

# St Columba's

December 2021 / January 2022



# ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



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## Sundays

Please join us for worship at 11 am. Sunday School (from age 4) and Youth Group meet during the morning service **but not every week: please check the website or contact the office** for dates and news of special activities. Children are always welcome to our services: a quiet corner at the rear of the church equipped with soft toys and books is available for children accompanied by an adult. After the service, everyone is welcome at the congregational lunch, served on **the first, third and fifth Sundays** of the month in the lower hall. The two course lunch costs £3.50 and there is no need to book. Tea and coffee are also available.



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Copy for future editions should be sent to us at the Church Office, preferably by e-mail

## Dear Readers,

It's time to think about a Christmas bird. I had expected Jim Blackwood to turn in an article on turkeys (have you spotted the one on Steve Amos's festively embellished cover?). But no, not a bit of it – not so much as a Christmas goose. Instead, we have comical corbies and magical whooper swans in atmospheric wintry settings, and all the better for that.

Outings are back. Isobel Carter has been to Winchester Cathedral with the Friends of St Columba's and Rona Black had a wet but worthwhile walk in Richmond Park with a Happy Hour group. Rosa Somerville has been on a round-the-world trip while snipping stamps for Crossreach, while this month it's Hilary Natzler's turn to be marooned on a desert island.

Which leaves books, and Jean Stephenson's bran tub lucky dip of titles that celebrate the common values and purpose of 'Community' – to which St Columba's community we have contributed and from which we have drunk deep over the past 18 months.

Books and birds, trips and tunes – we hope you find something of interest in this edition of the magazine.

With best wishes for Christmas,

## The Editorial Team

**Cover photo:** *Reimagined by Steve Amos*

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## VESTRY LETTER



December 2021/January 2022

Dear Friends,

“I was lying in the passageway at one point, and to the right of me there was a Yorkshire accent. To the left there was a Somerset accent, and opposite me an Irish accent.” These words of Steve Thomas, of the South and Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team, reflect the diversity of those who travelled to the Brecon Beacons for their recent critical mission. Thomas was one of the rescuers who took part in the 54-hour-long operation to bring an injured caver to safety from depths, hundreds of feet below ground. He was part of one of the ten cave rescue teams that came together, each travelling up to 200 miles, taking time off work, and spending more than two days crawling through the freezing water of the fearsome Ogor Ffynnon Ddu cave system – spurred on by banter and little treats stored in their helmets.

The rescue in Wales is an echo of the even greater rescue carried out in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand between 24th June and 10th July 2018 which captured global attention. A staggering 10,000-plus people were involved in the end, including 100 divers, 900 police officers, 2,000 soldiers and representatives from around 100 governmental agencies. Helicopters, ambulances, diving cylinders and pumps to clear more than a billion litres of water from the caves were all required. Many of the rescuers risked their lives, and one, Saman Kunan, died delivering supplies of air. The cost was astronomical, but everyone agreed it was worth it, for trapped in the Tham Luang Nang Non cave were twelve boys and their football coach. They all made it out alive.

Our Advent study book this year is “The Whole Christmas Story” by the UK-based author Jo Swinney. She opens the book referencing the dramatic events in Thailand then suggests: “The Christmas story is a pivotal point in the greatest rescue mission ever conceived.” As Charles Wesley’s carol, “Hark the herald angels sing” puts it:

*Mild he lays his glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth.*

Jesus was born into danger, hardship and hostility. He lived a life poured out for others – ultimately went to a brutal death. His rescue effort was not understood, sought, or even accepted by most, so why did he do it? None of this makes the slightest bit of sense, if the object of the rescue – humanity – wasn’t valuable/precious in God’s sight. Swinney concludes: “Jesus was born to carry out a rescue mission because the cosmos was worth saving.”

As we wait and watch in Advent, preparing once more for the birth at Bethlehem, may we sense how deeply God loves the world and how far, and how deep, God is willing to go to search for, and be reunited with, us.

Wishing you a profound Advent season and a joyful and peaceful Christmas when it comes.

Angus MacLeod

# Two Visions of Winchester Cathedral

Isobel Carter visited with the Friends of St Columba's

I had never visited Winchester. On the one hand, I knew it was a magnificent Gothic cathedral, steeped in history – “Winchester is a royal city...it dates back well over a thousand years, when it was re-founded by King Alfred. The Anglo-Saxon churches of the Old Minster and the New Minster were royal foundations, and the present cathedral was begun as part of the Norman programme of renewal under William the Conqueror...”

