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# CROSSPIECE



The Parish Magazine of St James's Church, Cambridge

September—October 2020

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Line drawing by Revd Ally Barrett  
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### Words from the Vicarage

Dear Reader,

The concept of 'jubilee' is the year at the end of seven cycles of Sabbatical years and, according to biblical regulations, had a special impact on the ownership and management of land in Israel. In the Book of Leviticus, Hebrew slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and the mercies of God would be seen in abundance. In a way, it draws a line under what has passed and offers an opportunity to start anew.

In church we are following a 'season of creation' throughout September and Harvest (on 4<sup>th</sup> October) and the theme is *Jubilee for the Earth*. Each Sunday morning we will be reflecting on our stewardship of the earth, including our care for one another, the church and our community. We will be noting how our efforts to care for the environment might have been altered by the experience of the pandemic.

It feels the right time to do this. We are emerging from a lockdown due to a pandemic that isn't going away and churches everywhere are considering how best to incorporate innovations, like Zoom, with a desire to bring back the long standing patterns of worship. A chance to begin again, but also to interpret new dreams and imagine a fresh vision, perhaps?

Our Harvest thanksgiving is on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October. As we gather to give thanks this year our attention may be broader than usual. We might want to think about how thankful we are

to those who produce the food that we need but also those who have given time to distribute food where it has been most needed, in the poorer regions of the world, and also locally via the Food Hubs in this city, for example.

We have been expressing our thanks over the Spring and Summer to those who help save lives and restore people to good health in their work for the NHS. We might also be thankful for the different ways we have explored staying in touch, connecting people across the community and finding new ways to be a church.

September and October is a time for thanksgiving; it will also be a testing time as schools and colleges return, and as some may be facing hardship through lack of work, illness and further lockdown restrictions. We will need to rely on deep resources of faith and on one another for care and compassion. With God's help we will find a sense of restoration and renewal.

#### **Revd Steven Rothwell**

*Eds: There are plans to introduce an 8am said eucharist on 20th Sept. Zoom services will continue for the foreseeable future. Morning prayer at 9.30 is set to resume in church. The hope is that the Harvest Festival service will be held outdoors.*

*Please consult the weekly sheet for information and updates.*



Because of unusual circumstances this year we did not bring out an issue of *Crosspiece* in April this year.

Consequently the next issue (July/August) was 16 pages instead of the usual 12. We are happy to be able to bring you 16 pages again in this current issue.

## Crosspiece 100

After a considerable gap when we did not have a church magazine (the previous one had been called *Focus* and was produced in-house), a new one was launched in the autumn of 2003. It was printed, and still is, by Printout of Histon., who have charged us a very modest price over the years, and delivered the copies promptly for distribution. The new magazine was to be called *Crosspiece*, the name suggested by Jonathan Pinhey and the editorial team was Jonathan himself, Ron Ferrari, and James Day.

Ron produced the magazine using the newly acquired Microsoft Publisher program. In the first issue, as contributions were asked for, the team proudly asserted: *"We will be using modern desktop technology, however, copy formats of all types ranging from quill pen to the latest digital ones, are acceptable."*

The front page masthead with its curved title and line drawing of the church by Jackie Bartholomew was designed by Caroline Sanford.

The magazine has appeared regularly 6 times a year (except for a recent glitch because of Covid 19) and the issue you are reading now is no 100.

There have been changes in the team but we would especially like to acknowledge with gratitude all the work put in by Ron over the years. He started out as editor, producing the magazine and also contributing written pieces and high quality photos until he finally retired from the team this year.

It is interesting to look back at that first issue in 2003. On the opening page the editors say (and stylistically this is clearly James Day): *"Please remember readers — it's your magazine and whether it pleases you depends on what you contribute to it We not only welcome sug-*

*gestions and material, we depend on them for the magazine's survival..... Please don't sit back and moan if you're not happy with our first effort. If you've got any complaints: send them in writing. The odd compliment or two would also be appreciated. But don't forget: if you want us to improve the product and if you want our revived mag to continue, please help us to do so by sending in a piece you think would interest people. God bless you."*

To mention just a little about the content, there was a piece by Ray Revell about moths, one of his passions, and a couple of pieces by Phyl Powell, who contributed a puzzle every time. Many people will remember her long involvement with St James, from church secretary to organizer of whist drives .

