

DECEMBER 2017 & JANUARY 2018

SPIRE



HAMPTON HILL'S PARISH MAGAZINE

YOUR FREE COPY

Shining a light on Christmas



A very Happy Christmas to all our readers

stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk or find us on



Meet the clergy



VICAR Rev Derek Winterburn

Derek was born in Orpington, Kent, and ordained in 1986. He served in several diverse London parishes before becoming vicar here in 2016. He is married to Sandra, a teacher, and has two children. A keen photographer, he posts a picture online every day, combining it with a daily walk or cycle ride. He can be contacted at any time other than on Mondays (his day off).

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CURATE Rev Jacky Cammidge

Jacky was born in Abertillery, South Wales and ordained in 2015. She is a self-supporting minister and has been at St James's since starting her ordination training. Jacky is married to Alan, and has three children. During term-time she runs Hampton Hill Nursery School with her family, based in the church hall.

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ASSISTANT PRIEST Canon Julian Reindorp

Julian was born in Durban, South Africa, and ordained in 1969. He has worked in parishes in East London, Chatham and Milton Keynes, and was Team Rector in Richmond until retirement in 2009. He continues to lead a busy life, often out and about on his trademark red scooter. Julian is married to Louise and has four children, three stepchildren and nine grandchildren.

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From the Editor

It is very difficult at this time of year to focus on the real meaning of Christmas when we are surrounded with all the trappings of the festive season for several months before the event. The Christmas lights were put up in Kingston town centre at the end of October!

Christmas is not only celebrating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but also a time to spend with family and friends. In our feature story, Jon Holloway recalls how he celebrated Christmas at sea, far away from his family.

This also reminds us that Christmas can be a lonely time for people on their own or with family far away. They might appreciate a phone call or a visit from you over the Christmas holiday, which for many now extends through to New Year.

On the opposite page there is a list of all the services at St James's over Christmas. You will be very welcome at any of them.

We are trying to widen our distribution of the magazine so perhaps you could take an



extra copy and pop it through a friend or neighbour's door to extend our Christmas message and invitation to the church.

On behalf of the Spire Team we wish all our readers a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Best Wishes

Janet

Cover photo: The Nativity, Bethlehem

SPIRE

The Spire is published nine times a year for the Parochial Church Council of St James. We make no charge for this magazine, but if you are a regular reader we hope that you will contribute towards printing costs to enable us to expand our outreach across the parish. Cheques should be made payable to the PCC of St James, Hampton Hill and sent to Spire Appeal c/o the church office.

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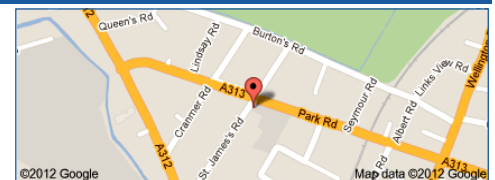
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Please recycle this magazine after use



Finding us

The church is on the corner of St James's Road and Park Road. The hall is next to the church and vicarage. There is ample parking. Buses include R68, R70 and 285.



Clerical Capers



'You're not the real Father Christmas! You're up there pinching lead off my roof!'

Are you prepared for Christmas?



Christmas must be important - it takes us three months (or so) to get ready for it! Like the first cuckoo of summer, the first Advent Calendar or Christmas Card is the harbinger of the great season.

I read that Selfridges's full Christmas department opened on 4 September (but they even had some gifts out at the beginning of August)!

Personally, whatever the occasion, I don't really like ages to get ready. You can have too long!

Of course, I realise that preparation is vital for many important jobs. The success of a decoration or building project is bound up in good preparation.

The same is true with food; all the ingredients need to be brought together and carefully sliced or chopped before the cooking starts.

Preparation for Jesus

The Bible story of the first Christmas seems to suggest a *lack* of preparation. Mary's pregnancy seems rather ill-timed - *before* the wedding.

