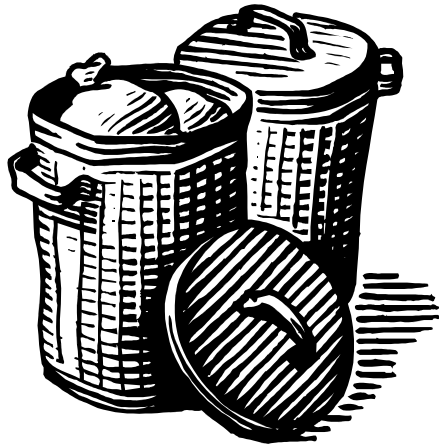


Parish Magazine of St Giles' & St Margaret's, Oxford



September 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/>

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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, 20 September, 5 pm (for distribution Sunday, 24 September).

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Dear Friends,

September 2006

In the next few months, one of the issues coming up on the PCC agenda in both parishes is our charitable giving from our two churches. The PCC will be deciding both how much will be given and the charities to which donations will be made. Over the last few years, a major beneficiary of our charitable giving has been the local organisations associated with work with the Homeless community. However, there is a current debate both nationally and locally about the effectiveness and desirability of such charitable work with the Homeless.

One argument is that a much tougher line should be taken with the Homeless and that charitable giving to them just encourages people to continue in an undesirable life-style. Proponents of such arguments want people to be actively moved off the streets and into a more normal and socially acceptable way of living. This change is deemed to be necessary to halt the rise in the number of homeless on our streets, in Oxford the official number of rough sleepers having more than doubled in the past year. However, those who oppose such a tough line argue that people will only be encouraged to stop living on the streets by a much gentler and more understanding approach. They argue that members of the Homeless community need to be helped to regain their confidence in life in order to enable them to re-establish themselves. Using an aggressive approach merely makes such vulnerable people more aggressive and this is thought by some to be giving rise to an increased level of violence associated with the Homeless in our city.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the two sides of the arguments, we thought that you might like to hear the views of those who currently work with the Homeless on the streets of Oxford. A number of articles are included in this edition of the magazine from different parts of the work with the Homeless in Oxford. I hope this helps you to appreciate more fully what is being done and the attitudes behind this work.

With love,

Andrew.



Oxford Night Shelter

It would be very hard to live or work in Oxford and NOT be aware that there are people who appear to be homeless.

Though appearances can be deceptive (not all beggars or Big Issue sellers are homeless by any means!), undoubtedly Oxford does have a very big homelessness problem. In fact, we have recently regained the dubious accolade of having the highest count of rough sleepers outside Central London in the UK. This article focuses on the work we do at Oxford Night Shelter – both at our night shelter at O’Hanlon House and our second stage accommodation at Julian Housing.

O’Hanlon House

This new building, near Folly Bridge, was built on the site of our old night shelter and opened in January 2005. It provides direct access, emergency accommodation to **up to 56 people per night**, every night of the year. It is also open during the day – not only to those who stayed the night before, but to people who have recently been homeless or are choosing to sleep rough for whatever reason. **Over 500 individuals use the Night Shelter every year, and over 800 individuals every year visit during the day.** A minimum of four care workers are on duty all through the day and night, with a team of 5 resettlement staff working alongside to resettle homeless people out of the Night Shelter and into the community.

Most of the rooms are single, with a small shower and toilet. Our clients can use laundry facilities and are provided with all their meals. They must contribute £3 per night of their own money to supplement our other funding (from Housing Benefit and Supporting People). The ethos of the night shelter is to encourage people to identify the reasons why they have become homeless and, with the input of care staff and resettlement workers, to address their problems and seek stable accommodation elsewhere - we don’t think it is acceptable for anyone to see a night shelter as their home.

We are extremely fortunate to be situated right next door to **Luther Street Medical Centre** – which provides primary care to anyone who is street homeless and not registered with a GP. This means that any new arrivals to O’Hanlon House can immediately be encouraged to register at the medical centre the next morning. It also means that the daily interactions our staff have with our clients can always result in swift access to medical care.

Julian Housing

Oxford Night Shelter also runs Julian Housing, a supported housing project for people moving on from O’Hanlon House. **Julian Housing consists of 12 houses, with 66 units of accommodation.** The houses are mainly situated in East Oxford, and are supported by a team of 6 staff.

