

A good number of people will have received some Christmas cards this year which were not only nothing to do with Christmas at all but were in very poor taste. We have become used to cards with robins and snow scenes and holly; pleasant designs and innocuous in that they are just stylized greeting cards. What we now have to expect it seems are cards which in another age would have been called blasphemous. There are cards which are clever but crude, ones which distort the Christmas message to such a remarkable degree that one can only assume that the artists and publishers know nothing about Jesus and certainly have no idea how offensive they can be. Sadly it seems that more of these are sold than anything else and the shopkeepers can not get enough of them to satisfy demand. In other countries it would be illegal to publish and print such cards let alone sell them. Fancy putting the mockers on The Prophet in an Islamic country! The publishers' feet would hardly touch the ground on their way to prison and punishment.

I am not suggesting that we go back to the times of the Inquisition and torture people if their faith does not add up to the 'official' line. What I am arguing for is the respect for the deep feelings of millions of ordinary people. We have become very sensitive, and rightly so, to the feelings of minority groups whether religious or not. Can we not also respect the majority? They also are people.

It is not true that 'we can do nothing about it'. We can. Recently I heard of one publisher who withdrew his printed cards from the market after having been made aware of what distress he had caused. So if anyone has received a card which he or she thought fell into the category of distastefulness or blasphemy or crudity I should be glad to know. I have already received some so do not feel that you are splitting in any way. If we take action it will not be in the first instance against local shops; it will be against the publishers.

We have already expressed some anxiety about possible legislation to do with Sunday Trading in previous editions of The Spire. The P.C.C. at its last meeting resolved to write to our Member of Parliament to express our views to him and ask how he intended to vote on the issue. The P.C.C. wished to say that it considered it would be a very retrograde step if seven day trading were to be introduced. Something infinitely precious would be lost and we were not at all sure how much would be gained except legalising what already happens in some places. Many families would suffer and some work people would be pressurised into working against their will or risk losing their jobs. The message has been delivered verbally since Parliament has been in recess. One thing is quite clear. We do not yet know the wording of the motion upon which M.P.s will be asked to vote. So nothing definite can be said. But Mr. Jessel shares our disquiet about the long term consequences of permanent seven day trading.

Nicholas Chubb

CHANCELPHOBIA — A morbid fear of the front area of ecclesiastical buildings, especially of the section near the pulpit. The patient is struck by an attack near the door, and collapses into the nearest seat.

ARCIC MEETINGS

Towards the end of last year, the Hampton Council of Churches organised inter-denominational groups of Christians to discuss the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The Bishop has asked all Anglican church people to think about the subject of Christian unity and to contribute an expression of these thoughts towards the long-range research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today".

This all sounds rather daunting, but the groups, made up of Christians from different Hampton churches and meeting in the homes of various kind and hospitable hosts, lost no time in settling down to consider the material given for consideration. If the group I attended was typical, we were members of St. Theodore's R.C. Church, Methodists from Percy Road and Anglicans from St. Mary's and St. James, meeting in a warm and comfortable room and very quickly becoming friends and enjoying talking to each other about our faith and practice. The course material, well prepared and clearly expressed, was shaped into five "units" to form the basis of fruitful and well organised discussion; the subject headings were "Coming together" for the introductory evening, followed by "Baptism", "Ministry", "Authority" and ending with the fundamental "Eucharist". Again, if my group was typical, the leaders were well acquainted with the material, skilled at drawing opinions and ideas from every member of the group and full of human sympathy and understanding.

At the end of the course, we could not pretend to have reached any profound conclusion or discovered deep theological truths, but a group of ordinary people, from diverse churches, felt themselves to be basically members of one family, sustained by the same faith and striving towards the same goals. We felt ourselves more united than we had expected and at the final report-and-party evening at All Saints, under the chairmanship of David Vanstone, these feelings were firmly expressed. At the very first ARCIC group meeting we were asked to use this prayer and at the end of the course I felt that it still embodied the spirit in which we met and shared our thoughts and hopes:-

"Christ our hope: we give you glory for the great grace by which upon the cross you stretched out your hands in love to us all. By that same grace, come, Risen Saviour, into every gesture of unity and fellowship we make toward one another. May the peace we share be your peace. Amen."