Then, rather than being in her own village with all her family's care, she has to give birth far away from home in a place where there are not even any spare rooms. The new family is not able to return to Nazareth for several years, not until the King, who intends to kill the baby, dies.

The New Testament insists that this was the chosen time, and that God had made all the necessary preparations.

All of God's desires for humanity pointed forward to this time, when he would personally fully fulfil his promises.

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son'

(Hebrews 1:1,2).

'For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all... while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.'

(Titus 2:11)

Most significant event in history

In effect God had been preparing for that Christmas for thousands of years. So it is ironic that in all our busyness in

December getting ready for the 25th (food, gifts, travel, TV...) that we skimp on preparing for the celebration of Jesus's birth - the most significant event in history.

The Archbishop of Canterbury challenges us all to anticipate Christmas by thinking about the phrase *God with Us* or, as we say these days, #GodwithUs!

There is a little booklet of reflections for the four weeks before Christmas and the nine days of Christmas - this can be ordered at church or the reflections can be received as texts, emails or through the social media.

Christmas at St James's

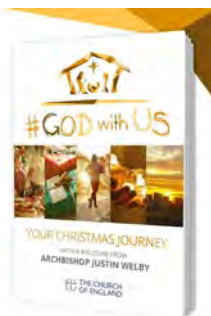
St James's has a full programme of Christmas services to welcome a variety of visitors, from the choral beauty of the Carol Service and the quieter dignity of 'Midnight Communion', through the services best for children to the church-family celebration on Christmas Day itself (0930). We are looking forward to it all!

A very Happy Christmas to you.

#GOD with US

is a major new print + digital Christmas campaign from the Church of England.

Find out more at churchofengland.org/Christmas



St James Hampton Hill

Sundays

Holy Communion (said)
0800-0830

Parish Communion
0930-1030

Together at Eleven
3, 10, 17 December. Resumes 7 January
1100-1145
followed by crafts and refreshments

Mon-Fri

(but not Tuesdays)

(Not 26 December, 1 January)
Morning Prayer
0915-0940

Tuesdays

5, 19 December, 16, 23, 30 January
Holy Communion
0930-1015
19 December, 9 January
Holy Communion and Coffee
1000-1100 (usually 2nd Tuesday of month)

Christingle Service

Sunday 3 December
1000

Our annual all-age service with Christingle candles is to raise awareness of and money for The Children's Society

Pop-up Cinema

Saturday 20 January
1800 for 1830

Join us in church for Oscar-winning *La La Land*

Carol Service

Sunday 17 December
1800

As traditional as turkey, raise the roof at our annual favourite

Children's Carol Services

Sunday 24 December
1500 and 1630

Children are encouraged to come dressed as Mary, Joseph, animals, shepherds, Wise Men or angels

First Christmas Eucharist

Sunday 24 December
2300

Celebrate the beginning of Christmas

Christmas Day Service

Monday 25 December
(No 0800 service today)
0930
Parish Communion

NEWS IN BRIEF

Just in time... our clock returns as good as new

THE CHURCH CLOCK returned just in time for Remembrance Sunday, having undergone a major overhaul. The dials were taken down in August by clockmakers J Smith & Sons and restored at their Derby workshop. The clock workings were also overhauled. Tower stonework was repaired and some of the brickwork re-pointed.



Shelter to home for Christmas

A HOMELESS man, who for the past three years has slept in a bus shelter by the pantile bridge in Hampton Hill, has accepted council accommodation in time for Christmas.



It comes after the local Safer Neighbourhood police team persuaded him to seek help. John said, 'After such a lengthy time in the old bus shelter it comes as a tremendous relief to have finally been provided with accommodation.' His new, one-bedroom flat is in Richmond.

Transforming our churchyard



YOU MIGHT BE surprised to learn that the maintenance of the churchyard is not the responsibility of the church. There are 27 graves maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the rest of the churchyard is the responsibility of the local council. They employ Continental Landscapes to maintain the churchyard.