There were two poems by Judith Pinhey and one by Linda Appleby, and we include two of these on the following pages, copied directly from the original publication. The calendar gave details of Christmas services but also some community and church activities: Friendship Club, Ladies' Social Club, Whist Drive, and the start of the Focus Christian Institute term. Our list of activities and groups would look rather different today.

It is noticeable that there were only two photographs but several line drawings.

As for *Crosspiece* now 17 years later, we are still publishing and over the years it has been a record of activities, worship, and people, many of whom are no longer with us. The church website archives the publication from 2016 onwards, but some of you may have earlier copies at home to look back on.

Right now, *Crosspiece* needs some serious thought. We have an editorial team of just three, all female, unlike in 2003: Jennifer

*(Continued on page 4)*

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Day, Christina Hood and Mary Calladine. We would welcome some help, and as was declared in 2003, it is your magazine and we welcome contributions in the form of written articles or photographs. We are a small team and cannot see ourselves continuing indefinitely. If you could help in a larger or smaller capacity we would be happy to discuss with you.

- take on the editorial role at times?
- write for the magazine?
- provide ideas and commission pieces from members of the church community?
- take photos of church events, and edit them?
- proofread?
- help with distribution?

Would you be willing to:

Any help in these areas would be welcome.

- join the editorial team?
- 

### Tell Me

"Tell me, old sailor, what are your prayers for?  
When your work is so dangerous and your home is so  
poor  
You visit each day that old church on the shore  
But you don't ask for riches, or even for more".

"I pray that each evening our boat will find home  
For clear, cloudless skies and a shelter from storms  
For God to preserve every creature that's born  
For peace in the evening and strength in the morn".

"I thank you, old sailor, for your teaching today  
You pray for support in the everyday fray  
Not for gold, not for riches or double your pay  
I'll pray for you, too" and his boat swings away.

Lynda Appleby  
to the tune of *Slane* (Lord of all Hopefulness)

## A Series of Mind-Shifts

Some have professed themselves astonished  
that I would follow a star.

Some have even admonished  
me for journeying so far  
beyond the call of duty  
to look for something of unique beauty.



I found no Shangri-la  
but something unexpected,  
something to make one wise:  
a child with human needs and human cries.

The scene was ordinary;  
there was nothing to charm the disaffected  
or flatter the luminary.

I had come to seek  
a child fit for a crown,  
but this child, poor and weak,  
has turned my cherished values upside down.

Some tell of precious gifts  
but I would rather speak  
of a series of mind-shifts,  
a suspension between heaven and earth,  
a tension between death and birth.

The gift that matters in the story  
is the child who shines with God's glory.

His light is with me every day,  
bringing grace to find and follow a hard way.

Judith Pinhey



St James Day eucharist



The celebration of the feast of St James took place on 26th July. It was particularly significant for those who attended, as it was the first time we had been able to gather together in worship since the middle of March. Steve and Anne blessed the bread and wine and we were able to share the bread together. Our photos show that we were properly socially distanced. For those sitting in bubbles, one member was able to take bread to give to the others. Some people stayed on afterwards to picnic and chat.



### A Tribute to Molly Sayer by her daughter

*Molly Sayer may have been unknown to some of our readers, especially those who come to the 10am Sunday Eucharist. However, she was a regular and valued member of the 8am Sunday Eucharist congregation over many years. Her daughter, Kathryn Wilson, pays tribute to her.*



Molly was an extremely kind and caring person. She loved her family very much and cared deeply for them all.

Molly was also an animal lover and as many people know, she was a keen supporter of the Donkey Sanctuary. She had many pets, starting as a child with her dog Mick. For the last few years, she was adopted by a feral cat who took up residence in the garden shed. Molly loved tending to Wallace and feeding her on the choicest roast chicken! She was also a great fan of hedgehogs and spent many evenings on 'hedgehog watch'.

British Red Cross who met in Glisson Road, and having gained many proficiency badges, as a young woman regularly volunteered for duties and made several life-long friends through the organisation.

She had a close circle of old school friends (from the Coleridge School) who all supported one another throughout their long years of friendship and were there for each other whatever the occasion, be it the birth of children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren, weddings through to turmoil within family life and bereavement.

Because she rarely expressed an opinion people liked to talk and confide in her – she seemed to draw people to her throughout her long life. She had the gift of approachability and people would come to her and tell her about their troubles. Someone or something would have to have been extremely bad before she would make a comment, although she did have some strong comments about the recent pandemic!

