

Parish Magazine of St Giles' & St Margaret's, Oxford



October 2006

Free

The United Benefice of St Giles and SS Philip & James with St Margaret

<http://www.st-giles-church.org>

<http://www.parishes.oxford.anglican.org/oxford-stmargaret/>

Vicar: Revd. Dr. Andrew Bunch,
The Vicarage, Church Walk, Oxford OX2 6LY 510460

Curate: Revd. Georgie Simpson,
10 Woodstock Road, Oxford 512319

Non-stipendiary: Revd. Michael Screech, 5 Swanston Field,
Whitchurch-on-Thames, Reading, RG8 7HP 01189 842513

Lay Ministers:
David Longrigg, 23 Norham Rd, Oxford OX2 6SF 557879
Margaret Hollis, 63 Bainton Rd, Oxford, OX2 7AG 515363
Paula Clifford, 3 Pound Close, Kirtlington, OX5 3JR 01869-350806

Benefice secretary: Anne Dutton 311198
(Office hours: Mon 9:30-12:30; Wed 10:00-11:30; Thu 9:00-12:00)

Benefice Magazine Editor:
Alice Keller, alice.keller@hotmail.co.uk
8 Rowland Hill Court, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX1 1LE 240886

The parish magazine aims to provide an opportunity for us to exchange ideas and to share our experience of the Christian life. Publication date is intended to be the last Sunday of the preceding month, so copy should be sent before the previous Wednesday. Please send the editor articles, drawings, book reviews, parish news. The editor is especially grateful for material which has no particular sell-by date and for copy sent by email attachment.

**Deadline for submissions for next issue:
Wednesday, 25 October, 5 pm (for distribution Sunday, 29 October).**

Parish Church of St Giles

Churchwardens:

Catherine Barrington-Ward, 558172
8 Apsley Road, Oxford, OX2 7Q
Catherine Hilliard, 439319
40 Hayfield Rd, Oxford

PCC Secretary: Betty Couldrey, 512475
73a Observatory Street, Oxford, OX2 6EP

Treasurer: Alison Bickmore, 513100
28 Northmoor Rd, Oxford, OX2 6UR

Organist and Choir Director: Cynthia Hall, 310686
22 Hayward Rd, Oxford, OX2 8LW

Captain of the Bells: Dermot Roaf, 559467
27 St Margaret's Rd, Oxford, OX2 6RX

Woodstock Road Group: Margaret Williamson 372498

Flowers: Claire Woods 552892

Parish Church of St. Margaret

Churchwardens:

Pascale Lafebre, 22 Polstead Road, Oxford 554456
Hugh Jaeger, 49 Park Close, Oxford 554814

Authorised Ministers

Michèle Crawford, 27 Southdale Road, Oxford 558983

John Davies, 20 Bishop Kirk Place, Oxford 554601

PCC Secretary: Margaret Hollis, 63 Bainton Rd, Oxford 515363

Treasurer: Jane Martineau, 24 Polstead Road, Oxford 557435

Sacristans: Felicity Blair, Michael Faulkner, Ant Morgan,
& Edmund Weiner

Vergers/ Sacristan: John Davies, 20 Bishop Kirk Place, Oxford 554601

Organist & Choir Director: Richard Goodall, 763045
41 Glebelands, Headington OX3 7EN

Children and Youth work: Michèle Crawford, 558983

Flowers: Michèle Crawford *see above*

Dear Friends,

October 2006

As the time of year changes from September to October, it has been a long tradition to celebrate Harvest in our churches. However, over recent years this tradition has been questioned by many people, especially by people who live in our towns. This is for two prime reasons firstly, with developments in the plants we grow, the farmer's harvest is generally much earlier in the year and secondly, many of us town-dwellers have very little to do with the produce of the land.

There is certainly some truth in both of these two points of view. However, the whole purpose of the celebration of Harvest is for us to recognise the impact of the generosity of God in our lives and to give thanks for this. In which case, it doesn't matter if we are growing our own fruit and vegetables, it is still very appropriate for us to give thanks. But the questions raised has made me look at Harvest in a fresh way and as a consequence, this edition of the magazine is reflecting on what type of Harvest we are now reaping from the past year's endeavours. Yes, it is right that some time for reflection should be given to the productivity of the land. But in our two churches there has been another harvest which is associated with our buildings.

The last year has been a very good year for the structure of both St.Giles' and St Margaret's Church. I am heartily thankful that the roofs of both the Chancel and Lady Chapel of St Giles' have been retiled and the newly restored organ and new dais have been installed and built in St Margaret's. In the spirit of Harvest, it is right to reflect and give thanks for what has been achieved and the spirit of generosity that has made this possible. I am pleased to say that this magazine reflects on both achievements and makes us ponder on what is possible when we work in co-operation together.

But the life of the Church is far more than bricks and mortar or even organs and worship areas...it is primarily about the worship of God and encouraging people to develop their relationship with God. This brings to mind another association with the theme of harvest, namely the way

Jesus saw that fields were ripe for a spiritual harvest but lacked sufficient labourers to bring the harvest in (Luke 10:2). I am very well aware that this observation of Jesus that he made in his lifetime is true in our current age. For the past few years, many researchers have been aware of a spiritual hunger in our society, but this hunger is not being satisfied. We are living in an age which wants to find a sense of direction, that needs to develop its awareness of God, but nothing seems to be happening!

This year, however, there have been some very promising stirrings on this front as well in this United Benefice. A number of people have been seeking ways in which we can develop the prayer life of the Benefice. This hasn't been happening on just one front, there have been several ideas that have been coming to the surface to be discussed. The ideas have now been collected, discussed and presented to both PCC meetings. I am delighted to say that both PCCs endorsed the ideas presented for developing the prayer life of our two churches and hence there is now another strand of the Harvest which we can celebrate. Over the coming months a series of new initiatives concerning prayer will be put into place. We are hoping that they will be enthusiastically taken up and I would like to draw some of these to your attention.