However, St James's is establishing a partnership with the borough to develop the area. We are beginning work on a 'wildflower meadow' near the War Memorial, and have plans for two other areas. The Mayor of London has awarded us four saplings as part of his *Trees for Sacred Space* scheme.

The area in the front of the church at the base of the tower is to be replanted and we have a new bench to go by the south porch. We want to become an accredited *Local Wildlife Site*.

Our plans have been developed with the council's officers, who are keen to see the community resource flourish. The area is open to everyone and we would be delighted if anyone wanted to lend a hand. Further details from the Church Office.

Peerage for Bishop Richard

DOWNING STREET has announced that Richard Chartres, who retired as Bishop of London in March, is to be made a life peer. He said, 'This is a tribute to the work we have carried out together, across the Diocese of London, over more than 20 years. I hope to continue to speak up for the causes important to London and beyond.'



FEATURE: CHRISTMAS AT SEA

Celebrating

I tend to consider myself quite lucky. Of the 11 years I was at sea I only spent two Christmases away from home. Statistically you'd expect to get hit for at least

half of them, so my situation was rather fortunate. There's also no rhyme nor reason; I was just lucky with the rosters and the way the dates fell. An added bonus was that both were



JON HOLLOWAY

before the birth of my two daughters, so I never missed the excitement of a family Christmas and all that entailed.

Despite being away a couple of times I have some good memories of the occasions, the first as a 17-year-old Engineer Officer Cadet in 1989 and the second as 4th Engineer Officer in 1993. I also feel that I should declare that things were a bit different then to how they are in 2017. The industry had yet to fully get to grips with the outcome of the *Exxon Valdez* spill, so we were still able to enjoy a beer or two in the evenings (many ships are completely 'dry' these days). Life was also far simpler – no wifi, emails or mobiles, just weeks' old snail mail, or telex, fax and VHF radio (when in range), or if you were feeling flush there was the satellite phone, billed at £5 per minute.

Work hard, play hard

Another difference was that on those less technologically advanced ships, we had larger crews to manage the physical workload of breakdowns and maintenance. There were often over 25 people on board, compared to as few as 19 these days.

The social life was usually more active, or in other words: we worked hard and we played hard!

My two experiences were certainly very different. In 1989, I was on *British Respect*, the flagship at the time of the BP Shipping fleet, and special as she had five decks of well-furnished



More than a million people will go to work in the UK on Christmas Day, but spare a thought for those at sea, hundreds of miles away, with only crew for company

Christmas Day and facing a five-course meal. I'm front right, hoping I can make it to pudding!



accommodation instead of the usual four on that class of ship. The ship was not long out of dry-dock in Singapore, had loaded a full cargo of

273,000 tonnes of crude oil from Iraq and we were on passage to the US Gulf to discharge.

Christmas therefore happened pretty much on the equator in the middle of the South Atlantic, not far from the western tip of Brazil. I was one of four Engineer Cadets onboard and despite being granted the day off we turned up to help the officers with their routines before everyone finished for lunch.

Once scrubbed up we were all summoned to the officers' bar by the Chief Engineer who made a toast, and then we proceeded to enjoy the day, with most of the afternoon spent by the pool taking in some sun and relaxing with a couple of beers.

Dinner was a pretty special affair. The galley crew had pulled out all the stops and we four cadets rose to the challenge of eating all five courses that



British Respect, flagship at the time of the BP Shipping fleet

far, far away



A ship tradition involved the youngest member ringing in the new year

night – the joy of youthful metabolism. After dinner, the Filipino crew had invited the officers to their own bar for an evening of entertainment, fun and more food, with the star attraction being their karaoke machine!

New Year in the Caribbean

A week later, which would have been somewhere in the Caribbean, we celebrated New Year, with everyone heading to the bow of the ship where, as the youngest on board (at the tender age of 17!) I rang in the New Year after the oldest had rung it out.