Molly practised her religion in a quiet way. She studied for the Bishop's Certificate under Rev. Eric Hutchison. She helped with the cleaning of the church when she was able to. With her Franciscan friend Pam she visited Walsingham Shrine for a few days quiet and contemplation for many years.

The family are sorry that only they could attend her funeral and extend their warmest thanks to those who kindly paid their respects to her during her 'drive-by' cortege en route to the service. She would have loved the vintage-style tea family party afterwards in her daughter's garden as she truly was the cornerstone of the family.

Starting in her youth, Molly joined the

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### A tribute to Anne Phillips by her brother



It is a real privilege for me to say something here about Anne and her life.

Our parents, Reuben and Mabel, came from Ilkeston, Derbyshire, a coal-mining town on the river Erewash. They were both born in 1901. Reuben was the only son of Charles and Sarah. He went to a local National school, was good at the 3Rs, and left at the age of 13. Like all other boys, he was sent to the pit, but he was too puny to have survived underground, so instead he became a clerk in the office.

Mabel was 9th of the 12 children. She was fortunate to win a place at the town's new Grammar school. She took her junior and senior Oxford school certificates, and then embarked on a teacher-training course at St Mary's Hall, Cheltenham. Then she taught at one of the town's primary schools.

As children, Reuben and Mabel both attended Cotmanhay parish church and its flourishing Sunday school; and in due course they both became Sunday School teachers. They married in 1927 and Anne was born in 1930. In 1933 Reuben moved to a new

clerical job at a furniture factory a few miles down the Erewash; and the three of them moved to a new house in Stapleford, Notts. I was born two years later.

Anne was a bright child. She became interested in missionary work at the age of seven: she told me recently that she was fascinated by our family missionary box, for collecting money to support the Church Missionary Society in its overseas work. The box was in the form of a circular African hut, with a thatched roof, a door but no windows, and a slot in the roof for coins. Anne was curious about the poor people who had to live in such mean huts, but were helped by missionaries, supported through the money that we contributed.

At the age of 10 her favourite Christmas present was a book *Seekers of the King*, about the Church and the lives of CMS missionaries in six different countries. She wrote to CMS for the address of a missionary in each country. Then she wrote letters to the missionaries themselves and in one case (at least) she received a reply – from Dr Margaret Carey, of Iyi-Enu Hospital, Nigeria, who also sent some photographs of the medical work being done there.

By this stage Anne had become a pupil at Nottingham Girls' High School, to which she had won a scholarship as a last-minute entry. Anne did well at her schoolwork. At the age of about 14 she had decided that she wanted to be a medical missionary; so when she entered the sixth form, she chose to take science subjects for the Higher School Certificate.

In 1948 she was off to Birmingham University Medical School. The University didn't provide accommodation, so our mother asked CMS for the names of vicars in Birmingham who supported the Society; and thus she found Gordon Selwyn, vicar of Selly Oak, near the University, whose two daughters were just off to boarding school, and whose family was pleased to welcome Anne as a boarder.

Anne did well in her medical studies. When she got to the Midwifery part of the course, she would tell us about delivering babies in the slums of Birmingham by the light of her bicycle-lamp.

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(In recent times, she was a ready-made fan of *Call the Midwife* on the BBC.)

But I'm getting ahead of a main storyline. On St Valentine's Day 1949, in her second term at University, Anne met John Phillips at a CMS meeting. John was reading Law and Theology at the University and a year ahead of her. He was tailor-made for Anne: he had missionary blood in his veins. John's father was the vicar of Darlaston. John was the youngest of four children and he had a brother and a sister who were, or were about to become, missionaries in Nigeria. The family were warmly welcoming to Anne.

Anne and John had a long engagement, while Anne finished her medical course, and worked for a year as a house-physician and surgeon in a hospital at Walsall. Meanwhile, John completed his teacher training, and gained teaching experience. They were married at Stapleford in 1954 and six weeks later they flew to Nigeria, where they set up home in Onitsha. John joined the staff of Dennis Memorial Grammar School, and Anne joined the medical team at Iyi-Enu Mission Hospital, about five miles away.

At Iyi-Enu, Anne quickly learned about the practice of medicine in the absence of extensive laboratory facilities of the kind that were common in the U.K. She found that the Nigerian nursing staff at the hospital were extremely competent – for example, in running the hospital's regular Wednesday "de-worming" sessions for out-patients. Anne also learned a lot from the nurses in the operating theatre: they knew how to perform the standard operations, while she sometimes needed the instruction-book, open on a side-table.