And yet, in contrast, I could not completely get out of my head the song, somewhat plaintive and lovelorn, which I had first heard in my youth in 1966 when the New Vaudeville Band's “Winchester Cathedral” hit the charts. In style it was a tribute to the dance band music of the 1920s and the vocals of Rudy Vallée. For those of you who are not afraid to be engulfed in time you can find it on YouTube by googling ‘Winchester cathedral, song’.

The morning of our trip, Saturday October 16, dawned cold and dank. By the time we boarded the train at Waterloo the rain was falling fast. In addition, this was the weekend, when South West Trains works on the track. So out into a bus we tumbled, to drive through the countryside – which was beautiful, even in the rain. Then back on to the train. And when we arrived at Winchester the sun was there to greet us and the sky was truly as blue as in the photograph.

Our guide made sure that his brethren from the Church of Scotland were not short-changed. We had much more than our allotted time to review the centuries the Cathedral has existed. He made King Alfred, William the Conqueror, William Rufus, Richard the Lionheart,

Stephen and Matilda come alive. The greatest single patron was Henry of Blois, brother of Stephen who became bishop of Winchester at 33 in 1129, and actually managed to remain until his death in 1171. He endowed the church with great treasures: statues, paintings, jewels, ivories and the magnificent Winchester Bible. The cathedral was richly decorated for the marriage of Queen Mary I, the first woman in England to reign in her own right, to her cousin-once-removed, Phillip of Spain. Within four years Mary was dead, and Phillip, as King of Spain, had become the great enemy of her sister, Elizabeth I.

In an ancient mediaeval practice kings distributed money to the poor on Maundy Thursday, three days before Easter. King George V revived the custom in 1932. Queen Elizabeth II has continued the tradition, visiting all England's cathedrals in the course of her reign. In 1979 she came to Winchester, on

the cathedral's 900th anniversary. Fifty-three men and women – the number of her age then – each received the sum of 53 pence from her in specially minted coins. Our guide was justly proud of Winchester, its history and its great wealth. We thanked him by saying that Winchester still boasted great riches – in the form of its guides.

After a delicious lunch in the Refectory, we went our separate ways – some back into the Cathedral, where a splendid rehearsal had begun for a concert that was to take place that evening. We walked along by the River Itchen to visit Winchester College, before climbing the hill back to the station.

As we crested the hill I turned back. Were those figures down in the valley, dancing in the sunshine – to the New Vaudeville Band's “Winchester Cathedral”?



# Round the World from my desk – thanks to you

Rosa Somerville on a different sort of stamp collecting

A bumper donation of stamps has resulted in several evenings of sorting and clipping to get them ready to send to Crossreach in Edinburgh, who can turn them into money. Officially we request that the stamps are left on their backing and clipped to make them a little lighter. But to be honest, as someone responsible for getting them to Edinburgh, I am happy to clip away to the merry tunes of Radio 3 of an evening. And this larger than usual pile has yielded some real treasures which I hope are valuable.

I suspect a donor has been through some very old correspondence. We have a 1p and a 1½ penny with heads of George V and another to Misses Cameron at 50 India Street with a proper date stamp (alas no more found) which looks like 2 Aug '29. Then a 1½ penny stamp with the head of Edward VIII – perhaps rare? And one with the head of George VI. An appropriate contemporary stamp with “Faith will Carry us Through” was cheering. A Scottish First Day (1987) has a handsome reminder of the Tercentenary of the Revival of the Most Ancient and Most Noble ORDER of the THISTLE. The arms of the Lord Lyon King of Arms are borne by a very cheerful couple of lions “rampant”.

The British stamps are more plentiful for obvious reasons. Christmas stamps are frequently donated, as nowadays that is the time of most post – but they are still welcome and worth saving. But I suppose the most intriguing are the foreign stamps. We are fortunate that so many of our congregation have contacts overseas who still write to them. So I have admired the natural world depicted on stamps from Uganda, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, South Africa – some landscapes, some exotic birds



and of course, the delightful Koala. If wildlife is not a country's speciality there is always an ancient object to commemorate (Eire), or a famous snow scene (Austria). Whether you wish people “Happy Christmas” or “Happy Holidays” Christmas stamps are still in production.

Then there are faces – Kings (Belgium and Spain), Beethoven (Serbia), Alfred Nobel (Switzerland), Chester W. Nimitz and Luis Munoz Marin – Governor of Puerto Rico (USA 1995), and Charlie Chaplin as the Kid a hundred years ago (France 2020). Only Australia issued a stamp with the full face of Her Majesty the Queen. Sadly, I cannot read the year stamp from Brisbane.

