

**Swindon Old Town Partnership of Churches
Anglican - United Reformed - Methodist - Est. 1969**

PARTNERSHIP MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2022

80 PENCE



**Queen Elizabeth II
1926-2022**

One in Christ - Together in Mission



**Wedding of
Bethany Simmons and Calum Wells
Saturday 3rd September
at Christ Church.**

Bethany is the daughter of our
Parish Clerk, Carol Simmons.



The newly refurbished Diving Board at Coate Water.
Photo by Noel Hunt

Your Contacts

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WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER CHURCHES IN OLD TOWN

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Partnership Letter

Immanuel Manse
152 Drove Road

Greetings to you all,

YOURS. MINE. US.

Towards the end of the 60s' there was a film called 'Yours, Mine, and Ours'.... But of course you are all too young to remember that; it was a comedy based on children being born to her family, to his family and then, when they married, to their family.

Having said that, I can't for the life of me understand why I have begun this way, except that I do want to write about Yours. Mine and Us. This began when attending the service at Bath Road on 2nd September for the welcome to Rach as minister and the induction of David Gray as Superintendent. The sermon was preached by The Rev'd. Jonathan Pye and I can still remember things he mentioned.

He reminded us that we can only be truly human when we recognise the humanity in others, so when we reject, despise, persecute others, denying them their humanity, we are losing our humanity as well. This got me thinking - a lot. It reminded me that one of the bases of our faith is what we share; when we go from being "me" to becoming "us." This is clearly seen when the people of God share the words of the Lord's Prayer, saying "Our Father....," not "My Father" or again in John chapter 20, when Mary Magdalene encounters the Risen Christ and she tries to hug him. Jesus doesn't allow it and instead he sends her to share the news with the disciples, so her move is transformed into being a mover for others.

And I have not been able to stop thinking about all that.

We live in times where there is an excessive expression of individualism and selfishness; where so many of those who should be serving others only serve their own interests. In this way, our togetherness is torn and in such a way that there is much suffering around: suffering of the totality of creation, human beings, the waters, the land, the air, living creatures on the verge of extinction. We have lost the sense of being "Us." ➤

I was then reminded of the words of someone I greatly admire – Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he taught us a wonderful word: UBUNTU. Since I first heard him say it, this has become to me one of the most powerful and wonderful words, one I repeat often. Ubuntu means “I am because we are.” Solidarity, humanity, trust and support for each other. As Jesus taught us, when we destroy that link of togetherness, we destroy our common humanity which is God’s gift to us.

It is a word worth remembering. It is a word we should hold dear to our hearts. It reminds us that the value of life lies in connections, the connections that lead from being “me” and “you” till we reach the point of being “us.” Jesus was so clear – “I have come in order that you may have life - life in all its fullness” (John 10;10). Life in its fullness is much more than merely existing. Jesus shows us the way of the Kingdom - what other way is there?

We have a long way to go still for this to be true for all people and I do hope we all feel we are on that way.

UBUNTU. God bless us all,



**The Old Town Partnership of Churches AGM
will be held at
Immanuel United Reformed Church
on Wednesday 19th October, 7.30 pm.
All are welcome to attend this meeting.**

FAMILY EVENTS

BAPTISMS

We welcome into the family of the Church

MARRIAGE

We wish joy and happiness to

CHRIST CHURCH

Sep 3 Calum John Wells and Bethany Esther Simmons

DEATHS

We extend our sympathy to the loved ones

CHRIST CHURCH

Aug 3 John David Twaddle

FLOODLIGHTING

If you would like to sponsor the floodlighting of Christ Church in celebration of a birthday, wedding anniversary, special occasion, to advertise your Company, or in memory of a loved one, the minimum gift per evening is **£30.00**. Cheques to be made payable to 'Christ Church PCC'. Please write to the PARISH OFFICE, COMMUNITY CENTRE AT CHRIST CHURCH, SWINDON, SN1 3HB at least a week before the date of the floodlighting. GIFT AID: If you are a UK taxpayer and wish Christ Church to reclaim the tax, you may Gift Aid your donation. email: parishoffice@christchurchswindon.co.uk Tel. 522832

CHURCH MAGAZINE: If you are experiencing difficulty in getting your magazine, you can always purchase one from Rose Earle, Newsagent, Newport Street, who kindly sells them for us throughout the year.