After three years in Onitsha, John was appointed headmaster of a recently founded boys' grammar school in the village of Emevor, in a remote part of the Niger delta – about 30 miles from the nearest post-office. On their journey to Emevor, Anne and John stopped off at a medical depot, where Anne purchased (with money provided by the Bishop) medical supplies with which to start a village clinic. When they were settled in, she asked the village elders if they could provide some accommodation for a clinic, but none was forthcoming.

One day, the village elders saw Anne setting off in her car. "Where are you going?" they asked.

The driver told them that they were going off to another village to hold a clinic. When Anne returned to the village, later in the day, the necessary premises had been identified! (Whenever Anne told this story, she would roar with laughter.)

The clinic, which Anne and her helpers ran four days a week, attracted many patients from a wide area; who between them spoke eight different languages. Fortunately, her various helpers in the clinic could speak all of them. But occasionally speakers of a ninth language, Ijaw, would arrive at the clinic, after a 30 mile, three-day walk. Fortunately there was a boy, Tom, in the school who spoke Ijaw and he would come and help.

Anaemia was a common problem. Anne would examine the lower eyelids of the patients in the waiting room for signs of this. Frequently there would be large ladies sitting in the front row, expecting to be seen first. When Anne would invite a small lady from the back row to come in, the ladies at the front would protest that they had not come about their eyes!

The second cohort of boys arrived at the school at the same time as John and Anne. The teaching staff of the small, but growing, school consisted of two Nigerians and John. None of the three could teach maths or science, which were main-line subjects. So Anne perforce also became a teacher. She set up a science laboratory, getting dimensions for the work benches from her old school.

Anne had one special problem in teaching practical chemistry. From very early in her childhood she had had a fear of fire, which included the lighting of matches. So, when the time came to light the Bunsen burner, she devised a strategy of explaining to the boys what a great *honour* it was to light a Bunsen burner. When she had found a volunteer, and explained to him what to do, she retreated to the end of the room while the deed was done.

### Chris Calladine

*Anne had such an interesting and rewarding life that this account will be continued in our next issue. It will include tributes from people she knew and worked with in Nigeria.*

## Preparing to be ordained priest



Those who are unfamiliar with the ways of the Church of England are often surprised when I tell them I'm going to be ordained as a priest. 'But didn't you do that last year?' Well yes, I was ordained last year... as a deacon, and as a deacon I've been with you at St James's. Deacons traditionally spend a lot of time shifting furniture around, so that didn't come as a surprise. But of course the really surprising time came with lock down and finding that instead of standing beside Steve at the altar and serving, reading the Gospel and inviting everyone to 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'...I was now moving my laptop from room to room around the house and saying some of the same things to 60 people spread across 30 or so little windows.

Of course there's been no Communion up to the time I'm writing this (except for our lovely outdoor Eucharist for St James's Day). So I'm preparing for the next ordination, to the priesthood, after which I will be able to celebrate this great Mystery, without having been up at the altar at

St James's since March.

Last year's ordinations took place in late June (Petertide: the traditional time) at Ely Cathedral. I've never seen the Cathedral as full as it was for my deaconing then. We all poured out onto the green for hugs and photos. Not this year of course.

This year we deacons will be ordained priest in batches of three at Michaelmas, on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September. We are dispersed around the Diocese, and I will be ordained, God willing, by Bishop Dagmar at 4pm at Great St Mary's. I expect there to be quite a bit of hand gel in evidence, and I'm expecting to receive instructions about the appropriate liturgical colour for face masks (joke!).

The great sadness is that none of the people of St James's parish will be able to come. I'm trying not to think about that too much, but it's the main thing I will really miss. I was so blessed to have had last year's wonderful celebration at Ely. Maybe it's right that this year's ordinations contain the sadness and joy that we somehow have to hold together as Christians. As we know, suffering and sadness don't disappear like magic as we come closer to God. We are invited to know a God who is closer to us than our own breath, who understands suffering because on earth He suffered alongside us. God sets a route through suffering before us, and into deep joy.

Please pray for me and all those to be ordained this Michaelmas. I will be praying for you.