Then there are one-offs – including one stamp from Japan (Nippon) commemorating the “International Letter Writing Week” in 2019. Italy and France are little represented; but Germany produced some nostalgic reminders of Mercedes

Benz classic models – when cars still looked distinctive.

Perhaps the most evocative are a group from “World vision Myanmar. Different country stamp is used to save costs”. The head of the King of Thailand is shown. I am not sure what this means. Bhutan's lunar year of the Ox (2009 if you are not keeping up) is a wonderful image of an ox turning like a bull in a corrida.

So you see, I have been round the world without going anywhere. It is such an education and a pleasure to think that these little images will make money for charity. Please keep sending them in to the office or dropping them off at church. They will be used to good effect.

# Corbies and Whoopers

Jim Blackwood on birds for the winter season

*“As I was walking a’ alane,  
I heard twa corbies makin’ a mane;  
The tane untae the tither did say,  
Whaur sall we gang and dine the  
day?”*

“The Twa Corbies”, that celebrated Borders ballad about two crows discussing their next grisly meal, fascinated me when I first heard it as a child. I was hooked by the macabre goings on of the corvid couple dining on a newly slain knight. They planned to pick “oot his bonnie blue e’en” and theek their nest with a “lock o’ his gowden hair”. You couldn’t not admire the clever crows. Corbie is the Scots name for a crow, from the French corbeau.

I imagine those “twa corbies” sitting on a bare branch in a wintry landscape. “In the bleak midwinter” you might think, at this Christmas time of year. Of course you can see crows at any time of year, but they somehow suit a winter’s day. On a postprandial Christmas walk you’ll no doubt see a robin and delight in its festive aptness. I reckon you’ll encounter some crows too. Notice them, admire them, as we do the cute Christmassy robin. If you have time, observe them for a few minutes. They’ll reward you with comic antics and smart behaviour. Catch their knowing avian eye. See the light dance on their feathers in blues and greens, purples and silvers. They’re not plain black.

Some folklore associates crows with darkness, ill omen, death. There’s another folklore approach which links crows with life’s great mysteries. I prefer the latter. They’re such intelligent, handsome birds. Although wary of human beings, they nonchalantly get on with their daily business, cheek by jowl with us. I used to enjoy watching them strut around on the grass on



*Two crows plan their next meal (Credit: Steve Amos)*

Chiswick Back Common, city gents in feather suits, as dapper as if wearing bowler hats.

The crow family includes several different UK species: carrion crow, hooded crow, jackdaw, rook, raven, magpie, jay, and chough. Many of the crows which visit our Lochwinnoch garden are hybrid hooded x carrion. They have grey waistcoats which aren’t quite as tailored as pure hooded crows. Their scruffier look suits their ragamuffin character. They are constantly on the look out for an easy meal. I’m sure that these hybrid hoodies hang out on village rooves awaiting a free lunch. Within seconds of my scattering leftovers on the lawn they will have dive-bombed in, like bargain hunters on Black Friday. They swallow the first delicacy, then gather a kebab of pieces between their mandibles, cramming as much as they can from back to tip. It’s comical to watch them as they attempt to squeeze in a final chunk, only sometimes successfully, before flying off to eat their fill away from the squabble of their pals.

There are several rookeries in the village. One is in the trees by Auld Simon, the crow-stepped gable remains of the 1729 Presbyterian church of St John, which still has its

working clock and bell tower. There has been a Christian presence at the site since the 11th century. I don’t think it’s fanciful to reflect that the rookery may also have such a venerable pedigree on the same site. It is as if the church and the rookery have journeyed through time together. They are reassuring constants: Auld Simon marks the hours; the rooks unfailingly mark dusk.

Every day at dusk the rooks gather in a flock and fly over the village. Their cries echo from on high into the streets, between the houses and into the houses. You can clearly hear them when you’re indoors. But if you’re outside, it’s an uplifting sound and sight. They swoop and spiral, like murmurations of starlings. The flock gradually increases in size as they fly around. More rooks join, and carrion crows and hoodie hybrids and jackdaws. It’s a ritual corvid gathering before settling down to their nightly roost. The volume of their cries waxes and wanes musically as they fly higher and lower, farther and nearer. They swoop low and skim the rooftops. They soar high in computer generated spirals. It’s awesome in the true sense of the word, but because it happens every day it’s easy to take it for granted. We’d

# Corbies and Whoopers

Continued



*Auld Simon with its crow-stepped gable*

miss it if it weren't there, just as we'd miss Auld Simon if it weren't faithfully chiming.