Margaret Taylor

CHRISTMAS EVE CRIB SERVICE

After the last-minute shopping and preparations for Christmas Day or celebrations at work, the short informal crib service is always an enjoyable and timely reminder, for adults and children alike, of the first Christmas. For many children this may be their only visit to church over the Christmas period and, certainly for the younger ones, this service is the one which may help them to understand that the Joy of Christmas does not just come from presents and parties.

All the children were very excited, but they joined in enthusiastically with the familiar carols and watched attentively the nativity tableau. This was performed entirely by children, in full costume — including a human star! — and narrated and directed by Nicholas. At the end of the service, following a few short prayers, Nicholas invited us all to look at the Christmas crib.

It was lovely to see so many families – the service seems to be more popular each year – and it would be nice to think that, having enjoyed this visit, the newcomers will feel encouraged to come back again during the rest of the year.

Barbara Essam

THE CHRISTINGLE SERVICE

The Sunday morning service on January 6th was dedicated to the Church of England's Children's Society. This was the first Sunday of the New Year and also the first service of the month and hence we were joined by all the youth groups. Sunday January 6th is also the Sunday closest to the date when the arrival of the three kings at Bethlehem is celebrated. There was a short tableau and readings by children from the Parish followed by a candlelit procession of children through the church. The children were then presented with a christingle, an orange representing the world; a candle representing the Light of God over the world; a red band symbolising God giving the life of His only son for the world; and four sticks of sweet fruits symbolising the seasons.

The service was most moving and we would all like to thank all the people who worked so hard to make it such a memorable occasion.

John Corney

CHRISTMAS TREES

Every Christmastide our village scene becomes more festive, more Christmas trees adorn the High Street; over 60 this year made it even more special. Our thanks are extended to our local traders who regularly transform Hampton Hill not only into a seasonal delight for the residents but into a mini-tourist attraction for neighbouring areas. This year Keith Day, the popular and public spirited host of "The Star" – appropriately named – led the arrangements. Outside his inn in the yard "because there was no room in the inn" was created a floodlit manger and crib with lifesize figures and animals. It caused a lot of appreciative comment and passersby paused a while to gaze and to be reminded of the real meaning behind all the celebrations.

The parade which heralded the turning on of the tree lights featured that popular and local character, Dudley the donkey, who touchingly accompanied the youthful Mary and Joseph from our Brownies along the road.

St. James Christmas Tree was a special tree this season. I have enjoyed its growth through the years in Ron Bridges' front garden until, alas, this year it had become too large and had to be sacrificed. However it had a beautiful and fitting end, towering gracefully up to the rafters, decked with a sprinkling of delicate lights and wafting its own particular fragrance into the air, like frankincense or perhaps, myrrh and adding its own distinctive offering to our worship.

Lovely Christmas trees! How grateful we are for them, how pleased to welcome them and how sad to see them go.

Margery Orton

STEWARDSHIP RENEWAL — NOVEMBER 1985

The church accounts for 1984 show our parish expenditure, in round figures, was about £22,000. This included about £7,000 for various church expenses, £3,000 for charitable donations and £12,000 to the "Common Fund Assessment". This last is money asked from the parish by the diocese; about 90% of it being used to help support clergy, including our own Vicar.

Our income during this period was about £19,000. Of this £16,000 was pledged, ie Stewardship giving, including the tax refund. Thus to meet our expenditure we ran down our reserves by about £3,000.

Last year, 1985, the PCC was faced with a "Common Fund Assessment" of nearly £17,000. It was clear that unless our income was significantly increased in 1985, we should be unable to meet our expenditure. Our Stewardship Review on 27th November focussed on this problem, and we hoped that giving would increase to meet our new need.