**Anne**

**Contacts at St James's Church****Priest in charge:**

Revd Steve Rothwell 246419  
email: s.rothwell3@btinternet.com

**Curate:**

Revd Anne Strauss  
email: stjamescurate@gmail.com

**Churchwardens:**

Pam Butler, 07745 591235  
email: pambutler27@hotmail.com

Michael Smale 478650

email: michaelmale05@gmail.com

**Pastoral Assistants:**

Mary Calladine 246742  
Rosemary Monk 246421

**Church Office:**

246419, Mon, Wed & Thur 9.15 am - 1.15 pm  
e-mail: stjameschurchcambridge@yahoo.co.uk

**Website:** <http://stjamescambridge.org.uk>

**Safeguarding officer:**

Jill Bradley 07971 013645  
email: happybeadsuk@gmail.com

**Director of Music:** Position vacant

**The Music Group:**

Grae Worster on mgw1@cam.ac.uk and 846295

**Church & Community Activities**

**NB: these may still be suspended.**

**Choir practice:**

Mondays 6.30 – 7.30pm

**Meditation group:** Fridays 1.30-2.00

**Beavers (6-8 yrs):**

16thcmbridgebeavers@gmail.com

**Cubs (8-11 yrs) at QE School:**

Stephen Harrison 07548 765421

**Scouts (10½—14) at QE School:**

16thcambridgescouts@gmail.com

**Creativity in lockdown**

During lockdown when it wasn't possible to move around the city and local area as usual,

it was a joy to be able to draw on Martin Bond's photographs from 'A Cambridge Diary' as a way of virtually inhabiting the local landscape.

Martin has generously invited local artists to respond to his pictures, and I've enjoyed contributing a few to his online gallery of artworks. What I love is how Martin treats often very ordinary things as being worth of attention – he has encouraged me to notice and cherish the things I see in a new way. For me, painting or drawing something is a way of being fully present, and treating the subject matter as worthy and significant, no matter how ordinary it may be.

**Revd Ally Barrett**

*Eds: several of Ally's pictures have been posted online. She has done some impressive colour interpretations of Martin's photos, but she has chosen to send us some line drawings for reproduction.*

### Sign language in an international world

*Revd Dr Ros Hunt has a long connection with St James Church, and we have greatly appreciated her contribution to our Zoom services, when she has shared her reflections with us. She has worked as a social worker with deaf people for most of her professional career. Here she tells us something of the complexities of sign language in different countries, language groups and localities.*

Often when I am interpreting in sign language, people comment that it must be great that Deaf people around the world can all talk to one another. At this point, I have to explain that sign language is not universal and that each country has its own – that is why I use British Sign Language (BSL). In the USA it is ASL, in Eire it is ISL and so on. Places that have more than one language might also have more than one sign language – for example there is French Belgian Sign Language and Catalan Sign Language. However, to a certain extent the language structure is similar – almost all sign languages sign time past, present and future in the same way. This similarity of structure is helpful when Deaf people from different countries meet as they often do (pre-Covid). Many Deaf people are very keen on international travel and there are a huge number of international Deaf sporting events.

There are sign language families where different countries have very similar sign languages for historical reasons – so BSL has many similarities to Australian Sign Language (Auslan), New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and South African Sign Language (SASL). Many of you will remember the fake interpreter who was present at the Nelson Mandela memorial event who simply made meaningless gestures. These sign language relationships are probably connected with colonialism. ISL (Eire), ASL (USA) and LSF (French Sign Language) have much in common for other reasons, probably connected with an exchange of teachers of the Deaf.

BSL signs are not word for word representations of what is being said. BSL takes the meaning of what is said and then represents that. Direction and placement of signs is essential to meaning. This makes translation of scripture and sermons even more complex – but that is a whole other article. A few signs are iconic – meaning that anyone can probably recognise them – examples would be ‘baby’, ‘drink’, ‘drive’. Some signs are translucent, meaning that with a bit of help people who don’t sign could work out what they meant – for example ‘tree’. The overwhelming number of signs are abstract, meaning that to the non-BSL user there is no obvious connection between the sign and the English word. A lot of these signs have interesting and possibly anecdotal derivations – is the sign for biscuit really what it is because sailors were getting rid of the weevils from their biscuits before they ate them?

Within British Sign Language (BSL) there are also accents and dialects. Accents are usually individual signs that use the same hand shape to make them but perhaps on a different part of the body or in a different direction. Dialect signs are usually very different and it is possible that the same sign will have a totally different meaning in different parts of the country – sometimes causing amusing or embarrassing misunderstandings! (Ask me about examples – not appropriate to be put in print). Numbers and colours are particularly prone to regional differences, so if there is a bingo session at a Deaf Derby and Joan national meeting, people will be walking around announcing the number that has been called in seven or eight different ways.

