

St Bartholomew's Church, Oxford Parish News



SERVICES AT ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

December	8.00am	10.00am	4pm	6.30pm
6 December Advent 2	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	Christingle	-
13 December Advent 3	Holy Communion	Holy Communion	-	Choir Concert 7.30pm
20 December Advent 4	Holy Communion	Nativity Play and YPF Christmas	-	Nine Lessons and Carols
24th December Christmas Eve	-	-	Crib Service	Midnight Communion 11.30pm (preceded by carols 11.10pm)
25th December Christmas Day	Christmas Communion 9.00am	Christmas Morning Worship 10.30am	-	-
27 December Christmas 1	-	Holy Communion	-	-

SUNDAY CLUB (FOR AGES 0-14)

Crèche: 0-2 years Infant: 3-7 Junior: 8-11 Senior: 12-14

These groups meet in the Church Centre during the 10.00 am service, except on the first Sunday when in Church for All Together Worship. Crèche is available every Sunday.

EPIC (for school year 5-7) meets on the 2nd Saturday in the month, 6-8pm in the Church Centre

YOUNG PEOPLE'S FELLOWSHIP meet every Sunday evening during term time in the Church Centre, 6.30 - 8.00 pm.

HOLY COMMUNION Every Wednesday 10.00 am (Book of Common Prayer)

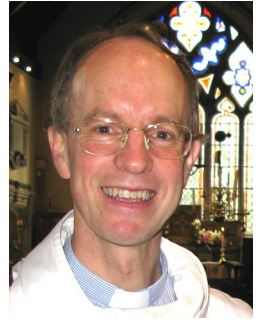
If you would like to book a baptism or wedding, please contact the Church Office 01959 523185.

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Magazine No. 12 Volume 85

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT

Christmas adverts are designed to create a “feel good factor”. The John Lewis advert featuring the lonely Man on the Moon and the kind-hearted Lily has the strap line, “Show someone they’re loved this Christmas”. While the Sainsbury’s advert which tells the story of “Mog’s Christmas Calamity” has a happy ending with the neighbours coming to the rescue of the Thomas family. However, there is more to the Christmas story than this.



Far from indulging in emotional escapism, the events of the first Christmas engage directly with the harsh realities of our modern world. I write this with the news dominated by the terrorist massacre in Paris leaving 129 innocent people dead and 350 injured. Atrocities on this scale reveal shocking depths of hatred and anger that can lie within the human heart. The terrible truth is that we live in a violent world. It is precisely into this context that the Christmas message speaks.

We are familiar with the joyful angels and the eager shepherds. They feature in every nativity play. However, within the Gospels there is also an account of great brutality with Herod’s command to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under. This was motivated by his fear that one born to be a rival King could be among their number. (Matthew 2:16) This is picked up in the words of carols such as “Unto us a boy is born” and the Coventry Carol that refer to Herod’s raging fury.

That is not the only time in the Bible that we find innocents being murdered. Another occasion is the edict of Pharaoh at the time of the birth of Moses that all the male Hebrew babies should be killed.

God enters into this context of brutality and violence to bring hope and transformation. In the Old Testament, the Israelites are led by

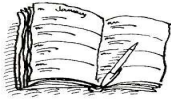
Moses from the suffering of their slavery under the Egyptians through the wilderness of the desert and into a land of blessing. In the New Testament, Jesus faces up to forces of evil and oppression in a path which leads to the cross but which is transformed by the resurrection.

I find it highly significant that Jesus is the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy of the birth of a child also carrying the name “Immanuel”, which means “God with us”. (Matthew 1:23) God does not sidestep the violence at work in our world, but rather steps into it and in so doing transforms it. When we truly take to heart the truth that God is with us, then we can find strength and hope.

The famous carol with the opening line, “God rest you merry gentlemen” continues with the exhortation “Let nothing you dismay”. The basis for this is the “tidings of comfort and joy”. In its root meaning, the word comfort is derived from the two Latin words, cum forte, i.e. “with strength”.

The Sainsbury’s advert shows a scene of rescue; the true Christmas message is about God coming to our rescue in a world of hatred and violence. The John Lewis advert urges us to show someone they are loved. The events of the real Christmas show God’s love reaching us in the person of Jesus giving us true comfort and joy. I wish you a blessed Christmas.

Your friend and Vicar, Richard



DIARY FOR DECEMBER 2015

Morning Prayer will be said in Church on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week at 9.00 am and on Fridays in the Cranmer Room at 9.00 am

- 1 8.00 pm Homegroup (Park Farm House)
2 9.30 am 'First Steps' (Otford Methodist Church Hall)
10.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)
- 3 8.00 pm Re-ordering Communication and Fundraising Group
5 9.00 am Christingle-making (in Church)
10.00 am Advent Quiet Day (Bishop James Langstaff) (Church and Centre)
- 6 The Second Sunday of Advent**
 8.00 am Holy Communion
 10.00 am Morning Worship
 4.00 pm Christingle
- 7 7.45 pm Homegroup (17 Leonard Avenue)
- 8 Magazine material for the January edition by today, please, to the Church Office, st.bartholomews@otford.net**
 2.15 pm Magazine Editorial Team
- 9 10.00 am Holy Communion (BCP) coffee afterwards
10 6.30 pm Russell House School Carol Service (in Church)
11 7.00 pm Tree of Light Service (St. Bartholomew's Church and then The Green)
12 6.00 pm EPIC Christmas party (Church Centre)
- 13 The Third Sunday of Advent**
 8.00 am Holy Communion
 10.00 am Holy Communion
 7.30 pm Choir Christmas Concert (in Church)
- 14 7.45 pm Christmas Celebration (17 Leonard Avenue)
15 8.00 pm Homegroup (Park Farm House)
16 9.30 am 'First Steps' Christmas service (Otford Methodist Church Hall)
10.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)
6.30 pm Otford Primary School Key Stage 2 Carol Service (in Church)
- 20 The Fourth Sunday of Advent**
 8.00 am Holy Communion
 10.00 am Sunday Club Nativity and YPF Christmas Presentation
 6.30 pm Service of Nine Lessons and Carols by candlelight followed by refreshments in the Church Centre