Prayer Support Groups: I am well aware that the distinctive nature of the Church relies on the fact that we are a praying community which is called together to worship God. However, both the sense of community and the practice of prayer are not as strong as many of us would like. For this reason, I will be writing shortly to all people associated with our two churches to invite you to become a member of a prayer support group. Each prayer support group will be made up of between 8 to 12 people who are prepared to pray regularly for each other, either daily or weekly depending on what can be managed. There is no commitment to meet regularly, but it may be helpful for each group to meet one another at the start of the life of the prayer support group. Then, as people pray for one another, it is my belief, based on experience, that the Holy Spirit works within us to draw us together into a community which experiences the love of God more fully. At Pentecost each year, the membership of each group would change and the membership of the

new groups would be selected randomly. My hope is that the members of both parishes will be very keen to take part in this scheme, but membership will be totally voluntary.

Exploring Prayer: From the start of October, the Eucharist on Tuesday evenings at 7:15pm in St Margaret's will be changing in nature. There will be a much greater emphasis on different ways of praying. One week there will be an emphasis on intercessory prayer within a Eucharistic setting. Another week the emphasis will be on silent prayer. On another week there will be a homily in which the message of the Gospel is explored and on another there will be a Healing Service. All these services will be Eucharistic, but the aim is to encourage people into different experiences of prayer. We will see how this develops over the coming months and please make your views known to me.

Teaching on Prayer: Many people have asked for some teaching on prayer. The favoured times for giving this teaching were selected as 9:30am in St Giles on a Saturday and 6:30pm in St Margaret's on a Sunday. Hence, once a month from November, these two times will be used to provide some teaching on prayer. Although we can provide the text of these talks on the web-site, it is likely that there will be an opportunity to experience the kinds of prayer at the teaching sessions. The first of these sessions is likely to be on the first weekend of November and will be an introduction to the practice of prayer.

Other ideas that will also be explored include having services of **Compline**, starting a **Meditation Group** and holding a "**Day of Prayer**" for various concerns as they arise. These ideas will be developed as the year progresses.

Hence there is another Harvest that is happening in the spiritual life of these two parishes. My hope is that this will enable all of us to be a much more effective witness to the Gospel and draw more people into a greater and deeper awareness of God's presence in their lives.

With love,

Andrew.

'We've got to change'

When people hear about global warming they may react in one of two ways. At one extreme there's denial, claiming that the scientists have got it wrong (they haven't); at the other there's despair – it's such a huge problem there's nothing anyone can do so we're all doomed (there is and we're not). Both responses lead to inertia: a stubborn refusal to do anything or a panicky immobility, like a rabbit caught in headlights.

You may think that we've moved beyond denial, that the scientific evidence has convinced everyone that something must be done, and fast, to halt climate change and where possible to reverse its effects. Not so. A recent letter in the *Baptist Times* claimed that it was all a conspiracy by government, citing no less an authority than a novel by Robert Crichton! But while, for some reason, that paper's editors took this view seriously, it's tempting to think we know better. Or do we? If we are not already making changes to our own lifestyles in order to reduce the carbon emissions that we are personally responsible for, then we are, in effect, in a state of denial.

A small group of farmers that I met in the small Central American state of El Salvador earlier this year certainly weren't denying anything. They may not know the science, but they do know that things are changing for the worse. There are more hurricanes than there used to be and the effects are much more serious. The hurricanes destroy their livestock and the flooding that follows ruins their crops. And they can't afford to replace either. Yet they are doing their best to halt the damage, by replanting mangrove trees and strengthening river banks. 'It's all our fault, we destroyed the forests', said a farmer called Mauricio. I tried to tell him that climate change was largely down to countries like ours, but he still protested, 'It's our fault, we've got to change'.

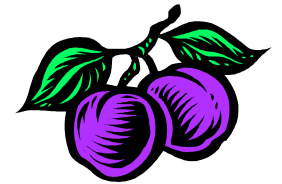
For me, the tragedy of climate change is that it is already killing the poorest people in vulnerable areas like Central America and south-east Asia. People who lack education and resources to start again after disaster strikes or who just cannot afford to move to areas less prone to drought or flooding are already living on the edge. It was painfully

obvious when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans last year, that even in a highly developed country the suffering of the poorest people far outweighed that of the rich.

It's because of Mauricio and his friends that I have been shamed into changing my ways – turning off lights, changing the heating system, using the bus more and the car less. He is making changes and so must I. The difference between us is that the next climate-change related hurricane to hit his village may well prove fatal. My chances are rather better.

Paula Clifford

Celebration and Harvest



The celebration for the harvest falls at a most appropriate time. The roof is finished, some but not all of the yew trees are flourishing, the weedy growth at the foot of the big trees in the churchyard has been cut away, the sorting out of the litter is in the reliable hands of those in the Parish rooms I/C The Big Issue, the drains are not blocked except in the fiercest of downpours, there are no leaks in the Lady Chapel, the scaffolding has gone and there is therefore more light in the Chancel, the grass round the urn burial area to the east of the church is recovering, the bin in the south side is emptied regularly, and the big wheelie to the north rarely overflows. The small lawn between the church and the parish rooms is in order, the hedges have been clipped, there is no superfluous vegetation between the Old Parsonage and the church, where nefarious practices can take place, there's on the whole a fair absence of needles, and not too many sleeping rough.

The church's harvest is more than the growth of daffodils, the upkeep of the graveyard, the tidying of the paths and the general presentation to the public of its grounds and buildings. The harvest involves people, not just those who are regular worshippers and on the electoral roll, but those outside the church. The church in its fullest aspect does not stop

at the church doors. God is not just inside the church hearing the petitions, pleas and problems of churchgoers. He is open to all, as a church should be. St Giles does very well in that aspect – the homeless, outreach, exhibitions, concerts, music, talks; articles have been written on each of the above, so there is no need for me to go into detail. Open the door, gather in the harvest, and let the people in.