This is just a taster about BSL – it is great to learn, but be warned that it is as difficult and time-consuming as any spoken language!

**Ros Hunt**



Baby

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Drink

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Tree

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### Tempus fugit

Some years ago a lady in the city celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was a sufficiently rare event in those days for the Cambridge Evening News to send a reporter to interview her. He concluded his interview by congratulating her on becoming a *centurion*.

I cherished this story for years hoping that some day I would be able to use it in a sermon. The opportunity arrived three years ago when I was asked to speak at the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party of my old friend Kathleen. I referred to the interview and congratulated her on also becoming a centurion and read the verses from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians which counsels us to put on the whole armour of God. She was a generous woman, a wonderful cook who practised hospitality on a grand scale despite only a modest income, a woman full of good works who for many years was a pillar of her parish church.

In these days centenarians are no longer rare, more and more are living to that ripe old age. I don't think my parents knew a single one, seventy was regarded as an achievement in those days, whereas I have known five – sadly only one of them a man, although my neighbour, Ray, died within an hour of his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Which brings me to the now commonplace event of my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday which took place in June. *Commonplace* that is to everyone else, but not to me. You see the older I get the more vigorously the nineteen year old inside me fights to get out: my grand-daughter once asked me when both of us were much younger, *Grandpa, what are you going to be when you grow up?* It is a question I still give a great deal of thought to. That still active teenager has a lot to answer for. One of the cards I received from someone I had hitherto mistakenly regarded as a good friend depicted a Ronald Searle cartoon of a wild old man cavorting about in the street like an organ-grinder's monkey. *It reminds me of you*, she wrote.

Most disturbing has been the rapidity with which so many years have passed. The hymn refers to time as being *like an ever-flowing stream*. Which for me conjures up a rather leisurely, gentle, rural image. Not so in my experience. Time has slipped too swiftly through my fingers. It seems only yesterday that I was an infant. Our life is as a weaver's shuttle, says the Bible. I was once taken into the weaving shed where my mother and aunt had worked since they were twelve years old, I never imagined that the shuttles shooting at lightning speed from one side of a loom to the other would be an apt simile of life's brevity. It is gone in a flash.

Nevertheless my 90<sup>th</sup> was a wonderful celebration – three parties despite the restrictions - a family party, a neighbours' party and one for several of my friends. The cards occupied every inch of flat surface in the house. *What shall we give him?* many asked, and *a book* was the commonest answer. I now have enough to keep me busy reading for the next few years. For the previous three months the only footwear I could get on my swollen feet was a pair of slippers which had been cut about a bit and then secured by sellotape. Clearly my good neighbours thought these were the harbinger of me selling *The Big Issue* and sleeping rough or else they feared my appearance would affect the house prices in the Court. So three pairs of slippers arrived to relieve my poverty.

I phoned an ex-churchwarden of mine to thank her for the *Red Cross* parcel of smoked salmon and patés she had sent me, others who also thought I was dying of hunger provided me with cheese, biscuits and four birthday cakes. In some ways most touching of all, especially to someone tone deaf, was a new composition Robin Holloway dedicated to me, all the notes are derived from my name and there are 90 bars to the work.

The Bible promises us that in old age we

*(Continued on page 15)*

shall be fat and flourishing. Thank God my reduced waistline negates the first half of that promise, but to my astonishment I find that having only recently been on the point of death I

am flourishing once again. Who knows, I too may become a centurion in a few years time.

**Geoffrey Howard**

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### The Healing Power of Music

In our last issue of *Crosspiece* Eleanor Pippard wrote about how she has managed to continue with her musical activities during lockdown. Many people will have something they are passionate about or formed part of their normal social activities, and which came to an abrupt end in March. Swimming, watching or playing football, dancing, going to the theatre or cinema, eating out, everything just stopped. For me it was singing. I have sung in choirs for the last 50 years without a break. My last concert was on March 14<sup>th</sup> just before everything came to a halt, with the rest of the season cancelled. Even now plans to start up in September are uncertain and will be in a very different format: rehearsals in some form but certainly no performances until 2021.

Various online choirs and groups started up, some local, some featuring big popular names like Gareth Malone. Lots of opportunity to sing rock and pop or songs from the musicals, and you would not need to read music. I wanted something more demanding and to my experience and tastes. Eventually I found The Self-Isolation Choir, and what a joy it has been for me.

The Choir was founded by self-isolating choral singer Mark Strachan and the choral director and conductor is Ben England. Ben has over 20 years of experience teaching adults to sing and as a baritone himself, he has sung lead roles with Bristol Opera, before becoming its Director of Music. He lives in Bristol and is deeply involved with singing and local music groups of all ages. I missed out on the first SIC project "Messiah at Home", thinking (wrongly) I had missed the deadline to enrol, but the amaz-

ing performance can be viewed on [youtube](#). Not only did they have top-flight soloists but it was such a success and of such an amazing standard considering that all performers, instrumentalists and singers alike were recording in isolation, that they produced a CD.

I enrolled for the summer course, three separate weeks in June, July and August. So how does SIC work?

Having downloaded the music, I only printed off one piece, as there were so many pages and I thought I could manage to view the rest on my laptop. I learnt how to put the music on the right-hand side of the screen and scroll through the pages while having the conductor, Ben, on the left. Ben rehearsed the different sections of the choir at different times, and it really was a rehearsal, involving concentration and hard work. He sat at his keyboard talking to you and rehearsing your part with you. He has an amazing voice and can sing all the parts: soprano, alto, tenor and bass, although he is actually a bass. He chats to you and gives you feedback so you feel as though you are in a rehearsal: *let's go back and do bars 45 to 57 again, shall we? There are some tricky rhythms, and don't forget to put the "s" on the end of "sanctus" on the first beat of bar 55.* He smiles and encourages and it really feels as though you are in the room with him.

The course was very well organised, and backed up by a group of professional singers, The Fieri Consort. There are recordings of your own vocal line, as well as recordings of the whole piece with all the parts and the accompa-

*(Continued on page 16)*

niment, so that you can go away and practise. There are recordings with your vocal line louder than the others, and others with your part removed so you can hear everyone else.

Each week we were given one of the pieces to record at home, although there was no obligation to do that. This was quite a challenge the first time I tried. When ready to record, I get Ben and the music on screen, open the recording app on my phone, start recording on his signal, and sing my part while hearing the other parts on my headphones but not recording them. Stop. Listen back to what I recorded. Whoops! Too late with my entry at bar 45. Sang the wrong word at bar 49. Delete the recording and do it again.

When satisfied I upload my recording to the Self-Isolation Choir website, then the wizard technicians put everything together (several hundred submissions) and at the end of each week we hear the finished version. A moment of sometimes weepy happiness when you hear what has been accomplished. The whole project is touching something deep in the participants.

So, who are the singers? An increasing number, now over 1000, from all over the world. One day, looking through the chat line going on before the rehearsal, I noticed Aberdeen, Leeds, Oldham, Bury St Edmunds, Dublin and Tipperary in the British Isles. Further afield there was Seville, Munich, Stockholm, Finland, Florida, North Carolina, Ontario, Alberta and Newfoundland. That was just the people who were online doing the rehearsal in real time. It is possible to do the recorded rehearsal at your own convenience, so the people in Singapore and Australia were probably asleep and of course some people would be at work. Though you do get greeted with "Hi, everyone, it's 4.30am here in Toronto".

The Summer Course finished on 21 August. We had done so well with our recordings that we have been asked to upload more of what we learnt so that we can release a CD. Ever more ambitious plans are in the offing, and I have enrolled to sing in Mendelssohn's "Elijah" and in the last movement of Mahler's "Resurrection Symphony" in the autumn, so whatever happens with my normal live choral singing in Cambridge from September, I will have plenty to do.

Ben himself is thrilled with how things have gone. "You are a choir, a real choir, even though we don't meet". And it does feel like a community of singers from all over the world, now. It is a wonderful healing force.

If you wish to hear something by "The Self-Isolation Choir" on [youtube](#), please go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=self+isolation+choir+for+the+beauty+of+the+earth](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=self+isolation+choir+for+the+beauty+of+the+earth) John Rutter's "For the Beauty of the Earth"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye\\_A-ebDsj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye_A-ebDsj8) Patrick Hawes "Quanta Qualia" 8-part chorus with saxophone obbligato

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HmihLmmgrU> Grieg "Ave Maris Stella"

I am there somewhere among the many sopranos!

**Jennifer Day**

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