@StGilesStMargarets.org. Our next issue is planned to go out in early February, so if you have any content – reports, announcements, personal reflections, reviews – please do send it through to the same address. Our next issue will have the theme of *Growing in Faith*, so anything connected to that theme will be particularly welcome!

Daniel Walters, Vicar

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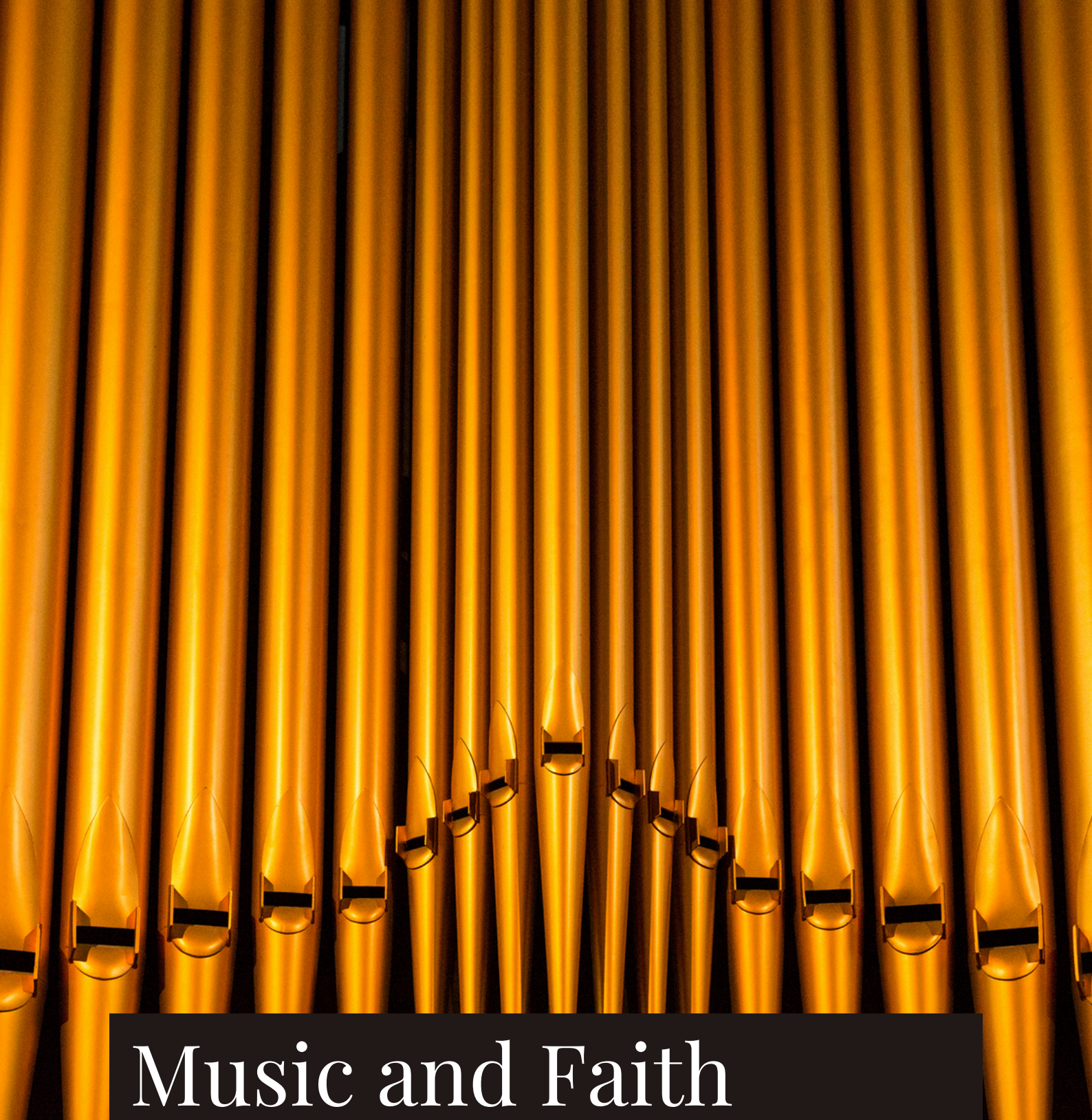
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Music and Faith

Music has always been important to religion, in all of its expressions around the world, and in that Christianity (and the Jewish tradition from which our faith emerged) has been no different.

Why is this? What, inherently, has music to do with faith? I think the answer has something to do with the inability of words not only to express our deepest feelings, desires and longings, but also to fully describe and explain the God who is beyond our human understanding.

This is not in any way to denigrate the written word. Both theology and Scripture are also rightly central to our faith, and our attempts to understand God better are not in vain. Our God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. We can develop our understanding of, and our relationship with God through so many ways - the record of God's relationship with his people Israel; the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the miracle of the risen and ascended Christ; and the thinking and reasoning minds we have been gifted with as human beings.

And yet... at the end of it all, we are still surrounded by the mystery of the God of the cosmos who came to us as a helpless infant. How can words ever hope to express such mystery on their own? How can words express how the King of the Universe came to suffer a barbarous death on the cross out of love for humanity?

Quite simply, I don't think they can. And when we run out of words, when they are no longer enough, music can step in to help us express that yearning and longing for what is beyond us.

Of course, that's not to say that words and music need to be, or even should be, opposed. One of the great gifts we have in both St Giles' and St Margaret's, which we must never take for granted, is that we sing the psalms each week (whether from the psalter of 1539 or 1999). Many parish churches no longer use the psalms in worship at all, and of those that do, many take them simply as an extra Bible reading - forgetting that they were written not as treatises but as hymns.

Indeed, surprising amounts of Scripture (not just the psalms) are believed to have been originally written as hymns or canticles, in both the Old and New Testaments. And of course, over the centuries, many great choral composers have taken verses from Scripture as inspiration for their work.

Perhaps, then, rather than seeing the relationship entirely one way - as the Bible providing fuel for the fire of composers and musicians - music can help us to approach the Bible in a different way. Not as a handbook or manual, or even an unambiguous source of dogmatic truth, but as a creative response of humanity, inspired by the faithful love of our God, to draw closer to the one who gives us our creativity so freely.

- Rev Daniel Walters



St Giles' Choir Tour Reports

Over the summer the choir visited Perugia in Umbria, Italy. Over four days we had the privilege of singing in many spectacular churches and basilicas, as well as exploring the region's history and cuisine.

Evening meals together in the Hotel Wine and Jazz were a wonderful way of relaxing after a long day of singing—though attendance at breakfast was a little more sporadic.

The highlight of the tour for me was the spectacular lower basilica in Assisi: singing mass from behind the altar allowed the choir to enjoy a unique perspective of the basilica's wonderful frescoes.

I'm sure that everyone in the choir would join me in thanking Dr Nicholas Prozzillo for organizing yet another incredible tour; we all look forward eagerly to next summer!

