

# The Spire

The magazine of St James's Church, Hampton Hill

Free, but a donation helps us!

October 2008

INSIDE



Meet our  
curate

## Harvest Festival

Don't miss: Parish Communion, Sunday 5 October at 11am,  
followed by a bring and share lunch

# Info Board

ONLINE Check out the website for all the latest news

## Welcome

October 2008



If you are a regular reader of **The Spire**, I hope it won't have escaped your notice that the magazine has a new look this month. The biggest change is that we now have full colour on the front and back pages.

The quality of the pages has also improved following the decision to return to having it professionally printed, rather than using the Parish office's photocopier.

These changes gave us the opportunity to refresh the magazine and introduce some new features. Talking to many of you, I know there is so much more we could be reporting on, but the magazine is only as good as we make it - so over to you!



This month is also exciting for all of us at St James's as we welcome our new curate, Debbie Oades. Her first service with us will be on Sunday 5 October, but before that you have a chance to read all about her inside this issue.

I hope you enjoy Harvest Festival. Best wishes

**Janet**

Janet Nunn  
Editor

## The Spire

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### Magazine distribution

**The Spire** is available free from church. It is also posted or delivered to more than 600 homes. For more about this, contact Susan Horner (see above).

### Contributions welcome

**The Spire** is your magazine and we welcome articles. We regret we cannot print fiction, poetry or anything subject to copyright. We can't promise to publish, so to avoid disappointment please contact the editor first.

### Getting the magazine

Lost a copy of **The Spire**? The magazine has been online since 2006. It can be enlarged and is available on tape. For more information contact the editor.

### Magazine appeal

If you have enjoyed reading **The Spire** please make a donation to help us cover the printing and distribution costs. Cheques should be made payable to 'St James's PCC' and sent to the Parish Office. Thank you.

### Next issue/Copy deadline

The next issue of **The Spire**, covering Remembrance Sunday, will be published on 2 November. All copy must be with us by: **Friday 10 October**.

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### Updates

Please tell us about any changes

## Printing

Caring for the environment



### Paper

Please recycle this magazine when you have finished with it.



### Mixed Sources

Product group from well-managed forests and other controlled sources.

Printed by

J A Hollingsworth 020 8686 4481

## Services for October

### Sundays

8am Holy Communion  
9.30am Parish Communion (11am 5 Oct)

### 5 October

20th Sunday after Trinity

8am Deuteronomy 8.7-18

2 Corinthians 9.6-15

Luke 12.16-30

11am Psalm 148; John 6.5-13

### 12 October

21st Sunday after Trinity

Isaiah 25.1-9

Philippians 4.1-9

Matthew 22.1-14

### 19 October

22nd Sunday after Trinity

Isaiah 45.1-7

1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

Matthew 22.15-22

### 26 October

Last Sunday after Trinity

Leviticus 19.1-2, 15-18

1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

Matthew 22.34-46

### 1st Sunday in the month

5 October

11am Parish Communion - note the time

### Mondays-Fridays (not Tuesdays)

9.15am Morning Prayer

### Tuesdays

9.30am Holy Communion

### 1st Wednesday in the month

1 October

7am Commuter Communion

### 1st Thursday in the month

2 October

2pm Holy Communion

# A new curate - a leap of faith or a sign of God's love of us all?

## PETERVANNOZZI

**K**neeling on the dais under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, waiting for the then Bishop of London, Graham Leonard, to ordain me as a deacon, I had mixed feelings.

I had been pretty confident for several years that I was taking the right path in being ordained. Others had seemed to agree with me. The journey through selection for training, and then the actual training for ordination, had not thrown up any huge doubts in my mind about the rightness of my path, or in the minds of those who selected and then trained me.

Compared to the length of time it can take for some people to reach ordination, I had had it easy. The problem had been the retreat prior to the ordination service.

My memory is a little hazy about this, but I think about forty of us were on retreat. We had three days at a retreat house to reflect and pray about what was going to happen to us.