Although these rookery aerodynamics happen every day, I notice them more in autumn and winter. I think the flock is bigger at this time of year, augmented by this season's youngsters before the cruel bite of winter by February will have culled the population. And dusk of course is earlier at this time of year, so I see the swoops and hear the cries through the window, from the sofa in late afternoon. I can see and hear Auld Simon too from there. After the birds' cries have settled, Auld Simon religiously chimes each hour. Sometimes during the night, I hear the timely bell and note how long it is before I have to get up. The rooks must hear it too.

Another wonderful sound on a winter walk is the "whoop, whoop, whoop"

of Whooper swans. Whooper is beautiful. Ragamuffin characterises the corbie; the Whooper is regal. Black corbie; their unmistakable call. Whooper white. A few minutes walk from Auld Simon is Castle Sempie Loch. On a crisp, blue-skied winter's day when the low light glows orange on the bark of the alder trees, there's no sight more beautiful than Whooper swans on the loch. They glide. Of course all swans glide. It's almost a cliché. But it's true. How can they look so elegant and immaculate after flying all the way from Iceland? There's an air of mystery about them, a polite aloofness. In Finnish folklore they're sacred.

As if seeing them on the loch were not enough of a treat, a greater thrill is seeing them in flight. "Whoop, whoop, whoop." You hear them before you see them. They stretch straight their necks, and fly in a skein. You can hear the beat of their wings, as they head to the far side of the loch in perfect V-shaped formation. When you get home you'll tell your loved ones that you saw Whooper swans that afternoon.

Handsome describes the corbie; the



*Whooper swan*

# Sermon

## Sermon preached at St Columba's Pont Street on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November at 3pm, Remembrance Sunday London Scottish Regimental Church Parade

*"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.*

*Teach them to your children and to their children after them."* Deuteronomy 4:9

If at some stage today you travel on the London Underground, you may see a current advertisement, on the other side of the track. It shows a familiar, steep underground escalator.

The escalator is "peopled"/populated, but not with the usual descending or ascending figures – commuters, shoppers, family outings etc – instead, the figures lie prone, curled, heaped, and overlapping, apparently sleeping, or at least trying to. The advert reads: *"It happened to people like you on a day like today... See how the war affected all walks of life."* There to promote the new Second World War and Holocaust galleries at the Imperial War Museum London: the striking image is a contemporary recreation of an original photo of civilians sheltering in the Underground during the Blitz. I saw the advert in the Knightsbridge tube; a stone's throw from St Columba's – about whose destruction by enemy action in 1941 we heard earlier, concluding: *"It (fire) slowly but surely enveloped the roof and when falling material set fire to the pitch pine pews below, there was no chance of saving the building."* (Rev Dr Scott, minister of St Columba's, Church Magazine May 1941)

Entertaining a ten-year-old in the recent half term, we visited the British Museum and Madame Tussauds. Both famous locations record being damaged in the war years. *"It happened to people like you on a day like today."*

At this morning's congregational service of Remembrance our wreathes were laid by a World War II RAF veteran (a sprightly 100-year-old), accompanied by a currently serving RAF Warrant Officer; two other wreathes were laid

by one of our Sunday School children and her Mum.

Noel Coward, the flamboyant, witty English playwright and actor, witnessed to the aerial war, affecting military and civilian, in his wartime poem about Allied aircrews: "Lie in the Dark and Listen".

*Lie in the dark and listen.*

*It's clear tonight so they're flying high,  
Hundreds of them, thousands perhaps,  
Riding the icy, moonlit sky.*

*Men, machinery, bombs and maps,  
Altimeters, guns and charts,  
Coffee, sandwiches, fleece-lined boots,  
Bones and muscles and minds and hearts,  
English saplings with English roots  
Deep in the earth they've left below.*

*Lie in the dark and let them go;*

*Lie in the dark and listen.*

The poem's final verse takes a swipe at those who profiteer from the conflict, preserving their own safety, while the airmen fly their missions towards mainland Europe:

*"Safe in your warm civilian beds,  
Count your profits and count your sheep  
Life is passing above your heads,  
Just turn over and try to sleep.  
Lie in the dark and let them go  
There's one debt you'll forever owe,  
Lie in the dark and listen."*

These fragments are prompted by the 80th anniversary of the destruction of St Columba's by enemy action. At the time, the Church Magazine (May 1941), carried the headline: *"The church building was destroyed by enemy action in a recent air raid. God willing, another building shall arise after the war. Meanwhile, in spite of war, the church lives on."*

Accordingly, this year is also the 65th anniversary



# Sermon

continued

of the dedication of the London Scottish Regimental Chapel – 25th March 1956; the ceremony attended by the Queen Mother.