Christmas 1993 was very different. This time I was on the *British Spirit*, a battered ship and a far cry from the luxurious *Respect*. It was on a regular run from the Arabian Gulf to ports in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. On this occasion we were unfortunate, as the route saw us heading north to Singapore through the Torres Straits, a relatively narrow route between the northeast tip of

Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Due to the navigational restrictions we had a pilot on board and the engine room had to remain manned with the main engine on 'standby' – ready for any movement – and it was just our luck that the date we made the transit was 25 December.

Christmas Plan B

We postponed Christmas until 27 December, but the slight delay did not impact on our celebrations, with a similar day adopted to 1989: basic routines in the morning followed by an afternoon in the sun. One significant difference was that we had several ladies on board, a couple of the Junior Officers and two wives. This greatly changes the dynamic of your average male sailor; they're generally far politer and will make more of an effort to be presentable in the company of women.

Unknown to anyone else, they had bought gifts for everyone on board – a really nice touch that meant we had

something to unwrap on the day. I'll never forget mine: a double CD of *Queen's Greatest Hits*. Karaoke was once again a big feature into the small hours, with what can only be loosely described as dancing.

Many faiths at work

I'd have rather been at home for Christmas, but someone is always going to have to work. On days such as Christmas Day, we should all think of the 1.5 million seafarers around the world of every nationality. Most of them will be working, in port or at sea; many having already spent nine months on board.

Communications are undoubtedly much better these days, with some ships equipped for Facetime and Skype, but many seafarers still don't get to speak to their families.

I have also sailed with Pakistani crew, all of whom were strict Muslims. Their needs had to be accommodated during Ramadan when they were fasting, particularly for those toiling in a hot and sweaty engine room. Such situations could be cause for dissent, but in my experience there is tremendous respect for individual beliefs. Seafaring requires great tolerance and trust of your shipmates to ensure everyone stays safe.

Although my Christmas experiences on board were primarily shared with Anglicans or Roman Catholics, there was very little religious engagement. The Muslim crew had a designated prayer room, including a compass as the direction of Mecca changed virtually hourly, but it was rare to come across people who openly practised their faith. Like politics, religion tends to be avoided in conversation. It's a very personal matter to many and therefore not always easily shared.

Port chaplains play key role

Various seafarer organisations around the world employ port chaplains. These men and women, ordained in, or followers of, a variety of faiths, provide support to seafarers, helping with routine trips into town or assisting anyone in prison, in hospital, even in extreme cases where ships have been abandoned by their owners.

For Christian seafarers, and 300,000 of them are Filipino, the chaplains often provide affirmation of faith by sharing prayers on board or in a local centre, and in some cases performing the Eucharist.

At times of religious celebration, including Christmas, those seafarers who can get ashore on, or close to, Christmas Day can perhaps look forward to free or cheap access to communications to call home, or can find the opportunity to give thanks for what they have.



The *British Spirit* lacked the luxury accommodation I had been used to!

Around the Spire

Mark's 40 years as organist



OUR ORGANIST, Mark Blackwell, celebrated 40 years as a church organist with a splendid concert in church on 14 October. In addition to two organ solos by Mark, music was provided by church choirs, Spelthorne Young Singers and the Incidentals, covering a wide variety of styles including church music, ragtime and swing. The enthusiasm of the singers, young and old, was echoed by the audience participation in the final excerpts from musicals.

The concert raised £750 to be split between Spelthorne Young Voices and Orphans Know More, a charity working to give orphans a face, family and future.

Mark cut a special cake made by his youngest daughter Maria.

Ringing in the latest recruits



WE WELCOME four new bellringers to our team. From left, Jane Dimond and her sons George and Billy Bannon, and Louis St. John Smith, have been learning since July and have now started to ring for services.

Ria raises cash for crisis centre

RIA BEAUMONT has raised more than £1300 for charity by swimming 50 lengths of Hampton Open Air Pool.

The money will go to the Crossway Pregnancy Crisis Centre, based in Twickenham, and where Ria works as a volunteer. The charity was set up in 1999 to support those facing an unplanned pregnancy or a miscarriage.