- 21 7.45 pm Homegroup (17 Leonard Avenue)
23 10.00 am Holy Communion (BCP) coffee afterwards
- 24 Christmas Eve**
4.00 pm Crib Service
11.10 pm Carols followed by
11.30 pm Midnight Choral Communion
- 25 Christmas Day**
9.00 am Christmas Communion
10.30 am Christmas Morning Worship
- 27 The First Sunday of Christmas**
10.00 am Holy Communion (BCP) (Rev. Chris Reed)



Registers



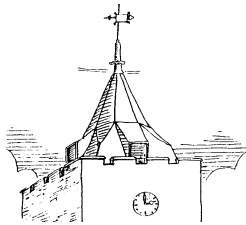
BAPTISM (Our Welcome)

21st November Alexandra Chloe **Williams**

FUNERALS (Our Sympathy)

20th October Brenda **Campbell** (aged 93)
31st October Carol **Griffiths** (aged 80)

FROM ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH



ADVENT TRAVELLERS

During Advent we are running the Advent Travellers scheme, whereby different families play host to the crib figures of Mary and Joseph for one night as they travel around the village before returning to church on Christmas Eve.

CHRISTINGLE SERVICE

This popular service will be held at **4.00 pm on Sunday, 6th December**. Bring your friends, too!

SCHOOL CAROL SERVICES

We look forward to welcoming local schools to church for their carol services: Russell House School on Thursday 10th December and Otford Primary School on Wednesday, 16th December.

TREE OF LIGHT SERVICE

This will be held on **Friday, 11th December**, starting in St. Bartholomew's Church at **7.00 pm** followed by the switching on of the lights on the tree on The Green. All are welcome and labels to remember those who have died may be obtained from the Parish Office in the High Street, or from the Hospice in the Weald. Donations will support the work of the Hospice.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

The Church Choir will present our annual Christmas Concert in church on **Sunday, 13th**

December at 7.30pm There will be a mixture of carols old and new, from England and many other countries, and plenty of carols for you to join in. Refreshments, in the form of wine or fruit juice and mince pies, will be available as always, and our entry price remains at the ridiculously low level of £5 (children free). Come and get into the Christmas mood with us!

YPF CHRISTMAS PRESENTATION AND SUNDAY CLUB NATIVITY PLAY

This will be on **Sunday 20th December at the 10.00 am service**. The Young People's Fellowship will be contributing to a Christmas presentation and the Sunday Club will be performing a traditional nativity play.

SERVICE OF NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

This popular choral service will be held on **Sunday 20th December at 6.30 pm** in Church, followed by refreshments in the Church Centre.

CHRISTMAS SERVICE DATES

Do make sure you have these dates and times in your diaries!

Christmas Eve

4.00 pm Crib Service, 4.00 pm

Christmas Eve

11.30 pm Midnight Communion
(with carols from 11.10 pm)

Christmas Day

9.00 am Christmas Communion

10.30 am Christmas Church Family Worship
(you are invited to bring a present to show the congregation)

UPDATE ON THE REDECORATION AND MINOR RE-ORDERING PROJECT

At a meeting in October the PCC voted unanimously to move on to the next stage of the redecoration and minor re-ordering project.

As a result of an extensive listening process last autumn, and a series of detailed discussions with consultants at the beginning of this year,

the design work has been largely completed. The Communication and Fundraising Group met in November to plan the next steps. There will be a meeting on Sunday 10th January at 11.45 in the Church Centre to share our hopes and plans.

We are also organising an Antiques Roadshow event on Saturday 12th March from 10am to 2 pm in the Church Hall - more details in the coming weeks.



IN MEMORIAM



Sheila Thorburn, 1932-2015

Sheila was born on 12th March 1932, and together with her three sisters and one brother she grew up in Dundee. She passed her 11+ and for her secondary schooling she attended the Morgan Academy in Dundee.

After school, Sheila trained to be a primary school teacher at Dundee College, part of the University of St. Andrews. For her first job, Sheila worked at St. Vincent's Primary School in Dundee, and then she taught at Longhaugh School which was closer to home. She worked with children in the upper primary age.

In 1960 Sheila began a new chapter in her life when she and her younger sister Gladys moved to Washington D.C. in the United States. Her older sister, Helen, had moved there a couple of years before and encouraged her sisters to come out, also. Here Sheila got a job at a private school in Flint Hill, Fairfax, Virginia. She taught 4th grade students at this school for 15 years. Her headteacher was very impressed with her work. In a reference for her he wrote that she had done an excellent job, that she always challenged her students to achieve their best at all times and not to coast, and that she was interested not just in academic success, but in their overall development. She also had

an excellent rapport with other teachers and with parents.