Of course, Julian Housing does not suit all of the homeless people who come to O’Hanlon House. Others move on to other supported accommodation providers in Oxford, such as Simon House or Lucy Faithfull House. Some go on to a drugs rehabilitation programme or other specialist provision. Some find their own accommodation in the private rented sector. Some find jobs with accommodation provided. But many find that the problems that have led to them becoming homeless are simply too massive to find an easy way through. It is these people that need us most, and we persevere to support.

How you might be able to help

Though most of our funding comes from statutory bodies, we are always in need of extra. Our core funding does not cover items such as welfare payments, spare clothing for residents, emergency loans or train fares. We also need to raise money for activities and training facilities. **Financial donations are ALWAYS welcome.** Space is limited but donations of underwear, single blankets or bed linen, toiletries or food are also welcome.

*For further information please visit our website:
www.oxfordnightshester.org.uk or phone us on 01865 304600*

Lesley Dewhurst Director, Oxford Night Shelter



Gatehouse

Working at the Gatehouse (Oxford's premier, award-winning café for homeless and vulnerable people), a headline from the US 'Eyewitness News' recently caught my eye: ***City of Las Vegas makes it illegal to feed the homeless in city parks.***

The article goes on to explain that some activists have made themselves unpopular with their city for meeting homeless people in the park and offering doughnuts and water. This has led them to openly defy a city ordinance, risking a fine of \$1,000 or six months in gaol!

Gail Sacco has found it necessary to defy many of the city ordinances designed to prevent people from feeding the homeless. "I don't believe that I need a permit to share food with hungry people. I don't believe that I need a permit to help people in need," she stated.

Sacco was at Huntridge Circle Park Sunday breaking the law again. She had a group of more than 25 people without a permit. They were planning a protest against the new city ordinances. She said: "Maybe they will arrest me. It doesn't really matter if they can do that in good conscience. I just can't imagine."

Can you imagine it happening here? Or do we still pride ourselves in offering a welcome to the stranger at our gate, especially in Oxford, where facilities for homeless people are second to none?

Unlikely as it seems, attitudes towards those who are on the margins of this city are hardening. The Department of Communities and Local Government (as it's called, now it's been taken away from the Deputy Prime Minister) wants local councils to reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough with a policy of assertive outreach: sending out contact and assessment teams into the streets to try to get people "reconnected" to their place of origin. Fair enough. It seems a good idea to get all councils to take equal responsibility for their homeless populations, rather than put them on the train to Oxford, where they will find a shiny

new Night Shelter, their own GP service at the Luther Street Medical Centre and a series of welcoming day centres. We know that for years that's what has happened.

But as things stand, there is no guarantee that facilities will be developed elsewhere to match Oxford's. So we will continue to attract the homeless like bees to honey. The new Reconnection Policy means that those facilities will no longer be made available on demand: after a ten-day assessment process, clients who are not considered vulnerable by a professional panel are to be excluded – from hostels and day centres. Fair enough, you may think. If the city chooses to pull up the drawbridge and lock the gates, why should we complain? After all, our council tax money is going towards the five-star accommodation, so shouldn't we be pleased that it's being taken care of?

But how does a project like the Gatehouse fit into this new regime? Started at the end of the eighties by Churches Together in Central Oxford, and still supported by all kinds of Christians and others of goodwill around the county, the Gatehouse has always had an open door policy (for those over 25, at least). No one visiting the premises in St Michael's Street has ever been under pressure to reveal anything about themselves or their circumstances – not even their name. The only criterion is whether someone is a danger to themselves or anyone else. In time, we hope they will learn to trust us enough to confide in our workers and seek help. That may be about coming off the streets and settling in a place of their own, but along the way they are likely to have to deal with issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and mental illness.

We prize our tolerance, based on the unconditional love we have ourselves received in Christ, and we prize our independence. Because we receive no statutory funding we have no targets to meet and no government bosses to placate. The welcome we provide is unconditional, and not qualified by the need to sign people up onto programmes and courses. This gives us the freedom to meet people where they are, or as the old revival hymn says "just as I am". Our "guests" (not clients – we don't have a business relationship with them)

appreciate this and welcome real human contact with all sorts of people from the community. And now that we have name badges, they can address us by our first names. That came about as a result of an entry in the suggestion book by one of the guests, by the way: listening and responding is part of what we do.