Harvests, as I have come to realise from my gardening experience, are never perfect and may fail through lack of experience, planning and preparation. I sit here in my garden shed, with a redundant bird's nest in the rafters at the back. In front of me are 36 healthy green brassicas, a very productive greengage tree, a large-leaved grape vine tree attached to a metal trellis intertwined with roses, a long-standing apple tree dominating the lawn. Two Victoria plum trees behind me grow against a south-facing wall – the south side of a house in Parktown: artichokes growing to the height of a first floor are tied to the side of my shed. I am invisible from neighbouring houses and windows, surrounded by nature and fruits of the harvest – a book, a pen, some paper, and perhaps a glass of. What is more I am just about to take indoors for supper a large round cabbage, a minor but delicious celebration of the harvest. I should not complain really; but I do. The raspberries have been terrible this year; the tomatoes small and spindly because I carelessly planted them too close to the artichokes; the two recently planted wisterias have brown leaves and look sick; the peach tree does not look at all healthy, and the leeks for winter are no more than pencil size; there are no grapes worth talking about on my two vines. Harvests remind me of school reports: 'Coming along well, but could make more effort in the weaker subjects'; 'Good on the subjects he enjoys, but a little erratic on the others'; 'Started off well, but tailed off towards the end'; 'The final exam results have been disappointing after a promising first half'. The church and the garden, too, have much in common. Neither is perfect, next year is another year, preparation is essential – but the harvest of St Giles is considerably more extensive and fruitful than the sometimes frustrating results of my gardening efforts at home.

David Longrigg

St Giles Roofs – 2006

The Roof Restoration at St Giles had a long and somewhat tortuous gestation, but a very painless birth.



All who have sat on our PCCs over the past ten years will have heard the words, 'the last Quinquennial reported that the Chancel and Lady Chapel Roofs are overloaded with concrete, the tiles are slipping and broken, there are leaking spots, the underlying battens are rotten, the roofs are in imminent danger of caving in'.

It is easy to take these words with pinch of salt. What else is a Quinquennial for, but to be the bearer of alarm and despondency? However, when Hawkins and Riveros, who carry out our six monthly maintenance checks, told us the same, then action really had to be taken.

All have now heard our Liability Saga: that we thought we were still owed Chancel Liability by St John's, who, as Lay Rector, had paid for the Chancel Roof retiling of 1936. From 2003, it took St Giles two years and some embarrassment to find that this was no longer the case and that the Liability now rested among many houses built on the old outlying great tithe fields, most no longer even in our present parish or benefice. The problems of identifying these and asking their owners for fractions of the costs can be imagined and the exercise was ruled out.

Then English Heritage made enthusiastic noises, until it decided that we were still the theoretical beneficiaries of such a Liability.

However, God helps those who help themselves and there were several 'silver linings' to these early thunder clouds.

First, it was thought that we would have to restore the two roofs as two separate contracts; but once English Heritage had turned us down, we found that we could save at least £20,000 to have both as one. Secondly, the estimates from the builders proved considerably less than we had expected, particularly as they were able to run another Oxford roofing job alongside ours. Thirdly we took a successful gamble on the

summer weather and saved ourselves another £10,000 by not having a complete plastic site covering. All these brought the price down to something that seemed attainable.

Alison Bickmore, our treasurer, was already in action. Maximum grants from the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust and WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd) not only gave us a flying start; but raised morale and our public profile. Our Fundraisers, nobly and imaginatively lead by Margaret Bullard, then entered the fray by raising the profile still further, accelerating the forward momentum, bringing in funds and giving us several memorable and enjoyable social occasions.

We found the builders, Everest Roofing, kept to time and were most co-operative to work with, and all the while, St Giles' neighbours, friends, congregation and visitors were giving time and money, some large donations, some small, but all extremely welcome.

This, however, has been a Fundraising where every penny has counted and been counted. VAT repayments through the LPOW scheme have been swift. Reserves have been moved to get maximum interest, if only for a fortnight. As a result we have raised the money needed for the starting price, although Fundraising needs to continue to pay for some unforeseen hiccups.

All such projects have their worries and there have been extras. The compulsory timber survey showed that some bracing would be needed to prevent further movement of the Chancel beams and that past Dry Rot and Death Watch Beetle (now dead!) had left some timbers needing repair. The Health and Safety requirement for a full up-to-date asbestos survey revealed further essential expense. However, when these extras have been dealt with, we can rejoice and give thanks that the Lady Chapel and Chancel have had a major overhaul that has set a new benchmark for repair, besides two beautiful roofs.

The stone-tiles have been laid by craftsmen using the most up to date conservation techniques, carefully planned and supervised by the patient and unflappable Rory Duncan of Andrew Townsend Architects. Half

the tiles are new and have been laid on the inner slopes to weather down. Some other stonework has been replaced or made safe and minor repairs undertaken while the scaffolding has been up.

This generation of worshippers at St Giles believes that it is leaving roofs that should last for generations just as our forbears left roofs for us. What has been particularly wonderful is the trouble-free ease and efficiency with which the project has been accomplished and the spirit of generosity and interest with which all, institution and individual, have worked to achieve this.

We hope that with the remaining fund raising efforts we will quickly cover the whole cost. *Deo gratias!*

Catherine Barrington-Ward

Two coming events in support of the Roof Appeal:

Thursday Lecture: St Giles' Church, 12.30 pm

October 5th: Richard Lethbridge: *Saxon to Victorian - beautiful churches of Oxfordshire*. This lecture is in aid of the Roof Appeal and will cost £7.50, including sandwiches and wine; tickets at the door.