From Flint Hill, Sheila moved to the McClean School in Potomac, Maryland. Here she taught for just a year, from 1975-76, but even in this short time she made a strong impression. Her headteacher at this school said that she was "a fine teacher who inspired her students to maximum effort" and that she had an outgoing personality, winning the respect of parents, students and staff.

Sheila left America in the summer of 1976 and returned to England, settling in West Kingsdown. Within a few months she was appointed as a teacher at St. Catherine's Primary School in Snodland, and she continued at St. Catherine's, teaching the upper juniors, for the next 17 years, retiring in 1993.

During these years, Sheila came to Otford, moving into her home in Well Road in 1985 together with her sister Gladys. In retirement, Sheila was actively involved in a wide range of village clubs and societies. She was a member of the Evening W.I., the Horticultural Society, the Historical Society and the U3A.

Her sudden death in the High Street in Otford came as a shock to all who knew her.

Brenda Campell, 1922-2015

Brenda was born on 9th April 1922 in Borough Green. She attended the local school, and when she left in 1936 at the age of 14 she gained this glowing reference from her headmaster: "Brenda has passed the whole of her school life under my supervision at this school. Her progress and conduct have been exemplary. She has intelligence and abilities well above the average and has worked diligently and successfully. She is refined in manners and character and I feel confident she will do thoroughly well." Brenda succeeded in living up to these words.

On leaving school in 1936, Brenda did a Pitmans shorthand and typing course at the Rogers School of Commerce in Maidstone. Her first job was as a secretary at a builder's yard near Borough Green where she was the only woman working for the firm. Then in 1938 Brenda got a job at the Sevenoaks and District Electricity Board. She was still living with her parents at this time in Borough Green, and would commute into Sevenoaks on the no. 9 bus. When the war broke out, she continued working at the Electricity Board, and during the German air raids she took her turn in firewatching duties, staying overnight in the office and sleeping on a camp bed.

It was during the war that Brenda met her husband, Don, a doctor from Glasgow, who was billeted for a while at Wrotham with the Royal Army Medical Corps. The two met when Don was called out as a doctor to see Brenda's cousin who lived in Wrotham, when Brenda happened to be visiting her. This was in 1941. Brenda and Don got married in Wrotham Church on Valentine's Day 1942 – Brenda was only 19 at the time (and Don was 9 years older).

Shortly after this, Don was posted to Kenya where he served with the Medical Corps for the next three years, working alongside and training Kenyan military medics. Brenda and Don kept in touch over these years by writing letters to one another. When the war was over,

Don initially worked for a medical practice in Didcot and then in Torbay. It was while Brenda and Don were living in Torbay that their first daughter, Christine, was born in 1946.

The family moved to Otford in 1948 when Don took on the medical practice of this village. The house, known at that time as "The Green" was in a bad state of repair and they spent the best part of two years restoring it. Work was also busy, with Don being the only doctor for the village until Dr. Lothian joined the practice in 1950. During this time they worked seven days a week and had no holidays. Brenda would assist Don by answering the phone and opening the door to patients. In 1949 their second daughter, Margaret, was born. Four years later, in 1953, their son, Roy, was born.

Brenda played an active part in village life. She and Don both enjoyed tennis. They would also enjoy visiting antique shops, and gradually they built up a collection of fine antique furniture.

Brenda was accomplished as a knitter, making dresses for her girls and jumpers for her grandsons. She was also a good cook, especially baking.

When the children had grown up and left home, sadly Brenda and Don went their separate ways after 35 years of marriage. With the sale of "The Green", Brenda moved to Sevenoaks for a few years. Don died in 1983, aged 72. Two years later, in 1985, Brenda moved into Warham Road, where she has lived for the last thirty years.

Brenda continued to keep up various interests. She took up painting, and every week she went to an art class in Beckenham. She also enjoyed swimming. For some years she also kept dogs. And Brenda was very proud of her family. As the years passed, the family grew to include six grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Latterly, Brenda's mobility was reduced, with both knee and spine injuries, and her eyesight deteriorated, but she was well cared for and stayed living at home right to the end.

DISTRICT COUNCIL NEWS



Telephone: 01732 227000 www.sevenoaks.gov.uk

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<http://michellelowe.yourcllr.com>

I recently attended 'Prevent' training at SDC which is part of the government's strategy to prevent people from being radicalised and drawn into terrorism or extremist behaviour. In this part of the world we are less threatened by Islamic extremists and more by far right extremists – but we can't rule anything out.

What was interesting was watching the testimonials of people who had been prevented from taking action for their beliefs. One was a fourteen year old white boy whose mother was working with her boyfriend most of the time. His older brother was a heroin addict and our fourteen year old took solace in his room as he was afraid of his brother. He was isolated and vulnerable and was being drawn into far right extremism. Luckily he was identified by his lonely behaviour and encouraged to join a youth group where he started to fit in, make friends and feel listened to – people had time for him.

The second was an Islamic boy who could not speak very good English. As a result he could not get a job and started to feel isolated as he could not communicate with the people around him. He was beginning to become attracted to extremist Islam. Again he was identified, introduced to others who spoke his mother tongue, felt loved and valued and dropped his extremist views.

I found the similarities between the two young men startlingly similar because, despite their very different cultures and values, both felt afraid, isolated and not valued. Both turned to extremism and to people who they felt loved them and where they felt they belonged. Extremists look for vulnerable people who they can groom and draw further into their ideologies in the same way that a paedophile

does. All of us are only ever just a few clicks away from extremist material on the internet.

Vulnerable people come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. They could be teenagers who have parents that don't have enough time for them; they could be victims of bullying or domestic abuse; they could feel isolated because they have mental health or physical issues or because they cannot speak English very well. It is our job to help find these people and help them feel part of our community and mainstream society.