We have no intention of undermining work that is happening elsewhere in the Network, but we do believe there is room for more than one approach. Let's hope our commitment to an open door policy isn't tested to the extent that it is being in the USA at the moment. I now read (internet again) that charity workers have felt it necessary to set up a soup kitchen on the steps of City Hall in Orlando, Florida, where they are having the same battle.

It's always good to hear from old colleagues, and I was intrigued to have the following reflections by a former project worker, now practising as a psychiatrist, a few days ago:

At the time [I worked with you] I think I used to define what the Gatehouse provided in terms of what it physically did: clothes from the clothing store, tea over the counter, marmite bonuses from the kitchen, stopping the under 18s coming in, chatting to the guests, providing newspapers, somewhere to sit, trying to resolve disputes, etc.

*I used to think: **Does all this really help?***

Well, to be honest, I don't think that in itself it really helps anyone even one tiny bit. People didn't need the food or the place to sit down; it wouldn't be disastrous for them if it was taken away. But what it surely does do is provide an idiosyncratic framework, a possibility and an opportunity, of one person treating another with respect and dignity and accepting them just as the individual they are. And of that other person then, as the consequence, gradually coming to some kind of acceptance of themselves and, correlatively, of their world.

Maybe that was all just obvious to my non-secular colleagues! However I wish I'd understood it better at the time, and I thought I'd write it down in case it was useful to anyone else who struggled with the same questions I did.

Breaking bread together is more than an empty tradition, not least because the people we see in St Michael's Street really are hungry. But it does go to the heart of what we are about. It's a starting point for human contact, a way of saying "You're welcome!" I hope everyone within the Benefice who has ever baked a cake, donated a tin of tuna or put 50p in the collection will feel a part of that, because when we open the door of the Gatehouse we welcome our homeless guests in your name. Not just that, but in the name of one who also had nowhere to lay his head.

Many, many thanks for your support over the years: I know there are some who remember the early days of St Giles' Parish Room during Christmas 1988. We've come a long way from there, and learnt many lessons along the way. But really, our job hasn't changed that much. Our aim is still: *To welcome the homeless and lonely, and provide a place where companionship, dignity, and refreshment can be found in a warm and safe environment.*

You may be aware that our future is uncertain, as our landlords, the city council, want the building back. But wherever we end up, we will continue to do what we do best: create a space where people feel at home and connected, whatever their circumstances and wherever they're from.

Andrew W Smith, Project Manager, Gatehouse

Chaplain to the Homeless

What does it mean to be Chaplain to the homeless community in Oxford? Being available, albeit on a limited basis as the post is part-time, for those who are homeless and turn up in the centre of Oxford, for those who work at the very large number of support organizations as paid staff, and also for the very large number of volunteers without which some of the centres would not be able to open.

In the sense that I do not have an office or base in the centre of Oxford, I too am homeless; and there are certainly occasions when I struggle

with the fact that I have so much security and so many creaturely comforts in comparison to those for whom being homeless means at best a room in a hostel and at the other end sleeping on the streets. It is a great privilege to be alongside these people and to be accepted by them in the way that I have been. There are very few who move away if I approach – especially when I assure them I am not going to preach at them and tell them how bad they are.

Sometimes Jesus words “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air their nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” come to me. I reflect on that as I talk with those who are in a similar position, but who also, like our Lord, have good friends who will often give them a bed for the night. But it has made me wonder just how many nights Jesus slept under the stars after he had gone off to a lonely place to pray. Many of those who sleep on the streets or in tents do have a strong faith that God, often expressed as ‘Him up there’, sometimes as a greater power, is looking down on them and protecting them. The words “In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone Lord make me dwell in safety” which I say every evening at Compline, take on a much greater significance for these people than they can ever really have for me.