There are about 130 contributors to the Stewardship scheme, some giving as individuals, some as families. The Stewardship Committee asked 20 visitors to go round the parish to other contributors, asking them to review their giving. So far we have had about 80 returns, of these about 25 have made substantial increases in their giving. However, it seems clear that not only are we unable to meet our 1985 commitment to the diocese (we are about £4,800 short), but we shall not be able to meet the £18,000 figure set for 1986 either.

The diocesan assessment is based mainly on our church membership as shown by our Electoral Roll. The calculation is that in 1986 our 190 church members should each give an average of £2.65 per week, or £138 per year. The Common Fund Assessment is a percentage of this; the exact calculation is complicated by other income and allowances but our Stewardship potential giving is the main factor.

We are a very long way from our nominal potential giving. We might project our 1986 income from pledged giving, including the tax refund, as £18,000. This is an average of £95 per person, as against the £138 nominal figure.

This average obscures a very wide range of giving, some very generous indeed, some very modest. There seems to be a twofold challenge to church members who are concerned to make our stewardship successful. Firstly to understand the position and to make it clear to others. Even more important, we need to make our church, what it stands for and what it does, so valuable to its members (and we hope members of the wider community) that they give with conviction and enthusiasm, as some do already.

This second task is a long and uphill one; we shall need to employ every christian virtue very seriously if we wish to succeed.

Dick Wilde

THE ANONYMOUS GREY COFFER

What happens to the money we give to the church? This question was posed in the last issue and it does call for an answer. Our own parish accounts explain what we do with our income, ie primarily the contributions from the members of our church. Dick has set out the broad breakdown of our expenditure – the £7,000 to which he refers being the amount (which of course varies from year to year) needed to meet the necessary cost of running the church – both buildings and services, but this does exclude our Vicar's stipend and the cost of maintaining the vicarage. I suspect that the grey coffer is not totally anonymous but is labelled "Common Fund Assessment".

As we are part of an organisation (it seems a shame to apply that term to a church, but it *is* appropriate, and most would say necessarily so) and we contribute to, and benefit from, that organisation through the diocese, let us now look at its finances, on the basis of its 1986 budget. This has just been published and made more widely available than before. It is not a small matter – it deals with nearly £8m.

Into this coffer will flow (it is hoped) some £5m from the parishes like ourselves, plus well over £1m from the Church Commissioners and smaller sums from miscellaneous sources. Out of the coffer is to be taken £7m for the needs of parishes, including ourselves, and well under £1m for servicing boards and councils for such fields as education, community and stewardship and for the other needs of the diocese itself and the General Synod. The £7m which goes out to the parishes provides the clergy stipends and for their housing and pensions. The average of these expenses for each member of the clergy approaches £15,000.

Thus, taken together, the parishes still receive a good deal more from the diocese than they give to it; but those, like ourselves, in well-to-do areas are asked to contribute considerably more than they receive. In this way the grey coffer is topped up sufficiently to be able to support clergy in poorer parishes in the diocese to assist in the doing of God's work there too: a need emphasised in the recent "Faith in the City" report.

So, although the grey coffer has seemed to us of late to be an ever-growing spectre haunting our accounts, it turns out to be the wherewithal for a man of God doing his best for God's people in a less fortunate part of London than Hampton Hill.

Ron Bridges

American reporter to Donald Soper: "Dr Soper, do you believe that God is dead?" Dr. Soper: "I didn't know he'd been ill."

Blood is thicker than water – and it boils quicker.

WHAT ON EARTH IS THE CHURCH FOR?

This is the Title of our Lent Course this year. It is not homespun but is a course which will be happening all over the country. In one of the largest efforts ever made, much of the material will be broadcast on Local Radio on both BBC and Independent Channels. Certainly we shall be able to hear it in London. There are also cassettes which are available for use in groups.

Last year's groups were an immense success in terms of numbers of people taking part. We hope this year to improve on that. We have asked for people to offer their homes in which we can meet. Once we know how many homes we have we can arrange the groups and the group leaders. It is not intended to be restricted to those who already worship in St. James or any other church. We would welcome those who are members of no church or who are simply puzzled by the variety of views which are put about as Christianity. Many people think they know all the answers – some people admit they know nothing. Most admit that 'things have changed' since they were at school (even the young people in their twenties!). Some admit to no interest at all until they suddenly need the ministrations of 'the church'. Clergy are a bit like doctors and solicitors to most of us; you only meet them when you need them at times of crisis.

