

# *THE Beckoner*

The Magazine  
For Beckminster  
Methodist Church

DECEMBER 2017 - JANUARY 2018

PRICELESS!



*Whitby Abbey, North Yorkshire*

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

Photo by Gordon Nicklin

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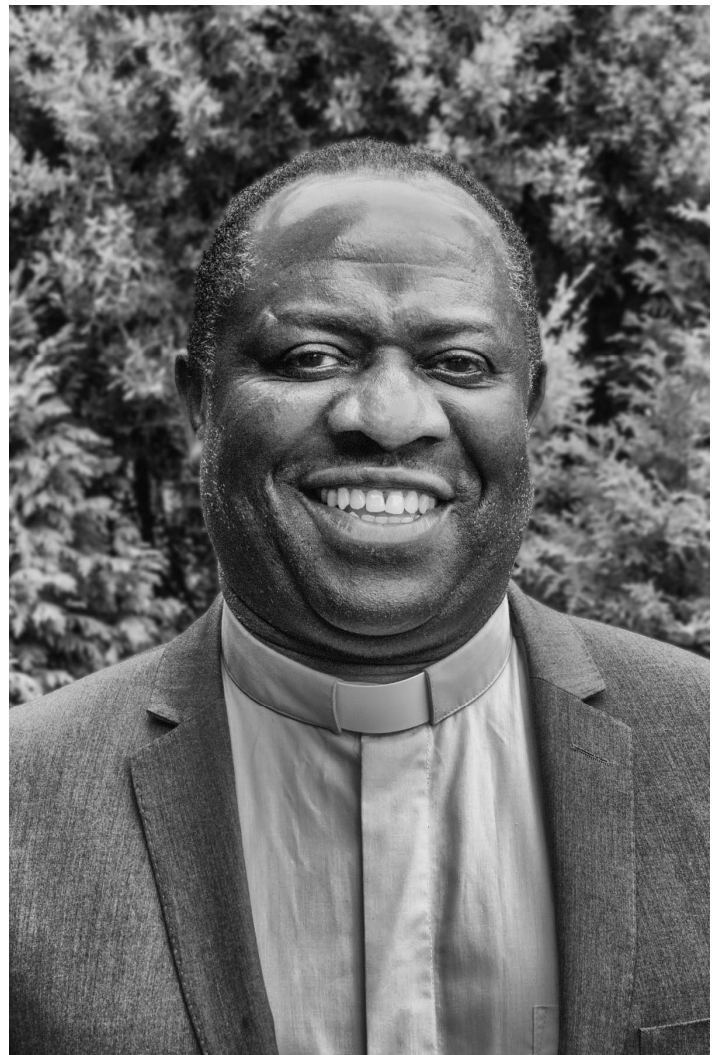
## *Dear Friends*

As I pen this letter to you, I am aware of the fact that the Advent season is just around the corner. It is clear to all of us that Advent and Christmas have become more exhausting and commercialised than they used to be fifty years ago. This is why some of us find this time of the year helpful in the sense that it makes us stay focussed and recover something of the mystery and excitement which we know can very easily get lost in the commercialisation and marketing on our televisions and shops. Indeed, as we approach the darkest time of the year – at least in this part of the world – this season offers us a gleam light and hope which are at the heart of the Christmas story.

However, this season of Advent brings with it a sense of puzzlement too that we need to recognise. If the word advent means 'coming' or 'arrival' then we can relate to the fact that hymns and readings used during advent point to both 'the first coming', the birth of Jesus, and 'second coming' when we expect everything to be put right. It is easy to get these two things muddled up, or even to get the emphasis wrong.

Our Christian sisters and brothers of the early church developed the church's calendar as a way of telling, learning, retelling and reliving the story of Jesus which stands at the heart of our faith. And as they did so, they reached an understanding that this process wasn't only about going round and round in cyclical way; always ending up where you started. I want to believe that this year's Advent season does not take us back to where we were last year; but rather it takes us forward into the purpose and larger project of God. If in Jesus' birth God brought heaven and earth together, we know that in his second coming that joining together will be complete as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13,12.

As some of you know I have been asked to lead Advent Bible studies for this year; and three themes I will want to cover are: Hidden Hope, Waiting with Patience, and God as promise keeper. I invite you to join us for these sessions of learning from scholars who have written about these topics and from one another in discussions.



If you cannot make it, may you find time to reflect about these topics in your own time. Bible readings to go with each topic will be published in our forthcoming weekly newsletters.

So as we as we look forward to celebrating the coming of God in Christ may we find time to reflect on the true meaning of this season for ourselves, for our loved ones and the whole created world that the Lord stepped into all those years ago. May we continue to see signs of God's involvement in our world today. I trust and pray that this season will be a blessed and precious period for us; a time when we feel God is taking us forward closer to the time when the coming of God's kingdom is made complete and lived in reality.

Best wishes for Advent

Your friend and Minister

*Paul Nzacahayo*

# Steward's Musings

We have had a busy few months and have seen lots of good things. It has been encouraging to see Paul engaging so well with members (and non-members) and showing such a keen interest in our lives and in seeking to learn the character of our church community. Personally, I have gained from Paul a better understanding of how we are seen through the eyes of others in a way that has helped and challenged in equal measure. Also, not wishing to be in any way complacent, I am detecting a spirit of togetherness and stronger sense of a caring community, which is so pleasing. Thank you, Paul, for becoming one of us and leading us forward.

One of the more unusual events of recent weeks was a joint Hindu/Christian funeral service we hosted at 7 o'clock one dark Friday morning in late October. Paul agreed to host it following a heartfelt request by bereaved relatives who came into Beckminster earlier in the week asking for help and guidance. (I didn't have to be at the funeral service, but couldn't resist attending). I found the ritual quite moving, with so many mourners walking around the open coffin and inserting flower petals etc. But what I found most pleasing was the way we opened our church and welcomed those of other faiths to share a precious time with us.

Welcome, warmth, and hospitality are so central to our faith. In a Messy Church publication which I read recently I was confronted by a question:

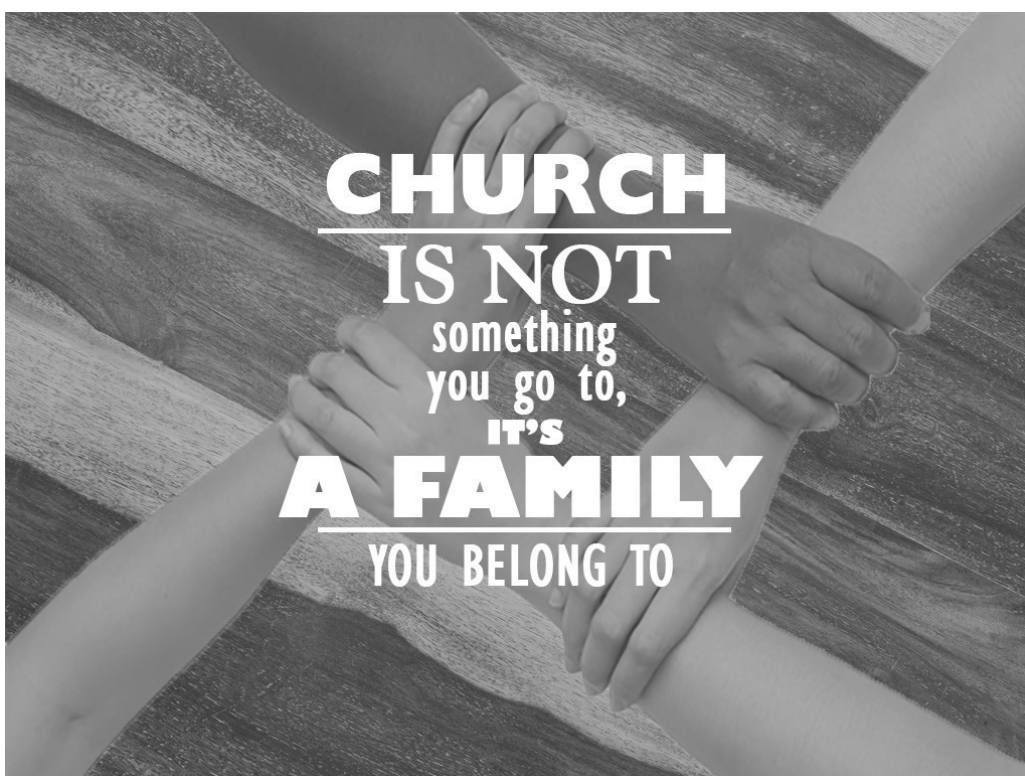
“How many small chain reactions do you start in your Messy ministry without even knowing it? Maybe your welcoming smile, your listening ear, your moment of enthusiasm about God's story or your flash of intuitive help could be the catalyst for conversations and healing that lead somewhere you could never have imagined? After all, you plant the seed, someone else waters it and God makes it grow. So, I guess you can expect more to happen **out of** your sight than **in it**.”