One of the things I have found during the 13 months I have been doing the work is that those who are homeless have a certain acceptance; this is how it is. Very often they know and accept that they themselves are part of the problem and what is hindering them from moving out of this way of living. But I have also found that in their broken-ness and vulnerability, and in their strengths as well as weakness, there can only be very slow progress to change. Part of what I am about is helping them to understand God’s love for them as they are, but also his longing that they become whole and that in that longing he is offering the Spirit of Jesus to help to bring about the change which they cannot do for themselves.

Some among the homeless do have church connections which varies from being very much part of a worshipping congregation and fellowship, to going to a service now and again or just going and sitting quietly in a church – or the church yard. The peace that a churchyard

has is greatly appreciated by quite a few, and one or two share with me that in sleeping there they feel even more protected. There are also those who flatly do not believe, those who see the Bible as a document thought up to keep the masses under control! Occasionally I will enter into discussion knowing however that I am not going to convince them that it is about the revelation of God to his people. Equally they know that they are not going to convince me, but we enjoy the discussion. But there are also those who have a sense that life has some greater meaning and are searching for that. Those I will spend more time with; but what I have also learned is that each encounter is just that: an encounter. I may never see the person again or not for some months by which time they can be asking other questions.

Recently I have been visiting a woman with a broken femur – on the first occasion the day before the operation she was clearly in great pain from her leg, but in even greater agony from the alcohol and nicotine withdrawal symptoms from which she was suffering. Looking at her felt very much like being given a close-up of our Lord’s passion and death on the cross; not in any sense comparing her suffering with that of Jesus, but rather through it receiving a deeper understanding of how it was for him. She is now on the slow road to recovery and so I pray that for her there will also be something of resurrection.

So what does it mean to be chaplain to the homeless? Clearly many things but what it has certainly done is allow me to experience the pain and the joy of life alongside a community who frequently show a love and concern for their neighbour, or very often fellow drinker, which is far greater than in most other communities today. It is work which brings me great sorrow as I see some going back down to the place from which they have just struggled to climb out from, but also great joy when some do begin to move on, and I feel they are beginning to experience something of the fullness of life that Jesus came to bring.

Sr Anne CSJB

Homeless and Outreach at St Giles

Oxford has the second highest percentage of homeless people in the whole country, in part because the facilities for looking after these people, as well as drunks and drug addicts, are excellent. The city has the Night Shelter, Simon House, the Porch, the Gatehouse, and some other places, mainly staffed by volunteers, which provide food and/or accommodation. For instance in St Giles' Parish rooms, the Salvation Army had facilities for providing clean clothing and showers; and now distribute a magazine for the homeless from there. Several members of the St Giles congregation, and I myself, have worked and are working, as volunteers in some of these institutions.

In St Giles we have a small lawn, and an extensive graveyard and green area to the south, where the homeless often sleep, as well as in the porch of the Parish rooms. What do we do with these people? We talk to them, we try to understand their problems, and take them to shops to have something to eat and drink. Generally we do not give them money as this is frequently mis-spent, and begging is in fact illegal. But of course our relationships with individuals are entirely a personal matter.

This church, situated as it is between two main roads with two public footpaths joining these to the north and south, is like a city centre church with accompanying problems. When the church is open, Monday to Friday 12 to 2.00 p.m. many people drop in, not just the homeless, of course, but curious visitors and those who like peace and quiet and would like to pray.

But our outreach, our contact with the public, is not confined to dealing with, and trying to look after, the down and outs. We have exhibitions. Artists are invited to show their work, and a small percentage of their sales are paid to the church. These exhibitions – and they are not always of a religious nature - bring into the church teenagers, many who are not Christians, or of any faith. We also have concerts, organ recitals, or one-man plays. Lectures on a wide variety of subjects are given on Thursday between 12.30 and 1.30. We have had authors such as Philip Pullmann, politician Douglas Hurd, and the once in prison Jonathan

Aitken, to talk. All functions and church services are, of course, open to the public.

One of the important functions every year is the St Giles' fair at the beginning of September lasting two days. Thousands of people come to this and the church stays open from ten in the morning until ten in the evening, manned, once again, by volunteers. The choir sings at the start of the fair, usually with the Bishop blessing the fair. We sell tea and cakes and once again this is an opportunity for all generations to come in, to relax in a church, to sit down, and to pray.