Advance notice:

Sunday, November 29th, 3pm at St Giles

Harpichord recital of music by J.S. Bach

Followed by tea and patisserie in the Church Hall, sponsored by Maison Blanc £7.50, in aid of the Roof Appeal, tickets at the door.

*But oh! what art can teach,
What human voice can reach the sacred organ's praise?
Notes inspiring holy love,
Notes that wing their heav'nly ways
To join the choirs above.*

Well, that may be a bit unfair to all the other instruments mentioned in Dryden's *A Song for St. Cecelia's Day*, but he does have a point. For centuries the organ has been used in Christian worship, and has no doubt secured its place by its ability to be so versatile. Able to accompany soloists, choirs and congregations, in anything from the most delicate to the most robust style, and also to provide appropriate solo organ music to capture the mood of any particular season in the church's calendar, the organ has earned its place on merit. Not only that, but it's a friendly instrument, quite willing to work in harmony with other instruments when the occasion demands. It's so well established, that we tend to take it for granted. But we miss it when it's gone! This was certainly the experience at St Margaret's, when after years of careful planning and fund raising, the organ left us for nine months or so to be re-built at Nicholson's factory in Malvern. Its return to use in July made a real impact, and although the organists will claim that they are still "getting used to it", there are already clear signs that the re-built organ is a significant improvement on the old one, much as we loved it.

So, it's not difficult to respond to the Vicar's invitation to write about "celebration", for celebration is in the air at St Margaret's, and music is both the cause and the means of our celebrations in the coming weeks. There is much to celebrate: the amazing generosity of those who responded to the appeal; the skills of the organ builders; the dedication of the church's musicians; the enthusiasm and skill of the choir; and the amazing tenacity of those who, over the last thirty years or so, have laboured to secure the future of the organ. How pleased they must be to see that we have at last achieved, after so many setbacks, what they started all those years ago.

(If you want to know more about this, and other aspects of the musical life of St Margaret's since 1884, you might like to buy a copy of **Music at St Margaret's Church, Oxford – an outline history of the organs and choir**, to be published by Positif Press, Oxford, and available from 29 September 2006 – all proceeds will go to the St. Margaret's Music Fund.)

So, over the next few weeks we will celebrate with: a service of dedication for the new organ and re-ordered church on 29 September; a concert of instrumental music on Saturday 30 November; a festal choral evensong on Sunday 1 October; a choral concert on Saturday 7 October; and the inaugural recital on the re-built organ to be given by Dr Simon Lindley on Saturday, 14 October. A glass or two of wine may well be on offer at some of these events. Do join us for as many of them as you can – a party is always better when the house is crowded with friendly folk! In addition, during the afternoon of Sunday 8 October, we will hold "open house" at St Margaret's to allow people, in a very informal way, to learn something about the organ, and have the chance to hear it and play it (even if only one or two notes – no skill required!). People who sponsored pipes are particularly welcome – come and hear the sounds you paid for.

[See concert programme on next page]

As you can see, we're in party mood, but often, after a party, there is a sense of anti-climax, a flat sort of feeling that takes some time to pass, and we tend to focus on the next celebration with anticipation. Well, at St Margaret's we can avoid the flat feeling, for the next celebration is never more than a week away. For many decades to come the re-built organ will assist in the celebration of the Eucharist, joining with the choir to provide appropriate music to reinforce the other aspects of the liturgy, and supporting the congregation as it offers its own praise and thanksgiving. That's *real* celebration!

Brian Davey

St Margaret's Church, Oxford

**Celebrations to Mark the Rededication of the Organ
Friday 29 September – Saturday 21 October 2006**

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Friday 29 Sept 7.00pm: | Service of Rededication of the Organ |
| Saturday 30 Sept 7.30pm: | Concert by the Blenheim Ensemble:
Gabriel Amherst (cello), Rupert McShane (harp).
Messiaen: <i>Quartet for the End of Time</i>
Ravel: <i>Introduction and Allegro</i>
Tickets £8 (£5 children) |
| Sunday 1 Oct 6.00pm: | Choral Evensong |
| Saturday 7 Oct 7.30pm: | Favourite Anthems sung by Oxford Voices,
including music by Tallis, Byrd, Sheppard,
Purcell, Haydn, Mozart, Wesley, and
Stanford |
| Sunday 8 Oct 3 – 5.30pm: | Open House for St Margaret's Organists and
friends |
| Saturday 14 Oct 7.00pm: | Opening Recital by Simon Lindley, former
President of the Royal College of Organists.
Music by Bach, Mendelssohn, Mozart and
others. |
| Saturday 21 Oct 8.00pm: | Concert by Oxford Pro Musica Singers,
including music by Vaughan Williams,
Tippett, Chilcott and L'Estrange.
Tickets £8 (£5 concessions) |

Many thanks to Lady Margaret Bullard, who seeing that it is Betjeman's anniversary this year, submitted the following poem in which the bells of St. Giles' feature. Margaret adds, 'I am indebted to the Keeper of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian for showing it to me. I am convinced that this poem had a profound effect upon Philip Larkin – who would have heard the bells regularly, while a student at St John's – when he came to write his late great poem 'Aubade'.'

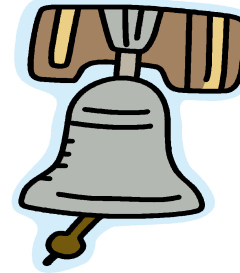
***Before the Anaesthetic, or A Real Fright (1958)*
Sir John Betjeman, 1906-1984**

Intolerably sad, profound
St. Giles's bells are ringing round,
They bring the slanting summer rain
To tap the chestnut boughs again
Whose shadowy cave of rainy leaves
The gusty belfry-song receives.
Intolerably sad and true,
Victorian red and jewel blue,
The mellow bells are ringing round
And charge the evening light with sound,
And I look motionless from bed
On heavy trees and purple red
And hear the midland bricks and tiles
Throw back the bells of stone St. Giles,
Bells, ancient now as castle walls,
Now hard and new as pitchpine stalls,
Now full with help from ages past,
Now dull with death and hell at last.
Swing up! and give me hope of life,
Swing down! and plunge the surgeon's knife.
I, breathing for a moment, see
Death wing himself away from me
And think, as on this bed I lie,
Is it extinction when I die?