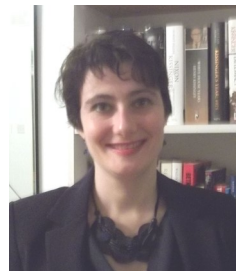
In fact the training I attended really woke me up to how isolated people are vulnerable to all kinds of unsavoury people whether it is slave masters, paedophiles or extremists. And how all of us depend on everyone else to identify people at risk of being drawn into something that will either hurt them, or hurt both them and lots of other people as well.

The key is if you ever come across something that does not seem quite right, something does not quite add up, something that will not leave your mind - then report it. You might have witnessed the missing piece of a jigsaw that could help the police. You can always report things to our Community Safety Partnership on 01732 227000 or to the Police directly.

If there is anything I can do to help you, please contact me.

I'd like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and happy and healthy New Year.

Michelle



FAITH IN THE FAMILY...

December: Preparing to welcome Jesus

Pause for thought: There is a difference between preparing for Christmas and preparing to welcome Jesus into our hearts and homes. The former implies much practical activity and perhaps striving to live up to certain man-made expectations; sophisticated decorations and cookery as shown in glossy magazines, amazing presents advertised in catalogues, etc. Spend a few minutes listing the expectations you feel under pressure to meet. Do these bear any relation to that first Christmas in a draughty stable or perhaps in the 'lower room' belonging to a distant relative of Joseph, where the animals were kept? (In the latter case, Jesus may well have been born into the midst of a loving extended family!) How do our children view Christmas? Do they wonder what they might give or what they might get? How can we model the sort of Christmas that would please Jesus and how can we equip them to play an important part?

Chatterbox

**The chatterbox:
seeing Christmas
in context**

If we see Christmas in the context of the bigger story of God's love for us, we will start to grasp the true reason for the season.

You will need the following as symbols: a friendship bracelet (fastened), small scissors, small mirror, picture or figure of a baby, small cross, all placed in your special box or tin.

Bring out the objects one at a time as you tell the story:

(the bracelet) God made the world and he made people to be his close friends and to partner with him in looking after his world and each other. But . . .

(the scissors) People let God down. They were selfish and wanted to do things their own way, so they turned their backs on God. *(Cut the bracelet apart)* One broken friendship!

(the mirror) God was very sad about this broken friendship. So he planned to send his own Son Jesus into the world to put things right. But first, he sent John the Baptist to get people ready to meet Jesus. John asked them to take a good look at themselves (their behaviour not their appearance), to say 'sorry' for the unkind things they were doing and to try to live better lives.

(the baby) Jesus was born at the first Christmas. He showed people that God still loved them and longed to be friends with them again.

(the cross) Although he had done nothing wrong, Jesus died on the cross. *He* paid the price for all the selfish things *we* have done. He brought us forgiveness and opened the way for us to be friends with God again. *(Tie the bracelet together again)* At Easter, Jesus rose again. He is alive and is our friend for ever!

Chat about why Christmas is so important in this context.

Table Talk

Buy an Advent candle marked with the 24 days until Christmas and light it at a meal each day. See if the family can remember the Christmas story between them and then check the details in a Bible.



Which is everyone's favourite part of the story and why?

Wondering: What signs have the family seen at school, work and out and about that show Christmas is getting close? Which of these things do they think have anything to do with the real meaning of Christmas? (Carry on being 'Christmas detectives' in the car, on the bus and on walks!)

Sharing: If you are thinking of doing Christmas differently this year, share your thoughts. For example, 'I always feel so stressed trying to create the "perfect" Christmas. I'm wondering if we could simplify things a bit this year? What do you think? How could we do that?' Or, 'We've never made time to go to the Crib Service. How could we fit that in, do you think?'

Christmas stockings

Everyone finds an attractive sock or decorates a small bag then fills it with small treats (eg homemade biscuits, sweets) to give to a neighbour or relative.



Bedtime story: Knock, knock! Who's there?

You will need: soft toy animals (eg mouse, owl, etc) and a baby doll

Tell a story about an innkeeper in Bethlehem putting his animals to bed for the night in his stable. Then just as he is about to leave, 'Squeak, squeak!' 'Who's there? Why it's a little mouse looking for somewhere to spend the night. Come on in!' 'Twit-twoo!' 'Who's there?', etc. Eventually, 'Knock, knock!' 'Who's there? Why it's Mary and Joseph looking for somewhere, *anywhere*, to spend the night! Mary's baby will be born tonight. Come on in!' Then in the middle of the night, all the animals are woken by a strange noise coming from the feedbox. 'Waaa-waaa!'

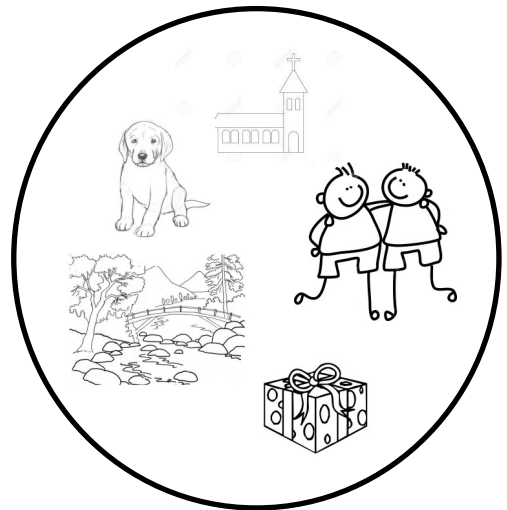
'Who's there? Why, it's baby Jesus, the Son of God, lying in the manger!'