Although there are nine Christian communities in the area of St Giles - Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Quakers and so on – we feel proud that, despite our relatively small electoral roll, this church plays an important part in this area, both inside this building and outside it.

David J.F. Longrigg



“What do you do?” It’s the classic opening gambit at parties, or for that matter synods and chapters. Sometimes I say that I’m the new industrial chaplain, or involved in industrial mission, because it would take too long to explain properly. But these shorthand ways of describing workplace ministry should come with a health warning: they may help people to understand what I do, but they also help people to *misunderstand*, because each word comes pre-loaded with its own ‘baggage’.

“Industry”, for example, does not just mean heavy manufacturing: we now talk about the leisure industry, tourism industry, service industry and so on. And “Mission” is not the exclusive preserve of missionaries in the Victorian sense. Indeed, the current description for this activity is

“Mission in Work and Economic Life” reflecting the spread of this ministry to all people in work, in the private, public and voluntary/community sectors, paid or unpaid.

Many of the traditional activities are still in place, and their scope is very broad: for example, being part of the employee support provision in an organization, visiting regularly, offering pastoral care to individuals who have lost a parent or are going through job loss or the break-up of a relationship. Engaging with the management structures of an organization, and offering a prophetic voice in its counsels. Pursuing social justice and good stewardship of natural resources through local government or community partnerships.

But, changes are taking place in workplace ministry which, unsurprisingly, closely resemble those we are now seeing in the wider church; which in turn reflect changes in the world in which we all operate: an important shift which Howard and Wellbourn refer to as “the new paradigm” in their influential book, *“The Spirit At Work Phenomenon.”*

Boundaries between the worlds have become fuzzy and subject to constant change. People are no longer born, schooled, married and buried within the parishes into which the church is organized: they do not even sleep, work and ‘recreate’ in the same community each week. Everyone experiences pressure to perform, and family time is eroded: 30% of the workforce now works on Sundays. This creates problems for the church, but important opportunities too. Many of the ways in which the church is responding to this new environment, for example developing fresh expressions of church (liquid church, network church, café church), are also highly relevant in the world of work: we can “make, be and do church” on a business park too, if that’s where people find community.

So, workplace ministry has become a shape-shifter: indeed, ministries in the working world are well placed to respond effectively to change. They may be ministries ‘on the edge’ from the perspective of ‘solid’ or mainstream church: but they are slap in the middle of where most

people spend most of their time, and form some of their most important networks: that is, at their place of work.

And perhaps the most exciting thing of all is that the church is already engaged in valuable ministry within many of these networks. To see this clearly, we must understand the church to mean the people of God, rather than the buildings where they meet; and we must understand ministry to be synonymous with service, and open to all believers, not just the ordained.

It seems quite clear to me that the future of workplace chaplaincy lies with a distributed, every-member ministry, and with ministry teams which draw on the rich resources of experience, talent and skill already present in the gathered church. I believe that the key task for me, and others like me, is to enable encourage and support the priesthood of all believers. Christians who work, can exercise a quiet but hugely valuable and powerful ministry among their own colleagues. And church members who have retired from paid work can use their lifetime of experience and people skills to minister to those who are still working: after all, every place of work is in someone’s parish. So this is “both/and” church in action, in a highly practical and effective way: “people of faith, serving people at work.”

The Oxford Industrial Chaplaincy offers a service covering the city, and in God’s good time the whole county, of Oxford. The harvest is plentiful, the potential huge: there are many needs out there, and employers are generally receptive. I would love to hear from more parishes and individuals interested in helping with the harvest!

For further information please visit our website www.oxinch.ik.com or phone us on 01865 251549.

Revd Dr Peter Steddon, Director, Oxford Industrial Chaplaincy

The Feast of the Transfiguration

I was asked, after the St Margaret's service on 6th August, to print the text of the sermon in the magazine. It looks at two major and contrasting events that we mark on this day.

There are very few dates in history that I remember, but the 6th of August is one of them. Maybe it's because this day is a major festival in the Church's year but, in my mind, for years the celebration of the Transfiguration has stood alongside the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. It could be argued that both events have tremendous significance for all generations, for both events have made mankind see the future in a very different light. Nobody could know how the mind and actions of mankind would change, but they have, this day of the year is a time of enlightenment for all of the future.

When Peter, James & John went up the mountain with Jesus, they knew Jesus was special, for otherwise they wouldn't have followed him and let him influence their lives. But on the top of that mountain they were given a glimpse of his true significance. They saw that in this man, all the aspirations of the past, The Law & The Prophets, came together in a way which made sense of everything! In one bright illuminated flash of inspiration, they saw something of the glory of God. It was dazzling, it was over-powering and it was awesome and perhaps it is comforting that these leaders of men didn't know what to say...! They were so blown away by the experience that they didn't know what to do.

Likewise, the moment when the first atomic bomb was dropped, people didn't know what to do or expect. The power of nature had been released in a new way and nobody was quite sure what would happen. Would this mark the end of war as it was known or would it spark a new conflict? Fortunately for those that came through the experience, peace prevailed, but the shock-waves of that explosion are still shaping our thoughts today. When the bomb went off, it was so powerful apparently people were vaporised, all that was left of one person was their shadow on a wall that remained standing. So the two events that we celebrate on this day have had a shocking impact on mankind. They have shown us

what is possible. But they have left us with a question? What will we learn from these events & how will they help shape our future?

The first lesson that I hope mankind will learn from this day is the awesome power of God. So often we think that we have power, that nations are powerful, and forget that the real source of power in life rests with God and his creation. We are deluding ourselves every time that we forget the enormous difference between the potential of what can be achieved when we work in harmony with God's will as opposed to what can be constructed by our own efforts alone. When we recognise the difference, then perhaps we should ask ourselves a question: Why do we find it so difficult not to recognise the wisdom in the words spoken at the Transfiguration of Jesus "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."

What Jesus came to share with us is a vision of life in which the glory of God would be known intimately, when life is lived in harmony with God. It is a truth which is blindly obvious yet very difficult for us to accept... as all of us have a tendency to think that in some way we know better than God. But God is gracious; he seems to accept that there will be a time delay between the moment when we see a truth for the first time and then change our lives to reflect the new level of insight and knowledge that we have received. For Peter, James and John, their conversion may have been initiated on the mountain, but it was only after the Resurrection that it changed their lives for ever.

It seems that before people are willing to accept a radical change in their lives, it is not good enough to show them the glory of the way life can be, they also need to know the full horror of turning away from God. For the disciples, that horror was experienced in the void after Good Friday when they knew for themselves how empty life had become without Jesus. Probably the hope of all the generation that survived the war was that the horror of Hiroshima would make mankind turn away from war for ever. But the lesson of history seems to be ...that we don't learn lessons from history! We need to experience things for ourselves! Yet, the truth is that if only we open our eyes to see ample evidence of the horrors of life lived in conflict with God's will – Lebanon, Iraq &

Afghanistan for example. Just ask yourself how much more evidence you need before turning and hearing those words

“This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to Him!”

and learn from his wisdom and teaching, for then we might have a greater appreciation of the Glory of God in our lives.

Andrew Bunch

Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), 3 September

In England there are thirty-two ancient and many modern churches dedicated to Pope Gregory, for he was responsible for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in sending Augustine to England in 597. Gregory had written in advance about his missionary intentions, and he continued to send instructions to Augustine although the latter found some of these perplexing. Bede at Wearmouth, Aldhelm at Malmesbury, and a biographer from Whitby wrote eulogies of Gregory describing him as the ‘apostle of the English’, and ‘our father and apostle in Christ’.

He had hoped to lead this expedition himself, in part because he had been impressed by some Anglo-Saxon slaves on sale in the Roman market. But after six years as a successful *apocrisiarin* (ambassador) in Byzantium, he became abbot of St Andrew’s in Rome and was eventually elected Pope, a position he accepted reluctantly. Immediately he had to deal with floods, famine, plague and a Lombard invasion, as well as attempting to convert to Christianity those then described as barbarian people. In this capacity he passed on to them the wisdom of the Fathers of the Graeco-Roman world such as Origen, Augustine of Hippo and Ambrose of Milan, as well as his own homilies on the Gospels and writings and other theological literature.

He was also most influential in forming the spirit and discipline of medieval monasticism, and, although he was Pope for only thirteen years, his reign was seen as decisive in the structure of the medieval papacy. He played a large part in developing Roman liturgy, inspired many prayers in the Gregorian Sacramentary, and his name has been associated with the Gregorian chant, the codification and adaptation of

at least four pre-existing forms of plainsong, and church music in general.

Pope Gregory’s day of commemoration is September 3rd, two days after St Giles. But that day this year is a Sunday when saints are not commemorated. The last time Gregory’s day was on a Sunday was in 2000 when the Lectionary writes ‘omitted this year except, where appropriate, by a mention in prayer’. But as far as I can make out, he is not mentioned at all, even ‘in prayer’, in 2006. Shame!

David J.F. Longrigg

“In hoc signo vinceris”?

Help! I am putting together some study sessions on Church history for our ‘Midweek Spread’ group in Crowmarsh. Revisiting one episode in the received story, I find it does not add up.

According to “Trad”: On the eve of the crucial battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, facing the rather more substantial forces of his rival general Maxentius, Constantine looks up at the sky and has a vision of the cross. He is given a divine instruction to order his troops to paint that symbol on their shields. This they duly do, and next day sweep on to total victory. Constantine becomes sole master of the Roman Empire, removes his capital to Byzantium which he re-names after himself, and attributes his success to the Christian God.

Actually the story of the vision seems to come in at least three versions:

- During the long march through Gaul, Constantine has a vision of Apollo at a shrine.
- The day before the battle, Constantine sees a cross in the sky and hears a voice saying, “In this sign you will conquer”.
- The night before the battle, Constantine has a dream in which he is told to have his soldiers paint the Chi-Rho monogram on their shields.

Personally, I cannot see that Constantine became, in any meaningful sense of the word, a “Christian”. He strikes me as: a) a politician, professing a belief in “Sol Invictus” which could be interpreted whichever way his audience chose; and b) a man with a very powerful mother.

However, going back to “Trad”: Constantine sees a cloud pattern, which looks a bit like a cross, and interprets that as a Christian symbol ... How could he have done? Leaving aside the immense improbability of a cloud looking like a cross, it would have been a tad anachronistic to read it as a Christian sign.

Up to and including the time of the Great Persecution (303-5 CE) there was a multiplicity of Christian symbols: an anchor, the Chi-Rho, a fish, a dove, the Ark, an olive branch, a palm tree, bread, a vine, grapes ... but not generally the Cross. (The earliest example of that I have seen is apparently 3rd century, but it is not a very good one. It looks like a tombstone the family have engraved themselves. A rough + may have been the limit of their artistic capability!) Likewise, Christ was depicted as a young Roman, handsome, clean shaven, and either risen in glory, or as a good shepherd carrying a sheep - but never crucified.

Once Christianity (along with a number of other religions) was decriminalised (Edict of Milan, 313) and became positively fashionable, the iconography abruptly changed. In came the cross - along with a tale of Constantine’s mother Helena having conveniently discovered the True Cross during building work for a basilica in Jerusalem, 335. Looking at Byzantine art from that period, I see Christ portrayed as a king, crowned in glory, with a neatly trimmed beard. The apostles Peter and Paul have also gone up the social scale, and are now Roman gentlemen complete with full sets and togas. (Actually Paul was a Roman citizen, as well as a citizen of Tarsus, wasn’t he, so entitled to wear a toga? I wonder if he ever did ...)

I cannot believe that I am first person ever to have noticed that the tale of Constantine’s vision does not quite ring true. I feel like the child watching the procession and observing the lack of Imperial clothing!

However, I can find very little help on this point in any of the books I have consulted. Can anyone from our congregations put me right on this?

Jennifer Brooker

THE OXFORD EYE PANORAMAS

An exhibition of Prints from the Virtual Tour of Oxford

By

Karl Harrison

At St Giles’ Church until Friday 15 September

FAIR DAYS UNTIL LATE

otherwise Monday-Friday 12-2pm

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



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: *Beautiful and Little-known Churches of Oxfordshire*

(This lecture is in aid of the Roof Appeal and will cost £6, including a light lunch).

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*

Further dates & titles to be announced later.