At a national level, 2021 is the 100th anniversary of the Remembrance Poppy. The British Legion was formed on 15 May 1921, bringing together four national organisations of ex-Servicemen that had established themselves after the First World War: Field Marshal Earl Haig, Honorary Colonel of the London Scottish Regiment and an elder of St Columba's, served as the President of the Royal British Legion until his death in 1928.

Inspired by the poem of Lt Col John McCrae, the World War I Canadian medic, of Scottish parentage, "In Flanders fields the poppies blow", an American academic named Moina Michael adopted the poppy in memory of those who had fallen in the war. She campaigned for it to become an official symbol of Remembrance across the United States and worked with others who were trying to do the same in Canada, Australia, and the UK. Also involved was Frenchwoman, Anna Guérin. In England in 1921, she planned to sell the poppies in London. There she met Earl Haig, the Legion's founder, and persuaded him to adopt the poppy as the emblem in the United Kingdom. The Royal British Legion ordered nine million poppies and sold them on 11 November that year. The poppies sold out almost immediately, raising over £106,000 to help veterans with housing and jobs – a considerable sum at the time. In time Major George Howson set up the Poppy Factory to employ disabled ex-servicemen. Today, the factory and warehouse in Aylesford produces millions of poppies each year. North of the border, Earl Haig's wife Dorothy established the 'Lady Haig Poppy Factory' in Edinburgh in 1926 to produce poppies exclusively for Scotland. (Four petals and no leaf, unlike poppies in the rest of the UK)

Much of this is familiar: I am sure there is more you could share. Earlier, after we heard the description of the destruction of the original St Columba's, we heard the words of scripture:

*"... do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."* Deuteronomy 4:9

In other words: *Tell the stories, pass them on. Remember.* Not as nostalgia, but to inform our present day, with all its difficulties – tell them, even while acknowledging our current day Armed Forces face some very public criticism for a variety, if proven, of breaches of codes of conduct and laws of war. Let our remembering be an honest remembering.

Finally, as we have dwelt this year on a city under aerial siege, I finish with another account of London in its time of war, from Robert Lind's essay, "The Darkness":

*"It is the moon that makes London by night beautiful in wartime. It is the moon that makes the North side of Trafalgar Square white with romance, like a Moorish city and makes the South Kensington Museum itself appear as if it had been built to music.*

*London under the moon is a city of wonder, a city of fair streets and fair citizens."*

This afternoon, gathered as Regimental family, military and civilian, let us remember *how the war affected all walks of life*, call to mind the debt we will forever owe, and maybe pursue our vocation, to be *fair citizens in a fair city, people like us, on a day like today.*

Amen

# Desert Island Discs

And this month's castaway is Hilary Natzler

Washed ashore on a desert island at Christmas I would immediately reach for Bach's *Weihnachtsoratorium*. It would exactly replicate my first impulse every Christmas morning when I fill our home with the glorious music celebrating the birth of Christ. Christmas would scarcely be Christmas without it. Uplifting and joyful, during my insular isolation it would be my go-to, pick-me-up on many days other than just 25 December.

New Year follows on swiftly and, since childhood, it too has always been marked with music – the New Year's Day concert from Vienna. The tradition, also in David's family, (his father grew up there) was possibly initiated by my paternal grandmother who spent many of her young adult years on the continent, including in Vienna where she was governess to Rudi Bing who went on to co-found the Edinburgh International Festival. Or possibly by my father who remembered his days in Vienna at the end of the war with relief, after years in North Africa, Sicily and up through Italy. So which Strauss waltz? It has to be "Wein, Weib und Gesang", which David and I waltzed to in the Epstein Palace in Vienna during the annual meeting of secretaries-general of EU Parliaments.

Lockdown at the beginning of this year was in some ways a guilty pleasure for us, with all three of our by now adult children working remotely from home. Despite being launched again into fulltime motherhood and ratcheting myself into overdrive to produce countless meals, for me it was a gift to be able to spend so much time again as a nuclear family. House rules demand that the cook does not wash up, which was a blessing as our dishwasher had packed

up, and so our youth stepped up, prancing about the kitchen – for some mistaken reason like pirates – singing along to "The Wellerman Sea Shanty". Undoubtedly I will be scanning the horizon for some wellerman to bring me "*sugar and tea and rum*" and this, my third choice, would make me smile at the memory.