It's not just true for Messy, is it? But, as it happens, I can quote a very recent example from our own Messy Church. A mother who came to the UK from the Middle East said to Wendy after Messy Church, “Thanks for all you do. I haven't got relatives here, but I feel that you are my family”.

Wow!

Merry Christmas!

John Ashwood





I remember the celebrations of 5 November each year as a child. We had some spare land near to our house and celebrated it there. All the neighbours came along and my mother made rabbit pie for us all to eat (why this, I had no idea!) It was good and we had roast potatoes done in the embers, treacle toffee, chestnuts and fireworks, sparklers, golden rain, Catherine wheel, rockets and bangers. We survived, often blackened by the smoke and wet with rain or cold with frost. We also burned a Guy (without much knowledge of what it meant!). I discovered that later and recently also watched the series *Gunpowder* on the television.

Many people watching the programme were horrified by the violence it had showed – the torture, the burnings and the sight of drawing and quartering. It was horrific. It was a time in Europe of political and religious persecution in the aftermath of the Reformation, when Catholic and Protestant nations and people struggled to dominate the other by destroying them. It followed from the Reformation but was also to do with nationhood, independence and politics.

We have also recently celebrated the beginning of the Reformation five hundred years ago when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg. I noticed in part it was celebrated in Rome with Protestants and Catholics together rejoicing over the insights Luther and other reformers gave to the Gospel by the emphasis they had on God's grace. We have come a long way in that regard from killing and torturing one another. Inter-church and inter-faith relationships have come a long way since then though politics and religion can still produce violence and destruction. Zeal can lead to intolerance and belief to the idea that we alone have the truth.

I have also been listening to Neil Macgregor looking at society through his fifty religious objects. His theme, I think, has been the creation of maintaining of cohesion in societies, our identity, rituals, sense of family, habits and

festivals through history. I believe he said that the only remaining festival in Britain that is universal is Christmas. It is seen by most people as a celebration of family, children and belonging. In the church we often have difficulty with its commercialisation and lack of Christian content. We want to emphasise its Gospel message. For us it is the celebration of the whole Gospel message of the Incarnation, God emptying Himself of all but love in the helpless child born in Bethlehem, to live and die showing us God's love and salvation and the message of the angels of peace and goodwill. If the festival is the only one left in Britain where we all celebrate, we have to hold on to it universally, seeking through our contribution in worship and carols, in the outpouring of goodwill in the work of charities and in the appreciation of family and community. It can be an opportunity in the universal celebrations to witness to the Christian message at its heart.

Many believe that religion of all sorts is divisive and creates violence and destruction as we see in religious wars in the past and present. The picture that horrified me most in *Gunpowder* was at an execution, where a Catholic was to be killed for loyalty to her faith. There stood a Protestant pastor asking if she wanted him to pray. She refused because she believed his faith had nothing to say to her in her need. Yet they both worshipped the same God but sought to destroy the faith of the other. Our commitment to our faith must never be the arrogance that says "I have the truth and all others are wrong!" The Gospel faith is to unite us by Love and to acknowledge that we only have a glimpse of the whole truth and need to listen and learn from others. We need the vulnerability of the child in Bethlehem, seeking to embrace all in the love of God. We need Christ's humility and openness to all, acknowledging that the Spirit works in and through all as they discover truths that we ALL can share in our common humanity.

Rev Glennys Bamford

# Traditional Christmas?

In Britain we all have our own ideas of Christmas traditions – sending Christmas cards, writing letters to Santa, putting out mince pies on Christmas Eve, decorating the traditional Christmas tree and many more. Even so, have you ever considered how other people around the world celebrate at this time of the year?

In the Netherlands, Father Christmas is called Sinterklaas and instead of the North Pole lives in sunny Spain. He arrives by steamboat with a helper called Black Peter rather than with an elf or fairy (or reindeer for that matter!). In Germany, Austria and some parts of Switzerland, St. Nikolaus (the saint on which many countries base their Santa Claus) is accompanied by a scary devil-like character as a warning to children to be good. In France there is a similar figure called La Pere Fouettard whilst in Italy a good witch called La Befana delivers children's presents on 6 January, using a broomstick rather than a sleigh. However, if you've not been good during the year all you can expect are lumps of coal!

Across Scandinavia a gnome-like character called Tomte in Sweden and Nisse in Norway is believed to protect barns and bring presents as well. Every Christmas the children leave a bowl of porridge out for him. In Greece, basil is wrapped around a cross and used to sprinkle holy water around the house to ward off mischief-making goblins called killantzarol. It is also traditional to burn old shoes and boots to bring good luck in the following year. Ukrainians decorate their Christmas trees with spider webs. Legend reckons that a magic spider once visited a poor family at Christmas and turned the webs into gold and silver.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, in Brazil, children receive presents in their shoes rather than stockings from Papa Noel. Skates are the order of the day in Venezuela where, in the capital Caracas, roads are closed off so that local folk can blade to morning mass. (They even tie pieces of string and dangle them out of the window so, in case they happen to oversleep, passers by will be able to tug on the string and wake them up! During the run-up to Christmas

in Mexico is the 'Festival of the Radishes' when farming folk carve the vegetables into human figures, including those from nativity scenes.

However, at the other side of the world, especially in Australasia, Christmas happens to fall in summer where tradition has it that Father Christmas swaps his reindeer to give them a chance to rest after flying all that way, for 'six white boomers' or kangaroos. It is also traditional to enjoy a barbecue on the beach.

In the West Indies traditional food is often very different too. Curried goat is often on the menu for dinner in Jamaica and Christmas is marked by a 'John Canoe' parade, which dates back to the times of slavery, where people dress up in wacky masks and costumes.

Czechs are taught not to eat anything on Christmas Eve until a special dinner is served so that they can try and see a mystical 'golden pig' appear. In Greenland the dish of the day is Kiviak - decomposed bird that has been wrapped in sealskin and buried under a stone for several months. Ughh! They also feed on mattak, slices of raw whale skin.

In Poland they place a piece of iron under the Christmas dinner table to make sure everyone has strong legs. The table legs have to be strong too – there are traditionally twelve courses, two of which are carp.

Finally, in Iceland they take no chances and have thirteen Santas! These Yule lads, more troll than our traditional Father Christmas, traditionally come down from the mountain one by one during the days of the festive season leaving presents or rotten potatoes depending on the child's recent behaviour. They have strange names so when you are decorating your tree this year or hanging up your stocking – feel grateful your gifts aren't being left by Door Sniffer and Met Hook! This Christmas I think I'll stay where I already am!

A happy festive season to all our readers! Don't eat too much turkey or drink too much wine!

Keith Cheetham

# For Lo! The Days are Hastening On.....

....as the hymn writer wrote. It was at about 11.30 in the morning of 6 September that I received my first intimation of what is now referred to as the festive season was fast approaching. For it was then that I caught my first glimpse this year of a display of Christmas cards and was immediately conscious of a sense of foreboding. Many of us fret for months over the problem of what to buy our nearest and dearest (and in some cases those a little less dear and a little further away) for Christmas. As a result the period leading up to the festival becomes one of the most stressful of the year, a situation not helped by the research conducted a few years ago by a psychologist, Dr. David Lewis, which showed that Christmas shopping so increased mens' stress levels that it put them in danger of a cardiac arrest, though it isn't recorded whether the same was true for the female sex. I am comforted by the fact that over several decades my own cardio has so far successfully resisted all attempts to arrest it, but one never knows.

Other research has also shown that men lose interest in shopping after 24 minutes which, if anything, is an over-estimate of their staying power. Given the choice, many men would rather undergo root canal surgery than indulge in what ladies refer to as retail therapy.

We are not aided by the fact that at this time of year newspapers and magazines are full of colourful articles recommending us what to buy for those we cherish, recommended no doubt at the behest of those firms making or selling the objects we are encouraged to lust after. The suggestions range from the outrageously expensive to the totally useless and are of little use in offering practical help so it is questionable whether any sensible person follows their advice.