By the end of those few days, I was virtually climbing the walls. It was nothing to do with the retreat conductor who was an excellent speaker and a spiritual guide to many. The building was comfortable, too, although some of us had renamed it 'Domestos House' by the end of the retreat due to the smell of cleaning fluid!

Once I stopped and pondered, after several busy years of training, I seriously doubted whether I could take the final step and do what I had been yearning to do for several years - to serve as an ordained minister within the Church of England.

Every possible alternative seemed far more attractive on retreat than actually being ordained. After all, I was still only twenty-four, and surely there were other things that a young man of my age could be doing than becoming part of a funny old institution such as the Church of England?

**D**espite all this, I got to St. Paul's, and knelt there, waiting for the bishop. I still was uncertain and frightened, and suddenly the cloud lifted. Was it due to a profound experience of God - a vision, a strong feeling, a distinct movement of the Holy Spirit? Not at all.

Opposite me on the dais was a friend from theological college, who was also on the retreat, and had known what a state I had got myself in. After his

ordination, he just looked across at me and winked. I am sorry that it was nothing more profound, but that one simple, human gesture made all the difference.

It was all right to be doing what we both were doing together with the other men and women kneeling under that great dome. It would sometimes be wonderful to be an ordained minister, and sometimes dreadful.

Each of us would be an ordained minister as a human being and not as some oddity that had become pious and perfect at the touch of the bishop's hands.

**O**n 5 October it will be St. James's privilege to welcome the Revd. Debbie Oades as our new curate. I do not know how Debbie felt under the dome of St. Paul's, but she describes in this month's magazine (pages 4-5) her path to ordination and its significance for her. We will get to know more of her story - though it is her story, and none of us has a right to see into someone else's soul.

Debbie comes to us a mature person with experience of life and most recently as an ordained minister - she was ordained deacon in 2006 and priest in 2007. She has served as curate of the Good Shepherd, Hounslow, and now comes to join us to continue her formation and training as a priest.

I am sure that Debbie will be made very welcome, and she will be part of the life of St. James's Church and parish.

**T**he arrival of a new ordained person gives a chance for each person to consider their own particular journey of faith. Many will sympathise with Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, who when asked about his faith said that it was like listening to Classic FM in the Chilterns - it comes and goes!

Yet a new priest with us can be a huge encouragement to faith. The fact that someone still wants to bother to be ordained in a secular and sometimes hostile culture speaks of the enduring story of Jesus. It is still good news and it still inspires.

In the ordination service for priests the bishop says of priests: *With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love.*

**W**elcome, Debbie, to St. James's Hampton Hill. Do tell us the story of God's love, and I am sure we will tell it to you in turn.

### IN THOUGHT AND PRAYER

A prayer of Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) who is commemorated on 4 October.

*At Harvest Festival we thank God for creation and Francis's words express this.*

Most High, all-powerful, Good Lord, all praise is Yours, all glory, all honour, and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong.

No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through all You have made, and first my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and through whom You give us light.

How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour; Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All Praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars; in the heavens You have made them,

bright, and precious, and fair.

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy, all the weather's moods, by which You cherish all that You have made.

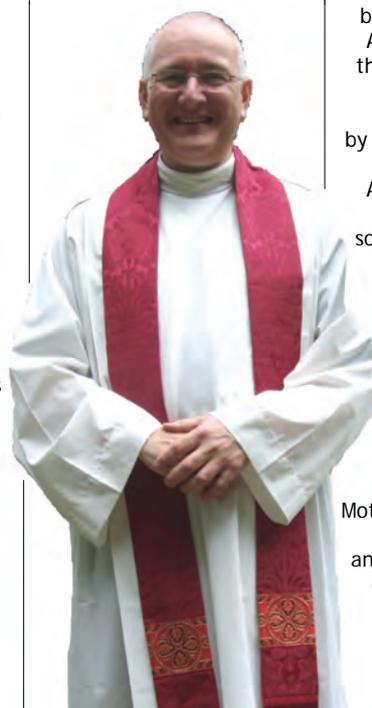
All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious and pure.

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You brighten up the night.

How beautiful is he, how cheerful!

Full of power and strength.

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us, and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.