The Old Town Partnership Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Queen Elizabeth II at Christ Church on Friday 16th September 7.00 pm

As the muffled bells of Christ Church tolled, many distinguished guests and local members of our wider community across Swindon gathered in Christ Church for a Service of Thanksgiving for our late Queen Elizabeth. The service was very well attended and we were particularly delighted to have many visitors from the Harbour Project join us.

Our worship was led beautifully by our Partnership Choir conducted by The Rev'd. Geoff Glead, with Tim Eyles playing the Organ and Noel Hunt on the Trumpet. The Choir anthems and the singing of the hymns was inspiring.

We were blessed to have our Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Sarah Troughton and Sir Robert Buckland, our MP for South Swindon and Minister for Wales, give their personal reflections of working with the Queen and the warmth of their memories shone through. The lessons were ably read by Margaret Williams and our Mayor of Swindon, Councillor Abdul Amin. In attendance also we were pleased to welcome the High Sheriff of Wiltshire, Lady Lansdowne.

Bishop Lee gave an inspiring sermon asking us to Remember at this time of national mourning and then to look to think about the words Revitalise and Renewal as we tackle the many challenges which are ever present in our world and nation. One of the most important parts of mourning is to remember well but then to look ahead especially as we give our support and encouragement to King Charles III in the weeks and months ahead.

The Rev'd. Rachel Collins, our new Methodist Minister at Bath Road, led some inspiring prayers which summarised these themes beautifully.

The service ended with the singing of all three verses of God save the King. Many people then queued up to sign the Book of Condolence which has been available at Christ Church for everyone to write their personal tributes. The book will be sent on to Buckingham Palace for the Royal family to keep.

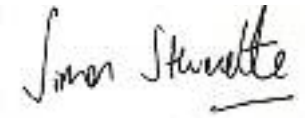
We were privileged to have Points West film the service which was then broadcast on the 10pm news. The service was also livestreamed and will be available if you missed it on the Christ Church website and our You Tube channel. ➤

There was a very welcome Cheese and Wine Reception at the Community Centre after the service where many gathered to share their stories and memories of the late Queen and all that these days of mourning have meant to them personally.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone across our Partnership who contributed to the smooth running of the service and the Reception afterwards. In particular, the car park attendants, The Tower, the musicians and choir, the welcomers, those on the sound desk, the Right Rev'd. Dr Lee Rayfield, The Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, the Mayor of Swindon, Councillor Abdul Amin, the Rev'd. Rachel Collins, Margaret Williams MBE, those who worked so hard setting up the refreshments and serving them and all our visitors and guests who came to commemorate our much loved and respected Queen Elizabeth.

We now look to the future with much to build on as we offer our prayers, our encouragement to our new Sovereign, King Charles III. May God bless him, The Queen Consort, and all the Royal family as we look to the future with hope.

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Skewton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Agatha Christie's 'The Mousetrap'

It was 70 years ago, on 6th October 1952, that the world premiere of Agatha Christie's play, *The Mousetrap*, opened in Nottingham. It then opened in London on 25th November, and is still going, making it the world's longest-running play.

Christie regarded detective fiction as a distinctively moral genre because it deals with questions of guilt and justice that are at times almost theological. The society and milieu of her stories are distinctively Christian. She was baptised into the Church of England and kept her mother's copy of *The Imitation of Christ* – a spiritual handbook – by her bedside. Its flyleaf carried a quotation from Romans, beginning "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

At her memorial service in 1976, her publisher William Collins described her as having a "gentle Christian spirit". ■



WE ARE BACK!

Venue: Bath Road Methodist Church

Date: Sunday 2nd October

Time: 3-4.30pm

Please note change of venue

Our Partnership of Churches is excited to announce that, after a break of two and a half years, Messy Church, Old Town plans to relaunch on Sunday 2nd October with a Harvest Thanksgiving Celebration.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming families, old and new, to Bath Road Methodist Church to join us for crafts and activities, fellowship, worship and refreshments. Our aim is to then meet regularly on the first Sunday afternoon of each month.