As a result most men of course regard shopping as a totally alien activity, only to be engaged in when absolutely necessary, the purchase of Christmas presents being one of those occasions. Unfortunately the sexes differ in their psyches. The male handyman (which term



certainly doesn't include the writer) will welcome the gift of acceptable tools for his hobby, whereas the keen housewife cook, opening the intriguing parcel beneath the Christmas tree, will be dismayed to discover a deep fat fryer, most likely considering it a slur on her culinary abilities. She would have much preferred a more utilitarian object such as a necklace or suitably expensive ring. This is an attitude the husband finds difficult to comprehend and normal relations will only be resumed when the shops re-open and the offending gift changed for something more acceptable.

Anthropologists put down our differing attitudes to shopping to the roles we played in our hunter gatherer history. Recent findings have turned our original thinking on its head and shown that the women did at least as much as the men in foraging for the family. This seems likely as the woman, being the more organised of the two, and aware of the need to feed her family, would hunt on a regular basis, whereas the man just went out when he felt peckish and hopefully brought something back to keep them going for a bit.

This theory is given some support when one considers the eclectic selection of gifts the Wise Men thought appropriate to take to Bethlehem. For centuries various explanations have been put forward for their offerings but these speculations have now to be viewed in the light of the latest findings. Imagine the scene in some Arab *souk* before the Wise Men set out on their epic journey. There would no doubt have been ready agreement to Caspar's

suggestion that gold would be an appropriate, albeit expensive, offering for an infant king. We can only conclude that the amount was relatively small as Joseph apparently wasn't able to give up the day job. Melchior's comment that all ladies like perfume probably won support for frankincense. However, after the outlay on these two costly items they probably had only a few shekels left and while none of them knew much about myrrh Balthazar ventured the opinion it would probably come in useful at some time or other. Possibly by now darkness was falling and the Magi were worried in case the star, as it were, left without them so they thrust their remaining currency into the merchant's hand, dashed outside, mounted their camels and began their travels.

Giving, one hopes, will also mean receiving, when tact may also be necessary. Upon receiving from dear old Aunt Madge a particularly colourful item of clothing that can only be safely worn to a fancy dress party or when visiting her, every effort must be made to conceal one's real feelings. A gift of bath salts or other ablutionary aid is best not regarded as a hint that one's personal hygiene leaves something to be desired.

Surely the best presents are those where the

giver has taken time, trouble, or made some personal sacrifice, to choose a gift guaranteed to give pleasure to the recipient or to meet a perceived need. When I was studying for my professional exams our minister made a special visit to our house on his bike, as few ministers then had cars, to give me a book he had come across which he thought would help with my studies. I have no idea what it cost him, possibly not a great deal, but that is immaterial against the knowledge that he put himself out for my benefit. Not surprisingly, I remember that thoughtful gesture over 60 years later, long after I have forgotten the many sermons I heard him preach. The gifts of the Magi aren't mentioned again in the New Testament but are remembered two thousand years later as expressions of the devotion and sacrifice of the Wise Men in bringing them in tribute to the infant King, who was himself the costliest Gift of all.

May our own gifts this Christmastide be true expressions of our love and affection for those who will receive them, hopefully without us suffering a cardiac arrest in the process!

Alan Causer

## 'OLDE ENGLISH' AFTERNOON TEA

On Wednesday 26 July, Beckminster's Luncheon Club played host to a special social event. An afternoon tea of delicious food of the kind served at only the very best places, with Entertainment to follow from a very talented group, *The Bluebird Belles*.

As soon as all the guests began to arrive, there was a lovely relaxed atmosphere. The sheer weight of cakes and culinary excellence which were carried by the prettiest cake stands proved a delight to both see and taste. Tables were adorned with some lovely local roses in creamy shades of pink and held in attractive vintage-style vases.

The afternoon began by Sue Lorimer and Jean Ordidge serving tea to the guests in delicate crockery – reminiscent of a bygone era. Conversation flowed and John Bate led

everyone in a 1940s quiz. This created quite a lot of buzz and triggered lively conversation and many memories for everyone.

The entertainment group then arrived and their superb voices echoed the whole vibe of the Vintage Afternoon with renderings of popular songs from the 1940s and 50s. There was lots of toe-tapping and even some dancing along to the catchy lyrics and music.

I should like to say a 'thank you' to everyone who helped make the day really special for all the guests.

Tess Davies

*Pastoral Worker for the Elderly at Beckminster*

# Enough for everyone

As Christmas 2017 approached, we are currently being reminded of the dangerous increase in obesity - particularly among children - which is affecting our nation. As we light-heartedly look forward to our inevitable festive over-indulgence, let us consider some of the statistics from Christian Aid and maybe put our situation into a new perspective as we consider problems of nutrition across the world.

**Food is at the heart of our Christmas festivities. It is also the key for the wellbeing and security of families in sub-Saharan Africa.**

## Safe in her garden



Colette in her market garden with her daughter Eulalie.

Earning a living in Burkina Faso is hard, and it's even harder for mothers like Colette, who used to spend days at a dusty mining site in search of gold with

## Christmas in Burkina Faso

Christmas day is special in Colette's household—a time of celebration and sharing. Just like in the UK, the food is prepared before they go to church, and then shared with friends and neighbours. Colette sells vegetables she grows so that she can buy spaghetti for her family. She says: 'Spaghetti is special for us on Christmas day. We can eat it and be happy.'

At Christmas, we celebrate God's overflowing love to us in the gift of his son. Sometimes our Christmas celebration feels like it overflows and gets away from us. So we're asking you to consider what is enough.

her six month old baby strapped to her back. Despite her efforts, Colette often went for days without finding anything to sell and this meant she couldn't afford regular nutritious meals for her family. Her situation got so bad that her baby became seriously malnourished.

Thanks to support from Christian Aid's local partner, Colette hasn't had to return to the mine. Through a market gardens project, she was given a plot of land and tools to plant and grow a variety of vegetables to feed her family and sell.

She says: 'The gardens changed my life. I can sell vegetables and my food is very rich now. My children are no longer malnourished. I feel safe in my gardens; there it is peaceful.'

Instead of that excess spending, consider giving the money to our Christmas Appeal, which will help ensure there is enough for everyone.



The garden is a much healthier place to be strapped to your mum's back.

We chuck out so much meat at Christmas that it would equate to 2 million turkeys.

We waste 74 million mince pies at Christmas

Food waste releases greenhouse gases, which increase climate change.

In December, one supermarket chain sells 650 tonnes of Brussels sprouts per week—those sprouts weigh more than a jumbo jet!

Wasted sprouts would fill 1,000 wheelie bins

The amount of wrapping paper thrown away at Christmas would stretch all the way to the moon.



## SO WHAT IS CHRISTIAN AID?

**Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.**

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

### Our vision

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision - an end to poverty - and we believe that vision can become a reality.

### Our essential purpose

- To expose the scandal of poverty
- To help in practical ways to root it out of the world
- To challenge and change structures and systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised.

### Our mandate

We are an agency of our churches in Britain and Ireland and are mandated to work on relief, development and advocacy for poverty eradication. Christian Aid's work is founded on Christian faith, inspired by hope and acts to change an unjust world through charity—a practical love and care for our neighbours.

### Our values

#### Love and solidarity

We are called to love and care for one another in compassion and humility, as we stand alongside all those who struggle against poverty, powerlessness and injustice.

#### Dignity and respect

We are convinced that every human being has innate dignity. All people are of equal worth, which is why we place honesty and respect for others at the heart of what we do.

### Justice and equality

We understand that where people lack power, poverty prevails, so we support work that empowers individuals and communities. We fight injustice and inequality with courage, hope and determination, challenging the structures and systems that prevent people from rising out of poverty.

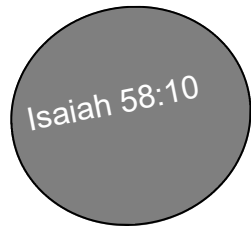
### Co-operation and partnership

Our work is rooted in a spirit of co-operation and we affirm the value of acting in partnership with others. We work with and for the churches, as well as with other faith and secular groups. We also engage with other key actors, including civil society, government and the private sector, in various ways and on various levels.

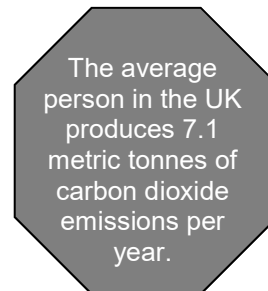
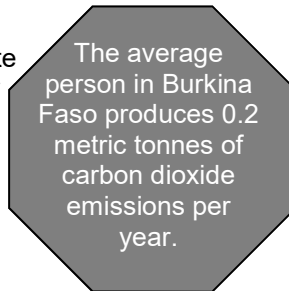
### Accountability and stewardship

We are accountable for how we use the resources entrusted to us, ensuring that our decision-making is open and transparent. We measure our impact and are always striving to improve our performance.