Features

News Bulletin

Rules relaxed on church weddings

WEDDINGS New laws making it easier where you get married in church come into force this month.

Until now, unless couples obtained a special licence from they could marry only in a parish where one of them lives or is on the parish electoral roll.

Under the Church of England Marriage Measure, a couple will be able to marry in a church where they can



demonstrate a 'qualifying connection'. This includes a church where they have been baptised, or where a parent or grandparent lives/lived or was married. The move has been

brought in as a response to demographic changes.

Some young adults who moved away from home could not wed in the local church where they grew up.

In 2005 there were 84,400 religious ceremonies and 88,710 were held in 'approved premises' such as stately homes and hotels. The majority, 244,000 marriages took place in register offices.



Talking newsletter needs volunteers

HELP Richmond Talking Newspaper for the blind is a locally produced cassette of news, distributed weekly and free of charge. But it needs volunteers to join the team to help produce this valuable service.

There are vacancies for editors (who compile the content), clerks (dealing with distribution), readers (clear voice essential!) and especially technicians (to work recording equipment).

If you can spare a couple of hours a month, visit the team at Teddington School, Broom Road, on Friday evenings to find out more, or call 020 8890 3437.

Planet Earth 2050

VISIT The Science Museum has an exhibition called *The Science of Survival: Your Planet Needs You!* Interactive exhibits and games lets you shape how our world might look in 2050, covering water, food, clothing, transport, and housing. It also features recycled fabrics and new building materials and fuel sources. It runs until 2 November.

Registers for July and August

**JULY:**  
**Baptisms**  
 13 Sachin Jaynti Stuart Crawford and Shivani Indira Bella Crawford.  
 13 George Joseph Bannon and William Robson Bannon.  
 27 Taylor Jade Wallis.  
**Weddings**  
 19 Geoffrey James Nunn and Tiffany Claire Henry.  
**Wedding Blessing**  
 26 Craig and Gail McLean (née Cargill).  
**Funerals**  
 18 Robert Arthur Lelliott, 75, Hampton Hill.

**AUGUST:**  
**Baptisms**  
 24 John George Alfred Robley and Rosemary Beatrice Robley, Hampton.  
**Weddings**  
 9 Alexander James Robertson and Lisa Louise Roberts.  
 30 Thomas Edward Brooke and Amanda Christine Rosemary Groundwater.  
**Funerals**  
 18 Winifred Feasby, 103, Hampton.  
 20 Alice May Wallis, 92, Hampton Hill.  
 21 Joseph Robinson, 80, Hampton.

'I never wanted to be a minister - it wasn't in my life plan!'

It may have been an indirect route, but our new curate Debbie Oades has never been happier, as Nick Bagge found out when he met her.



The first thing you notice about Debbie is that she smiles a lot. There's that infectious laugh too. She has good reason to be happy.

A proud Yorkshire lass, a husband and two sons who excel at everything from music to sport, and now a vocation that is taking her to St James's Church. And the church owes it all to Debbie's intense dislike of badminton.

Debbie was born in 'God's Own Country' of Yorkshire in 1963. 'Both my husband and I are both Hull born and bred and are Hull Kingston Rovers supporters. We were brought up within a couple of miles of each other as children. I definitely feel I'm a Yorkshire girl - down to the point that I had white roses for my wedding.

'I lived with my grandparents when I was younger. My grandfather was a fisherman, so we were brought up on fresh fish from the docks. He had a big garden where he looked after rabbits and chickens, and there were orchards, which is where I discovered my love of gardening.'

The eldest of three children, Debbie developed a passion for music, which is how she met her husband. 'We both progressed through all the city of Hull youth bands, concert bands and orchestras.' Rob plays the euphonium, Debbie



the clarinet and saxophone. 'Then Rob joined the Humberside Police Band that I was already playing in, and shortly after that we started going out.'

They married in 1986 - 'My husband regularly tells people you get less for murder!' - and have two sons, Robert, 18, and just beginning a degree in photography at Falmouth University College, and Thomas, 15, studying for his GCSEs at Thamesmead High School, Shepperton.