I move my limbs and use my sight;
Not yet, thank God, not yet the Night.
Oh better far those echoing hells
Half-threaten'd in the pealing bells
Than that this "I" should cease to be--
Come quickly, Lord, come quick to me.
St. Giles's bells are asking now
"And hast thou known the Lord, hast thou?"
St. Giles's bells, they richly ring
"And was that Lord our Christ the King?"
St. Giles's bells they hear me call
I never knew the Lord at all.
Oh not in me your Saviour dwells
You ancient, rich St. Giles's bells.
Illuminated missals --spires--
Wide screens and decorated quires--
All these I loved, and on my knees
I thanked myself for knowing these
And watched the morning sunlight pass
Through richly stained Victorian glass
And in the colour-shafted air
I, kneeling, thought the Lord was there.
Now, lying in the gathering mist
I know that Lord did not exist;
Now, lest this "I" should cease to be,
Come, real Lord, come quick to me.
With every gust the chestnut sighs,
With every breath, a mortal dies;
The man who smiled alone, alone,
And went his journey on his own
With "Will you give my wife this letter,
In case, of course, I don't get better?"
Waits for his coffin lid to close
On waxen head and yellow toes.
Almighty Saviour, had I Faith
There'd be no fight with kindly Death.

Intolerably long and deep
St. Giles's bells swing on in sleep:
"But still you go from here alone"
Say all the bells about the Throne.

© Copyright John Betjeman 1958, 1962, 1970, 1979.
[From Collected Poems (1997), John Murray: New Bats in Old Belfries
(1945)]



Date for your diary:

Saturday, October 14th: Service of Thanksgiving for the life of *Julian Bullard* at 2.30pm in the Church of St Mary The Virgin.

Da Vinci Code, merely a novel

The following lecture was given by the deputy head at Queen's College Assembly in Taunton on 19 May. As a committed Christian and having read the novel, he was afraid that the film might leave young people at his school with the wrong impression. The lecture was given in order to ensure that the boys were made aware that the *Da Vinci Code* is merely a novel and a piece of extended prose-fiction.

Well, *The Da Vinci Code*, out in cinemas today, is creating quite a stir. The book (as far as I've got in it) is a really exciting novel, and the film, costing £114 million, is bound to be sensational – whether as good as the novel, we'll have to see.

One of the problems is that people have forgotten it is a novel, the proper definition of which is “a piece of extended, realistic prose fiction” – and fiction of course means it's made up, it's not history. And “realistic” means it's easy to believe or see as real – and so people have started believing what the characters tell us.

Actually, all the central claims of the characters in it were subjected to a complete hatchet job for two hours last Saturday on ITV by Tony Robinson, of *Blackadder* fame, till hardly a stone was left standing in the wreckage – I've got the video, if you want to see it.

But one thing that he didn't deal with is one of the things that interests me most, and it's this: in the book, through its characters, it is claimed that the Divinity of Christ, that is, the belief that Jesus was not just a man but the Son of God, didn't become widespread, or what Christians believed, until the fourth century – in fact 300 years *after* the Crucifixion of Jesus. It's like saying we've just started believing something about an event in 1700.

Now this is something that history *can* help us with, *and* literature, *and* archaeology. Let's start with some reports, books and letters.

Non-biblical 1st / 2nd century authors stating the Divinity of Christ:
Pliny, Tertullian, Ignatius, Clement, Irenaeus

To take just one of them, Pliny (a set text for me at university) was a high-ranking official in Roman government – in fact he was Governor of a province in north-west Turkey – and he wrote to the Emperor Trajan wondering what to do about these wretched Christians, who were a nuisance, but only because they were worshipping Christ as God, which was a threat to the official status of the Roman Emperors, who appointed themselves as gods from the time of Augustus onwards. I have his letters here, dated, for you to read if you want.

But let's get on to the fun bit.

Pompeii was a city in central Italy near Mount Vesuvius, an active volcano. In the first century, in 79 AD, an enormous eruption took place there which utterly destroyed the area and covered the city in metres of ash. All life was destroyed, and the city was lost even to sight. Nothing was left above ground, and no-one lived there.

I've known for 30 years that when Pompeii was excavated in the 18th century, puzzles were found on the walls of several houses, and the puzzle was a code. Here it is:

R O T A S
O P E R A
T E N E T
A R E P O
S A T O R

The question is, can we break the code? Let's look at it. It's what is called an *acrostic* because you can read it different ways: left to right, right to left, top to bottom, bottom to top. It's a perfect word square: five words, five letters each, 25 in all. Perfect. But it's also unique because it makes a passable Latin sentence: *Arepo the sower holds the wheels (at?) work*

Let's decode it a bit. Look at the centre, the heart of the puzzle: TENET.

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

That's Latin for "he holds", "he sustains", and of course it is in the shape of a cross. And at each end of each word, there is a cross, because the Greek letter T looked like a cross and was the symbol for the cross in the early church.

So, central to the beliefs of these early Christians was the idea that something special happened at Jesus's death – it was not ordinary, it was central to history and central to what he came for. The cross holds everything together in the puzzle of life.

Let's decode it a bit more:

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

Wherever you get the T symbol, you get A and O on either side of it: the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha (A) and omega (Ω). In the Bible, Jesus and God are described as exactly that – the alpha and the omega: the first and the last - and in the puzzle they flank the sign of the cross.