It was my father who brought an eclectic range of music at full volume to us every morning after waking us up with a kiss. It was to ensure that we remained awake, which we did, but sometimes to lie and listen rather than to leap up and dress. *South Pacific* always brought us to our dancing feet and as there will be stretches of sand to dance on I should like "A Cockeyed Optimist" or, as I sang it, "A cockeyed octopus" – that being the extent of my seven-year-old vocabulary! It will encourage me to be "*stuck like a dope with a thing called hope*". I still think it's one of the best musicals of all time. It's not all froth; there's strong coffee in that cappuccino.

Moving on, my fifth choice would remind me of our annual outings to Leith town hall for Edinburgh University Gilbert & Sullivan Society performances. The most animated *Mikado* I ever saw was, however, in Mombasa, Kenya, performed by local school children. They were loving it: portraying the different characters with such dramatic intelligence, verve and enthusiasm. It was a highlight of a long summer vacation spent with a cousin, a medical missionary who had established a church and hospital in the bush. My job was to give English classes, type hymn books and sew curtains, as well as to man up when confronted with an abundance of cockroaches and ants. "I've got a

Little List" could well be adapted to all the creepy crawlies and other untoward fauna I might encounter on the island.

Three more to go and I realise that so far my selection has been unreservedly upbeat. I'm bound to feel low at times and need profound music to help me process my grief at loss and loneliness. Etched on my heart is our school hymn – and it is a beautiful hymn; no way is it a song – "Ex Corde Caritas". A prayer to love, it sets a moral compass and laudable goals to strive for, and the melody is worthy of the angelic host! Do google it. I still know it off by heart, as does Helen Miller, and I loved singing the descant. It never ceases to fill my heart to bursting and is sure to release some tears onto the sand.

There is so much more music I should like with me. I love opera, chamber music, concertos, sonatas, jazz, *Supertramp*, *Queen*, *Runrig*, *Capercaillie*, *Simon and Garfunkel*, *Pink Martini*, *Dave Brubeck*. I'd fill the magazine if I listed them all by name. Should I choose the longest, the most demanding, the most moving, the most ecstatic or the most serene? Serenity would ease me into meditation and I'd have plenty of time for that. No words then; just melody. My mother loved *Mozart's Horn Concertos*. Hauntingly beautiful, I think any of them would resound compatibly with me and my environs. The *Andante cantabile* in *No 4 in E flat major* would bring me to stillness and thankfulness for all the good and gracious influences on my life.

Finally, I'd miss my complete set of *Beethoven's String Quartets* played by Quartetto Italiano. They demand full attention and are wonderful companions; with them I can never

# Desert Island Discs

continued

feel lonely. There is so much to listen to. It is like being in an intimate friendship bubble listening to the exchange of banter, sometimes serious, sometimes jovial, and always empathetic – a little glimpse of heaven on earth. *No 127 in E flat major*, please. Crumbs, E flat major again – exploring the emotional characteristics of the key, Sir Mark Elder describes its life-affirming sonority as having great resonance, solemnity, human warmth and vigour. That sounds about right for my island circumstances.

If I'm to be a Robinson Crusoe cast ashore on a desert island without a Man Friday, I should like with me Bear Grylls Survival Skills Handbook Collection Series – 10 books. My luxury would be pads of

drawing paper together with pencils and crayons. I drew a lot as a child and think I could while away many an hour on the island attempting to map it and sketch its flora and fauna.



# Happy Hour walk

by Rona Black

On October 2nd, Happy Hour members and guests celebrated renewed face to face meetings with a walk in Richmond Park. The weather was damp, and there were minor travel hiccups for some, but neither detracted from the real enjoyment of all walkers.

As we walked, much appreciated contributions came from John as a fount of local knowledge, Patricia who told us all about edible and inedible fungi, Louise who has a wonderfully wide knowledge of UK coastal paths, and our new member Fi who told us of her experience

volunteering at owl camps for differently abled children.

Our walk finished with an excellent snack lunch. This was a very worthwhile experiment and one which we will definitely repeat in the future.



# Community Chest

## Dip into Jean Stevenson's not-so-random selection

Last month I attended one of the Congregational Conversations organised by the Church Office. It was an opportunity to discuss "stuff" with random members of our church. Obviously, no individual felt they were random, but there was nothing cohesive about the grouping, except of course that we had all signed up to take part on that particular date and we were all connected with St Columba's. One of the questions we were encouraged to respond to was what had we missed or what had we appreciated most during the pandemic. What people had appreciated and what they had missed were very similar and can be synthesised into one word – "Community". A community may be defined as "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common". This sparked an idea for this article, and I decided to select some books that I had read during the last year in which you might be interested and in which community or absence thereof featured in one way or another. That's the Community Chest I shall be opening – not the one on a Monopoly Board!