Back then, Debbie's career path had no real direction. 'I've been a petrol pump attendant, a doctors' receptionist, a medical secretary, a criminal records clerk, but it was through my music that I got into teaching.

'A primary school teacher played clarinet in the police band and she asked me to help teach twins, as one had failed an exam, and I found I quite enjoyed it. Soon a private school asked if I would help them out - and before I knew it I had 60 pupils! It sort of took off, so I went off and did my Teaching Certificate with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.'

Then in 1999 her husband's job in the chemical industry brought the family to Staines. 'I was trying to sort out my sons' violin lessons and asked if there were any jobs. They asked when I could start! Debbie began teaching for Surrey County Arts in January 2000, travelling around the county to schools three days a week.

'It was while this was happening that I found St Peter's in Staines and got involved in music there, playing occasionally. Quite rapidly I wanted to do more in church, and it sort of grew and grew.

'As a youngster I went to a Church of England primary school and then I was advised to go to a Catholic junior school because they were better for music and I think it was there that my faith started to develop. There were several nuns who taught us and we had services for every saint's day there was - in fact it was amazing that we ever got any work done!

'As a non-Catholic I wasn't required to attend the services, but the teacher who used to oversee the library session that we had to go to instead was a badminton player. He knew I played table tennis (Debbie represented England) and wanted me to play in the badminton team, so I decided it was the better option to go to

the church services - and I found that I liked them. It was there my faith started to take hold.'

There had always been a Bible at home, but Debbie grew up in a Christian family who believed, but didn't necessarily go to church. 'Then as a teenager, I started attending St. Columba, the local CofE church, on my own without telling people where I was going, but it wasn't until I was getting married that Rob and I began going a little bit more often.'

Debbie's route into the Church has been an indirect one. 'I never wanted to be a minister - it wasn't in my life plan! I was quite happy doing what I was doing, and thoroughly enjoying teaching. However over a short space of time there was a growing desire to get to church and I discovered Morning Prayer at St Peter's.

The pull became very strong, and was noticed by Revd Rod Cosh who said: "You seem quite desperate to get here." I said: "I am. I wake up in the morning, get the children to school and need to come here to pray." So we talked through what I was experiencing.'

Her involvement there soon extended to Eucharistic visiting, being a Sacristan, working on the Churches Together plan and setting up a Sing Praise Band. 'I anticipated that each role would satisfy that pulling - but it didn't.

At one particular service people were talking about their favourite hymns, and someone hadn't turned up. Rod said: "Can you say something about it?" I took one look at the hymn and it was one of my favourites, *As the deer*, and as I stood up to say why, I knew at that moment that God was calling me to ordained ministry.'

Nevertheless, it made Debbie nervous. 'It was the last place I wanted to be and I spent the next two years fighting it, but it wouldn't go away. I got to breaking point as I knew what I was doing wasn't enough and yet I didn't think I was capable of doing what I was being asked to do.'

So she finally gave in. 'I thought, OK God, let's start the system and see what

happens and if it's meant to be it'll be and if I've got it wrong then somebody will graciously tell me I've got it wrong.

'Part of me was desperately hoping that somebody would, but they didn't which came as a bit of a shock! From there things moved quite rapidly. I came along to see Brian Leathard (area Director of Ordinands) thinking he'd say no as well, and he didn't.

'Even when I finally plucked up courage to tell the whole family, nobody was surprised. As time went on I experienced a deepening sense of humility and trust, allowing me to let go of the reins and let God take the lead; peace at last!'

In 2003, Debbie began studying part time for a BA Hons degree in Contextual Theology at the North Thames Ministerial Training Course. On 1 July 2006 she was



ordained deacon and on 24 June last year priest. For the past two years she has been an assistant Curate at The Good Shepherd, Hounslow West.

'I still do double-takes if I walk past a shop window and see the clerical collar. It may not have been in my life plan, but it was in God's and I wouldn't change it for the world.'

Debbie is coming to St James's as a SSM (Self Supporting Minister). 'I think to go into stipendiary ministry straight off would not have been the right move from the family point of view, but I think that ultimately a ministry will take over.'

Debbie still teaches music (clarinet, saxophone and recorder), but now as private tuition at home two nights a week, so aims to be at St James's for a good part of the week.

Gardening, music, rugby, fish and faith. A match made in heaven!

Around the Spire



News and events from Hampton Hill and beyond

Diamond Wedding couple

Congratulations to Hal and Eila Severn who celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on 21 August. They were married at St. James's, as were their daughter Coryn and granddaughter Caitlyn. Hal and Eila are pictured here at Caitlyn's wedding last year.



The funeral of Alice Wallis took place in August. Alice had a lifelong connection with St. James's, having lived in the area all her life, seventy years of which were at her home on Uxbridge Road.

A clutch of birthdays for the month of July

July was 'baby month'! Sophie Elizabeth Tandara was born on 13 July. Her parents, Vlado and Claire, were the last couple to be married by Brian before he went to Chelsea, and they now live in Amersham.

Jenny McEvoy, well-known to many through the Globe Players, has become a grandmother with the birth of a daughter, Abigail, to Nansi and Matt.

Margaret Hobbs's first grandchild, Luke, a son for Emma-Jane and Dean, was born on 28 July.

The following day saw the arrival of Liz Butler's



second grandchild, Gabriel Michael Charles, a son for Kirsten and Damian. Proud grandmother Liz is pictured above with Gabriel.

Congratulations and best wishes to all these families.

We were pleased to welcome the van Thiel family and many friends on 7 September for the baptism of their third daughter Elsa Victoria. Her sisters Ingrid and Anna were also baptised here.

The Hampton Hill Association urgently requires for an editor for their quarterly magazine. If you think you could help, please contact Michael Walker on 020 8979 6607.

Sunil de Mel is now recuperating at home after his time in hospital. We also send best wishes to Jean Wilson who has been unwell for several weeks.

Barbara Stover, daughter of Vera and Len Rockcliffe, visited St. James's to see the stone commemorating Joe Boyle who was buried in our churchyard but whose body was moved to Canada in 1983. Barbara lives near Vancouver and visited Joe's grave in Woodstock, Ontario.

Got any news? Please contact Susan Horner tel 020 8979 9380 or email: smhorner5@yahoo.co.uk

# Young Spire

With Prill Hinckley



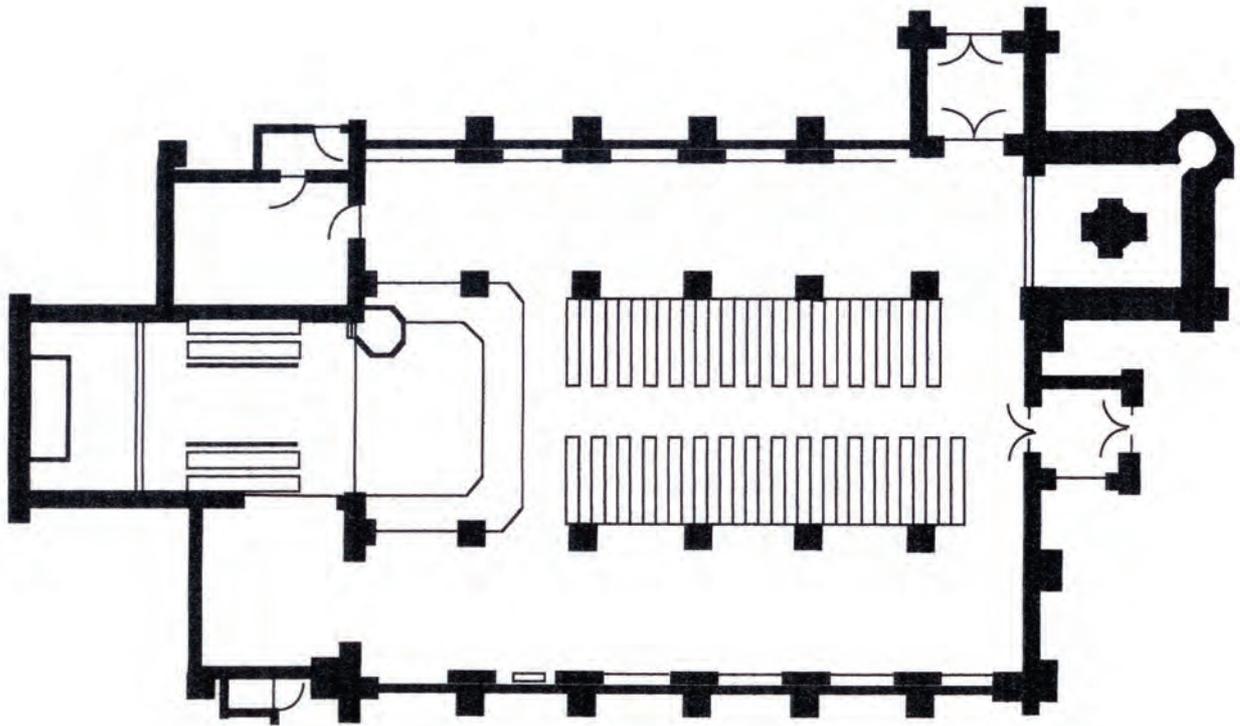
**ONLINE** There's much more to read and do online! Young St James's has a guide to our church and patron, Bible stories, puzzles and groups to join.

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## Inside the Church

- There are different areas in the church which are used for different purposes. Draw arrows from the areas in the plan to the correct titles and pictures and/or descriptions.

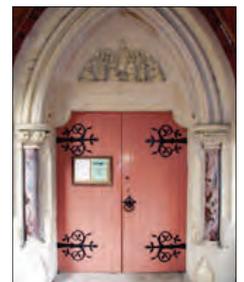
Nave     Vestry     Baptistry     Sanctuary     West Porch     North Aisle     Chancel  
 Bell Tower Entrance     South Aisle     Organ Chamber     South Porch



This is the eastern part of the church where the choir and clergy sit.



This is at the east end of the church beyond the Chancel, separated from the chancel by a step and altar rail. It is the most sacred part of the church around its altar.



This surrounds the baptismal font, and is near the church door to remind us that baptism is the entry point into the church. The entrance to the Bell Tower is in the far corner.

This is the central open space of the church, the main aisle with rows of pews either side. It is the part of the church where most of the congregation sit during services.

This is at the east end of the South Aisle. It is the room where the clergy, servers and choir robe up. These robes are stored in the vestry, along with various other vestments, pulpit falls, bible book marks and clergy's stoles and top garments.



*If you need help, go to the appropriate page on the Young St. James's section of the website.*



## What's On

### The World Food Crisis

*Wednesday 1 October, 7pm,  
St James's Church, 197 Piccadilly, London.*  
A combination of bad policies towards agriculture, worsening global climate, use of food crops for bio-fuels and the steady increase in population is causing a drastic increase in food prices. What can we do to prevent greater world starvation? Join the debate. Tickets £8.

### Harvest Festival Bring and Share Lunch

*Sunday 5 October, following 11am service.*  
An opportunity for all the congregation to meet and enjoy lunch together. If you can contribute a dish please add your name to the list on the board, call Liz Wilmot on 020 8977 9434 or email: elizabethwilmot@talktalk.net. We will be collecting essential items for SPEAR and The Upper Room.

### Initiatives of Change Forum - Will there be food for all?

*Tuesday 7 October, 7.15pm,  
24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD.*  
Jim Wigan, co-ordinator of the Farmers Dialogue, will give a farmer's perspective on feeding a world accelerating towards nine billion. Against a background of rising food and energy prices and shortages he has a particular emphasis on the part we can all play. The talk is free, but a collection will be taken towards expenses. Call 020 7798 6000 to book a place.

### St James's Theatre Club

*The Circle, Tuesday 30 September, 7.45pm at Richmond Theatre.*

Susan Hampshire heads the cast in Somerset Maugham's social satire. Tickets £15.  
*Far from the Madding Crowd, Wednesday 5 November, 7.45pm at Richmond Theatre.*  
English Touring Theatre's new production of Thomas Hardy's enduring novel. Tickets £10. Contact Ria Beaumont on 020 8943 4336. Transport can be arranged.

### RNLI Big Band Concert

*Saturday 25 October at 7.30pm, Salvation Army Citadel, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford.*  
RNLI Twickenham and District Branch present a concert featuring the Thames Television Big Band. Tickets £10 (£11 on the day) available from 01784 211977 or 020 8977 8855.

### Eco Fair

*Saturday and Sunday, 27-28 October,  
10am-5pm, Landmark Arts Centre,  
Teddington.*

Over 60 exhibitors will be offering practical lifestyle choices that don't cost the earth. Tickets £3, under 16s free. For more information telephone 020 8977 7558.

### Charity Christmas Cards

*Sunday, 2 November after 9.30am service.*  
Buy your Christmas cards from us and support a host of charities. Charities represented will be: RNLI, FSID (cot death research and support), Princess Alice Hospice, Shooting Star Hospice as well as our very own St James's Church cards. Fairtrade goods will also be available, including Christian Aid cards.

### All Souls Service

*Sunday 2 November, 6pm, St. James's Church.*  
A service to remember friends and loved ones who have passed away.

### Advent Course

*Starting Monday 24 November, 7.30pm,  
St James's Church.*  
There will be an opportunity in Advent for prayer, study and reflection. You are welcome to come along to the church on all or any of four Mondays - 24 November, and 1, 8 and 15 December. Each evening will begin at 7.30pm and be finished by 9pm. See the weekly pew sheet for more information in due course.

### Trip to Winchester Cathedral

*Saturday 29 November, leaving St James's Church 10am, returning at 4pm.*  
Spend a memorable day at Winchester Cathedral and start your Christmas shopping at the market, go skating on the ice rink, climb the tower, hear the advent bells or simply sit back and listen to the cathedral choir practising for their carol service. The cost (depending on numbers) will be £20/25, and includes return coach transport and a one hour guided tour of the cathedral. If you would like to come add your name to the list on the board in the South aisle of the church, telephone 020 8977 9434 or email: elizabethwilmot@talktalk.net

## REVELATIONS



### A Tale of Two Cities

Where you live matters and the contrast was never starker than when natural disasters struck the neighbouring countries of China and Burma in May this year. China opened its doors in unprecedented fashion following an earthquake that killed some 40,000 people. Just across the border in Burma, thousands starved while its rulers insisted that there was no crisis and that its people were grateful for the food its army handed out - UN food that it controlled, repackaged as its own and distributed only to the chosen few.

While China welcomed outside support and agencies, Burma shunned international help. Charities were turned away, the authorities convinced that workers were journalists or, worse, spies intent on causing trouble.

Whilst it would be naïve to suppose that some of China's openness had nothing to do with the Beijing Olympics, or indeed the pragmatism that guarantees the ruling party's continued support, there are encouraging signs that there may be a loosening of the iron grip of communism.

### Christianity v Islam

It probably came as no surprise to many of you that a report commissioned by the Church of England accused the government of marginalising the Church. The report said ministers were failing to understand the Church's role in providing social services.

It also accused them of favouring Islam and other religions, and paying only 'lip service' to Christianity. It concluded that the government is 'religiously illiterate' and knows very little about the Church's work.

It seems the fear of offending Muslims, in the aftermath of 9/11, is now so overwhelming that we would rather undermine Christianity than work with it to create harmony and banish intolerance as well as extremism.

The government denied it was a bias, calling it common sense when it had to redouble its efforts to fight extremism and prevent young Muslims from falling prey to terrorists.

What a sad world where religions have to jostle for positions in some prescribed pecking order.

### More tea, Vicar?

The Vicar's Wife is the stuff of folklore: rosy-cheeked, kind if a little condescending, and spends a great deal of time in her country kitchen, cooking jam in her sensible shoes.

But not so Elisa Beynon from north London. She has just landed a £20,000 publishing contract for a cookery book - quite an achievement for someone whose best recipe until a few years ago was broccoli and tomato ketchup!

Food for her means putting nourishment into bodies. She says that it is the people that come first and the sharing that is central to her Christian attitude. The Vicar's Wife Cook Book comes out next March and will focus on events and the food that she has cooked on those occasions. With a love of pink champagne and cooking in high heels, Elisa has been compared to Nigella Lawson. What next, her own TV series?

### Vicar's View



...well if he's going to be an Olympic swimming champion he needs to start training as soon as possible...

## Your Voice

Dick Wilde

## Our Church

# Delusions or deluded? Why I found comfort in an atheist's book



**R**ichard Dawkins is a brilliant scientist, a good expositor and a popular writer. I have read his book in the paperback edition, which has the advantage of a useful extra preface, answering some of the criticism which his professed atheism in the hardback raised.

It is mostly easy and interesting to read, and I believe potentially of great value to any faith community. It should persuade any serious readers to think about what they believe and why. Its enthusiastically professed atheism has certainly pleased many non-believers. As Dawkins hopes, it may release some people from the bondage of their religion.

I think that it may lead others to a more thoughtful and perhaps deeper faith. Dawkins writes with the certainty and enthusiasm of a Victorian missionary spreading the truth to the heathen. He lists the reasons why he thinks people believe in a God, and shows what poor reasons many are, and how easily refuted.

He considers the legends, metaphors, uncertain history, peculiar practices and beliefs of several religions and holds them to sometimes deserved ridicule. However, he has difficulty refuting personal experience and belief in a transcendent power.

In fact in some passages of the book Dawkins himself seems to sense, rather uncomfortably, the presence of something beyond the flimsy trappings of faith that he demolishes with such indignation.

While pouring scorn on fundamentalist preachers he refers with respect to Tillich and Bonhoeffer, and in later chapters of fruitful discussion with Bishops John Spong and Richard Harris.

In the first chapter of the book, *A deeply religious non-believer*, he writes with affection of his school chaplain, and of his own wonder and awe at the mystery of nature and the universe.

But he says: 'A quasi-mystical response to nature...is common among scientists and rationalists. It has no connection with supernatural belief'. Why ever not, and why quasi-mystical? This begs the question of the validity of the experience.

This brings to a focus his central thesis, summarised in six statements at the end of his chapter, *Why there is almost certainly no God*.

With apologies to Dawkins, I think these can be summarised by saying: 'Everything in the cosmos, and everything we experience can be explained by science, if not now, eventually'.

On his home ground, the evolutionary theory, he is unchallengeable. Perhaps a lot of his anger at religion in general is due to the determination of religious fundamentalists to reject Darwin's work.

To him, this wonderful discovery, together with modern cosmological theories, demonstrates that science can or has the potential to explain everything, the cosmos, the world, natural creation and of course man.

*The Mother of All Burkas*, the last section of the last chapter of his book, is an inspiring taste of some of the wonders revealed by modern science. Modern psychology continues to make progress, and he believes will eventually explain away mystical revelation and hence religious belief.

Dawkins sees all religion as a bondage on humanity. He would like to see a peaceful world free from such beliefs. With John Lennon he laments: 'Imagine...a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, ...no 9/11, no 7/7, ...no Israeli/Palestinian wars...'

One could respond with equal validity: 'Imagine a world with no science. Imagine no poison gas, machine guns, warplanes, cluster bombs, nuclear missiles, biological weapons...' Not that this comparison validates religion, only the meaninglessness of the argument.

We would lose an awful lot without science. I think we would lose part of our humanity without religious belief.

I have read essays by believers of several faiths which dismiss the scholastic proofs of the existence of God as ruthlessly as Dawkins, but giving accounts of their own experience of a reality transcending, though not contradicting, science and logic.

Albert Einstein said: 'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.' And that pretty well sums up my argument.

If we shed the pride that science can tell us all we can ever know, then science and religion can work together enriching each other.

If you'd like to comment on something in the news email the editor: [janunnhh@btinternet.com](mailto:janunnhh@btinternet.com)

Parable of the Sower  
'This window is erected to the  
Glory of God and in memory of  
Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram  
first vicar of this parish  
1882 by EEW'