The cross is the central point between the beginning and the end, the pivot, the hinge upon which all events before and afterwards turn. It was not an ordinary death, but the one where the Alpha and Omega was nailed to a T, to a cross.

But is there anything else hidden in the code?

Is it perhaps not just an acrostic that can be read across and up and down, but an anagram – a jumble of letters which, rearranged, spell out *another* word or words which are the final meaning? Let's have a go.

A
P
A
T
E
R
N
O
S
T
E
R
O
S
T
E
R
O

Ah, we've made another cross, and at the beginning and end of each extent of it is the A and the O again – God surrounds all things and at the heart of the mystery, the arms hang, pinned to the words. And the words on the arms of the cross and at its head and foot are "Pater noster" – twice.

The words are Latin, and are rather important: "noster" means "our", and "pater" is father".

"Pater noster" means "our father" in Latin: they are the first two words of the Lord's Prayer in Latin – "Our Father, who art in heaven".

So, the Pompeii code decoded: what does it mean?

It means that the worship of Jesus as divine, as the Son of God, had reached not just north-west Turkey, but also the central Italian mainland within the lifetime of the first disciples – people like Peter, Matthew, James and John, and it was unquestionably before 79 AD, when Vesuvius erupted, because after that *nothing* was written in Pompeii, no-one even found Pompeii for a very, very long time – about 18 centuries.

It also means that Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, while being *perhaps* good fiction, is all lies when it comes to theology, or religious studies, and the identity of Christ.

Contributed by George Pulford

New Expressions: An answer to whether we need them

*Almighty, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes
... to whom all desires are known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden ...*

In this cool, post-modern world, it's possible that the language of worship is beyond the comprehension of the majority of ironically-minded, text-messaging consumers. How sad to be cut off from God because of language, worship style, Gothic buildings or Gregorian chant or ancient Creeds – or even because of incomprehensible Sacraments introduced by Our Lord Himself. How sad to believe that that is the way it has to be!

Since the Incarnation, the Christian community has been torn apart by divisions, first over the basics of belief, latterly by bible interpretation, worship styles, and doctrinal emphases. Until the 20th century, each division was an attempt to rediscover a more “serious” faith, usually accompanied by turning from the “world” to the “other”.

In the 1960s the “Jesus People” broke on the hippy scene, reaching out to youngsters caught in the drug culture. This marked the beginning of a new kind of Christianity: with this movement came the choruses and “informality” but also, paradoxically, the same fundamentalism and authoritarianism that characterised earlier sectarian movements. My generation of students was drawn into evangelical Christianity by the teachings of Francis Schaeffer, attracted by an “alternative” Christian lifestyle of long skirts, wild hair, hippy informality, cultivation of the arts, and critique of the Establishment – combined with strict Biblical morality.

As young adults many of us ran informal Christian meetings in our homes, and designed and led “alternative” services, believing that replacing the traditional forms of worship would enable “unbelievers” to enter a “meaningful relationship” with God. In the 1970s and 1980s the “Jesus People” worship style invaded the mainstream churches, with

songs from Sounds of Living Waters, accompanied by the belief that replacing organs with guitars would bring people into church. Country-wide happenings, “Come Together” and the “Festival of Light”, attempted to promote a national return to God based on traditional morality (their heritage is possibly the anti-abortion and anti-gay emphasis of some groups). The call throughout these movements was to “make faith understandable” and life “meaningful” through knowledge of God; their assumed wisdom was that liturgy and traditional churches were incomprehensible to the common man.

Now we're hearing about the “New Expressions” movement: I have a feeling of déjà vu, combined with a degree of public-relations-induced scepticism. What does this call for more informality, for abandoning the liturgy, really mean?

Incomprehensible to the common man? God created – and indeed became, through the Incarnation – the common man. Yet, to the incomprehensible mysterious Almighty of the pre-Christian era, the Gospel adds a Son of God whose teaching is by no means obvious. Who makes people think. Who calls himself, quoting Isaiah, “a stone to make them stumble, a rock to make them fall”. Who keeps his ministry hidden, charging the healed not to shout about their cures, forbidding Peter to tell people that he is the Messiah, making oblique references to his suffering and resurrection. Who speaks in parables and performs miracles which the majority fail to understand. God's explanation of himself is Jesus Christ; yet however close and loving our relationship with Jesus, otherness is the essential nature of God; mystery, wonder, and awe are key elements in appreciating and responding to him.

It is not a question of fashions or the needs of the age. Those inside the church may think that “simpler”, “informal” services in a secular building will reach the population better than liturgy inside a Gothic-style building. Reasons for not belonging to the church may include religious language being “difficult”, worship too “establishment”, or the demands of Christian teaching being unreasonable in today's world. But such objections have been made for a long time and are worn and predictable. Society is driven today, as throughout history, by its own

desires. Dumbing down Christianity to fit them is hardly an answer to the challenge of human “sinfulness”.

The traditions which are said to “put off” the majority are not the weaknesses of the church: they are its strengths. The Eucharist, mysterious as it is, is not only central to traditional worship, but is the one form of worship ordained by Christ. “Do this in remembrance of me.” The Liturgy is ancient, its roots in the worship of the early church. It is organised, containing the essential elements – confession, absolution, acknowledgment of God’s mysterious creative and redemptive otherness – and the Eucharist itself. The language is not “religious jargon” but functional. Words such as “sin”, “grace”, “temptation”, “hallowed” are not in daily use – but that does not deprive them of meaning or a place in our lives. The Sacraments are outward and visible signs of inner realities, not meaningless “rituals”. “Informal” worship is often reverse worship, because singing choruses beamed on to a screen is an activity originating in us; but in the Eucharist we – vulnerable, grateful, awestruck – are made to receive the Incarnate God. Moreover, “informal” groups risk losing their link with the historic faith; while claiming to be more “inclusive” in language and style, they frequently evolve to become less “inclusive” in beliefs and attitudes: a glance at history shows how today’s new styles become tomorrow’s sects.