Messy Church can only run with volunteer help, so how about you volunteering to make some cake at home for the tea or, on the day, helping either with welcoming and registration. setting up, preparing tea, assisting with crafts and activities or clearing up. It is only once a month so you would not be committing yourself weekly. Interested people can get more information from church contacts:

Bath Road: Matthew Vatcher (matthewvatcher@gmail.com)

Christ Church: Janice Titcombe (janice.titcombe@btinternet.com)

Immanuel: Sam Chandler-Benjamin (amchandlerbenjamin@gmail.com)



AVEBURY VOCAL ENSEMBLE

**Saturday 22nd October, 7.30 pm
at St. Alban's Church, Watchfield.**

The Avebury Vocal Ensemble (AVE) will be performing Britten's 'Hymn to Saint Cecilia' and Monteverdi's 'Beatus Vir' in their Autumn programme in honour of St. Cecilia, the patroness of music. The celebration of the Vaughan Williams sesquicentenary continues with a performance of his five English Folk Songs and there will be a group of English Anthems emanating from wartime by the Stanford and Wood. We are pleased to be accompanied in this concert by Simon Dinsdale. AVE is a chamber choir based in North Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire.

Further details may be found at www.aveburyvocal.org

Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust Ride & Stride Saturday 10th September



Thank you to everyone who took part in this fundraising event and to the welcomers at each of our Partnership Churches.

Photo, l. to r. Daniel Pitt, cyclist, Elaine Guiding, one of the walkers, with her dog Freddie, Arline Stovell, organiser of the event and Caroline Pitt, another walker, outside the Community Centre at Christ Church.

Why walking a small dog may win a woman's heart

Men who walk small dogs are seen as less threatening to women than men who walk large or even medium sized dogs.

Using cute little dogs to appeal to women is a well-known tactic on dating apps, but now scientists at the University of Jaen in Spain have found that even just walking a small dog can attract women to a man.

It seems when women see a man walking a small dog, they remain relaxed, they feel safe and calm because they do not fear losing control of the situation and if the dog is really cute, then a conversation may even begin!

Christ Church with St. Mary's

Sunday Club Shoebox Appeal

We are collecting items for the children to pack into shoeboxes later in October on behalf of the charity Link to Hope. This is a small charity who will be delivering the shoeboxes to families and the elderly in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria.

We would be grateful for any donations, from an empty shoebox, a single item or a completed box. Please leave at the parish office Monday-Friday 10.00am-1.00pm or pass on to Sue Clack.

For further details please visit <https://linktohope.co.uk/> or see Sue at coffee on Sundays. You can also email sue@christchurchswindon.co.uk.

Last date for donations will be Sunday 30th October.



Tea & Chat at the Goddard Arms Hotel Tuesday 4th October, 2.30 pm

Everyone is welcome to this monthly event and we look forward to seeing you.

If you would like to know more, please phone Margaret Williams, 421102.

Swindon Concert Band Saturday 22nd October 7.30 pm at Christ Church in aid of Swindon Music Trust

Swindon Music Trust was formed in 1998 and provides access to funding for instrumental lessons on-line, at home and in school. We believe passionately that all children should have access to quality affordable instrumental tuition. Many of the children we support have special educational needs, are from low income families or are children in care. We support those who come from economically deprived areas or whose families are on benefits as well as supporting adult learners who are in receipt of benefits. We assist schools by providing part funding in order that they may run whole class music for all ages, and general music lessons in a school setting. *See page 13.*

Singing and Worshipping in York Minster

From August 29th until 4th September I was singing in York Minster as a member of the RSCM Residential Choir. There were 36 members, including myself. We are drawn from RSCM affiliated choirs from different parts of the country. This event used to be held once a year until recently, but due to Covid restrictions and other problems this was not possible.

Unusually, we were asked to sing Choral Evensong at 5.30 pm on the day we arrived. It was therefore necessary that we all arrived by a certain time to allow rehearsals to take place for the evening service. This year we have a new director, Martin Rawles, who is assistant Director of Music at Lichfield Cathedral. Our organist was once again Chris who is assistant organist at Newcastle Cathedral, a very expert organist.

Each day consisted of starting at about 9.00 am with rehearsals in a nearby church hall which we hired for the week. These lasted until about 1.00 pm when we had a break for lunch. We had to arrive back in the cathedral for 3.30 pm during the week, do some more rehearsing in the choir vestry and then go downstairs to the choir and do final rehearsals for that evening's service.

On Sunday 4th September we were required to sing 3 services in the Minster. a Mattins service which lasted for about 40 minutes, a communion service at 11.00 am and lasting for about one and a quarter hours, and then Choral Evensong at 4.00 pm. The day included a break from 12.15 pm until 2.30 pm when we had to be back for rehearsals for Choral Evensong.

Reaching the choir vestry had its own problems as it is at the top of a narrow spiral staircase. This is the only access to and from the choir vestry. Care needs to be taken if you are not used to that type of staircase.

Each evening, we were joined by quite a large congregation. The cathedral is closed to visitors around 4.00 pm each day during the week to allow the Minster staff to get ready for the evening service. As we concluded our practice in the choir each day, it was very reassuring to see a large queue forming in the cathedral of people waiting to come into the evening service.

The whole week was very busy but very rewarding. The Minster is a wonderful building in which to sing and I very much enjoyed this as part of my 60th anniversary year celebrations as a chorister. The venue for next year has not been decided as negotiations are ongoing.

Charles Vince



CHARITY Christmas Market

**Saturday
19th November 2022
11:00am - 2:30pm**

- To be opened by
The Mayor of Swindon
at 11:00am
- Many Charity Stalls
- Refreshments
- Christ Church
Choir will sing in the
Community Centre at
1:30pm and in
Church at 2:00pm
- Christ Church
Handbell Ringers
will perform in the
Community Centre
at 12 noon and in
Church at 12:45pm

**FREE
ADMISSION**

CHRIST CHURCH, OLD TOWN

Participating charities retain all proceeds



October Diary

- 01 Sat 7,30 am Christ Church Morning Prayer followed by fellowship breakfast in the Community Centre.
- 02 Sun** 8.00 am Christ Church,1662 Holy Communion
9.00 am St. Mary's, Holy Communion
10.00 am Christ Church, All Age Service
3.00 pm Hillier's Bereavement Care Service in Christ Church
3.00 pm Messy Church at King William Street School
6.30 pm Christ Church, Holy Communion
- 04 Tues 2.30 pm Tea & Chat at the Goddard Arms Hotel
- 05 Wed 10.30 am Christ in Quiet with Holy Communion
7.00 pm to 8.30 pm in Christ Church: Fellowship of Faith, Exploring Christianity and supporting one another.
- 09 Sun** 8.00 am Christ Church, Holy Communion
9.00 am St. Mary's, Holy Communion
10.00 am Christ Church, Family Holy Communion
- 12 Wed 10.30 am Christ in Quiet with Holy Communion
6.30 pm Healing Prayer Group
- 16 Sun** 8.00 am Christ Church, Holy Communion
10.00 am Christ Church Informal Holy Communion
6.30 pm Christ Church, Choral Evensong
- 18 Tues 10.00 am King William Street CE Primary School Harvest Service in Christ Church
- 19 Wed 10.30 am Christ Church, Christ in Quiet with Holy Communion
7.00 pm to 8.30 pm Christ Church, Fellowship of Faith. Exploring Christianity and supporting one another.
7.30 pm Partnership AGM at Immanuel
- 22 Sat 7.30 pm Swindon Concert Band in Christ Church,
- 23 Sun** 8.00 am Christ Church, Holy Communion
9.00 am St. Mary's, Informal Holy Communion
10.00 am Christ Church, Family Holy Communion
- 26 Wed 10.30 am Christ in Quiet with Holy Communion
- 30 Sun 8.00 am Christ Church, Holy Communion
9.00 am St. Mary's, Holy Communion
10.00 am Christ Church, Family Holy Communion



An AUTUMN CONCERT
Saturday 22nd October 7.30pm

Christchurch, Swindon. SN1 3HB

proceeds to Swindon Music Trust



Tickets : Adults £10 -under 16s FREE

Available on the door

Or call 01793 813095

or email tickets@swindonconcertband.co.uk

Immanuel

Services every Sunday at 10.30 am with
Holy Communion on the third Sunday of the month.

URC minister elected as World Council of Churches president

The Rev'd. Dr Susan Durber was elected as President of the European Region of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at its Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany on 5th September. In total, eight new presidents were elected.