My first choice is a book written in 1933 by James Hilton who also wrote "Goodbye Mr Chips". I read "The Lost Horizon" many years ago but re-read it again this year. This book became amazingly successful very quickly and the name of Shangri-La gained great popularity – so much so that President Roosevelt named his presidential hideaway in Maryland after it, although it was subsequently re-named Camp David. It is a shortbook/novella which tells the story of Hugh Conway, the British Consul in Afghanistan, who is being evacuated following a revolution and ends up on a plane which is hijacked

and crashes in the mountains of Tibet. The survivors are Conway, his vice consul Mallinson, a British Missionary Miss Brinklow and an American, Barnard. The four are an unlikely group and seek shelter in the lamasery of Shangri-La, where for those whose minds are open to it, inner peace, love, and a sense of purpose are to be found as well as long life. Once they become accustomed to it, the community of Shangri-La becomes very alluring for three of the four, but Mallinson is desperate to leave and Conway, against his own strong desire to stay and with the knowledge that they are unlikely to succeed in escaping, decides to go with him.

The book is of its time – the characters are in many ways caricatures: the golden boy Conway, entitled, multilingual but a seeker; the hothead, impetuous Mallinson; the spinster missionary, and the mysterious and bombastic American. One can see why it has been made into a film multiple times. When I re-read the book, a number of my book club community found it difficult to understand why Conway leaves Shangri-La, where he has found the peace for which he has been searching, to help Mallinson escape. Is it a religious allegory, or is it something that readers in the 1930s, with the memory of the First World War and the special bond that tied those who fought in the trenches, would understand without questioning? You'll have to read it to make your own decision. I'll also throw in a little puzzle here for those of you who like them - what connects the Hymn "Lord of all Hopefulness, Lord of all Joy" to this book? Answers next edition.

My next choice is a much longer book and again one that was very popular when it was first written in

1929. Perhaps many of our readers will remember copies of it on their parents' bookshelves but may never have opened it. Like "The Lost Horizon", "The Good Companions" has been made into films and stage plays and made its author JB Priestley's name. The story is set in the depression and it concerns three main characters: another spinster Miss Elizabeth Trant, who has come into a little money after devoting her life to looking after her father and is now looking for adventure; Jess Oakroyd, a down to earth working man who has just been made redundant and, trapped in a loveless marriage, takes to the open road; and Inigo Jolifant, a piano playing teacher who loves writing songs and who leaves his job in a terrible private school to start a new life. There are other characters of course but the paths of these three collide as a result of random acts of kindness on each of their parts and they join a troupe called the Dinky Doos (later renamed "The Good Companions"). It is a long book but I think it is a comforting one and is what I would term an "easy read".

The Good Companions troupe becomes their community, and they look out for each other as they travel the countryside putting on shows. I don't think one can draw many comparisons between this period in history and the time we have recently lived through, but these characters found themselves alone and reached out, took some risks and found a challenging but rewarding life. The travelling life doesn't continue but they go through a series of adventures and disasters in the course of the book which entertain the reader and bind the characters together.

I come from the North of England so I didn't find the northern vernacular

# Community Chest

continued

which is used by Jess Oakroyd a challenge but this might be a book to listen to on Audible if reading it might put you off. It is a book of its time and some may find aspects of the language unacceptable. However, if you feel like snuggling up with a good read/ good listen on a cold or dreary winter's afternoon, this is certainly a possible choice for you.

My next two recommendations feature "family" as the community or perhaps more accurately represent how the lack of community in a dysfunctional family can have a profound effect on those concerned. The first is "The Lying Life of Adults" by Elena Ferrante. This coming-of-age novel is set in Naples – both the high and low ends. It begins with the heroine Giovanna overhearing a conversation between her parents. The opening lines of the book are: "Two years before leaving home, my father said to my mother that I was very ugly." She goes on to write about how until that moment her life with her parents had been idyllic, she was a good student, her parents adored her and each other, they had very good friends who in turn had children who were great friends of Giovanna and they all lived in the best area of Naples. It transpired that the veneer that covered this happy life was very fragile and at first slowly, then rapidly, began to peel and crack. Giovanna demonstrates her rebellion by becoming a Goth, uncovering her family connection with the less-advantaged districts of Naples, falling behind in her studies but at the same time and quite surprisingly studying the Gospels! There was of course a boy behind this interest in the Bible. Giovanna's family disintegrates and her friendships also change

but Giovanna learns a lot in the process of growing up, including how to lie and dissemble, but also how to be loyal. We read this book in the St Columba's Book Club which is a community that was revived during the pandemic. One of the interesting thoughts that emerged was that although the book covered the adolescence of Giovanna in the 1990s, we all agreed that it felt much more like a book set in the 1970s. If you read it, let me know what you think (and also if you can understand the mystery of the bracelet).