'It is a very worthwhile charity,' she said, 'and, like many small charities, is dependent on grants and fundraising to be able to continue to offer such an invaluable service.'



UNDETERRED by the threat of Storm Brian, six people from church joined Becky Jones on 21 October for a lovely walk in California Park, near Bracknell, and a pub lunch.



Our uniformed organisations took part in the Harvest Festival service, pictured above, in October. The Brownies read and acted out a story from the Bible, with artwork.



SUSAN HORNER

FOCUS ON BROWNIES

The Brownies welcomed three new members at the beginning of term. Much of the pack's time has been spent on working towards their Friend to Animals Badge.

Each Brownie chose an animal charity and talked about it, and they produced artwork using animal patterns.

They visited Old Farm Stables, where they helped to groom the horses and led them round the sand school as part of their daily exercise.

The Brownies also enjoyed an energetic jazz dance evening and, on 31 October, a Celebration of Light, where they made lanterns and lighthouses and decorated biscuits.

The evening, open to all junior school-aged children, continued with games, party food and a talk.

FOCUS ON SCOUTS

Our Scouts took part in the annual National Scouts Rifle Championships at Bisley in October.

It is the biggest event in the national Scouting calendar, with 730 youngsters taking part in a competition that demands

co-ordination, discipline and teamwork.

Under the leadership of Paul Fitchett and Wend Williamson, our group has a history of doing well in this competition, and this year was no exception.

They achieved three individual bronze medals and two silvers. The group also won bronze in the Team Pistol and gold in the Team Rifle.

In the overall team championship, the Seniors (Explorer Scouts and adults) came fourth and the Juniors (Scouts up to 14) came second, with a team score in excess of 500 and only losing out to the winners by a mere 8 points.

Well done to you all!

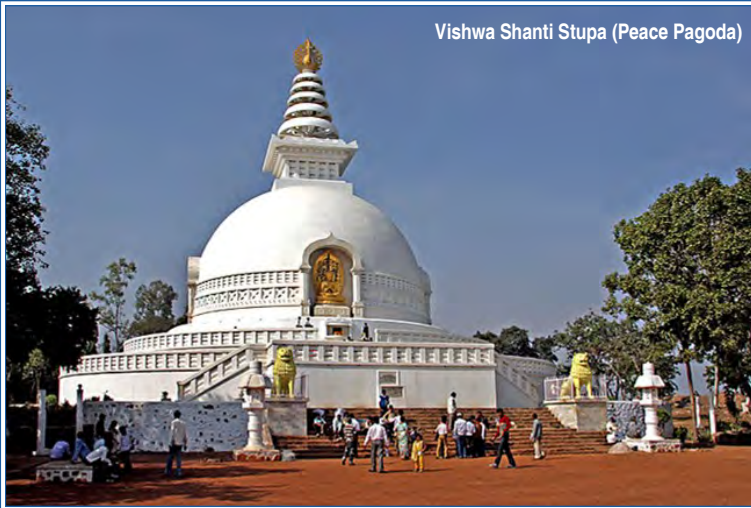


The photograph above shows the winning Rifle Team with their trophy. The three Scouts were also overall Junior Silver medallists.



Celebration of Light, our alternative to Halloween, included craft activities

Vishwa Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda)



Rajgir is a place of important significance for Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains; but one which is less well-known in the West and is rarely on the usual itinerary of anyone visiting India.



LAURENCE SEWELL

It lies in the north-eastern part of the country in Bihar state, some 75 miles south of the state capital of Patna. Rajgir and the surrounding parallel ridges of hills rising to 1,000 feet contain important Buddhist and Jain pilgrimage sites and are sacred to the memory of the founders of both religions. They are especially associated with the life of the first Buddha, Gautama (or simply Lord Buddha), who often taught there.

Majesty and mystery

The origins of the city, whose name literally means the 'abode of kings' remain unknown, although based on pottery at the site and other archaeological evidence it is estimated that Rajgir was established around 3,000 years ago.