It does seem as though there is a great deal in this course for all of us. Those who came last year were very glad that they had made the commitment for the five weeks of Lent. Many wanted their groups to continue – one did. So whoever you are who reads this be assured of a very warm (but unstuffy) welcome at any group you can join. There will be a list in the Church by the time you read this article. If you can't (?) get to church then ask a friend. And if you really don't want to join a group or genuinely can't then search out the Radio Talks. There will be publicity about them when they start. And have a happy Lent contributing to the discussion and exchanging views. The Church has had some surprising publicity recently following the Bishop of Durham's statements and the Report on the Inner City. Come and join in the debate, add your pennyworth, explore and be brave. No one is going to think any the worse of you for taking part. You will be joining thousands if not millions throughout the country. Can we make it hundreds in Hampton Hill?

MOTHERS' UNION

Nearly seventy of us enjoyed the Mothers' Union Christmas party. That number included members and their friends. We shared in a game, listened to the Ladies Choir singing Christmas Songs from home and from Australia. We concluded by singing verses from familiar carols. Our Vicar called in and said grace before we had tea.

I hope now that as many M.U. members as possible and some of our friends, too, will come to our next meeting on February 5th when we get down to the more serious question "How shall we keep Lent this year?" Nicholas (the Vicar) will be our guide. A follow-up meeting will be held on March 5th.

Please note that we are organising a "Rent a Stall" sale in the church hall on Saturday February 22nd. Do enquire from M.U. members if you want to Rent a Stall.

Jean Wilson

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER – Friday March 7th

St. James's Church is the venue in this area for the annual inter-denominational Women's World Day of Prayer. The theme of this year's service is "Choose Life", and it has been compiled by groups of women in Australia. It is very appropriate therefore that the speaker at the afternoon service at 14.30 is Mother Frances of the Community at St. Michael's Convent Ham Common. She has recently returned from Australia, having visited the Sisters who work in that vast continent. At the evening service, at 2000 hrs, the speaker is very well qualified to speak on this theme of "Choose Life"; she is Ms. Shelagh Phillips who is a counsellor, and a consultant for the Lisa Sainsbury Foundation working for the terminally ill.

Light refreshments will be available after the services and we do hope that as many women as possible who are in any way connected with St. James's will be able to be at one or both of these services to welcome our guests and support this world wide day of prayer.

Jean Wilson

A LETTER FROM FR. TOM STANTON

I was very glad to be with you again for Christmas. It is three years since I was last in England. They have been eventful years for me. For six months, - from 6 September 1983 to 5 March 1984, I was in jail. Contact with the outside world is reduced to a minimum in jail and one tends to feel forgotten, so the Christmas Card which Hannah sent me signed by so many of you, meant a great deal to me. Thank you for that and for your prayers for me during that time.

This year I have started a new job. My Community has undertaken to look after the parish of Holy Cross in Orlando West for three years. For the last two years they have been without a Rector, though Services were carried on by Arthur Mbalula, - a priest ordained into the self-supporting ministry. Noel Williams was inducted as Rector on 18 May and Arthur and I were licensed as his assistant priests. It is a big parish in Soweto and Sunday congregations are not as large as they should be; but we usually get between 300 and 350 at the main Communion Service at 9.30 am. During the week we do the usual parish things. We have a daily Communion Service attended by at least six people. Then sometimes we take communion to sick people in their homes; sometimes there are parents to be prepared for the Baptism of their children; and there is always visiting to be done. The busiest day of the week is Saturday when many do not go to work and are free to come to the Mission House with their problems; Saturday is also funeral day in Soweto, usually in the morning and they take a long time; in the afternoon there are Confirmation Classes, Servers rehearsals and so on.