St Margaret's Church, Oxford

Celebrations to Mark the Rededication of the Organ
Friday 29 September – Saturday 14 October 2006



Friday, 29 Sept 7pm

Service of Rededication of the Organ

Saturday, 30 Sept 7.30pm

Concert by the Blenheim Ensemble:
Gabriel Amherst (cello), Rupert McShane (harp).

Messiaen: *Quartet for the End of Time*

Ravel: *Introduction and Allegro*

Tickets £8 (£5 children)

Sunday, 1 Oct 6.00pm

Choral Evensong

Saturday, 7 Oct 7.30pm

Chamber Choir Concert

Sunday, 8 Oct 3 – 5.30pm

Open House for St Margaret's Organists and friends

Saturday, 14 Oct 7pm

Opening Recital by Simon Lindley, former President of the Royal College of Organists. Music by *Bach, Mendelssohn, Mozart* and others

ST GILES' CHURCH ROOF APPEAL

COMPETITION

First Prize: Two return tickets to New York.

(generously given by Richard Branson)

Runner Up: A crate of Champagne

(kindly donated by Oxford Capital Partners)

Guess the age of the Chancel Roof Timbers £1 for each entry - as many as you like!

This church was founded in c1120. The roof timbers may be medieval : they are now being accurately dated.

Entry envelopes available in the church.

(open weekdays 12-2.00pm each weekday and for services)

Enter your chosen year, and your name and postcode on an entry envelope, seal your £1 entry fee into it and drop it in the churn by the south door of the church.

(Last entry: Noon, September 23rd)

The result will be announced on 23 September 2006

At the party in the Church

In the event of a tie, the winner will be decided by draw.

Dates for your diary September 2006

Friday, 1st	St Giles of Provence, Hermit, c 710
Sunday, 3rd 10.30 am	THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY Patronal Festival <i>at St Giles'</i>
Monday, 4th 12.30 pm 5.30 pm	St Birinus, Bishop, 650 St Giles' Fair St Giles' Church open from 11.00am to 10.00pm Eucharist <i>at St Giles'</i> Pig Roast in churchyard in aid of Roof Appeal Evening Prayer <i>at St Giles'</i>
Tuesday, 5th 12.30 pm 5.30 pm	St Giles' Fair St Giles' Church open from 11.00 am Eucharist <i>at St Giles'</i> Pig Roast in churchyard in aid of Roof Appeal Evening Prayer <i>at St Giles'</i>
Saturday, 9th 10 am-6 pm	Charles Fuge Lowder, Priest, 1880 Ride or Stride <i>St Giles', and St Margaret's</i>
Sunday, 10th	THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
Wednesday, 13th 8.00 pm	St John Chrysostom, 407 PCC Meeting <i>at St Giles'</i>
Thursday, 14th	Holy Cross Day Church Crawl, with lunch at Church Hanborough
Saturday, 16th 12-12.30 pm	St Ninian, Bishop, c 432 Visiting ringers <i>at St Giles'</i>
Sunday, 17th	THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Saturday, 23rd

6.00-8.00 pm Private view of *Lift up your Eyes: Roofscapes* exhibition, and announcement of competition winners **at St Giles'**

Sunday, 24th

2.00-5.00 pm **THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**
Lift up your Eyes exhibition **at St Giles'** until 15th October. (Open 12 noon-2.00 pm weekdays; 2.00-5.00 pm weekends)

Thursday, 28th

12.30 pm **Mary, Martha & Lazarus, Comps of Our Lord**
Lunchtime talk **at St Giles'**
Julian Munby: *Some medieval roofs in Oxford*
(Admission free)

Friday, 29th

7.00 pm **St Michael and All Angels**
Sung Eucharist **at St Margaret's**
Service of Rededication of the organ

Saturday, 30th

7.30 pm **St Jerome, 420**
Chamber music concert **at St Margaret's**

Sunday, 1st Oct

10.30 am **THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**
Harvest Festival **at St Margaret's**
(50th anniversary of Stuart Brand's ordination)
6.00 pm Choral Evensong **at St Margaret's**

Thursday, 5th

12.30 pm Lunchtime slide lecture in aid of Roof Appeal **at St Giles'**
Richard Lethbridge: *Beautiful and little-known churches of Oxfordshire*.
(Tickets: £6, including light lunch)

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 St Margaret
with Sunday School & Crèche
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