There seems no reason to downgrade worship in order to draw people to Christ. The more downgraded and emptied of content, the less “value” there is to the “consumer”. Our challenge is to present to the world-weary not another informal, coffee-fuelled, chatter-filled meeting in workaday surroundings equipped with overhead projectors, photocopiers, mobile phones, and digital everything; but to present Otherness, Awe, Alternative Time, where there is beauty for the senses and a haven from the ratrace; where the mysterious God compassionately understands the secrets of our hearts and the motivations of our desires. But it is also true that this God will make demands.

Clare Weiner

Response to “In hoc signo vinceris”?

In the last issue we published an article by Jennifer Brooker in which she queried the vision and conversion of Constantine and the subsequent use of the symbol of the cross. Martin Henig, who is an expert on this subject, provides a possible solution.

Dear Jennifer,

Your letter has made me think; it has identified all the main problems but you are right that there are no definitive answers. All we can do is to read and where possible reconcile various sources, in the way Averil Cameron and I with various others have tried to do in the catalogue of the Constantine exhibition held in York this year.



You are certainly right about *Sol Invictus*, for Constantine saw himself as the comrade of the Sun-god. However, I think this says something about the process of conversion, with which – as a convert myself – I can empathize. For me, arriving with Jewish baggage, the starting point is the prophetic voice, of Hosea, Jeremiah and the (various) Isaiahs. These were the starting point for Our Lord as well as providing the blazing vision of God’s love which he fulfilled. For me they are almost always more alive than, in many cases, the epistles and if I had the power to change our liturgy in any way it would be – at least sometimes- to replace the second (Epistles) reading with one from the Prophets.

Constantine came to Christ with all the baggage of Roman cult, and for him the process was rather identifying the Sun-god with the supreme Ruler of the Universe; something that took him a lifetime to do. However, it began with the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and from 314, when he was present at the Council of Arles, he presided at Church Councils and allied himself with the Church, for whom he built great churches in Rome and throughout the Empire, including the Holy Land and his new capital, Constantinople. It is true that the Emperor was not baptised until the time of his death, but this was probably to ensure that all the sins someone in his position was bound to accumulate were

washed away. There is no reason to doubt Eusebius, quoting him as saying :

'I know that I am in the true sense blessed, that now I have been shown worthy of immortal life, that now I have received divine light.' (Life of Constantine IV,63.1)

He was buried amongst the remains of the Apostles in Constantinople, but that did not stop an Empire, still largely pagan, from deifying him!

As for the visions, we must remember that Constantine was a driven man. At his accession in 306 he looked to Apollo and at Grand, he was indeed vouchsafed a 'vision' of Apollo Grannus, but at the Milvian Bridge in 312 and thereafter he equated 'his' Apollo with Our Lord.

I would suggest that, as in my own case, there was a deepening understanding of God. And what he saw at the Milvian Bridge was *not* the cross but the *chi-rho*, a monogram consisting of the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek. It is this symbol which appears on coins.



As for St Helena [*his mother*], although she was also a Christian convert, we do not know when her conversion took place and, although she went to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, the legend of her 'finding' the True Cross goes back only to the late 4th century.

And as for the iconography, as an art-historian dealing with early Christian symbols, I could go on all day... You are right that the Cross is generally late, and when it occurs effectively conflates the instrument of horrendous execution with the Egyptian life symbol, the *ankh*, which for me is always integral to the Christian message.

The history of the Church is altogether wonderful and fascinating, and I find that the more I read (and one cannot do better than start with the wonderful, recently published history by Henry Chadwick) the more I want to know. Perhaps we should think about founding a Benefice

Church History Society, in which we can explore all the many problems together?

Martin Henig

St Giles' Fair – 2006

This year's church opening for St Giles' Fair has been one of the most, if not the most, enjoyable that I remember. Of course the warmth and sun over both days helped and brought in an unprecedented number of visitors, (over 1200). The 1000th visitor was presented with a box of chocolates to her great surprise and obvious pleasure.

The church itself was *en fête* celebrating a return to normality after the internal disruptions caused by the roofing. David Longrigg and his team had worked hard on the previous Saturday to 'spring' clean. Clare Woods had arranged the profusion of flowers given by St John's and Somerville into sumptuous and beautiful displays which were complemented by arrangements sent from other colleges and florists. So there was a party atmosphere even before the Fair celebrations began.

Margaret Williamson had excelled herself by ensuring that there were three different exhibitions in the church. Alison Bickmore and Margaret had set up a most professional and fascinating showcase about Stonefield tiles, John Steane lent us six of his gently observed paintings of roof beams and Karl Harrison again showed his own intriguing and superbly crafted photographic images of Oxford buildings. These caught the interest of young and old and it was especially interesting to have an image of our own church.

Yet all this was just a setting for the best and happiest team effort that I can remember. This year there were ample helpers on each day. Better even than this, they were drawn from all parts of our worshipping community including the bell-ringing team. There were those who said they could not think how many years they had been coming to help St Giles at the Fair. There were those for whom this was their first time.

Victoria, our church-watcher, handed out cake. Cynthia played the organ at both lunch-times after the special celebrations of the Eucharist. David Longrigg and Jim Smith manned the evening shifts and all the while John Clements was minding the Pork Roast. On the second day when the spit was set outside the church door, the delicious savour wafted into the church. No wonder it sold out so fast. Of course, St Giles' congregation provided the customary scrumptious eats but the quality of the home-made cakes, rolls, sandwiches and biscuits seemed even higher and more tempting than usual.