The present state of 'unrest' started in September 1984. It really only reached us in July this year. I saw a train load of cheering youths arrive at our local station; soon after I saw a column of smoke which I later found to have been from the nearby Bottle Store. They then set fire to a TV and Radio Rental Store just beyond our Church. Soon after the army arrived in their armoured vehicles to restore order; restoring order means terrorising the local populace by firing at any group of youths they see. They may use rubber bullets, but these don't bounce off, - they are quite heavy things and can break your leg or even kill you. Since then there have been a few similar incidents. One morning in

September our Prior from Rosettenville arrived with both back and front windscreens of his car shattered by stone throwing youths. But by and large we have been less affected than other areas.

For a while the Higher Primary School next door to us kept open, but after a while it closed together with nearly all the schools in Soweto. The black educational system has ground to a halt. It is estimated that between 220,000 and 250,000 children are out of school.

So this is the kind of situation in which we are called to proclaim the gospel of liberation in Christ. I am sure that God wants all his people to be free, — not just free from guilt through the forgiveness of their sins, but free from all that keeps them from fulfilment, — free to know him, to love him and to serve him, free to love one another according to his will. There must be a political side to this as well, but it seems that it is going to be a long time before political freedom comes to Soweto.

Most of us live in a world which is half asleep, or are deliberately kept unaware. We don't know much, but I think it is right that we should know something of what is going on in the black township of Soweto, — that at least we should know what tear gas smells like.

With love and best wishes for 1986.

from Tom Stanton

3 January 1986

A MEDITATION

People think we go to church "because we are good". Sometimes we think so too! People do not follow us very often but turn away from the Church because all too often they can see that we are *not* good. We do shabby things, say shabby things, fail in kindness, in generosity, in Christian deeds and by professing what we do profess, lower the Lord in people's eyes instead of showing them the way to Him.

No — we seek the Lord because we acknowledge, albeit often with little depth, that we are *not* good, we are all sinners but we *want* to be good, we believe in God's forgiveness and through this belief and through His grace, His free offering of love to us, we hope in faith for the coming of His Kingdom, both here 'at hand' on earth as His presence is felt and manifested among us, and in Heaven. Christ did not come for the people to whom it sufficed that they were rich and powerful. It was such as these that crucified Him, and often — not knowing Him — still do. He came for the weak, the lonely, the despised, those that the world despises or who despise themselves. He came to lift up the fallen, love and pardon the sinful, to cure the sickness and misery of Man by His life-giving Spirit and Presence.

"*Come* to me — all that travail and are heavy laden and I *will* refresh you." This is a promise of the Lord and therefore worthy to be believed. How blessed are those who know and acknowledge that they are 'poor' for the Kingdom of Heaven is open to them. How blessed are the sorrowful who come to the Lord for they shall find consolation. The world can do but little to help. It is God, through Christ and His Holy Spirit, the strengthener, the comforter, who can wipe all tears from your eyes, put a new song in your mouth and a new way before your feet as you discover His truth and walk in it. But you have to come.

NEWS FROM THE MADDISON CLINIC

I should like to thank all those who contributed so generously to the Maddison Clinic League of Friends in memory of Leonard. The total amount exceeded £600. On December 12th a Yamaha electric keyboard was formally presented for use in the three Day Clinics. The model chosen has Play Cards which can be inserted — if no one present can play the instrument — and a great variety of musical effects can be produced.

Our MP, Toby Jessel, played a short piece to open proceedings. He spoke of the way in which he and Len had co-operated in the struggle to save the Clinic from closure in 1983, and of his admiration for Len's close interest in the work of the Clinic over many years.

St. James's was represented by our Vicar, and the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance by Mr. E.A. Taylor. Those attending the Day Clinic were delighted when Mr. Taylor played several of the Play Cards for them. There was instant response from them all.

In the afternoon Mrs. Bennett played Christmas Carols in which patients, Staff, Doctors and Committee members all joined. The League President, Dr. Marguerite James, expressed the thanks of all for the gift of the organ. Since then the instrument has been in action a great deal and has given stimulus and pleasure to all the patients.

A loom was bought from the fund also and our visitors were able to see this in action. Weaving is proving very popular.

I know how pleased Len would be with such lasting memorials of his years as Chairman. Thank you all.

Vera Rockliffe

AROUND THE SPIRE

Our very heartiest congratulations go to Joe Brownlee and his fiancée, Ann, who announced their engagement at Christmas. Joe has been a member of St. James's congregation for a number of years now and an active member of the Social Committee for most of them. For several years Joe also ran the Church Youth Club very successfully. Unfortunately Joe will be moving away from the area after his marriage in the summer and we shall lose his talents.

Ruth and Jack Gostling had cause for celebration on November 12th when their fourth grandchild arrived, safe and sound. He is to be called Joel, brother for Paul, and second son to John and Melanie. Our good wishes go to them all.

Two of our members have recently had cataract operations, Jessie Kirk and Alison Thompson and after a slow start both are now improving rapidly.

By now most of you will know that Mrs. Casey left various monetary bequests; one of these was to the Community Care Group. They decided to use it for the benefit of her many friends among the old people of the area, and so on New Years Day they gave a party for them at All Saints Hall and everyone enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

All denominations of the Christian Church admire and applaud the work of the Salvation Army. The Teddington branch of the "Sally" Army is now celebrating its 100th Anniversary. We send them our greetings at this happy time and long may they and their work prosper.

Annual Buffet Party of the **HAMPTON HILL ASSOCIATION** at St. James's Parish Hall, School Road on **SATURDAY, MARCH 8th** 7.30 - 11.30. Entertainment by the "After Eights", dancing and games. Tickets £1.75 for members, £2 for non-members. There will be a bar. Tickets from HHA Street Representatives or Sue and Keith Lyons, 93 High Street, 941 2761: Audrey Smith, 5 Lime Tree Court, 95 Burtons Rd., 979 1835: Edna McLean, 28 St. James's Rd., 979 3407.

THIRD HAMPTON HILL SCOUT GROUP

Saturday 22nd February come and enjoy yourselves at our Baden-Powell Dance in the Church Hall, School Road to the music of the well-liked John West Group. Tickets from Ingrid Payne 977 5917.

Saturday 15 March Jumble Sale & Auction in the Church Hall. Give us all you have in Muck and Brass — we need it! Info from GSL Mike Childs, 977 5041. "50 Club" Prizes as drawn 9 January 1986: £20 — P. Boyce, South Road, Twickenham: £12 — G. Low, Park Road, Hampton Hill. Congratulations! If you wish to join the scheme (£10 per Annual Unit) ring Mike Frazer 979 0948.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Baptisms

Jan 12 Chloe-Jane Mary Wilde, 15 Holly Road
Emma Bethan Thomas, N.S.W., Australia

Marriage

Jan 4 Stephen John Tunmore and Linda Jane Errington

Funerals

Dec 17	Doreen Hyacinth Kathleen Pratt	29 Bennett Close Hampton Wick	aged 77
18	George Ernest Smeed	1 Greenwood Lane	aged 78
20	Margaret Emily Randall	Laurel Dene	aged 91
24	Paul Peter Meades	12 Edward Road	aged 8 weeks
24	William John Crimmin	62 St. James's Ave.	aged 68

DATES TO NOTE

February

4	20.00	Deanery Synod
	20.00	Tuesday Club — "Finest 7th Century Building North of the Alps"
5	14.30	Mothers' Union — "Keeping Lent"
8		Christian Resources Exhibition at Horticultural Halls Westminster Deanery Lay Training Day
11	20.00	P.C.C.
12	20.00	ASH WEDNESDAY — Parish Communion
16	18.30	Shortened Evensong followed by talk and discussion on the Church in the Argentine by Miss Sylvia Seaman
22	10.00	Mothers' Union Rent-a-Stall

March

5	14.30	Mothers' Union — "Keeping Lent"
7	14.30 and 20.00	Women's World Day of Prayer at St. James
9	09.30	Mothering Sunday — Children's Eucharist
12	20.00	P.C.C.
24-29		Holy Week - details in March Spire
30		EASTER DAY