It was mentioned in the ancient Hindu epic narrative poem *Mahabharata* (an important source of Hindu *dharma* - moral law - and history) as the capital of Magadha ruled by the mighty King Jarasandha, recounting the



Detail from the Peace Pagoda

numerous battles being defeated by Krishna, and in early Buddhist and Jain scriptures. Magadha was an ancient Indian kingdom in southern Bihar in the 6th-8th centuries BC, and Rajgir earned prominence for its association with the Shishunaga dynasty which is believed to have been the third ruling dynasty of Magadha.

The Lord Buddha converted King Bimbisara of Magadha, his contemporary, and countless others to his religion in the city, and it was here that King Ajatashatru kept his father Bimbisara in captivity after overthrowing him.

The beginnings of Buddhism

The city is divided into two parts, the old fortified city which lies in the valley surrounded by seven hills and the new city established by Ajatashatru. Buddha not only

spent many years in Rajgir but it was here that his teachings were written down. It was also the venue for the first Buddhist Council in the cave of Sattapanni after Buddha's death in around 483 BC.

In a sense, Rajgir can be considered the place where the beginnings of the Buddhist movement occurred. Mahavira, (otherwise known as Vardhamana), a key figure in Jainism, also spent 14 years in Rajgir.

In the caves and hills around Rajgir are many sacred sites and temples associated with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Today these sites are also major tourist attractions.

They include the ancient city walls from the Ajatashatru period and Bimbisara's gaol; Gridhrakuta (Vulture's Peak) which was one of Buddha's favourite retreats; the Sattapanni caves; and the Jain temples on the five peaks.

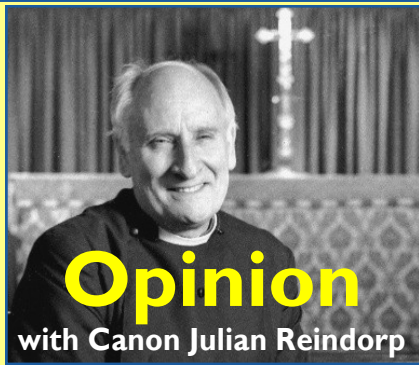
Spa resort to cure ills

Another attraction of the region is the aerial cable car that leads up to the hilltop Vishwa Shanti Stupa and monasteries, built in 1969 by Japanese Devotees of the Buddha on top of the Ratnagiri hills.

This is one of the 80 peace pagodas in the world to spread the message of peace and non-violence.

Rajgir has also developed as a spa and health resort due to its hot water springs seen below. The baths have been developed where the waters emerge from the underground caves, known as Brahmakund. They are a sacred place for Hindus and said to contain medicinal properties that help in the cure of many skin diseases.





Opinion

with Canon Julian Reindorp

'O LITTLE TOWN OF ...'

I find it difficult to sing one of my favourite carols, *O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie...* ever since I first went to the Holy Land. Today, this Palestinian city is entirely surrounded by the 26 foot high 'security wall'. Its people face huge difficulties to go to work or visit Jerusalem, seven miles away. If people work there they rise well before dawn to get through the checkpoints. Each day more homes are built by the Jewish settlers on Palestinian land - the UN calls it 'a flagrant violation of international law'. There are now more than 600,000 settlers. Meanwhile small but deeply committed communities of Jews work for peace and justice for the Palestinians, among them Jewish Voices for Justice and Rabbis for Peace.

BALFOUR DECLARATION

As I write this (on 31 October) it is exactly a hundred years since the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, wrote a letter to the Zionist Federation. 'His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious right of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in other countries.' Our government have rightly supported the establishment of the Jewish state, but what about our support of the Palestinians?

UNIVERSAL CREDIT DILEMMA

I watched the Parliamentary debate on Universal Credit on the BBC Parliament channel. All parties agreed that the policy to unite all benefits in one was right, but the practice was often producing real suffering, particularly around the six or more weeks' wait for the new benefit to begin. A number of women Labour MPs spoke passionately about their experience of bringing up children on benefits. Iain Duncan Smith, the Conservative MP who introduced the policy in 2010, had resigned because it was being 'salami-sliced.' Sir John Major described the new benefit as 'operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving.' Previous benefits were received weekly or fortnightly, so why the dramatic change now?

BRAIN FADE MOMENTS

Nine out of ten Britons have 'brain fade' moments a recent poll suggested. Most of us endure moments when we forget why we walked into a room, or absent-mindedly put the cereal in the fridge and the milk in the cupboard. The most common 'fades' are forgetting someone's name, or where you parked the car, and looking for your glasses when they are on the top of your head. I found this poll very reassuring.

CLERGY IN FANCY DRESS?

A group of priests in Cardiff went into a pub to celebrate a colleague's ordination. The publican of the City Arms, thinking they were a stag party in fancy dress, asked them to leave. The clergy tried to prove they were the real thing and eventually the manager realised the mistake and they were treated to a round of drinks. On local radio, he said, 'They were great sports and when we offered them free drinks they were happy to stay. Our Rev James ale is one of our most popular beers so it was great to have a real-life Reverend James and his fellow priests enjoying a pint or two!'

CHRISTMAS BLESSING

It is time for my favourite Christmas Blessing. 'You who are the God of a thousand faces, yet whom nothing can reveal so completely as the face of the child in Bethlehem, continue in our lives the mystery of your incarnation, that we may be for all those whom we meet a revelation of your love.'

Challenging times at Milo hospital

The support our parish has given to St Luke's hospital over more than 30 years is very much appreciated.

While missing our friend Benaiah Kilwale, who died in 2011, three of his daughters continue to work in the hospital and our parish is well known by the staff.



ANN PETERKEN

The hospital buildings are located round a quadrangle and include an outpatient's dispensary and two wards which together provide 50 beds for inpatients.

The annual report for 2016 records that the hospital treated 974 inpatients and 2,226 outpatients, as well as helping to deliver 233 babies. The colourful photo shows relatives sitting outside the male ward.

The hospital does not provide food for patients, so relatives prepare meals in the hostel building that St James's funded in 2000. It is very basic, but gives shelter for cooking and sleeping.

Benedict Sandagila, pictured right, became doctor-in-charge in 2014 after completing medical training funded by a lady doctor from Dorset.



He conveys his thanks for our recent donation, which will be used to purchase a binocular microscope and a water bath for the laboratory. Any money remaining will be used to buy medicines and clinical provisions

Benedict's role is very challenging, not least because of funding and staff shortages. There is also work to be done on the hospital buildings, including the construction of a new laboratory.

Dr Sandagila has told us that all the health personnel look upon themselves as church servants, combining their



professional skills with prayer and the offer of Christian hospitality to patients and their relatives.

Please pray for them and for adequate funding for all they seek to do.



COMING SOON



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Songs of Praise, Sunday 21 January 2018

All Saints' Church, Hampton, at 1700

Material for 2018 was produced in the Caribbean and uses Exodus 15, a song of triumph over oppression, as the motif of the Week of Prayer. Abuses of human rights are found across the region and we are challenged to consider our manner of welcoming of the stranger into our midst. Human trafficking and modern-day slavery continue to be huge issues.

REGISTERS

OCTOBER

FUNERAL

6 Beryl Briars, 87, Teddington

INTERMENT OF ASHES

24 Leslie Joyce Hyde, 92, Teddington



Striking the right notes

It is impossible for me to think of a Christmas without music. My personal preference is for 'classical' vocal music rather than the treacly stuff you normally hear in supermarkets and department stores.

There is a personal connection to many of my choices either through performing them and / or by having known the composer.



MARTIN HINCKLEY

A Spotless Rose by Herbert Howells



This hymn to the Virgin Mary shows the way Howells takes musical inspiration from the 14th century words by using gently weaving continuous movement to express the word 'blowing' near the start of the anthem. He creates wonderfully expressive harmonies for *in the dark midnight and cold winter's night* too. I had composition lessons with Howells, pictured, in my teens as a member of the National Youth Orchestra, seen above, a treasured extension to actually playing in the orchestra. He was a delightful old gentleman and signed a fugue exercise for me with himself as 'beginner' and me as 'developer', a treasured manuscript that has pride of place at home.



O Magnum Mysterium by Tomás Luis de Victoria

This 16th-17th century Spaniard is one of the musical renaissance's most important composers.

O Great Mystery is typical of both his style and that of the period because most contemporary

composers did not aspire to individuality but to perfection in using their craft to the glory of God. The piece begins with the voices entering one by one in imitation, the melody starting with long notes and then moving to shorter ones. The effect, as with most renaissance church music, is deeply spiritual and other-worldly. The church choir has sung this piece several times over the years.



O Magnum Mysterium by Morten Lauridsen



Using the same text as the Victoria piece, the American composer, pictured, re-creates a similar atmosphere, but with some gently modern twists of harmony. It is a very

emotional piece to sing and also to conduct, which I did at one of our church carol services a few years ago when I was temporary choirmaster, in between organists.

Shepherd's Pipe Carol by John Rutter



Including at least one Christmas piece by Rutter goes pretty much without saying but it is difficult to choose between them. So I have chosen two of my favourites, this one partly because of the variety he manages to get into the one piece. It begins in the typical jolly and bouncy Rutter style, but it also has a smooth middle section with a vocalised 'ah' accompaniment from the lower voices. The catchy changes of rhythm make it a somewhat precarious piece to perform.

Nativity Carol by John Rutter



By contrast, this piece shows another side of Rutter's writing being smoothly flowing throughout. It is without his trademark lively organ accompaniment, but does have a section where the lower parts hum the accompaniment. It has a rather wistful feel to it. As an undergraduate I met John Rutter, pictured, at Cambridge and played in some of the composition classes he gave. I received a bottle of wine as a 'thank you' — that's long gone, but the memory remains!

Angelus ad Virginem arranged by David Willcocks



This has another Cambridge connection as Willcocks, pictured, was then at the height of his powers as a leading light in the university (and was also Rutter's mentor at Kings). This piece has a lively organ accompaniment and a section where the lower voices vocalise 'ah'. I wonder where Rutter got that idea from — hmm?



The Lamb by John Tavener

I remember first hearing this on the TV one Christmas Eve while watching *Carols from Kings* and not liking it that much. There is no rhythmic interest, the voices all sing at the same time and there are some sharp melodic clashes between the parts.

Since then, having sung it several times, it has really grown on me. It is actually quite a hypnotic piece and the way it has been written appeals to the musical craftsman in me. Much of the writing involves turning the melody upside down, as it were, and singing that version against the original, leading to the clashes I mentioned. It's clever, but also very effective.



In the Bleak Midwinter



Finally to three congregational carols. There are two versions of this, one by Holst in 1906 (the usual one) and one by Harold Darke in 1911 (sometimes done just with the choir, but often sung by the congregation). Both have lovely harmonies and similar rhythms. There is no plagiarism by Darke as the rhythms both composers use fit the natural beat of the words - one can't imagine anything else. I do wonder whether the Holy Land gets 'snow on snow' though.

O Come All Ye Faithful



Another splendid arrangement by Willcocks, especially verse six where the sopranos have what is, for me, a spine-tingling

descant to *sing choirs of angels*. The previous verses also have a special effect when a choir sings with the congregation — on the repeats of *O come let us adore Him* the ladies start, then the tenors join in and finally the basses. Listen out for this at our carol service at St James's.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Like *O come*, one verse has a thrilling descant by Willcocks, the sopranos soaring up to top A (pretty high) near the end and an even bigger spine-tingle for me! The main tune was written by Mendelssohn and you can't get much better provenance than that.