Another book which concerns a dysfunctional family is "The Burgess Boys" by Elizabeth Strout. Although there is an incident that throws a shadow on the lives of the Burgess Boys which occurred in the childhood of the boys and their sister, the story really revolves around the return of the brothers from New York City to their home town of Shirley Falls in Maine at the request of their sister. Her son has been accused of a hate crime against the Somali community after throwing a pig's head into a Somali mosque. One of the brothers, Jim has become a successful corporate lawyer whilst the other, Bob is a legal aid attorney so they are obvious people to call on to lend support to their sister and nephew. During the course of the book we see the family dynamics evolve – the realisation by Jim that he has taken his seemingly perfect life for granted, and the acceptance by Bob that perhaps he can find the happiness that has eluded him by returning to Shirley Falls and becoming part of the community there. It is also interesting to see the importance in a community (in this case the Somali community) of leadership.

I like to include a non-fiction book in my selections as I know there are some people who find fiction unappealing. "The Interest; How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery" by Michael E. Taylor shows how a common cause, in this case the abolition of the slave trade, can unite very disparate groups of people either in the fight against or in the fight to retain it. The book shows that there is a national myth that through the fight of enlightened Britons such as William Wilberforce, Britain ended the slave trade in 1807, before any other nation, and thereafter campaigned to end it everywhere else. In fact, slavery continued in British colonies until the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. An Anglican bishop at the time explained how slavery was supported by the Bible's teachings, as there was all the difference in the world between the sinful trafficking of kidnapped Africans and the divinely sanctioned trade in existing slaves. If one is a member of different and opposing communities, this can cause friction. Perhaps that is something we have all experienced in our various communities in recent years in discussions concerning Brexit and Scottish Independence.

Although I began this article with a definition of "community" I think I need to amend it. Community is more than "a group of people living in the same place"; geography and circumstance may be factors but common values and purpose are much more important. I think we have all learned as a result of the pandemic that thanks to the magic of Zoom, a community is not bound by time or place, it needs to be nourished to survive and it needs the input of individuals to thrive.

# Baptisms • Marriages • Deaths

## BAPTISMS

*"Suffer the little children to come unto me"*

**7<sup>th</sup> November**                      **Cassius Alexander DeBeaumont Cumming, W4**  
**Joshua Florian Groves-Kirkby, W14**  
**Mia Caroline Jennifer Smeaton, SW11**

## MARRIAGES

*"Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it"*

**9<sup>th</sup> October**                      **Stuart Robert William Cumming to**  
**Heather Elizabeth Hardman, Preston, PR1**

## DEATHS

*"Blessed are they that die in the Lord"*

**23<sup>rd</sup> October**                      **Mrs G Collett, 4 Guildford Park Avenue, GU2**  
**25<sup>th</sup> October**                      **Mr Alexander Smith, 334 Walton Street, KT8**

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please contact the Church Office

**St Columba's Church Office, Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD**

# Church Diary:

## 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021 to 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022

At the time of publishing, we are live streaming via our website [www.stcolumbas.org.uk/livestream](http://www.stcolumbas.org.uk/livestream). Please keep in touch with the Church Office or website to check if services can be attended in person.

<b>5th December</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service with Baptisms</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>12th December</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
	<b>5.00pm</b>	<b>A Service of Lessons and Carols Followed by a reception for Borderline</b>
<b>19th December</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>24th December</b>	<b>11.15pm</b>	<b>Watchnight Service with Communion</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>25th December</b>	<b>10.30am</b>	<b>Family Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>26th December</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>2nd January</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>9th January</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
	<b>5.00pm</b>	<b>Evening Service for Epiphany</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>16th January</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>23rd January</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren
<b>30th January</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd Angus MacLeod
<b>6th February</b>	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Morning Service</b> Revd William McLaren

# Prayer

## Prayers for Advent

*God of faithfulness and truth,  
you sent your servant John the Baptist  
to preach in the desert  
and summon the people to repentance.  
Make us and all things new,  
that in the wilderness of our hearts  
we too may prepare a way  
over which your Son may walk.  
Amen.*

(Common Order)

*God help us to change.  
To change ourselves and to change our world.  
To know the need for it. To deal with the pain of it.  
To feel the joy of it.  
To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.  
The art of gentle revolution.  
Amen.*

(Michael Leunig)

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