What do you think it was like in that stable?

Step into my world!

In the run up to Christmas, give everyone who will be gathering together a circle of white card about the size of a side plate. They decorate this with drawings of people and interests that are important to them (eg a friend, a pet, a football, a church). These could be coloured, decorated with glitter and displayed. On Christmas day, encourage everyone to compare their 'worlds' and explain more about their lives to each other.

Vicki Howie



IN CONVERSATION WITH...HELEN CASIOT

'I try to keep Christ at the centre of all I do and say' Helen told me and, in conversation with her, I became conscious of the strength of her faith; a faith which has never wavered since she first accepted Jesus into her life when she was just four and a half years old.

Born a week after the Second World War broke out, Helen's earliest memories are of the noise of planes flying over her home in Whalley Range, Manchester. She also recalls her parents listening intently to the war news on the radio every Sunday lunchtime and of her mother saying 'that's serious' – possibly whilst thinking of her youngest brother (Helen's uncle) who had been reported missing and who spent time as a prisoner of war. In 1944, when Helen started school, the first thing pupils were taught was air raid drill and how to use the air raid shelters.

Helen's parents were actively involved in the life of their local Free Church and Helen participated in a Sunday School which catered for eight hundred children. She can vividly remember the morning when a speaker used visual effects to show how sin makes the heart turn black. He then illuminated the same heart to show the difference that can be made when Jesus comes into our lives. Helen was so moved by this demonstration that she went home saying she wanted to ask Jesus into her heart. Her father knelt with her by her bed and they prayed together for this to happen - the beginning of a lifetime of firm faith.

Whilst Helen's father worked as a director of the family building company, her mother was a traditional homemaker. Helen spoke of the happy, secure childhood she experienced



growing up with her two sisters. Aged twelve she went to Fallowfield Church of England Technical High School – an 'all girls' school where she did an A Level in Housecraft and was given business training. The next step, at eighteen, was a 'rather boring' six month course in shorthand, typing and book-keeping at Greenwood's Secretarial College. Rather more exciting was receiving her first pay packet when she started work in the welfare department of a local organisation; the pay was £4 a week, of which £2 went to her mother and the rest covered Helen's clothes, holidays, lunches and bus fares!

Helen had a varied work life with employers ranging from The Salmon and Trout Fishing Association to the Scottish Life Assurance Company. In the early sixties she worked for the family building firm to support her father after he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Some of Helen's most fulfilling jobs were when she was employed by Christian enterprises; in both 1961 and 1989 she worked for Billy Graham. She attended many of his meetings reporting that, 'you can't help but be moved when you see hundreds come to Christ'. At

another point she undertook a full time role in London with The Campaigners – an evangelical, uniformed, Christian youth organisation.

Latterly Helen spent ten years working for The Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ).

It was while she was volunteering as a cook at a Campaigners' Summer Camp on the Isle of Wight that she met John - the man who later became her first husband. They married in 1967 and moved to St Albans where their three daughters were born and where Helen was to stay for thirty seven years. John died of pancreatic cancer in 2002.

In 2005 Helen found happiness again when she married David Casiot. David was born and bred in Otford but had spent thirteen years as Rector of St Edmund's, Whalley Range, close to where Helen's parents still lived. It was through mutual church connections that, after John's death, their relationship developed. Helen and David had eight wonderful years of marriage

before he died suddenly in January 2014. They had just finished reading through the Bible together for the fourth time.

Although Helen misses David greatly, speaking of a lonely path, she does not doubt that her life has been blessed. She keeps busy and feels gratitude for friendships developed since David's death, the meals she has been invited to and the opportunities she has had to share Christ with others. Helen has six grandchildren, five step grandchildren and a long list of friends to keep in touch with. She loves entertaining, doing crosswords and reading. She also regularly speaks at women's Christian meetings and reads the Bible and prays for an hour every morning before rising.

Helen, you are an example to us all. Thank you for talking with me.

Christeen Malan



THROUGH THE SEASONS

Enjoying our Surroundings

No. 10

December – the Climax of the Year

The last month of 2015, I wonder what nature has in store for us? The piles of leaves that we have raked up over the last month will have become home for centipedes, beetles, spiders, and worms, all enjoying their particular delicacy whilst luxuriating in the warmth of the decomposing leaves. In the bottom of ponds, frogs will have hibernated together with nymphal stages of damsel and dragonflies, beetles and water bugs.

December is an exciting time as we plan and prepare for the celebration of Christmas. The holly this year is boasting an exceptional display of berries, but we shall have to wait a while to see if the birds have left some for us to decorate our homes. In days gone by berried holly in the home was said to ward off evil spirits. If severe



weather comes, birds and wild animals will also have the fruits of hawthorn, sloe, wild privet, yew, juniper, mistletoe, rowan and rose hips. There are the vibrant yellow and orange berries of berberis and the profusion of small red

berries on the widespread branches of cotoneaster. If the weather is mild, one may see a squirrel searching for a buried nut. Great tits also tackle hazelnuts by holding the nut under one foot and hammering away with their bill to make a hole in the shell to reach the contents.



Many people like to make their own wreaths to hang on the front door, and during walks gather the fluffy heads of old man's beard (travellers' joy) and some ivy (though some superstitious folk believe the latter to bring bad luck if brought indoors). Slices of oranges can be dried in the microwave and added to the decoration together with sticks of cinnamon tied with red ribbon. Pine cones of various sizes, collected earlier in the year, are often included. Then there is the fun of choosing our Christmas tree.

We brace ourselves to don woolly hats, scarves and gloves, then slip our feet into boots or strong shoes to face the various weather conditions. It is comforting to return to a warm

home and a hot drink. December is not a dull month; there are many coloured sunsets, while various shades of green are seen in clumps of moss and lichen. It gives us a chance to look at the different patterns of tree bark. Winter-flowering shrubs quite often give off a sweet scent. I'm thinking of the pale pink flowers of viburnum, the yellow flowering spikes of mahonia, not only for us but for the many insects which can still benefit from their pollen and nectar. Although gorse blooms mainly from April to June, providing it doesn't freeze for too long, a few flowers will brave the winter.

Worms continue to push up their 'casts' as they work their way around underground. Moles, too, continue to make their little hills to the annoyance of many a gardener. The countryside is never still.

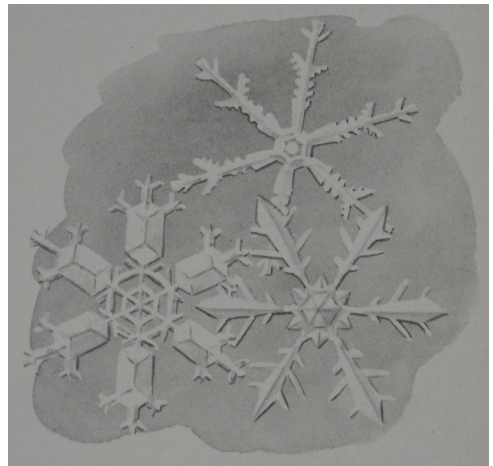
In my childhood I can remember being fascinated by the wonderful leaf-like patterns of frost on the inside of a window pane. These days we have central heated homes and this does not happen, except possibly in an unheated greenhouse or garden shed. Maybe we will experience snow, although it is more likely in January. People often say, "It's too cold to snow!" This is because the colder the air, the less moisture it can hold. In bitterly cold weather there is little chance of rain or snow. In such conditions if you have a barometer you can see the atmospheric pressure drop, followed by a fall of snow. More often than not an area of high pressure is ousted by a low pressure area coming in from the Atlantic. At the boundary of these two air masses, high up in the clouds the moist air freezes forming ice crystals. As these fall

they increase in size by taking up moisture and colliding with each other making snowflakes.

If the temperature is very low we get flurries of fine dry snow, sometimes like a fine mist because it is so dry. When the temperature is around freezing point the crystals clump together and we get larger snowflakes. These make super snowballs. It is interesting to look at snowflakes under a magnifying glass, at their beautiful, innumerable hexagonal patterns: some are pointed, others are branched. They are always six-sided.

The year has now come full circle and I have enjoyed the opportunity to convey my enthusiasm for our surroundings. We are indeed lucky to have such countryside on our doorstep. HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

Elizabeth Ward



ANCIENT WISDOM - MODERN LIVES

John the Baptist (Matthew 3)

We all look forward to things, whether it's the weekend, a holiday or spending time with special people. That anticipation involves patience and often a little imagination. What will we do when the time comes? Are we ready? Is there anything we need to do to prepare? It can seem a long time to wait; ask a small child waiting for Christmas morning and they will tell you just how long Christmas Eve is!



Many of the Jews of Jesus' day were looking forward to the time when the Messiah would come and rescue them. They hoped he would get rid of their Roman occupiers and return them to the glory days of Kings David and Solomon.

Then along came John the Baptist, a man who lived out in the wilderness, wore poor clothes and had a strange diet of locusts and honey. He had an even stranger message: "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the kingdom of Heaven is near." Why would people want to listen to this man?

Yet Matthew tells us that people came from all over the country and the capital city of Jerusalem to see and hear John speaking, and that his preaching had an effect. Many people did repent of their sins and as a sign of this they were baptised in the river Jordan.

John didn't make life easy for those who came to listen to him. He told tax collectors to be fair

in the taxes they collected. He warned soldiers not to make false accusations. He told those in the crowd to share their possessions. His strongest warning, though, was to the religious leaders and those who thought they were in a good place with God, explaining that they couldn't simply rely on that but that they must lead better lives, since God would still be their judge.

John's message was uncompromising, challenging and practical. Those that heard him had a choice, either to act on what he said, or to ignore him. Many chose to act but some chose to walk away.

John's role was to announce the coming of Jesus. He was always really clear with the crowds that he wasn't the Messiah, the one they were waiting for, but was preparing them for the coming of the Messiah. That Messiah was Jesus.

As we approach Christmas, we look forward to celebrating the coming of the Messiah, who was born in a humble stable and died on the cross for each one of us. In all the 'busyness' of the season, perhaps we need to make sure that, just like John, our preparation points towards Jesus.

Dawn Hallam, Reader



MISSION MATTERS...THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Through our direct practice, policy work and campaigning, we fight childhood poverty, harm and neglect.

The St Bartholomew's Christingle service during Advent focuses on Christ's light for the world and assisting the work of The Children's Society, one of our Mission Link partners.

The Society continues to carry out vital work in nationally located centres, supporting vulnerable families and children. Lobbying and campaigning over child poverty and children's welfare also continues. One aspect of the Society's work this year is preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE), helping victims and assisting other agencies in expertise and encouraging good practice.

'We have been fighting against child sexual exploitation for twenty years, and supporting children and young people affected by it.' The Society have recently published a joint report with other charities and Coventry University entitled 'Unprotected, Overprotected' looking at the vulnerability of those in care to sexual exploitation.

'When a young person finds it hard to understand the world around them, or to communicate clearly, this can make them especially vulnerable to harm and exploitation – and make it even more difficult to protect them.'

The study brought together five organisations in a unique collaboration to find out more about the issue. 'We focused on how to better support individual young people who were being sexually exploited or were at high

risk, and looked into what needs to change in how society treats young people with learning disabilities so that they can become safer in the future.'

'We have services across the country – in Manchester, Birmingham, London and elsewhere – that directly support children at risk of CSE through prevention work, as well as direct work supporting young people affected by it. We also provide training to professionals in schools, the police, social services and other agencies.

Our work with victims of sexual exploitation supports children through the entire journey; from identifying that abuse is taking place, preventing abuse from escalating and helping them deal with the consequences of abuse, through to supporting them through the court process.

We want to double our support to help more than 1,000 young people stay safe and rebuild their lives through our specialist services across the country.'

With your help, we're working to improve children's lives

For further information and guidance see: <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk>



OUT AND ABOUT...



OTFORD EVENING WI will meet on Thursday 10th December in the Memorial Hall at 7.30pm when Bob Harding-Jones will

be our speaker. His talk and competition about audio clips and fun catchphrases should get us in the festive mood.

Our President, Margaret Lidbetter, can be contacted for more information on 01959 524831.



KEMSING SINGERS Christmas Concert, "Mistletoe and Wine" 11th & 12th December, 7.30pm St Edith Hall Kemsing TN15 6NA

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GUIDE CHRISTMAS POST BOX The Guide Christmas Post Box will be in Otford Library between Thursday 26th November and Friday

18th December inclusive during opening hours.

A second Box will also be available in the Parish Council Office on Monday to Friday *between the same dates*. All cards will be delivered by Brownies and Guides before Christmas in Otford village

Stamps will be **25p** per card and *all* money will go to the girls chosen charities, Ellenor children's Hospice and Sevenoaks Counselling Service.



This will be the 33rd year that Otford Guides have been delivering Christmas cards in the village and we would like our Christmas Post Service for the village to continue and be really successful, so please give generously and support us by posting early.



Otford & District Historical Society will be holding their AGM on Wednesday 9th December at 8pm in the Village Hall. There will also be mulled wine and a guest speaker.



"I'm sorry Michael – even if you **HAVE** changed your ring-tone to 'Away In-A-Manger', it's still **ALL** mobiles **OFF!**"

PUZZLE PAGE

Silent Night

This much-loved carol comes from Austria, where it was first sung as *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht* on Christmas Eve, 1818. It was written by Father Joseph Mohr, a young priest at St Nicholas parish church, in the village of Oberndorf bei Salzburg. As Christmas 1818 approached, he asked the local schoolmaster, Franz Xaver Gruber, to compose a melody

for his carol. Gruber was organist in the nearby village of Arnsdorf, and so was happy to oblige. On Christmas Eve they presented the carol to the church during the midnight mass. The carol went on to become loved worldwide; and the version sung by Bing Crosby is the third best-selling single of all time.



Silent
Night
Loved
Carol
Austria
First
Sung
Stille
Nacht

Heilige
Christmas
Eve
Father
Joseph
Mohr
Young
Priest
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Midnight
Mass
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Single
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8 x 100g Turkey Breast Steak Fillets
8 Slices of Parma Ham
500g Block of Puff Pastry
Flour for Dusting
One Egg for glazing
Small amount of milk

Cranberry Stuffing

1 Small Onion – finely chopped
Knob of Butter
100g Turkey Trimmings
2 Pork Sausages – skinned
1 Egg
100g Dried Cranberries
150g Unsweetened Chestnut Purée

Cut eight oblong “cuboid” steaks from the turkey breasts. Trimmings can be used for the stuffing. Chill until required.

Cranberry Stuffing:

Cook the onion in a knob of butter for a few minutes until softened but not coloured.

Remove from the heat and leave to cool. Blitz the turkey trimmings in a food processor until smooth. Add skinned sausages and egg then blitz again for 30 seconds until mixed. Season with salt and pepper.

Spoon the stuffing into a large bowl. Mix in the cooled onions and the remaining stuffing

ingredients. Chill the stuffing until ready to assemble the Wellies.

To assemble the Individual Wellingtons:

Cut the pastry into eight even-sized oblongs. Place one piece of the pastry on a well-floured surface and roll out to an oblong shape approximately 8” x 6”. Lay a slice of Parma ham across the middle. Put one tablespoon of stuffing on top (in the middle across the narrowest width of ham) and flatten to an oblong the same size as the turkey steak. Place the turkey steak on top and put a further tablespoon of stuffing on top. Flatten as previously. Pull up the Parma ham around the stuffing to form a casing.

Cut the pastry sides diagonally up to the Parma ham at ½” intervals. Brush the edges of the pastry with milk. Fold the end flaps of pastry over the filling and then draw the pastry strips over each other in alternate crosses to “plait” the pastry. Brush with beaten egg. Decorate the top with shapes made from the leftover pastry and brush again with beaten egg. Place on a baking sheet lined with baking parchment and chill for 30 minutes before cooking.

Cook in a hot oven until the pastry is golden brown and risen. Check after 10 minutes and if browning too quickly move lower down in oven, reduce heat or, in Aga, move to fourth set of runners and put cold shelf two sets of runners above.

If cooking a large number of Wellingtons, it may be necessary to move the outer ones to the middle and vice versa so they brown all over.

Serve with a Port and Mushroom Sauce.

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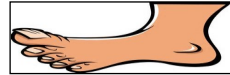
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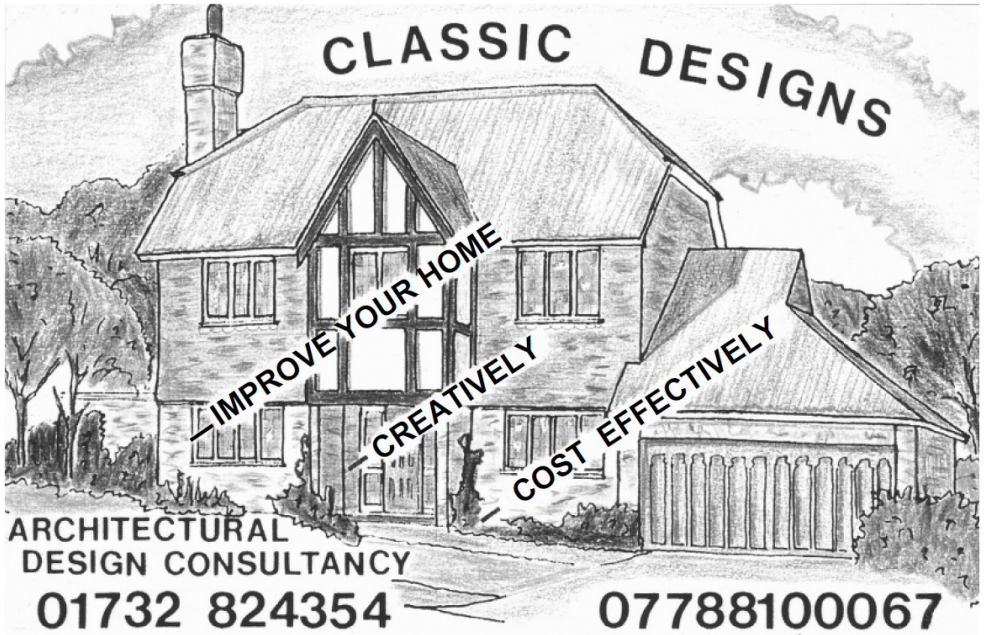


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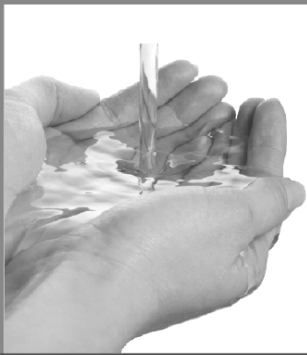


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Who's who in the Parish Church . . .

VICAR:	Richard Worssam 01959 523185
READERS:	Dawn Hallam 01959 526865 Bill Lattimer 01959 522058 Margaret Lidbetter 01959 524831 Mags Southgate 01959 524720
READER EMERITUS:	Peter Downing 01959 522327
PASTORAL ASSISTANTS:	Susan Reid 01959 523234 Margaret Lidbetter 01959 524831 Donna Worssam 01959 523185
HONORARY MINISTER:	Chris Reed 01959 523439
CHURCHWARDENS	Margaret Lidbetter 01959 524831 Nick Page 01959 928071

Organist and Choirmaster: Kevin Grafton 01732 452117

Sacristan: Tony Grogan 01959 523649

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Vice Chairman: Derek Shilling 01959 522059
Hon Treasurer: Janet Hunt 01959 523820
Freewill Offering Sec: Mervyn Harris 01959 522813
Hon Secretary: Sam Barnett

PARISH OFFICE

Monday to Friday 10.00am-12.00pm:
Susan Reid,
Clive Southgate
01959 523185
Email: st.bartholomews@otford.net

CHURCH HALL

Manager and Booking Sec: Robert Hunt 01959 523820

MAGAZINE

Editorial team: 01959 523185
Vicki Howie, Christeen Malan,
Clive Southgate, Richard Worssam
Advertisements: Deborah Vigis 01959 523331
st.bartholomews@otford.net

CHOIR

Choirmaster: Kevin Grafton 01732 452117
Practice night: Friday 8.00-9.30pm New members always welcome

YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK

'First Steps' (for parents and pre-schoolchildren)
Contact: Najen Harris 01959 522813

SUNDAY CLUB (Sundays at 10.00am)

Infants (3-7s)
Juniors (8-11s)
Seniors (12-14)
For all groups contact Donna Worssam 01959 523185

YOUNG PEOPLE'S FELLOWSHIP

Contact: Dawn Hallam 01959 526865

OUTREACH

Chairman of Mission Links:
Andrew Hill 01732 469538

BELLRINGERS

The Tower Captain: Bobbie Fairclough 01959 522696
Secretary: Janet Whitehead 01959 524088
Practice night: Thursday 7.45-9.15pm

CHURCH COUNCIL

The Vicar and the Churchwardens Margaret Lidbetter* and Nick Page, Samantha Barnett, Jo Chandler, Jason Gunn, Dawn Hallam*, Andrew Hill, Mark Holmes, Vicki Howie, Janet Hunt*, Mike Jones, Bill Lattimer, Derek Shilling#, Sue Stephenson, Anne Stevens, Mark Tierney, Steve Vigis, James Wall.

Ex-Officio (Diocesan Synod) * Ex-Officio (Deanery Synod)