We are committed to being effective stewards of the planet's scarce resources and caring for the earth for the sake of future generations.



'Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.'



Achai Khan lives in South Sudan, where conflict and poor harvests have made it difficult for her to feed her children. With our support through a local partner, Achai can now provide for all her children. Will you help ensure more people like Achai have enough to eat this Christmas?

Loving God, you make us in your image.  
Forgive us when we fail to see your image in each other, when we give in to greed and indifference  
When we do not question the systems that are life-denying.  
As we are made in your image.  
Let us live in your image  
And be Christ-like  
In service, endurance and love.  
Amen.

Wendy and John Bate

# A METHODIST CHILDHOOD AND TRADITIONS

Having been brought up in a Methodist family I was always well aware of the various Church traditions we held – not just week by week but year by year. Just about all of these now seem to have either disappeared or taken on a more updated version, especially Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas. Nevertheless it's nice to reflect and consider how things used to be and note how they have changed.

I was fortunate in many ways that where I was brought up in the north of Sheffield I had many relatives. My father had been the ninth of ten children and mother, one of four. Consequently I had lots of aunts, uncles and cousins but only one grandfather whom I well remember as I was fifteen when he died. In those days few people had their own transport and consequently many large families tended to live within easy reach of one another, often within the radius of about a mile or so. Most of my relatives had some connection with our Methodist church though not all were regular attenders.

My father was one of the founders and captain of our company of The Boys Brigade (of which he was a member for over seventy years). He also became President of the Sheffield Battalion and later of the Yorkshire District. Consequently my brother Graham and I were brought up quite strictly but kindly and encouraged to attend all activities. I subsequently joined The Life Boys at nine and moved up into The Boys Brigade at twelve. We had games evening on Tuesdays and parade night on Fridays. Sundays was always a busy day when we would attend Bible Class in the morning. This was followed by the Church Service. Sunday School was in the afternoon (after which we used to follow some of the girls to our local park) and, later, sometimes attended Evening Service.

The Boys Brigade annual camp was held under canvas, usually at Bridlington, and every year we held an Annual Inspection. This was an open night and demonstration of our various activities. At the conclusion, any promotions within the ranks were announced for that year and I finally reached the rank of staff sergeant. However, after two years doing National Service



in the RAF. I really didn't fancy any more regimentation so, after demob, took up drama and operatics plus business studies in the evenings.

Our church Anniversary Services were always held on Palm Sunday and the following Monday evening. Beforehand, we would rehearse hymns and an anthem for about six weeks and try to become word perfect. For the event itself a temporary wooden platform of about eight rows would be erected at the front of the church, facing the congregation, on which all those taking part would be seated. Ladies and girls were expected to wear a white dress or blouse and boys in white shirt and tie. The choirmaster would stand at the front facing the singers to conduct the assembled choir.

I was only three when the blitz on Sheffield took place. Our house was completely surrounded by bombings and we were lucky to escape unhurt. Dad was in the ARP as he had formerly served in the First World War. Terraced houses in our road were all inter-connected through their cellars to allow escape, the same cellar as we would later watch the coalman tipping down bags of fuel! As I grew a bit older and took my place on the Anniversary I well remember some of the services – especially in evenings during wartime when many of the congregation had sons, daughters or other relatives who were serving overseas, not knowing what their fate might be. I always think of some of the poignant hymns which had lines such as *Guard the*

*sailors tossing on the angry sea.* There were tears of sadness on many faces and it was a very emotive time.

Perhaps Whitsuntide was more a joyous occasion (now re-named Pentecost) when on Whit Sunday afternoon we held a parade of witness around the working class areas surrounding the Church.

Led by the Boys Brigade band, each local Sunday School had it's own banner and would process to about four given points, usually at the junction of two or three roads. A horse and dray was always available to transport an organist and harmonium to accompany the singing of the hymns at each stopping place. Locals loved it and it seemed everyone in the district turned out to watch the bands and processions go by. It was a true witness to God's love in a sometimes rough working class area, where for many, attending the local pub would be their main leisure activity.

On the following Whit Monday, the same routine would take place but marching in procession to a large park where we would be joined by Sunday Schools from other districts. We had a march of two and a half miles which took us down a long hill of about a mile before reaching our destination. I used to play a side drum in the Boys Brigade band and on that occasion it always seemed like hard work.

The problem was that on the return journey we had to march back up the steep hill. The drum kept banging against my groin with the result I had bruises for about a fortnight afterwards. On Whit Monday afternoon we had games and sports in a nearby park and returned to Church for Whitsuntide tea. (I was always amused by this as some of the ladies used to gather earlier in a vestry for 'cutting up' as they called it – this was making the sandwiches! I always remember they first took off their coats before starting but always kept their hats on (a forerunner of good hygiene rules).

Our company of the Girls Brigade held a May Festival every year. It took place on four evenings and a short operetta would be presented in the first half before the crowning of the new May Queen in the second.

Harvest Festivals were usually held in September and in the afternoon all the children took a decorated basket of fruit and vegetables. A long-serving Sunday School teacher or the minister's wife would be asked to 'receive' the

baskets which were then placed close to the altar as part of the Harvest Thanksgiving. Often there would be a piece of coal and a glass of water on the altar as well. Produce collected was re-sold on the Monday evening after a short concert or other entertainment.

Christmas was always the time for nativity plays, usually put on by younger members of the Sunday School. During our teens we joined with other carol singers on Christmas Eve to visit homes around the district. We usually started from the Manse where the Minister's wife would provide mince pies and drinks before we set out. As it got closer to midnight, people began to appear at their bedroom windows to listen. We usually sang three carols at each household and, for the third carol, asked householders if they had a request (every other one seemed to ask for *Silent Night!*).

The following morning was Christmas Day service after which most people went home for Christmas dinner and a quiet family time. Some would later make a visit to the annual pantomime at a nearby theatre. A week later we were at Watch Night Service to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new. This was another late night after which we would look forward to another year with hope, confidence and trust in God for the forthcoming year to come. Where did all those years go to? They remain mostly as happy memories.

Keith Cheetham

**Don't forget!**  
**copy deadline for**  
**Feb - Mar Issue**  
**7 Jan 2018**

# BECKMINSTERAMA

## Open Way



Dec 4 Engelberg

Dates and venues to be advised in Church Notices for January.  
Contact Hilda Evans Tel: 421777

## Monday Focus

Everyone is welcome to join us at Monday Focus at 8pm on Mondays in the Beckminster Coffee Bar.

Dec 10 Service at Engelberg (4.00pm)

Jan 8 Funny Business

Alan Causer and Roy Evans

22 Villains and Victims in 19th

Century Wolverhampton

Mrs Bailey

Contacts: Ann Holt Tel: 650812

Margaret Nicklin Tel: 742537

## Emmaus Group

Meet Thursdays at 7.45 pm. All welcome

Contact: Janet Anderson Tel: 337404

Dates and venues to be advised in church notices for Dec and Jan

## MESSY CHURCH (I)

Monthly — Fridays

3.30 - 5.45 pm. Fun for all the family

Dec 8 Stars

Contact Wendy Ashwood Tel: 831637

## Crèche and Sunday Club

Whilst the crèche allows parents of very young children to worship together, Sunday Club explore the Christian faith in exciting ways.

## This is a typical week in the life of Beckminster Methodist Church.

- All groups meet at the church unless otherwise stated
- New members are always welcome at any group

### Sunday

10.30am Crèche and Junior Church  
10.30am Morning Worship  
6.30pm Evening Worship

### Monday

9.30 - 12.30pm Art Group  
10.30am Prayer Meeting  
2.00 - 4.00pm Art Group  
8.00pm Monday Focus

### Tuesday

9.45am The Toddler Group  
1.30pm Art Group  
4.15pm Dinky Divas 'N' Dudes  
6.15pm Brownies  
8.00pm Open Way

### Wednesday

11.30 Luncheon Club  
5.45pm Rainbows  
6.30pm 'Soaring Spirits'  
7.30pm Horticultural Society (monthly)  
7.30pm Happy Feet Dance Group

### Thursday

9.45am The Toddler Group  
2.00 - 4.00pm Take a Break  
7.45pm Emmaus Group  
7.00 - 9.00pm St. John's Ambulance

### Friday

10.30 am LWTC Diabetes Prevention Group (monthly)  
3.30pm Monthly Messy Church  
7.00-9.00pm Gateway Group

### Saturday

#### Communion Services

The sharing of bread and wine takes place on four Sundays a month, either during the morning or evening worship or as an early Sunday morning service at 9.00am on first and third Sundays. Everyone is welcome.

## Girls Uniformed Organisations

Rainbows 5 – 7 yrs

Wednesdays 5.45pm

Brownies 7-10 yrs

Mondays & Tuesdays 6.15pm

Various activities according to age – include crafts, cooking, badge work, swimming, service to others, pack holidays, hikes and camps.

Contact: Julie Tonks

Tel: 01952 461006



## Luncheon Club

Wednesdays 11.00am – 3.00pm

25 housebound people and helpers meet for coffee, lunch and tea. A short entertainment and epilogue. An opportunity to meet people, chat etc to relieve loneliness. A caring service provided by volunteers (who are always needed)

Contact: Tess Davies Tel: 07789 260953

## Boys Uniformed Organisations

Beavers 6 – 8 years Thursday 6.15 – 7.15 pm

Cubs 8 – 10 years Monday 6.30 – 8.00 pm

Scouts 10 – 14 years Wednesday 7.00 – 9.00 pm

All groups meet at Scout HQ in Skidmore Avenue, for badge work, crafts, games, various activities and service. Camps.

Contact: Sheila White Tel: 332134

## Take a Break

Thursdays weekly during term times

2.00 – 4.00pm

Indoor bowling. For people wanting to meet new friends and try something different. All welcome.

Contact: David Jones

Tel: 762408



## Toddlers

Tuesdays and Thursdays,

9.45 – 11.15 am.

Approx. 40 Toddlers with Mums, Dads, carers or grandparents meet for mutual support whilst toddlers play.

Contacts:

Barbara Bennett Tel: 341877 (Tuesdays)

Camilla Clarke Tel: 07391 718084



## Please hand articles, news and views to:

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[info@beckminsterchurch.co.uk](mailto:info@beckminsterchurch.co.uk)

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## Christmas Events

### Saturday 2 December

Christmas Gala Concert 7.30pm

Wolverhampton Community Brass Band/Wulfruna Ladies Choir

### Saturday 9 December

'Church Alive' Christmas Meal 8.00pm

### Thursday 14 December

Carol Singing (Action for Children) 11.00—12 noon at Waitrose

### Saturday 16 December

Mince Pie Distribution

Carol Singing (Churches Together in Penn Fields)

In aid of Compton Hospice. 12 noon at Waitrose

Wombourne Choral Concert 7.30 pm

### Wednesday 20 December

Carol Singing Action for Children)

# Luther

## **What does Luther matter now?**

On 31 October this year people celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses in Wittenburg. The Theses were about the sale by the Catholic churches of the day of indulgences to reduce the time spent in Purgatory by the souls of the dead – not of any concern or interest to us today so why do we remember it?

People remember it now because it sparked a huge change in life in Europe, provoking arguments about more fundamental matters than the sale of indulgences which are still echoed in events today

## **Ripples that became a tsunami:**

The 95 Theses were points for discussion by theologians about the sale of indulgences but they included also direct challenges to the authority and actions of the Pope and contradictions of church teaching. They caught the public imagination because they were printed, using the process invented by Johann Gutenberg 80 years earlier, which enabled news and ideas to spread more rapidly than hitherto. The Theses were printed in Latin but, more importantly, Luther's accompanying short tract was printed in German ("Sermon on Indulgences and Grace") and set out in simple terms his teaching about repentance and forgiveness. The tract became a best seller, printed 24 times in three years and helping to ensure that in the following seven years a third of all printed books and tracts published in Germany were by Martin Luther.

Most people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century couldn't read or write but they were better able to understand the Theses because the books were now able to include reproductions of drawings and woodcuts, together with the cartoons of Cranach and Albrecht Durer showing the evil and corruption of Pope and Bishops and the triumph of the Gospel proclaimed by Luther.

People in earlier centuries had preached against the Pope's authority and church

doctrines but their Latin sermons, lacking also the advantage of printing, had not been able to spread like Luther's German translations.

## **The language and music of the people:**

Martin Luther moved rapidly from contradicting church teaching about indulgences to denying the authority of the Pope and Councils of Bishops and preaching that the Word of God in scripture and the faith of a person in Christ were the basis of truth and salvation. Inevitably he was excommunicated by the Church, and he and his followers had to set up new ways of being church, of worship and church organisation. The worship, preaching and scripture readings were now in German as Luther translated the Bible into German, completing the work in 1534.

The hymns were also in German as Luther knew that music and singing were an excellent way to teach and spread the Gospel. Two of Luther's hymns are in "Singing the Faith".

## **Changing religion – changing politics:**

Martin Luther was neither a democrat nor a political revolutionary but his defiance of the Pope and the Emperor encouraged others to defy authority. He was utterly opposed to violent revolution but believed in social and economic change by peaceful means; money, he said, was like manure – no good unless you spread it around. In his own city of Wittenburg he brought in social reforms which became the precursors of the modern welfare state. But he also taught that both the rule of the church and that of the state were ordained by God, to govern different aspects of human life.

## **Luther's "harmful legacy":**

The break-up of the church in Western Europe that stemmed from Luther's protest led to civil and international wars in Europe for the next 150 years – conflict between Catholic and Protestant that still rumbles on in the UK today.

While Luther is regarded as the founding father of German nationalism and the German

language he had a savage attitude towards the Jews, leading some people to trace Adolf Hitler's nationalism and hatred of the Jews to his influence. Also, Luther's teaching that the government is ordained by God and must therefore be obeyed in all except spiritual matters is believed by some people to have led to the slavish obedience by many German Lutherans to the Nazi government in the 1930's.

### **Methodism – English Lutheranism?**

Martin Luther's conviction that a person is saved by faith in Christ and not by good works was shared by the Wesleys, as many of Charles' hymns proclaim. Like Martin Luther, John did not set out to found a new church, but to reform the church in which he was an ordained priest. Like Luther, Wesley was sure that that, when the Word of God and his own conscience led him to break church rules, it was right and necessary to do so. Like Luther, the Wesleys' faith meant they spent much of their lives setting up new congregations and introducing new forms of worship, with hymn singing a major component.

### **The Donald Trump of the 1500's:**

Many people in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe regarded Luther as Donald Trump is regarded today. He

was coarse and vulgar and deeply insulting to his various opponents, especially the Pope. Just as Donald Trump uses Twitter to by-pass the established media, so Luther used the new printing process to put across his message, bypassing the official church and government communications.

Many were horrified by the heresies Luther propagated, the conflicts which his activities led to and his betrayal of Christian morality as it had been taught for centuries.

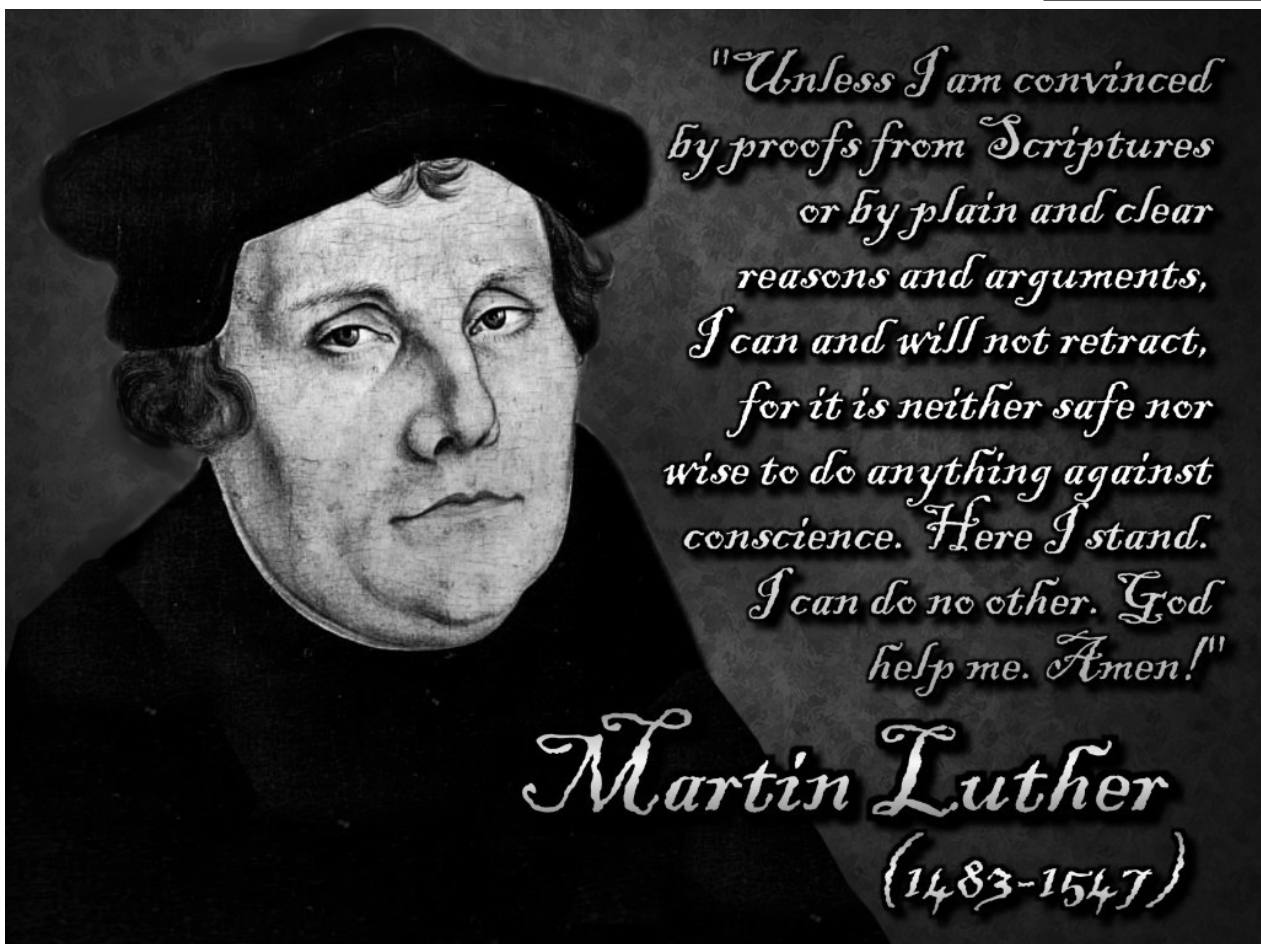
### **Contradiction – nonsense or paradox:**

Like Donald Trump, Martin Luther is often understood to be contradicting himself, but he believed that the Gospel was itself a paradox, in that while each of us is utterly sinful we are still treated as righteous through the love of Jesus, who died for us all.

Above all, we cannot bargain with God, either by paying money (as with indulgences), doing good, or making promises. God loves us – utterly unreasonably, given the mess we have made of the world and the way we behave.

Trust in God's love for you; you know it in Jesus' dying on the Cross for you.

Rev. Cecil King



# A NORWEIGEN CHRISTMAS

In the Norweigen countryside in the distant past, farmers and families felt that they were dependant on the goodwill of some small beings called *Nisser*, whom they believed were responsible for and in charge of the crops and livestock doing well every year. Round about Christmas time the farmers would place outside in the barns bowls of porridge with cream on the top, if they could afford it, which were meant to placate and please these elf-like creatures so that the farm would prosper the following year. When Per, my husband, was a child, he experienced this happening in the little hamlet where he spent time with his grandparents. This apparently took place every year until the 1950s. Since that time *Julenisse* (*Jul* = Christmas) or whom we call Father Christmas was adopted in the same way as England.

The idea originated in Germany, with whom Norway had close links, and now is accepted as the norm. However, returning to Per when he was a child.

There was always snow when he was a small boy and he lived in a house in which eleven family members of varying ages had their homes. At 2.00 pm the whole family, if they could make it, all went to church. The family then went on to the Grandmother's home, which in Per's case, was in the same building, and with the eleven family members who lived there already. In total there could have been over fifteen people including both adults and children.

At 5.00 pm they would all sit down to a meal consisting of vegetable soup, followed by ribs of lamb with potatoes and swede. The meal was always served in the best room – one kept specially for such times – just like front rooms kept for special occasions in Britain, a room in which the children were not normally allowed to go. In this room would be a Christmas tree, under which would be lots of wrapped gifts. The whole group of people held hands and walked



around the tree singing Christmas songs and, if there were a lot of folk – which there were in their case – as the room was rather small they formed two groups circling the tree. Nobody was allowed to touch the gifts because they had to wait for *Julenisse* to arrive. This always caused great excitement and not a little fear as some children were eagerly waiting and others a little scared. They would suddenly hear a loud knock on the door downstairs and the atmosphere would be very tense!

Someone, usually one of the family, would have donned a red costume, stuck a long beard on their chin and climbed up the stairs to where everyone was waiting. With a “Ho! Ho! Ho!” *Julenisse* would ask in a loud voice, “Are there any good children here? Have you been good?” He would then join the children singing around the tree before he opened his large sack and took out small presents which were given to each child.

When the sack was empty he would get up and leave, saying that he was in a hurry as he had to take more presents to some other children. He said he came from the North Pole. The adults then handed out all the presents which were under the tree and, for a while, the children opened and played with their gifts whilst the adults all had coffee and cakes. At about 9.00 pm everyone went home or back to their part of the house as the party was over. It is interesting that there was never any alcohol served at all and people went outside to smoke in order to prevent any fires as all the buildings were made of wood.

This tradition still stands today in some households but, as in Britain, many families are split up over the holidays and some choose to have their Christmas meal in a restaurant. It does seem a pity that the wonderful atmosphere and belief in magical events is slowly dying out.

Iris Bjorno



# The Lighter Side of.....Music

Of all noises I think music is the least disagreeable.  
*Samuel Johnson.*

It's quite untrue that English people don't appreciate music. They may not understand it but they absolutely love the noise it makes.  
*Sir Thomas Beecham.*

There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn what happens in between.  
*Sir Thomas Beecham.*

*To a lady cellist*  
Madam, you have an instrument that can give pleasure to thousands, and all you can do is scratch it!  
*Sir Thomas Beecham.*

Once in every lifetime a really beautiful song comes along..... until it does, I'd like to do this one.  
*Cliff Richard.*

Nothing soothes me more after a long and maddening series of piano recitals than to sit and have my teeth drilled.  
*Bernard Shaw.*

I don't mind what language an opera is sung in as long as it is one I don't understand.  
*Sir Edward Appleton.*

No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they are sensible.

*W H Auden.*

Opera is when a guy gets stabbed in the back and, instead of bleeding, he sings!

*Ed Gardner.*

People are wrong when they say that opera is not what it used to be. It *is* what it used to be. That is what is wrong with it.

*Noel Coward.*

"What do you gargle with ..... pebbles" ?  
*Prince Philip to Tom Jones after a Royal Variety performance.*

"I do wish he would switch his mike off"  
*Prince Philip at an Elton John concert.*

A town and country soprano of the kind often used for augmenting grief at funerals  
*George Ade.*

**On Wagner**

I am told that Wagner's music is better than it sounds.

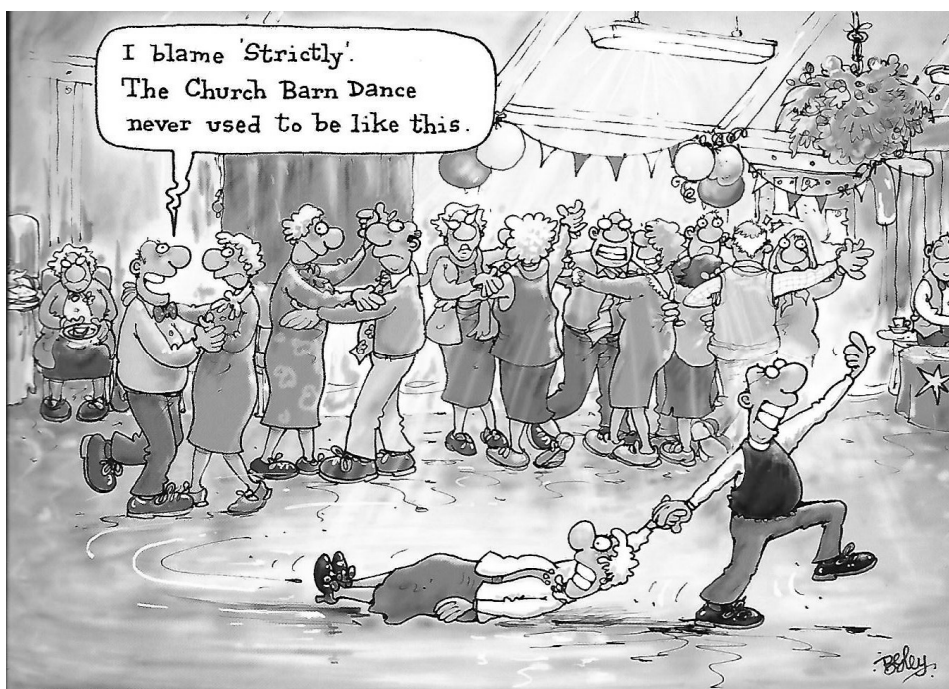
*Mark Twain.*

The first act of the three occupied two hours. I enjoyed that in spite of the singing.

*Mark Twain.*

I love Wagner, but the music I prefer is that of a cat hung up by its tail outside a window and trying to stick to the glass with its claws.

*Beaudelaire.*



Wagner has lovely moments but awful quarters of an hour.

*Rossini.*

Unusually for an actor Sir John Gielgud was asked to direct an opera production at Covent Garden. Accounts vary as to which opera it was but at the dress rehearsal something went wrong on stage and Sir John ran down the auditorium yelling "Stop, stop, stop! Do stop that dreadful music"

Alan Causer

# FESTIVE EVENTS AT METHODIST SITES

In order to celebrate the festive season, three of our major Methodist heritage sites have announced they are preparing a number of events to depict Christmas and the New Year.

We start with **THE OLD RECTORY** in the quiet little town of Epworth in North Lincolnshire. It was here that John Wesley was born in 1703, followed by his brother, Charles, in 1707. Along with their siblings they were the children of the rector, Rev Samuel Wesley and his wife Susanna. This house is now a registered Museum and has in the past been visited by quite a few people from our church. There had been an earlier rectory on the site but in 1709 it had burnt down in a fire when young John was miraculously rescued from an upper floor window.

His mother exclaimed that 'he was a brand plucked from the burning and God had saved him for some special purpose!' Until 1954 the Old Rectory was still used to accommodate the rector of the local St. Andrew's parish church. It was then sold and stood empty for some years until it was bought by the World Methodist Council as it was in need of restoration. June 2017 marked the diamond jubilee of its' first having been open to the public.

In December of this year, evening tours with candles and guides dressed in 18<sup>th</sup> century costume are being offered as part of their special events. The management is able to offer tours for groups of eight people or more. These can be arranged by contacting Epworth Old Rectory on Tel: 01427 872268 or e-mail: [admin@epwortholdrectory.org.uk](mailto:admin@epwortholdrectory.org.uk)

Candlelit tours are scheduled to take place on 9, 10 and 11 December at 7.00 pm at a cost of £12.50 per person, or at other times by arrangement.

Our second site is **WESLEY'S CHAPEL, HOUSE & MUSEUM OF METHODISM** at 49 City Road in London, where activities are planned to celebrate the festive season. In the adjacent Wesley's House, re-enactors will be turning back time to show how people lived in 18<sup>th</sup> century London. This is to take place on Wednesday 13 December and baking will be demonstrated in the kitchen for visitors to taste. *John Wesley* will be seated in his study and *Betsy*, the housekeeper, will tell about life in those days. Visitors will also be able to learn about how handmade lace was produced.



Epworth Old Rectory  
Candlelit Tours  
December 8 & 9, 2017  
7p.m. Cost - £12.50  
Small groups  
Pre-booking essential  
Refreshments to finish  
Costumed guides



On Saturday 16 December and inside Wesley's Chapel itself, Quantum Theatre is to perform the Charles Dickens favourite *A Christmas Carol* between 3.00 and 4.30 pm. If anyone happens to be in London over either of the

above dates you can always find out more by phoning Tel: 020 7253 2262 or E-mail: [admin@wesleyschapel.org.uk](mailto:admin@wesleyschapel.org.uk)

Our final site in **THE NEW ROOM (JOHN WESLEY'S CHAPEL)** in Bristol. I wrote about this site extensively in our August/September edition of this magazine. This covered the opening of their new Museum and Visitor Centre by HRH The Duke of Gloucester on 13 July 2017. The site was the very first Methodist chapel in the world and built by John Wesley in 1739. Like the other two sites above, The New Room will be organising a full programme of carol services and other events to celebrate Christmas.

However, perhaps one of their most important announcements this year is that a new train on the Great Western Railway is to be named after John Wesley, founder of The Methodist Church. This announcement comes following a competition to find the '100 greatest Westerners of all time' and run by the Bristol Post and Great Western Railway. This is indeed good news coming just before Christmas.



David Worthington, manager at the New Room, submitted the name of *John Wesley* to the organisers, where it was selected alongside 49 others. David said "We thought it most appropriate to put forward John's name." (Although Wesley was born at Epworth in Lincolnshire, Bristol always remained one of his three main centres, the other two being London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. ) It is understood the *John Wesley* train will be rolling out in the next year or two. God speed ahead then in furthering his name to the masses who travel by rail! Further information can be obtained from Tel: 0117 926 4740 or E-mail: [admin@newroombristol.org.uk](mailto:admin@newroombristol.org.uk)

*Keith Cheetham*

## JMA UPDATE

On Sunday 29 October Beckminster JMA collectors present received their certificates and year badge for supporting JMA over the past year.

I would therefore like to thank all those who support JMA – including the 23 individual collectors who between them have raised over £598. We have also recently welcomed two new collectors, Libby and Elissa who now have JMA boxes for their collections.

One or two collectors also took up the 'penny challenge' and I'm most grateful to both Ellen and Alice for their contributions. In addition, over £65 was raised by the four group collectors of Beavers and Cubs, Mums and Toddlers, Messy Church and Tuesday Brownies.

I would also like to thank all Beckminster friends for their continued support for the JMA Christmas post last year when £352 was raised plus any Gift Aid declarations which would increase the total amount. The final total collected for the year came to £1,119.47.

Many thanks to everyone for their continued support. If anyone else would like to become a collector, please do not hesitate to ask for a box.

Val Pollard

JMA Secretary



# A Biblical Garden

I recently returned from an awe-inspiring tour of North East Scotland when I was able to visit a number of National Trust and Historic Scotland sites plus a visit to the Castle of Mey, the personal home of the late Queen Mother. Another of the sites I visited was the ruined remains of Elgin Cathedral, which stands in the little town of Elgin in the county of Moray and situated just six miles south of the wide Moray Firth expanse of the North Sea.

Elgin Cathedral was first established by the Roman Catholic church in 1224 on land outside the town and close to the River Lossie. Over the years it suffered extensive fire damage in 1270, 1390 and 1402 and from later attacks by warring chieftains and armies. Damage was such that at the Scottish Reformation it was abandoned after which it steadily fell into decay until it eventually became just a stately ruin. It is now administered by Moray Council in conjunction with Historic Scotland.

However, after visiting the site of the Cathedral, my attention was drawn to a nearby garden, on King Street and just around the corner from the entrance to the Cathedral. It is what is known as *The Biblical Garden* and is the first one in Scotland and open daily from May to September. It is just three acres in size and, bearing in mind the past history of Moray which has for over fourteen centuries played an important role in the development and changing fortunes of the church, it is in an ideal location.

Whilst using the Bible as its reference point and including all one hundred and ten plants

mentioned therein, together with tablets and sculptures depicting the parables, it is intended that this garden, as well as those who study the scriptures, will also appeal to anyone who enjoys gardening or visiting them. The scheme has been made possible by the generosity and goodwill of the people of Moray and its many visitors and provides a haven of peace and enjoyment for all.

Some ninety trees and shrubs, donated by school groups, have been planted. A desert area has also been created depicting Mount Sinai and the cave of Resurrection along with a marsh area within the Garden. An impressive central walkway consisting of over a thousand textured paving slabs has been laid in the shape of a Celtic cross. The garden areas, planted around the central cross with every species of plant mentioned in the Bible, also includes a number of life-size sculptures depicting various parables, including *The Prodigal Son*, *the Good Shepherd* and *The Sower*. Backdrop to the garden features a striking trellis which mirrors the design of the nearby Cathedral and covered in red, white and yellow roses. Plants are all cross-referenced to a particular passage in the Bible and as an indication of their use in Biblical times.

I came away having been very moved by what I saw of *The Biblical Garden*, which has that air of serenity, thoughtfulness and thanksgiving to God for his Word and goodness.

Val Pollard



# SAINT VEBLEN'S DAY

## The Feast of Conspicuous Consumption

Like St George and many other saints, the origins of St Veblen are lost in the mists of history. The fact that his origin is virtually mythical does not stop people celebrating in style. Different parts of the world celebrate on different days; in the USA the main celebrations are held on the day after Thanksgiving whereas in this country the main celebrations are held on the day after Christmas day.

One of the main motivations for observing the day seems to be as an antidote to the excessive time spent the previous day with family and friends. This may go some way to explain the minor celebrations of St Veblen's day which occur in UK whenever there is a public holiday. Originally, the celebrations were held in various places in the centre of towns but in more recent years dedicated sites, accommodating more than one cult, have been built on the outskirts.

Each cult has its own special way of observing the key features of the celebrations. It's usual for high priests to arrange special attractions to entice devotees; each cult has its own invocation (*Never knowingly undersold; Every little helps; Because you're worth it etc*). All cults have exclusive membership cards to record current expressions of devotion which can be redeemed in future celebrations with very enthusiastic followers buying special wallets to carry them.

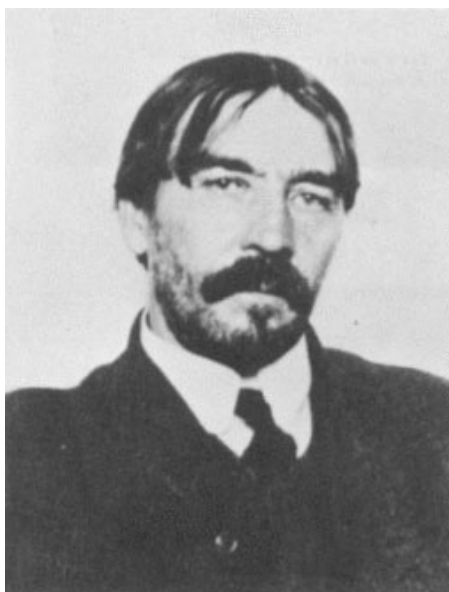
On major celebrations (e.g. the day after Boxing day in UK), pressure to gain entrance to the shrines results in people queuing from the early hours to be the first to register their devotion and, in some cases, has led to violent disputes as to whom is the most dedicated. In recent years, an alternative electronic practice has developed of solitary observance in advance of the main feast.

Celebration of St Veblen's Day is largely confined to those with large families who have money to spend or, more commonly, anticipate that they will have money to spend in the future. Those with limited means or few social contacts often spend these festival days on their own.

If, whenever and however you observe St Veblen's Day, may your celebrations be a source of blessing.

Glyn Powell

*(Although not the originator, the name of the celebrations comes from Thorstein Veblen, an American-Norwegian economist who first identified conspicuous consumption, and particularly, very expensive and exclusive products (Veblen goods) intended to demonstrate the wealth and status of the owner e.g Jimmy Choo shoes, Gucci handbags and Porsche cars etc).*



**"Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure."**

**Thorstein Veblen**

# INDIA and 2017 and ALL THAT!

During the past year India has featured heavily in the news, largely due to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the partition in 1947, which split the country to form what is known today as the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The various programmes shown on television were a real eye opener as to what the people involved had to go through. Families were ripped apart and 10-12 million people were displaced, along religious lines, as the two provinces of Bengal and Punjab were divided based on district wise Hindu and Muslim majorities. Up to possibly two million people lost their lives and the hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan sadly still plagues their relationship to this day

As well as the countries being divided so was the British Indian Army, the Royal Indian Navy, the central treasury and the railways. It also resulted in the dissolution of the British Raj and so, therefore, many of the British living there lost their privileged lifestyles and were forced to return to England.

Rewind back 60 years to 1887. Queen Victoria was on the throne and ruled over a vast British Commonwealth which stretched over nearly one-fifth of the globe. One of the Queen's many titles was Empress of India and, in this year, she was 68 years old and celebrating her Golden Jubilee. She had lost her beloved husband, Albert, 26 years previously and in 1883 her faithful servant, John Brown, had died. Cue the arrival of a handsome young Muslim, Abdul Karim.

Many of you may have seen the 2017 film *'Victoria and Abdul'* featuring Judi Dench and Ali Fazal in the title roles. As ever, with these productions, a fair bit of artistic license is used and it was implied that two tall Indian men were chosen to present Her Majesty with a gold mohur coin.

Reading up on this story revealed that some Indian princes were invited to celebrate the jubilee and it was Victoria, herself, who



requested some Indian servants as well to help with language and look after the princes. Abdul and Mohammed Buksh were sent as presents to the Queen! They did, indeed, present her with the Mughal coin and Abdul made a huge impression by kissing her feet.

What followed was a special, albeit seemingly innocent, relationship between monarch and servant. Within a year, Victoria quickly promoted Abdul to that of Munshi, which means teacher. She asked him to teach her how to speak and read in Hindustani and, later, Urdu.

She bestowed many honours on him much to the consternation of the Royal household. There was talk of her giving him a knighthood but there is confusion as to whether she thought of it or he asked for it. Whichever is the right version, it never was given to Abdul.

It would seem that Victoria became obsessed with the young Muslim. To prevent him going back to Agra, home of the Taj Mahal, she had

his wife, mother-in-law and young nephew brought over. They were given a house in Windsor and cottages in the grounds of Osborne House, Isle of Wight and Balmoral.

What comes across on reading about Abdul is that he was quite arrogant and pushed his own worth. The Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) hosted an evening for the Queen at Sandringham, Abdul was sent to sit with the servants and felt so insulted that he retired to his room. Victoria, from then on, insisted he sit with the Household. When he asked for a pension for his father, she immediately wrote to the Viceroy of India and demanded he act on it.

One thing abhorrent to Victoria was racism. She accused her family and Household of showing “race prejudice and jealousy” toward Abdul and demanded that they “be courteous to the Munshi at all times”. This of course led to whispering campaigns and plots to remove him. At one point they all threatened to resign and the Prince of Wales warned his mother he would have her declared insane. Victoria stood firm and said she would accept any resignation proffered. None came!

Victoria made sure Abdul would be well provided for, with land and pensions, as she knew the family and Royal Household would make things difficult for him after her death.

When she passed away, on 22 January 1901, Edward VII allowed Abdul to be the last one to

view her before the casket was closed and he would be part of the funeral procession. However, within hours of the funeral being over, a small party, led by Queen Alexandra, was dispatched to the Karim’s cottage and every letter, photograph and memento connected to the late Monarch was burnt and destroyed. Some survived and Abdul had written a journal which he must have managed to save.

Abdul Karim and his family were deported back to India within days, as were all the Indian servants, and he died eight years later aged just 46, a broken man. He, who had served the Queen faithfully, now lies in a derelict grave in Agra. He was survived by his wife (some reports say two wives) and had no children so his wealth was passed to his nephews. His descendants left for Pakistan during the Partition, leaving behind the house given to him by Queen Victoria.

Why was she so taken by this Muslim man? It could be that he appeared to treat her like an ordinary human being and wasn’t as sycophantic as most of those that surrounded her. The film portrays her as being so weary of all the pomp and ceremony that comes with being Queen and also, bizarrely, quite lonely. If Abdul Karim made Queen Victoria’s final years happy and bearable then he could be forgiven his arrogance and ambition.

Hazel Graham



# Christmas and New Year Services at Beckminster

**Thursday 7 December**  
Advent Bible Studies 7.00pm

**Sunday 10 December**  
Toy and Gift Service with Parade - Rev Paul; 10.30am  
Churches Together in Penn Fields all age Carol Service 5.00pm

**Thursday 14 December**  
Advent Bible Studies 7.00pm

**Sunday 17 December**  
Holy Communion - Rev Glennys Bamford 9.00am  
Nativity Service - Rev Paul 10.30am  
Carol Service 6.30pm

**Thursday 21 December**  
Advent Bible Studies 7.00pm

**Sunday 24 December**  
Holy Communion - Rev Paul 10.30 am  
Christingle 4.00pm  
Holy Communion - Rev Ivor Sperring 11.15pm

**Monday 25 December**  
Christmas Morning Service - Rev Paul 10.30am

**Sunday 30 December**  
Morning Service—Rev Paul 10.30am  
(No Evening Service)

## Our Thanks

The Editorial team would like to thank everyone who has contributed articles, photographs and other items for publication in *The Beckoner* over the past twelve months. These include our Ministers (Linda and Paul), Supernumeraries (Glennys and Ivor), Stewards, Leaders and other members of our congregation plus other outside contributors. Without your assistance it would have been impossible to publish such a varied range of material to appeal to as wide a readership as possible regarding our Church, people, activities, faith and mission in our area of Wolverhampton and beyond. We are especially indebted to our two excellent photographers, John Holt and Gordon Nicklin, who have provided us with some stunning photographs for our front covers and other articles. Finally, again we should thank Richard Graham, our proof reader, along with printers, Genie Printing & Mailing of Birmingham.

We wish these people and all our readers a very happy Christmas and a bright, healthy New Year.

Any views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial team, Beckminster or the Methodist Church. All details published in this newsletter were accurate at the time of going to press.