Freddy Chelsom



Sitting here on a cold, wet, October day in Oxford, it's hard to imagine that three short months ago we were basking in the fragrant heat of an Italian afternoon, being serenaded by the choir of St Giles. In July this year we visited beautiful Perugia for a five-day exploration of culture, music and community. This annual tour helps us to celebrate another year of music-making and community at St Giles. As always, the age of the singers on the tour ranged from primary age children to those enjoying their later years - showing the widespread appeal of singing together and of choral music.

On our scenic tour of Southern Italy, the choir visited many breath-taking cathedrals and churches. These included the Cattedrale di S. Lorenzo, Basilica di S. Dominico and the Cattedrale di Narni. Our trip to Narni was especially memorable as the day we were there; the city was recorded to be the hottest place in Europe. We were immensely grateful for the coolness of ice cream and the church as we listened to our choir represent St Giles.

The choir was lucky enough to be invited to sing at the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. They sang a Mass service in the beautiful blue interior of the church. We particularly enjoyed hearing the Widor Tantum Ergo, which highlighted the lower voices in the choir. As we were leaving the Basilica, we took a few moments to watch the sun set over the stunning courtyard in front of the church.

Though Perugia is a land locked area, we still managed to find two swimming pools to cool off in. It has become a tour tradition to show off questionable diving skills, and bravery on the water slides. After a morning spent messing about in the water, we were in for another treat. This time in the form of olive oil. We visited Frantoio Berti, a family-owned olive oil farm and vineyard. There we learnt about oil extraction techniques and enjoyed a light lunch, featuring the farm's oil and wine.

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In Perugia, there were many attractions to see. One being the underground walking tour that many families went on. On this tour we learnt about the vast history of Perugia and the significance of many structural changes to the city's architecture. You could see the different stages of the city's foundations right from the Etruscans to the modern era, including areas of 'fire rock' left after a devastating fire in 40BC. It was fascinating to see the archeological evidence left by the city's various incarnations. It was also a relief to be cool on a day of Perugian heat.

As always, there were many moments of hilarity on this trip and countless quirks. The hotel that the group stayed at was appropriately themed -'music and wine'. It was lovely to be serenaded by one of our young musicians, playing one of the many pianos located in the reception area. We all enjoyed having a pool on the roof of the hotel, with wonderful views of the old town.

On all choir tours, we have enjoyed unusual forms of transport, Perugia was no exception. A mini metro can take you from the hotel to the old town, with a lovely view along the way. Once we had figured out how the tickets worked, we enjoyed travelling on the monorail and watching the city unfold below us.

There are often moments of spontaneous music-making. This year, on the way back from Narni, we were treated to a rendition of Zadok the Priest on the coach. A sign that our young people truly enjoy singing together.

And finally, no choir tour would be complete without the last night's dinner which featured thanks, speeches and goodbyes. One of the great joys of the tours has been sharing food and fellowship with each other. On the last night we reminisced about previous tours and said goodbye to choristers who have grown up and will now be heading off to University. The tour magnifies and celebrates what happens all year - music, faith and community shared together. Another truly memorable choir tour.

By The Woo Family - Emma, Chris, Ben, Evie, Hannah



Where to begin with the 2024 choir tour to Perugia? Perhaps the most defining feature of this year's tour was the hotel in which the choir stayed, a startling upgrade from the non-air-conditioned convents of the past, which, although always more than sufficient for our needs, had nothing on Hotel Giò Wine e Jazz. Iconic does hardly enough to describe this glorious accommodation. In addition to housing a rooftop pool and a selection of pianos (that we weren't always allowed to play), the hotel consisted of two, equally one-of-a-kind halves: the jazz half and the wine half - as suggested by the name. Staying in the wine half and dining in the jazz half meant one had ample opportunity to walk the piano-tile design floor that adjoined the two areas at basement level.

I am pleased to report that the annual waterpark trip was no less exciting for the hotel having its own pool. A liberal selection of slides, diving boards and even inflatables provided something for everyone. Memories of this refreshing morning became frankly torturous when the air-conditioning on the coaches malfunctioned, resulting in two very warm coach trips. Similarly sweaty were the mass and concert sung by the choir in Narni, which, on the day we visited, was the hottest town on the entire continent (this was not, in the eyes of the choirmaster, reason enough to abandon the cassock and surplus attire).

As is the case with all choir tours, the extent of musical talent harboured here at St Giles' impressed the Italian locals greatly, something that showed in the attendance at our performances. On top of the full choir performances, audiences were able to enjoy duets, solos and a touching rendition of 'Ave Maria' sung by the probationers, while organ accompaniments were distributed between a team of hard-working organists. The tour also saw a return to the idyllic town of Assisi; although each church was beautiful in its own right, the Basilica in Assisi was arguably the most striking.

Other highlights included a presentation on the process of making olive oil, followed by a tasting session - although oil is oil, it was interesting to detect the subtle differences in flavour. Many of us invested in a bottle. The minimetrò transport system in Perugia made travelling around the city both easy (the alternative was a steep, half-hour walk) and exciting, and there was also the opportunity to tour the Perugia underground.

I think I speak for us all when I express my heartfelt gratitude to our choirmaster NP for organising another wonderful choir tour - I know we're all anxious to know where St Giles' will venture when we travel to Italy in 2025!

By Mia Middleton



Back in Time for School

St Giles' Choirs visit the Ancient Schoolroom

by Andrew Sillett



Last December, the choristers of St Giles' church, along with their parents, friends and supporters, were invited by the University of Oxford's Classics Faculty to take a journey back in time to an authentic recreation of an ancient Roman schoolroom.

Just down the road from the church, next door to the Ashmolean Museum, we were invited to put ourselves in the shoes of a child 2,000 years ago, experiencing their first day of school. We were given a pair of Roman sandals, a tunic, and a hairband. Off came our watches, away went our phones, some of us even handed over our glasses to see how we would cope without modern technology to aid our learning.

Stepping through the doors, we met our teachers: our *magistri* and our *magistrae* (roles excellently played by my colleagues at the University of Reading and Oxford's own graduates and undergraduates). The children very quickly spotted that their teachers had no lesson plans, they didn't even take a register. Instead, they sat on their polished wooden chairs and watched us milling about.

Eventually, we realized that we would have to take responsibility for our own learning. We took it in turns to go up to our teachers, say hello ('salve, magister!'), and ask for something to do. They offered us a curriculum consisting of three parts: reading, writing, and maths. Each pupil had to choose how many of these parts they wanted to cover (if any!), in what order, how much time they wanted to spend on each, and how much support they wanted from their teacher. Some of us took a bit of time to adapt to this, others jumped in straightaway (possibly a bit too keenly in some cases!). Eventually, we all figured it out.





For those trying their hand at writing, there were two approaches on offer. The first saw our pupils being given a big chunk of broken pottery (and ostrakon), a pot of ink and a reed. Although some of us (like Roman children years earlier) thought this an excellent opportunity for a spot of doodling, we eventually turned to forming our letters clearly, then to writing words. A broken bit of pottery, though, is far too small a space for writing in full sentences. For that, our pupils had to ask for a tablet – though not the kind they were used to at school. A Roman tablet was a flat, postcard-sized piece of wood, covered in a thick layer of beeswax. To write on it, we had a stylus, a metal scraper shaped like flat head screwdriver. You could write with the thin edge and erase with the flat one. What we wrote was up to us. Some of us copied down what we had practiced reading, others tried their hand at some creative writing. When we were happy with our creations, we took them over to our teachers, either to get some feedback on our handwriting, or to read out what we had written.

To practice our reading in the Roman way, we were not given any books to work with. Instead, our teachers had painted some of their favourite poems on the walls. Our job was to read them out loud. As well as being rather noisy, this exercise was a bit more difficult than it sounds, because not only did the Romans not use any punctuation, they wrote entirely in capital letters, and they didn't even put spaces between words. It took us a while to figure out how to read: FRIENDSROMANSCOUNTRYMENLENDMEY OUREARSICOMETOBURYCAESARNOTTOPTOPRAISEHIM





Maths proved the most popular lesson. Using a counting board and a little pebble (a calculus), we learnt how to add, subtract, multiply and divide using Roman numerals: I, X, C and M took the places of 1, 10, 100 and 1,000. I thought I was grateful to live in a world where glasses have been invented, but I learnt I was even happier to be able to use zeros in my calculations. The children took to things rather quicker than I did, and some even progressed to the the advance course in how to use this method to calculate compound interest. The economy is safe with the choristers of St Giles'.

All of our pupils had fun putting themselves (quite literally) in the sandals of schoolchildren learning to read and write two thousand years ago in a Roman school. We are very grateful to Professor Eleanor Dickey and her team at the University of Reading for bringing her schoolroom to Oxford, and to Oxford University's Faculty of Classics for inviting us to have the classroom to ourselves for a morning.

*Dr Andrew James Sillett
Senior Researcher at the Faculty of Classics*

News from the Gatehouse

As many of you will be aware, Katrina Horne who has been CEO at the Gatehouse for the past number of years moved on to pastures new in October. Kat worked closely with our own Revd Dr Anne Holmes, and others, to form a partnership with St Giles' and Oxford Diocese to establish the Gatehouse Counselling Service which goes from strength to strength.

Collections over Christmas in both of our church communities will towards this very important work. The new CEO is called Sasha and comes with significant experience of work in the charitable sector, and we look forward to welcoming her to St Giles' on a Sunday once she has had a chance to settle in!

The Gatehouse Christmas appeal has begun, they are looking for help to make up present boxes for each and every one of their guests. They are primarily looking for chocolates and biscuits to fill 150 boxes. For more information email: admin@oxfordgatehouse.org. Normal drop-off times are Mon-Fri 3.30pm-6.30pm and Sun 2.30pm-5.30pm but please email in advance to check. Thank you!

The Gatehouse Christmas Gift Appeal

Donate items by 20th December 2024

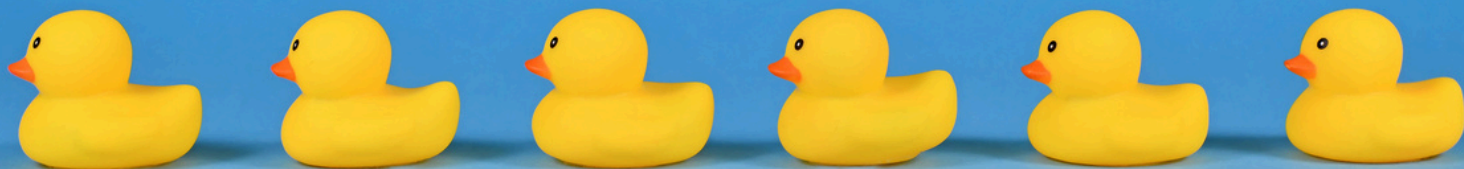
This year we are asking for donations of boxes of chocolates and biscuits to be able to give each guest a box at Christmas. We need around 150 boxes to be able to offer each guest a box this year. Can you help?

(Please ensure all chocolates and biscuits are alcohol free)

We are also appealing for donations of new pants and socks. The donations we receive will ensure we are able to keep our clothes store well stocked into 2025.

Email:

admin@oxfordgatehouse.org
for more information and drop
off details.



Godly Play

by Eva Walters

Last month, Claire and I attended Godly Play training, generously funded by the Oliver Heaton Trust. The training was wonderful and has strengthened some of the ideas that have been discussed in the wider ministry team around children and young people's faith journey's supported by St Margaret's Church.

My own relationship with Godly Play stretches back to St Agnes, Longsight and taking my own children to a Godly Play session that our American curate had started. It was about baptism, and I remember having lots of fun with toy ducks near the font in the "work" section. The Godly Play movement is itself over twenty years old now and is founded on the belief that every child is innately aware of God's presence through their own spirituality.

Godly Play sessions are a carefully crafted experience. Movements, words, colours and materials are all chosen specifically for how they can encourage the spiritual formation of children (and adults). They start with a welcome and an invitation to take part, before presenting the Christian story and liturgical practices through a story which uses objects that are small and toy-like, often the size of a child's hand. This is followed with space to wonder aloud or quietly. The session ends in an opportunity to create a response. This is called the work part where the children choose from a collection of mixed materials to create an outward, prayerful (and sometimes playful) expression of the story that they have just heard and their own wonderings.

So, from December of this year, St Margaret's will trial having one large group for Junior Church with those in primary and pre-school together for an Advent Godly Play session. The children and young people will leave after The Collect and return at The Peace as usual, and the teens discussion group will continue to meet as normal with a rota of teachers.

The Godly Play resonates comfortably with the overarching principles of St Margaret's children's work in providing opportunities for our younger members to grow and develop in their faith. We are intrinsically linked to the arts and this quote from *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae, "We all can dance when we find music that we love" has been coming to mind a lot as I write this article. Godly Play gives each child space to tune in to the spiritual music of their hearts and an opportunity to embrace it.

SUMMER

ART

WORSHOP

At the end of August, we welcomed over 15 children to St Giles' to take part in an art workshop. The aim of the day was for the children to produce three panels which would come together to decorate the children's worship area in St Giles'. Each of the panels has a biblical theme: Jonah and the Whale, the miraculous catch of fish by the disciples and the story of creation.

We were guided by local artist Lesley Morris who helped the children with their artistic techniques. The children drew the broad outlines onto the panels and worked together to complete the details once the backgrounds were painted. Every one – adults included – had the chance to paint a fish to sit in the sea and Sunday School recently added to the design of the world with animals of all kinds. The artistic skills of our young people are really amazing and have three wonderful, completed panels for our recently re-stocked children's area. Do go and take a closer look!

The day offered the chance for young people to use the church in a different way and lend their talents in service of the wider community. There were also chances to explore the aspects of the story and prayer through activities around the church kindly supplied by Sarah-Jane.

A huge thank you goes to Lesley, Helen Dodd, Sarah-Jane White, Andrew Sillett, and Kevin (for providing wooden animals), along with adults who brought along young people.

- Claire Browes





A Musical Roman Year

by Robert Gullifer

Louise and I were very fortunate to be able to spend the last academic year in Rome. Louise had a sabbatical which she wanted to spend researching and advising at UNIDROIT (the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) in Rome and I was pursuing my research into the theological, political and cultural influence of built Anglican Churches in 19th century Italy.

On our first Sunday in Rome, we duly made our way to the Anglican Church of All Saints' in Via Babuino with its neo-Gothic spire standing out amongst a sea of Baroque domes. A comfort, apparently, to Pope John XXIII who commented to the then Anglican chaplain that when he felt lonely at night, he would take up his binoculars and look at all the churches in Rome. 'When I do that,' he said, 'there is your little spire right in the middle of my window.'

Like many English parish churches, All Saints' Rome has an 'all-comers' choir, but because of Rome's mobile international community it is also a bit of an 'all-leavers' choir, so we were quickly signed up to join a very small core of welcoming long-standing resident expatriate choir members. And amongst them, it must be said, was evidence of great faithfulness in a very practical sense.

The spire of All Saints' Church, Rome with the dome of St Peter's Basilica behind

Turning up an hour for rehearsal before the service, having braved Rome's appalling 'traffico' or yet another city centre marathon run, might have daunted many less dedicated singers; or indeed the organist who never quite knew how many singers might be present on any one occasion or whether an archbishop or two were going to be presiding, with varying musical requests.

As you might imagine, Anglican choral music is a pretty niche interest in Italy. So, once our credentials became known, we were invited to join a lively international chamber choir whose first concert was of William Byrd's music in honour of the 400th anniversary of his death. And it turned out that as one of the few choirs in Rome with an Anglican repertoire, we were in demand for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The events of that week were truly moving as traditions of music and liturgy were shared in a spirit of Anglican/Catholic unity. Highlights included an Anglican Evensong in St Peter's Basilica, the Archbishop of Canterbury celebrating at a Sung Eucharist at the Catholic church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola, and attending Vespers led by Pope Francis and the Archbishop, sung in traditional plainsong by the Sistine Chapel choir, at the Basilica of St Paul without the Walls – the site of St Paul's beheading.

It is interesting to reflect how the worship of God in the psalms of the daily offices remains part of the bedrock of faith across different Judaeo-Christian traditions. Whether recited antiphonally, cantored in meditative plainsong, or chanted to choral psalmody, there's no doubt that the poetry and music of the

psalms has the power to stir our faith at a profound level.

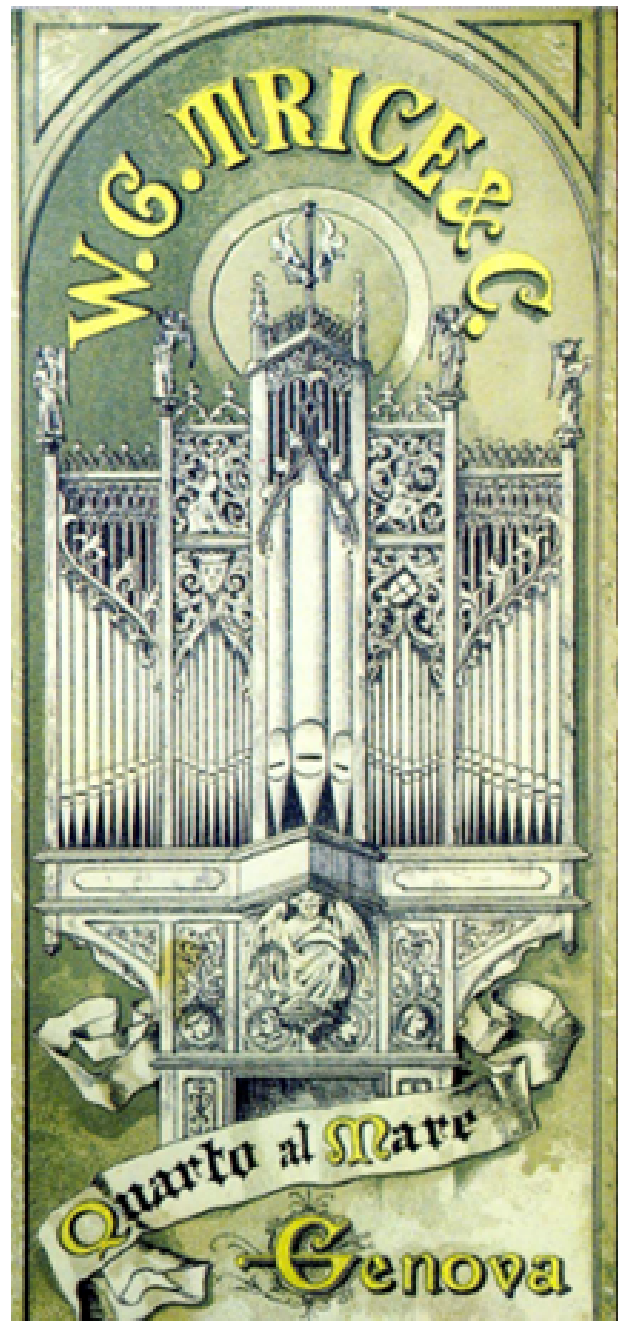
Some unkind critics might not say the same about the less distinguished examples of Anglican hymnody, but across Italy we were reminded of the strong tradition of Anglican, and indeed Protestant, hymn singing which was and still is a very distinctive and moving expression of collective faith, even in some of the smaller Anglican congregations abroad.

When some of the earliest Anglican chaplaincies were set up in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly as travel became easier after with the gradual expansion of the railway network, hoteliers began to set aside rooms for an Anglican chapel or even build Anglican chapels in their grounds. Without fail, such chapels were equipped with a harmonium, while chaplaincy registers usually recorded the name of a willing member of the congregation who volunteered to play, often with a remark about how many 'ladies and gentlemen' formed a small choir. As more elaborate purpose-built Anglican churches appeared in Italy towards the end of the century, so English organ builders were commissioned to install some very imposing instruments, at considerable expense to expatriate patrons. One English organ builder, William Trice, even established a factory in Genoa. Whilst Prime Minister Gladstone was of the opinion that the fashion for more elaborate church furnishings 'may not represent the spiritual growth, but the materializing tendencies of the age,' there is no doubting that this material

investment says a great deal about the importance to congregations of the shared spiritual and liturgical experience of rousing hymn singing led by an organ.

It is germane to this liturgical tradition that I should mention the Anglican Centre in Rome. The Centre was set up in 1966, following the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, to foster a relationship of friendship and deeper understanding between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. Its premises, including a little chapel, are in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilij in central Rome. The Centre's weekly Eucharist is a time of ecumenical encounter as well as an opportunity for Anglicans from across the world-wide communion to join together in worship. If you are in central Rome on a Tuesday lunchtime, I recommend it!

On the advice of friends at All Saints', we duly attended the Eucharist early on in our stay. It's fair to say that the congregation were struggling, albeit valiantly, with the hymns.



So, in the best traditions of Anglican chapels abroad, the appeal went out for someone to accompany the hymns and Louise duly volunteered. Little did she know that a couple of weeks later, she would be playing for Cardinal Parolin, the Pope's Secretary of State, who was visiting the Centre to preach at the Eucharist. But what a wonderfully simple expression of ecumenical faith the service was: a roomful of Christians from different traditions joining together in worship with 'hearts and hands and voices.'

In a memoir of a musical Roman year, it would be remiss not to mention Saint Cecilia, on the site of whose family home in Trastevere (on the left bank of the Tiber) is a basilica dedicated to her. Martyred for her faith in the hot baths of her house, she eventually became the patron saint of music and musicians. As Anna Jameson, the popular 19th century art historian, asserted: 'She played on all instruments, but none

sufficed to breathe forth that flood of harmony with which her whole soul was filled; therefore she invented the organ, consecrating it to the service of God.' We visited both the basilica in Trastevere and the place of her burial in the catacomb of S. Callixtus on the Appian Way. In each place there is a rather powerful marble sculpture of the saint whose story speaks perhaps most eloquently of all of faith and music. And in a very Anglican way, she is commemorated in stained glass in All Saints' Rome.

***This Article was
Written by a Member
of the Congregation.***

Send your articles,
images, reports, or
anything else you think
would suit the magazine.

Simply email Billy at
manager@stgilesstmargarets.org with
your content. We aim to publish
quarterly - next in Spring. The theme
for the next issue will be *Growing in
Faith*.



Windows are to let in light

In the last years of the 19th C, the stained glass in the windows of St Giles' church was felt to be too dark. New stained glass for the main east window in the chancel, using more light-transmitting colours, was commissioned in 1894 from Burlison and Grylls by the Rev Henry Delacour de Brisay, Chairman of the Oxford School Board, as a memorial to his daughter.

It replaced a strongly coloured window with a central figure of the crucified Christ commissioned in 1862 by F. J. Morrell (but, according to the guide-book currently on sale in Garsington church, made for St Giles' in 1883) from Clayton and Bell to replace a window made of patterned coloured glass. Described by Pevsner as of high quality, the glass removed from St Giles' was given at the Morrell family's suggestion to the church at Garsington, where it was installed in 1898. (The Morrell family had property in Garsington, and F. J. Morrell's grandson Philip and his wife Lady Ottoline were later to make the Manor in Garsington a gathering place for artists and writers.) The architect of the then new church of St Margaret's in North Oxford, H. J. W. Drinkwater, took charge of the alterations at St Giles'. Photographs of the glass removed from St Giles' and now in the east window at Garsington, and of a detail from it showing the Last Supper, accompany this article.



De Brisay himself died in 1916. Some of the funds collected in his memory were spent on completing the process of lightening the chancel of St Giles', under the supervision of Harry Redfern, an 'Arts and Crafts' architect. In a note applying for the Faculty, he said that the Victorian pseudo-Gothic ornament, apart from being in questionable taste, made the chancel very gloomy and obscured much of its architectural character. The lower third of the east window was uncovered, and three panels of the same light-transmitting glass by Burlison and Grylls were installed as de Brisay's memorial. This work was completed in 1920.

The continued desire to lighten the church remained the main aesthetic influence at work in St Giles' in the 20th C , and between 1948 and 1952 the opportunity was taken to replace much of the glass in the aisle windows, removing glass with dark-coloured geometric patterns which had previously surrounded the central picture panels, and replacing it with small panes of clear glass in a variety of patterns.

John Pusey





Faith

and Music

by David Smith

Faith and music – how can I separate them? I became a choirboy before my seventh birthday, and I've sung in church and chapel choirs ever since, without a break. Both Christianity and music (sacred and secular, classical and popular) are threads that run through my whole life and a tremendous source of inspiration. It's not just moments of illumination and excitement, welcome though those are, it's also the strength derived from regularity and commitment : choir practice when you think you are too tired to bother, hymns you have sung hundreds of times which suddenly strike you afresh, the companionship of fellow worshippers and singers, week after week.

Yet I think it is important, for me at least, to separate the two. There are plenty of strong and active believers who have no interest or involvement in music. I also know plenty of church musicians who claim to have no religious beliefs at all, though I hope and believe that some of the faith "rubs off" on these, whether they are conscious of it or not. It's possible to get so immersed in music preparation and performance that you forget what it's for, and in the case of sacred music that must be to give glory to God, to be aware of our faults, to commit ourselves to the service of others. Once you accept that, then faith must also involve prayer, attentiveness to the Bible and to the church's teaching, and participation in the life of communities of faith.

I'm sounding more pious than I intended to. Unless you are a much stronger character than I am, you won't continue doing anything for very long unless you enjoy it. I get huge joy from music, both hearing it and doing it, and huge joy from faith in the Christian Gospel, hearing it and doing it to the best of my ability. I'm very lucky to have both, in harmony!

A Librarian's Reflections

It's not really possible to capture my last 10 years with St Giles' in any number of words, never mind so few as this. There are too many memories to ever do justice to, too many faces to possibly recall, and too many beautiful pieces of music bastardized by myself in the shower. Our altos would weep to hear my own, inspired rendition of This is the Record of John.

However much my solo voice might leave to be desired, nothing of the sort matters when singing with the St Giles' choir. There are few experiences so special as feeling your singular voice disappear into sublime harmony, and no experience more special than when that harmony is comprised of such wonderful people. You might never know which one of them stole your cassock seconds before the service began, but with organisation like ours, who's to say that any one cassock really belongs to any one person?

I've been a part of that organisational effort a long time, having spent hours as the choir Librarian, filing music, clearing the stalls, sorting and distributing robes. I have in mind more than one criminal individual when I implore you all, for the sake of those Librarians who have taken my place, remember to return your own music to the vestry after a service. The deep pain of having filed away a box of music scores only to see another stray copy arrive, forgotten on a pew – it does not bear recounting.



(Contrastingly, the deep satisfaction of finishing a service to find the kitchen bar stocked with tea, coffee and biscuits makes up for all prior anguish, and I must thank everyone who brings such a blessing upon the congregation and choir!)

As I've grown up at St Giles', I've had the chance not only to see and appreciate, but also to take part in what goes on behind the scenes. Being able to contribute to this charming environment that so captured me as a child, of friendly adults and wonderful music – being trusted with that responsibility has, above all, made me happiest. For anyone in this position still, I dearly hope you know all the good you do. For anyone slowly growing into that position, take pride in it! The more I put into St Giles', the more evenings I spent singing, teaching music theory, the more afternoons spent filing music and preparing the vestry for Sunday morning, the more I felt given in return. I will treasure that for a long, long time.

- Max Rutterford



A Sermon

by Siân Grønlie, 25th August 2024

The collect that is set for today is, in my view, one of the greatest prayers ever written. And it probably won't surprise you to learn that it's one of Thomas Cranmer's, although the version in the pew sheets has been modernised and modified. So I want to start by reading you what Cranmer actually wrote in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer:

Almighty and Everlasting God which art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve. Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid and giving unto us that that prayer dare not presume to ask, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One of the best things I discovered at theological college is how collects work. A collect is rather like a sonnet or a haiku in the sense that it has a very tight structure or form which condenses an enormous amount into a small space. The art of a collect lies in how you use this set form to maximum effect. Cranmer was brilliant at it. All collects have five parts. The first part is the invocation or address to God. Often, that's just 'O God'; here it's: 'Almighty and Everlasting God'. Then we have the acknowledgement, which describes one or more aspects of God's character that are relevant to the prayer: here that's 'which art more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve'. Then we get to the heart of the collect, which is the petition, what we are asking for: 'Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy'. That's followed by the aspiration, which is what we hope will be the outcome of the prayer: 'forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid and giving unto us that that prayer dare not presume to ask'. It ends with the pleading, in which the prayer is made 'through Jesus Christ, our Lord'.

So this collect is a prayer, but it's also about prayer. It's about the reasons why it's difficult to pray. And it's about how all prayer is an act of daring, an act of presumption. How dare we ask anything at all of God? Why should an 'almighty and everlasting God' have any interest at all in the petty desires of finite, limited, imperfect creatures? I love the fact that 'prayer' rhymes with 'dare' in this collect: 'that that prayer dare not presume to ask'. In the BCP, the Lord's Prayer is introduced by the words: 'as our Saviour hath taught us, so we are bold to pray'. Bold, daring, presumptuous: to what extent do these words characterise our prayers? In this collect, they characterise all prayer.

But it's also about how, before we even start to pray, before the words begin to form in our mouths, before the desire begins to form in our hearts, before we even know what we want, let alone how to ask for it or whether there's any hope we'll granted it, God is already there. God is already there.

Let's start with why it's difficult to pray. What stops us praying? You probably have your own answers to that question: maybe you don't have the time or the space (that's very typical for young parents, for example!), or maybe you haven't got into a routine yet, and prayer is just falling by the way. Or maybe it's something deeper. There was certainly a period of my life—a period of bereavement—when I prayed very little and, to be brutally honest, that was because I didn't think God would give me anything I wanted anyway, so I didn't see the point. I didn't think I was a good enough person for God to listen to me. This collect gets right to the heart of this question of what we want and what we merit: 'Almighty and Everlasting God, which art [...] wont to give more than either we desire or deserve'. That's a wonderful word-pair, isn't it? Desire or deserve. Because there's usually quite a big gap between what we desire and what we deserve. I personally would be pretty happy with God giving me what I desire, but I'm not sure how I'd feel about God giving me what I deserve. Deserving can be positive: 'she deserves to do well in her exams, she worked really hard'. But it isn't always: 'I was really rude to her, but she totally deserved it'. Who decides what we deserve and on what basis? We can't possibly know what we deserve. And a lot of the time, we probably don't know what we truly desire either. We might think we know, but we might also be wrong. I thought I wanted a pet turtle, but it turns out on closer acquaintance with turtles that I really didn't. But neither of these things matter because God gives us not what we deserve, not what we desire, but more—more than we deserve would be good, right? But more than we desire? Whatever we ask of God, whatever it is, God wants to give us more. God's 'more' is not limited by time and space like our quantifiable 'more'—more money, more time, more gadgets—it's the 'more' of infinitude and eternity. A more we can't even begin to imagine, although Cranmer has a go with the image of God 'pouring' down the abundance of his mercy (and notice the rhyme between more/pour). If our 'more' is a light drizzle, God's is more akin a torrential downpour of heavy rain.

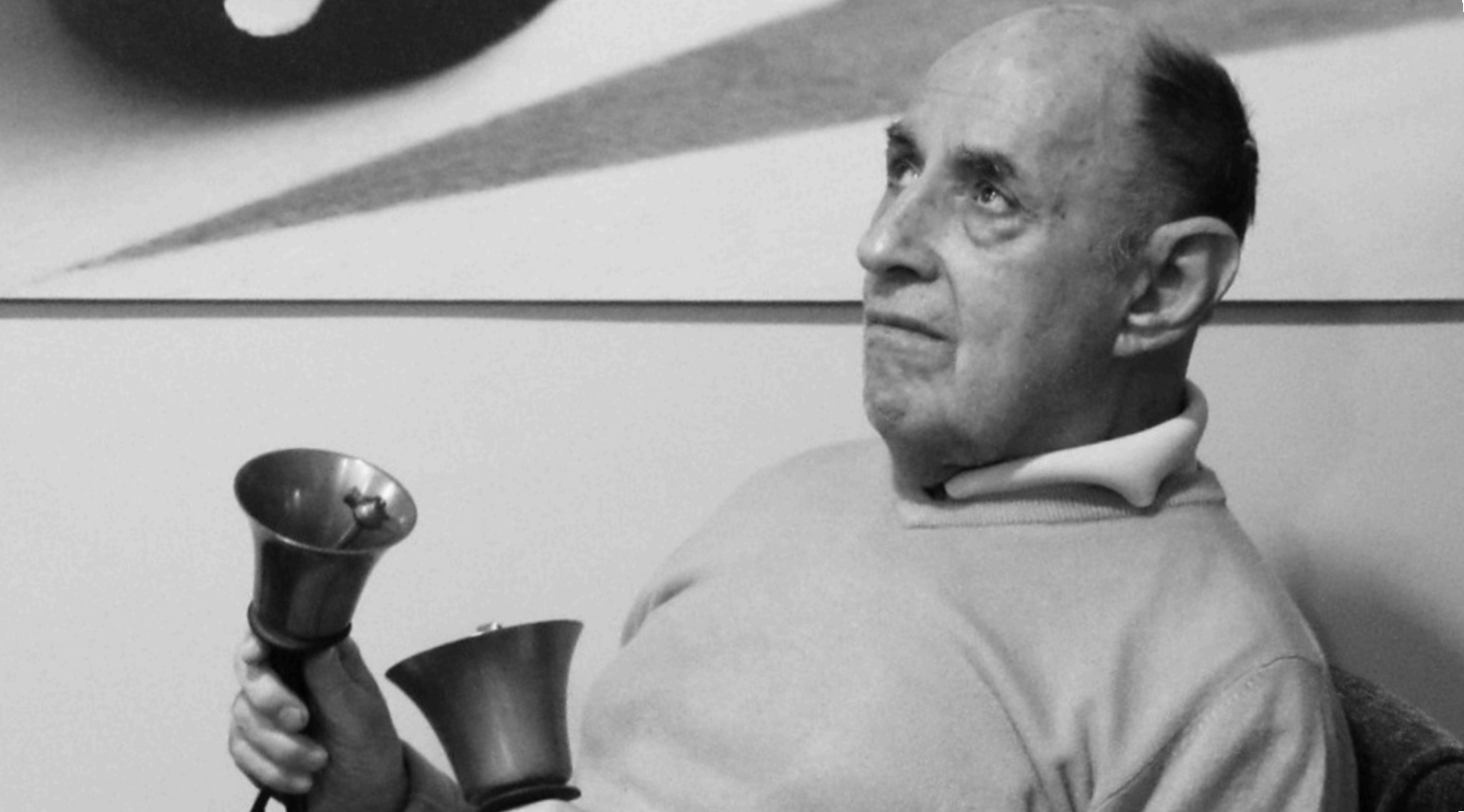
There's one other source of reluctance, though, and it's in the collect's aspiration: 'forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid'. It's interesting that the collect doesn't name what those things are, because there's a sense in which the things of which we're most afraid are precisely the things we can't name, the things we're too ashamed to put words to, the things we can't even acknowledge to ourselves, let alone to anyone else. These things can hold us back in prayer. Why would God want to listen to anything I have to say? Our collect has an answer to this: 'Almighty and everlasting God, which art always more ready to hear than we to pray'. Oddly this collect begins where it should end. Let me explain.

The way asking for things usually works is that we want something, we come up with a persuasive way of asking for it, we speak to the person that has what we want, and they hear us out and give an answer. But this prayer starts with God hearing it. God hears before we speak, and God grants our prayers before we even know what to ask for. If you think that sounds too good to be true, then look at Psalm 139: 'Before a word is on my lips, you know it completely, O Lord'. Or Isaiah 65: 'Before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear'. We never initiate prayer. Prayer is a response to the God who has already heard us. That's why we can be bold. Prayer is not a transaction and God does not answer our prayers based on how good we are. It's more the other way round: how good we are depends entirely on God's gift. I love the echo in this collect of 'forgiving us' and 'giving unto us'. It brings out the 'give' in 'forgive': forgiveness is a gift, not a concession.

And that brings us to our Gospel reading for today and God's greatest gift of all—the gift of God's self. 'The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh'. This is where I want to leave you, because this brings us to our celebration of the Eucharist in which God invites us to his table to receive his gifts: 'Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which is given for you and his blood that was shed for you'. How daring it would be, how presumptuous, how bold, to ask God for a share in the divine life. And yet that is exactly what God wants to give: 'Those that eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them'. That's not only, by any account, more than we deserve, but also more than we could possibly desire. Amen.



Thomas Cranmer, the writer of the collect in question, was one of the Oxford Martyrs. Image from *Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe (1563)



***John Pusey, tower captain,
on the late Bernard
Masterman, former ringer
at St Giles'***

John Pusey has passed on news of the death during the last week of October of Bernard Masterman, a totally blind man who lived for most of his life in Botley. Bernard started learning to ring bells at St Giles' in the 1970's at the age of about 30 (followed soon after by his twin brother Roger, who had also been blind from birth), and continued ringing at St Giles' for many years, though after about 2000 mainly at St Nicholas' Church, Old Marston. Bernard's ringing reached an advanced level, and he rang several hundred quarter-peals, most of them with the St Nicholas' Marston band, and 13 three-hour full peals (all between 1977 and 1992, ten of them at St Giles', including a peal of Plain Bob Major conducted by Bernard himself).

After a serious accident in 2018, Bernard made only a partial recovery, and did no more ringing on tower bells; but not long before the outbreak of Covid, a group including John visited Bernard and rang handbells with him at Cumnor Hill House, where Bernard lived until his death.

St Giles' owes Bernard a great debt of gratitude for providing a gift of money (understood to be the bulk of his life savings) which met just over half of the cost of the retuning and rehangings of our bells in 2011; without his gift, we should probably not have believed that it would be possible to raise the full amount required, and in particular to cover the cost of retuning the bells as well as rehangings them.



Coming Concerts

What concerts are coming up this Winter

Tom Thorp and Illumetris. 9 November 7:30pm. International award-winning saxophonist/composer Tom Thorp presents his exciting new quintet - Illumetris. They join us in the first part of their European tour, with the release of their new album *There be Monsters..*

The Budapest Cafe Orchestra. Myths and Magic. 8 December 7:30pm. Unconventional and snappily attired the BCO redeliver gypsy and folk-flavoured music in their own fresh and surprising way.

A Child's Christmas. 11 January 7:30pm. An evening of Jazz written by the late Stan Tracey based on Dylan Thomas' poem A Child's Christmas in Wales. Performance from The Mike Goff Quartet, with narrative passages read by Tom Neill.

Book now at jazzatstgiles.com

Benjamin Grønlie. 15 December 4pm. Former St Giles' Organ Scholar returns for a concert in aid of Project 900. Repertoire includes Bach's Partita no. 1 in B-flat major, Ravel's Oiseaux Tristes, Debussy's Nocturne, Chopin's Ballade no. 4 in F minor.

Book now at sg900.org

These concerts are being held to raise money for Project 900, the ongoing fundraising effort at St Giles'.

Launched to celebrate the 900th anniversary of St Giles', Project 900 is raising over £750,000 to restore and improve the fabric of the church and to install a new, mechanical action organ which will maintain St Giles' as one of the UK's leading institutions for the education of young organists.

A Miraculous Event from Nature

By Helen Dodd

At least we think it was so rare and unlikely, it merits this description.

In July my husband Richard was driving along the London Road, past Bury Knowle park out of Headington towards the big A40/ London roundabout. I was in the passenger seat and the front windows (only) were fully open on this very hot day. We were keeping to the 30 mph limit, when there was a sudden bang on the car, and we slowed down to inspect what had happened. Nothing untoward was apparent and we assumed it was a small branch from an overhead tree.

When we turned left at the roundabout towards Oxford, we gathered speed to 50 mph and wound up the windows to reduce traffic noise.

After two or three minutes I could hear a strange rustling in the back of our car. We have a people carrier car, but generally have all the rear seats out to save fuel energy.

When I turned to look, imagine my astonishment to see a young male sparrow hawk hopping around, sharing our journey!!

What precision of flight and eyesight to enable this bird to have flown over my head into the rear of the car, at our speed of 30 mph!

After about two miles, we were able to pull in to open the car boot, and he flew joyously away, apparently unharmed. We shall always remember our extra special passenger.





Oxford made the news this month when PhD student Eleonora Svanberg captured a beautiful video of two foxes playing in the snow at Magdalen College.



Get Involved

There are always opportunities to get involved and volunteer in church activities. Besides the usual - helping at services, be it with teas and coffees, readings or sidesperson's duties - there are some upcoming events that require volunteers.

John Pusey and Geraint Jones, who are in charge of the bellringing at St Giles', would always be interested to welcome not only any newcomers who are already experienced ringers, but also complete novices who are willing to learn to ring St Giles' bells. Exploratory first visits would always be possible, but there would be a lot to learn, and it would take perhaps a couple of months of attendance at practices on Thursday evenings before a complete novice would be able to take part in ringing before Sunday services.

David Clover, who runs Jazz at St Giles', is always looking for volunteers also. Get in touch with him via jazzatstgiles.com

We have many fantastic volunteers who help Eva with her children's work at St Margaret's and cross-benefice. If you would like to get involved, please do speak to Eva.

Helen Dodd is also always working on projects around St Giles', especially in the garden, so do get in touch with her to lend a hand.

Thank you to all who already help out.





Compline

It is the time of year when – by tradition – the newspapers run stories about the fact that Christmas advertising on the TV and Christmas products in the shops are arriving ever earlier. What has been christened ‘Christmas Creep’. We might disapprove of mince pies already being in the shops but there is no denying that Christmas is firmly on the horizon and that, liturgically, we are fully into the ‘Sundays before Advent’. Advent is for the preparation. And so, these weeks before Advent are the time to make a plan – to prepare for the preparation!

Sunday by Sunday in Advent we contemplate and prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas and at the eschaton – the end of time. But beyond Sundays, how are you going to use the short weeks before the 25th December? Siân and I decided that we would find singing Compline helpful as a way of taking time out to prepare for Christmas, and we hope that it might serve some of you too.

Compline is an ancient, monastic service which simple, short and predictable. The prayers are the very end of the day – for a quiet night and a perfect end. The service chanted and spoken and consists of prayers, a confession, and psalms. During Wednesdays in Advent, we will be singing Compline at 8pm in St Giles’ by candlelight. If you join us, we hope that it will transport you away from the busyness of the practical preparations for Christmas, to encounter with God.

*Be present, O merciful God,
and protect us through the silent hours of this night,
so that we who are wearied
by the changes and chances of this fleeting world,
may repose upon thy eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Claire Browes

Dates for your Diary

December

Sunday 1 6:30 - *Advent Carol Service at St Giles'*

Sunday 8 7:30 - *JASG Budapest Cafe Orchestra at St Giles'*

Saturday 14 4:30 - *Service of Riddles and Carols at St Giles'*

Sunday 15 3:00 - *Benjamin Gronlie Concert at St Giles'*

Tuesday 17 7:30 - *Beer and Carols at the Rose & Crown (North Parade)*

Saturday 21 10:30 - 12 - *Christmas SAMS at SMI*

Sunday 22 6:30 - *Nine Lessons and Carols at St Giles'*

Christmas Eve

11 - *Carols Around the Tree at St Giles'*

2 - *Children's Pop-Up Nativity at Phil & Jim School*

6 - *A Service of Lessons and Carols at Phil & Jim School*

11 - *Midnight Mass at St Giles'*

Keep up to date with all events on our joint benefice website: StGilesStMargarets.org

Christmas Day

8 - *BCP Communion at St Giles'*

10:30 - *Communion and Carols at St Giles'*

10:30 - *family-friendly Eucharist with carols, Phil & Jim School*

January

Thursday 9 12:30 - *Bible Study at St Giles' (2nd Thursday Each Month)*

Saturday 11 7:30 - *JASG A Child's Christmas at St Giles'*

Wednesday 15 12:30 - *Lunchtime Eucharists Restart every Wednesday at St Giles'*

Wednesday 22 - *St Margaret's PCC*

Wednesday 29 - *St Giles' PCC*

Thursday 30 - *Book Club at St Anne's, Orbital by Samantha Harvey, contact Sian for details*





Electoral Roll

Every six years, all parish churches are required to throw their old electoral rolls in the bin, and create a brand new one – everyone who wants to be on it has to apply again. This is happening next year (2025) – although at St Giles’ and St Margaret’s we’re getting ahead of the action and starting the process from the beginning of Advent this year (from 1st December).

In the context of a parish church, being on the electoral roll is the nearest thing the Church of England has to a “membership list”. We don’t technically have a “membership”, because historically everyone in England was assumed to be a member of the Church – and, specifically, of their own parish church.

Nowadays, electoral roll membership is to make it clear who has the right to vote for churchwardens, Parochial Church Council (PCC) members and Deanery Synod representatives – and the right to attend the annual meetings where these are elected.

More than this, however, it’s a ‘snapshot’ of all the people who are active in a parish church at any given time. Somewhere in the small print, this is defined as people who have been attending church services in that particular church about once per month or more, for the past six months.

Importantly, membership of the electoral roll does not require you to sign up to any particular list of beliefs, nor does it require you to be receiving Holy Communion. If you are happy to declare yourself to be a “member of the Church of England”, and if you’ve been attending your local parish church for the last six months or so, you are free to join (16 and over only).

And we hope that you will join. Why? Because it is helpful for us, and for the Diocese, to have an up-to-date and accurate idea of the size of our parishes (for one thing, it affects the size of our ‘parish share’, the money that we pay to the Diocese each year).

So whether you attend every week, or more sporadically; whether you live in the parish or not; whether you are a convinced believer or someone who is just questioning; whether you’ve been attending for 50 years or just moved here in 2024 – please do consider applying. It’s a quick-and-simple process which you can do either via the traditional paper form or online, and the only information which you need to give is your name and your postal address (the latter of which is kept confidential). The form will also have spaces for your e-mail, contact phone number and date of birth, but these are all entirely optional (and, again, strictly confidential).

If you have any questions at all, please get in touch either with Billy (the Electoral Roll Officer in both parishes) or Daniel who will be happy to explain further.

Contact Details

Joint Benefice

Vicar

Revd Daniel Walters

vicar@StGilesStMargarets.org

Tel: 01865 559409

Daniel's usual day off is Monday.

Associate Priest (stipendiary)

Revd Claire Browes

associate@StGilesStMargarets.org

Claire works in the Benefice on

Tuesdays – Thursdays, and Sundays.

Associate Priest (self-supporting)

Revd Dr Anne Holmes

anne@ac-holmes.co.uk

Curate

Revd Dr Siân Grønlie

sian.gronlie@st-annes.ox.ac.uk

Benefice Manager

Billy Morton

manager@StGilesStMargarets.org

St Giles'

Churchwardens

Mary Whitlock

Paul Rutterford

Safeguarding Officer

Lorraine Desai

St Margaret's

Churchwardens

Tom Plant

Richard Cooper

Safeguarding Officer

Becca Rose