The presidents are ex-officio members of the WCC central committee, and Dr Durber has just stepped down as the WCC's Faith & Order Moderator.

Susan said, "I am moved, surprised and profoundly honoured to have been elected as WCC President for Europe. I have been involved in the work of the WCC since I first went to a world conference on faith and order as a younger theologian in 1993.



"This new role gives me a privileged opportunity to do what I love; to meet with people among different churches and to speak for an ecumenism that is grounded in relationships and in shared faith, that listens to the voices of all the people and that is committed to justice, peace and the healing of creation.

"As the churches and peoples of Europe face the very deepest challenges right now I will give my strength to the ecumenical movement in bringing a counter-cultural call for unity."

According to the WCC constitution, the role of the WCC presidents is to promote ecumenism and interpret the work of the WCC, especially in their respective regions. ■

From Immanuel's Church Meeting...

For those in the partnership who don't know, in the long centuries old tradition of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches that preceded us, Immanuel URC maintains a regular meeting of its members that democratically reviews and considers the life of the church.


Among the items at the meeting on Sunday 11th September was an update on the proposed merger between Immanuel and the URC in Highworth. Unsurprisingly, until such time as the Charity Commission sorts out some of the complications that beset us, yet again there was "nothing to report".

We heard that, after many months of investigation, we have finally agreed to adopt the cover offered by the Performing Rights Society, so that from now on we shall be safe from possible prosecution for breaches of copyright and public performance of works (our former cover with CCLI limited us to only 6 public concerts in any one year) so we can now breathe a collective sigh of relief!

One interesting topic under discussion, closely linked to the pressing economic crisis that faces everyone, was whether, with winter approaching, we should consider opening our warm, safe halls and meeting rooms to vulnerable folk from the local community who might otherwise be sitting in cold houses for lack of money to heat them. A meeting had already taken place between representatives from Immanuel with councillors of the Borough and the South Swindon Parish. The church meeting on Sunday authorised the church elders to continue with talks...any firm proposal will, of course, be brought to the church meeting for a final decision.

As is the usual practice, various reports were presented, so we heard ideas from the Worship Committee, as well as plans for our Harvest Appeal, of church finances, the state of the buildings...and of course developments in our Partnership of Churches.

It made for a useful and informative meeting and people still got home in time to enjoy their Sunday roast!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Frai". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized hand.

Secretary

IMMANUEL HARVEST APPEAL



This year we would like to support Tools for Self Reliance in memory of Bernard Phillips, a great supporter of this charity, which was started by a handful of dedicated volunteers who wanted a more people-led approach to development assistance in Africa.

Tools for Self Reliance was formally registered as a charity in 1980 with the mandate of working with local organisations in developing countries to relieve poverty by supporting tradespeople in some of the poorest parts of the world. Today, volunteers in Self Reliance groups across the country collect and refurbish tools to be sent out to local partner organisations in Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Zambia.

These local partners are able to identify their local needs and then deliver training programmes which include not only technical skills, but also business and financial management, health awareness and life skills. Upon completion, trainees receive a start up kit of tools and are supported in forming their own businesses. This approach has been proved to support the development of sustainable livelihoods and income diversification for people affected by poverty.

We are particularly interested in helping to fund a Transition to Work Programme in Ghana which is being delivered by Street Girls' Aid. This agency was established in 1994 to work with young women and girls on the street and offer them better protection and opportunities to improve their situation.

A Year 1 training project in tailoring has gone well, with 25 students hoping to graduate in September after sitting their exams. The Year 2 programme, starting in January 2023, will assist the trainees to start their own business using mentors, further education and work experience as well as assistance with equipment. Tools for Self Reliance have promised to continue funding the trainees' accommodation and meals, with the cost estimated to be around £6,000.

The project was visited by staff from Tools for Self Reliance in May and they were able to speak to several trainees. One of these was Judith, who had been selling cake on the streets until she was able to leave home, a street shack, to live at the Street Girls Aid Centre while she undertook the tailoring course.

.Judith has not been able to attend education classes before and is seen as a very driven and intelligent young woman. She can now use a sewing machine and make tailored clothes for her family and is hoping to start her own business and further support her family in the future, for example by allowing the younger children to attend school.

As usual, any money recovered from your use of 'Gift Aid' envelopes will serve as a direct response to any of the disasters that sadly occur each year. Last year's 'Gift Aid' money supported the Disasters Emergency Committee appeals for relief aid in Afghanistan and to help refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Memories of the late Queen



My mum, Muriel Baker, joined the ATS in March 1945 and was posted to the ATS No 1 drivers training school in Camberley at the same time as the then Princess Elizabeth and although their paths did not cross, mum being a private and the Princess, an officer who went back to Windsor Castle every night, mum recounts the following.

“Every day we went out with a Cpl. instructor and we would drive around the tracks which had been set to a square. Every time we got to the first corner she would tell me to turn left. After the third time, I asked why she never said turn right so she did this time. We started to meet vehicles coming the other way. We went round again and then

finished. When I got back, the other girls were excited and asked me “Did you see her?” I said “Who?”, they answered “The Princess” with the Cpl. I had to laugh as it was me they had seen!”

Christine Senior

The Sound of Music raises £1000+

Our thanks go to The Immanuel Dramatic Society who, on Saturday 10th September, put on a stunning concert in the church hall with an amazing buffet supper. With all proceeds going to support the church, we know that our treasurer will be delighted to receive in excess of £1000. With heating and lighting bills set to soar even higher (note that churches have to face business rates for utility bills!) such a sum will certainly help. Thank you IDS!

Bath Road

Welcome Service

On Friday 2nd September The Rev'd. Rachel Collins was welcomed into her ministry in Swindon and Bath Road. The Rev'd. David Gray was also commissioned as Superintendent Minister of the North Wiltshire Methodist Circuit. The service was led by Rev Jonathan Pye.



L. to R: The Rev'd. Jonathan Pye, The Rev'd Rachel Collins,
The Rev'd. David Gray

Services at Bath Road - 10.00 am every Sunday

October	2nd	Alex Scott
	9th	Harvest Festival, Service led by The Rev'd. Rach Collins
	16th	Eric Hewitt
	23rd	Geoff Rhodes
	30th	Bible Sunday, Service led by The Rev'd. Tony Barnes

Open House - Mondays 10.30 am to 12 noon

Open House is now back and has been running successfully for a few weeks. It is on Mondays 10:30am to 12 noon. Please feel free to come along. We are also looking for volunteers to help run it. All you need to be able to do is make tea and coffee and cut up a cake or two. If you are able to help, please let me know. Thanks Keir. 07749726446.

Bath Road Church Community Breakfast

9.00 am to 11.00 am

Saturday 8th October

£1.00 for a bacon roll with tea or coffee

All are welcome



MOPS

(MOPS stands for Mix Of People)

We meet on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 2.30pm to 3.30 pm in the Crossland Room at Bath Road Methodist Church.

The usual format is to spend the first half hour chatting and the second half hour listening to a speaker or doing an activity.

October	6th	Flowers made of icing - Carolyn Wallbank
	20th	Celtic Saints - Eric Hewitt
November	3rd	Oberammergau - Martin, Keir and Gary
November	17th	Christmas Card making - Janet Hunt
December	1st	Chatting/Life stories - Janet Hunt
December	15th	Mince Pies and merriment - Brenda Hewitt

ORGANISERS; Brenda Hewitt, Tel. 683926 and Janet Hunt, Tel. 521934

The third booklet of sermons by Matthew Cammish, entitled 'Even More From My Headmaster's Study' is now available.

Matthew Cammish attended Bath Road Methodist Church for over 50 years and was a distinguished lay preacher. His sermons were all written and a few have been documented by one of his friends, Martin Robins. Another series of sermons has now been published in a booklet called 'Even More From My Headmaster's Study'. If you would like a copy of this book, please email Martin Robins at martinrobins@btinternet.com

Oberammergau 2022

On 18th August six of us from Bath Road, Martin, Keir, Gary, Clive, Dorothy and I went to the Passion Play in Oberammergau.

We went as part of a group with McCabe Pilgrimages led by the Rev'd. Debbie Hodgson. Debbie was a former Minister at Stratton, St. Andrews and Rodbourne. This was



the same company that organised our pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2017 which was also led by Debbie.

We were pleased to meet up again with people who had been on the previous pilgrimage as well as a lot of new friends. The trip was originally scheduled for 2020 but like many things was postponed due to the Covid pandemic.

Before we went to Oberammergau, we spent five very enjoyable days in the Austrian Alps in a beautiful village called Maria Alm. During this time we had some organised trips that included worshipping in some lovely chapels in beautiful settings as well as free time for walking or exploring on our own. One of the trips was a visit to Salzburg where we went to an organ recital in the Cathedral, after which we were able to sing "Guide Me Oh Thou Great Redeemer" in the crypt! We had a wonderful local guide called Rena who has since sent us all some great photos and videos from our trips.

The Oberammergau Passion Play normally takes place every 10 years. It started in 1634 during the Black Death when the villagers pledged that if no one else died they would perform a Passion Play in gratitude. After making the pledge, nobody else died and the play has been performed ever since. There have been occasional interruptions for political reasons or due to war (there was no play in 1940) and the 1920 performance was postponed to 1922 due to Spanish Flu, setting the precedence for 2020. There have also been extra performances to mark special occasions in 1815, 1934 and 1984. This year's performance was the 42nd.

For the first 250 years or so it was a local event performed in the churchyard where those who had died from the Black Death were buried. It started to

grow once the railways came and international travel became easier. One of the first people to bring tour groups to the play was Thomas Cook. From 1900 the play was performed on its present site in a purpose-built outdoor theatre that has since been rebuilt and enlarged. The current theatre seats 5100 people. The seats are now covered and there is a retractable roof to cover the stage in the event of rain.

The play is truly a local event involving most of the village. To take part in the play one either has to live in the village, have been born in the village or either one of your parents or grandparents has to have been born there. The population of the village is about 5,500 and about 2,600 of them are involved in the production. This includes a full orchestra, choir with



soloists and the production and administrative staff. Children from the schools take part in the street scenes. Real animals are also used, including camels that live in the village! It really runs in the villagers' blood with people being involved from a young age and aspiring to take more prominent roles as they get older.

Casting takes place the previous autumn (this had been done in 2019 for this year's play) and rehearsals start in the spring. Before rehearsals start, the actors playing the key roles (e.g. Jesus, Pilate, Caiaphas, Judas and Mary) go to the Holy Land to visit the Holy sites pertinent to the story. Those playing the main Jewish characters start growing their hair and beards from Ash Wednesday. At the end of the last performance they then have their hair and beard cut and the hair is collected and used to stuff toys that are given to needy children.

Performances start in mid-May and there are five performances a week until 2nd October giving 110 performances overall. The main characters are played by two actors with each playing 55 times but not always with the same other key players. In the past there were accusations that the play was Antisemitic (Hitler saw the 1934 production and approved of it because it made the Jews look bad and the Romans good). This has been addressed in recent performances with extensive consultation with Jewish groups. In this year's play, certain key passages in the Last Supper and elsewhere are spoken in Hebrew and not German. ➤

For a long time, participation was restricted to Roman Catholics but this has also changed and in this year's play two parts were played by Muslims of Turkish origin.

There are many interesting aspects of the play. The role of Judas is very prominent and is written to be quite sympathetic to him. Great play is made of his regret and agony when he realises that Jesus is going to be condemned to death. Also, because it is felt that people may not be as familiar with the background and gospels as they used to be, key pieces of Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount are included when Jesus visits the temple and when he is in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. They also show that not all the Sanhedrin were in favour of Jesus' death and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are given key roles arguing for Jesus and against what is being done to him.

The play really is an amazing and moving experience. It lasts for around five hours and is split into two sessions, each lasting two and a half hours. Apart from the bits of Hebrew mentioned above, it is performed in German. We were given English translations to follow but it was difficult to follow this and what was happening on stage. However, most of the time you could understand what was happening, even if not what was being said.

After we got home, I re-read the whole script to refresh my memory while the experience was still fresh. The acting, singing and music were very professional and it is remarkable to consider that they are all amateurs from the village. At the end of the performance I was emotionally drained but it certainly was an experience of a lifetime that I would recommend to anyone.

The next performance will be in 2030 and there will be an additional performance in 2034 to mark the quadricentenary for which planning has already started.

If you want to hear more about the play and see more pictures, Martin, Keir and Gary are giving a talk to MOPS on Thursday 3rd November.

George Kennedy



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