However, much less would have been achieved without the awe-inspiring energy and stamina with which Jane Edwardes and Rachel Hands set up, provided, and organised on both days. The event raised, from food, £467.67, (about £100 more than last year) and church and wall-safe donations and sales, £261.22, (about the same as last year) a total of £728.89.

However, what was so special was the joyful spirit permeating the whole occasion. This was not just a splendid fund-raising exercise, it was a celebration of community, co-operation, mutual respect and love....just as it ought to be.

Catherine Barrington-Ward

Exhibition, St Giles' Church

IN CELEBRATION OF ROOFS

Lift up your Eyes: Roofscapes

Sunday, 24th Sept - Sunday, 15th Oct
Weekdays 12 – 2; Weekends 2 - 5

Women Bishops – Opportunity or Threat?

A recent meeting of the Oxford Deanery synod discussed the issue of women bishops. We heard four speakers, and then divided into four groups to quiz the speakers individually, followed by some comment from the floor.

The first speaker was Jonathan Baker, Principal of Pusey House. He explained how bishops could be seen as representing the universality of the church in the context of apostolic succession and the three orders of bishop, priest and deacon, the latter two being local. He asked whether the Anglican church should be divided from other churches by this issue, pointing out that the ordination of women was not presented as a *fait accompli* but as an offering to other churches of how things might be in the future. In that sense, female ordination was provisional, and it was far more difficult to envisage any arrangement whereby female bishops could be so structured. He claimed scriptural justification for his stance, and pointed to the all male selection of apostles.

Our second speaker was Rosemary Tucker, who had held senior positions in major charities, and now led training, including that of bishops. She outlined her own progression to support of female ordination through her experience of chauvinistic behaviour by male clerics. She pointed out how Martha and Mary were not invisible to Jesus, and how radical Jesus had been in his own time. She gave an example of a woman opposed to female ordination who had herself felt the call of God and become ordained and asked how decisions could be taken by men alone without taking account of the female constituency.

Prudence Daily, from Cowley Deanery and a member of the Diocesan synod, presented her view that the pressure for women bishops was instigated by secular feminism and that this was opposed to God's created order. Women were not identical to men but had complementary qualities. She also mentioned the selection of only male apostles, and felt that women bishops could create problems of invalid ordinations in the future, and damage relations with other churches.

Christopher Lewis, Dean of Christchurch, felt that the debate was not about women or the spirit of the age, but about different models of the church; a pilgrim model where the church moved and looked for new insights, and a convert model where people came 'on board' an existing structure that took them through life. Women priests were as mixed a group as male priests; how could their contribution be differentiated? To him it seemed strange to have single sex bodies, rather than working together and sharing experience. The disciples were chosen for their humanity, not for their sex; it is with Jesus' humanity that we identify, not his maleness.

The discussion in my group focussed on the need to make space for those opposed to the concept, and questioned why we needed to be led by our relations with other churches. Comments from the floor included basing decisions on the scriptural case, the need for democratic decision-making, and a plea for the church to be rooted in real life. Finally, our own Andrew pointed out how much more important it was to develop the laity than spend endless time and effort debating this issue.

John Clements



THURSDAY LECTURES: AUTUMN 2006
St Giles' Church, 12.30 pm

Festival lectures: *Lift up Your Eyes: Roofscapes*

September 28th: Julian Munby: *Some medieval roofs of Oxford*

October 5th: Richard Lethbridge: *Saxon to Victorian - beautiful churches of Oxfordshire*. (This lecture is in aid of the Roof Appeal and will cost £7.50, including sandwiches and wine; tickets at the door).

October 12th: John Crook: *Bishops and base crucks: 14th century timber halls in Southern England, and their carpentry*

Termly lectures:

The Seven Deadly Sins in Literature and Life

October 19th: Professor Michael Dobson and Dr Nicola Watson: *Vanity: the case of Queen Elizabeth I*

October 26th: Professor Val Cunningham: *Gluttony*

November 2nd: The Rev'd Mary Bide: *Apathy: all Laodiceans now*

Further dates & titles to be announced later.

Advertisement

Who was St. Margaret's only lady organist?

What was her taste in millinery?

How many pipes are there in the Nicholson re-built organ?

Which renowned counter-tenor sang at St. Margaret's in the 1960s?

Which Vicar decided to disband the choir, and why?

How were the boy choristers rewarded in the 1920s?

When did ladies first sing in St. Margaret's choir?

How much did the Hill organ cost in 1892?

What anthems and settings did the choir sing in June 1968?

Have any recordings ever been made by the St. Margaret's choir?

What is the date of the second-hand pipes used in the re-built organ?

What did the congregation think of Latin settings of the Mass in the 1960s?

**Find the answers
and learn much more about the musical life of St Margaret's
from 1884 to 2006 in:**

Music at St. Margaret's Church, Oxford

An outline history of the organs and choirs

by

Brian Davey

Published by Positif Press, Oxford.

On Sale from 29 September: Price £6 (or two copies for £11)

**ALL PROCEEDS WILL GO DIRECTLY TO THE MUSIC FUND
OF ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH.**

(The author is most grateful to a number of very generous sponsors who have helped defray the printing costs, thus allowing the Music Fund to benefit from the entire sales proceeds)

Weekly Services at St Giles' & St Margaret's

Sunday

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
8:00am	Holy Communion	St Giles
10:30am	Parish Eucharist <i>with Sunday School & Crèche</i>	St Margaret
10:30am	Mattins & Holy Communion	St Giles
6:00pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret
6:30pm	Evensong	St Giles

Monday

5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
--------	----------------	----------

Tuesday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
7:15pm	Eucharist	St Margaret

Wednesday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
12:30pm	Eucharist	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Thursday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
8:00am	Iona Liturgy	St Giles
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Friday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
1:15pm	Taizé Service	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Saturday

9:00am	Morning Prayer	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret