

Saints ALIVE

The magazine of:
All Saints, Leighton Buzzard
St. Nicholas, Hockliffe
St. Michael's, Eggington
St. Michael and All Angels,
Billington
The Good Shepherd, Sandhills

November 2025

£1

The Fire:

Phoenix from the ashes:
belief in renewal
when the world
seems broken:
the smoke, the noise,
the smells;
the despair
and the faith.

An eyewitness account of
that fateful night
40 years ago.

Festal Evensong

on All Saints Sunday,
2nd November at 5pm
with Bishop Richard
followed by
soup and fireworks
to commemorate
that night.

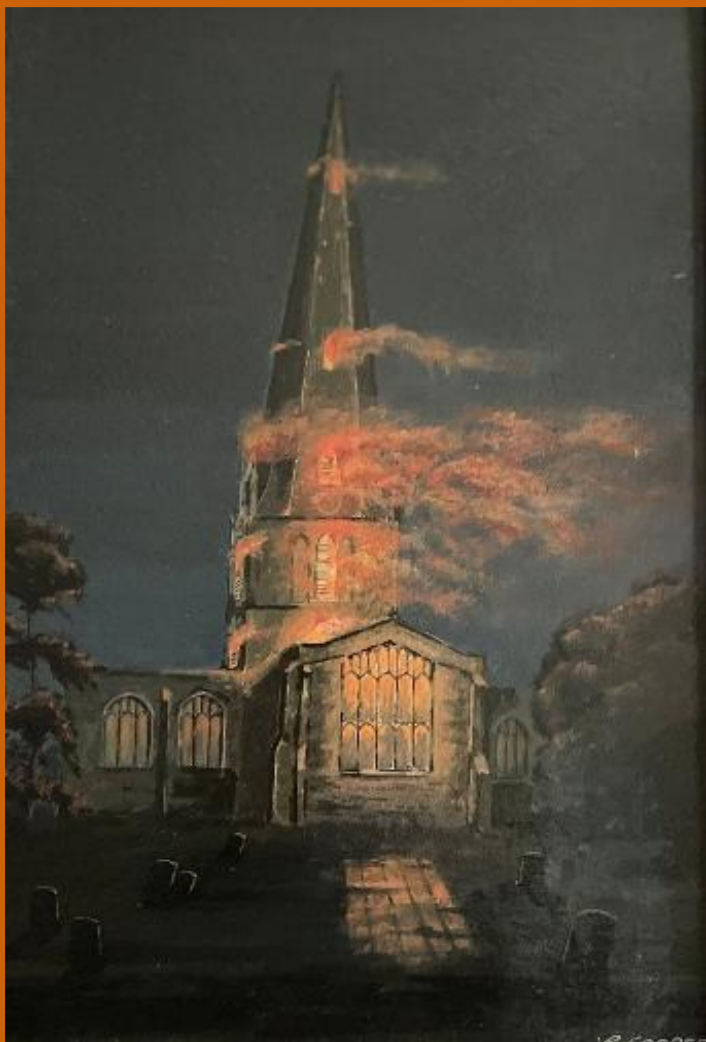
Growing Church

looking at Baptism.

Living God's Love

Send us out
to care and serve.

*(Painting by Ron Cooper
presented to All Saints
by Terry Warburton)*



All Saints Leighton Buzzard

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Laughter: The Universal Language of Joy

By Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Laughter is one of the simplest yet most profound expressions of our shared humanity. It cuts across language barriers, social divisions, and cultural boundaries, uniting people in moments of joy, relief, or even nervousness. Whether it bursts forth as a belly laugh or escapes as a quiet chuckle, laughter is more than a reaction—it is a gift with remarkable power.

Whenever I was abroad, I would call my parents say something funny just to hear my mother laugh. It kept me going till the next time I called.

Scientists tell us that laughter does more than lighten our mood. When we laugh, our brains release endorphins, the “feel-good” chemicals that reduce stress and foster happiness. Laughter also improves blood circulation, strengthens the immune system, and relaxes muscles. In fact, just a few minutes of genuine laughter can leave the body relaxed for up to 45 minutes afterwards. It’s no wonder some call laughter “internal jogging.”

Beyond physical health, laughter plays an essential role in human connection. We tend to laugh more in groups than when we are alone, suggesting that laughter evolved as a social signal—a way of strengthening bonds and easing tension. I came out of a cinema one time and I heard a couple behind me say, “there is the fella doing all the laughing”. Shared laughter builds trust and reminds us that we are not alone, even in challenging times. Think about how an inside joke can unite friends, or how a child’s giggle can draw strangers into shared delight. Fyodor Dostoevsky said “if you wish to glimpse inside a human soul and get to know a person, just watch them laugh. If they laugh well they are a good person”.

Laughter also holds profound psychological benefits. Humour helps people cope with adversity by reframing painful situations and allowing room for perspective. Hospitals and therapy centres are increasingly turning to laughter therapy and clown doctors to ease patients’ stress and encourage healing. It is not a cure in itself, but it often provides the hope and positivity that treatment alone cannot deliver.

Of course, laughter is not always innocent. It can sometimes be wielded as a weapon—mockery, sarcasm, or exclusionary humour remind us that laughter has a shadow side. Yet even here lies a lesson: the most uplifting laughter is that which is shared, not at someone’s expense but in celebration of life itself.

In our fast-paced, stressful world, it is easy to take life too seriously. But laughter reminds us to pause, breathe, and embrace joy. It is free, contagious, and endlessly renewable. As comedian Charlie Chaplin once said, “A day without laughter is a day wasted.” Perhaps the best prescription we can all take to heart is simple: laugh more, live better. Perhaps we can also say, laughter is a renewable energy!

Noel McGeeney

Our present pattern of services across the Ouzel Valley Team

All Saints

Sundays:

8.00am Holy Communion

9.30am Parish Eucharist

11.30am (usual pattern but can vary occasionally)

1st Sunday: Messy Mass

3rd Sunday: All Age Service

2nd & 4th Sunday: Holy Baptism

6.00pm Evening Prayer

1st Sunday: Choral Evensong Plus

3rd Sunday: Sung with hymns
(NO choir) followed by Benediction

2nd & 4th Sunday: Said Evensong

Weekdays:

Holy Communion

10.00am Thursday

9.00am Saturday

(Service of Healing on 4th Saturday each month)

Morning Prayer:

9.00am Tuesday – Friday in the Chancel

St. Barnabas, Linslade

Sundays:

8.00am Said Eucharist

10.00am Parish Eucharist

6.00pm Evensong

www.stbarnabaslinslade.uk

St. Michael's and All Angels, Billington

11.15am Holy Communion

Good Shepherd, Astral Park Sports & Community Centre, Johnson Drive, Sandhills, LU7 4AY:

Sundays at 9.45am:

1st Sunday: Holy Communion & CGS Juniors

2nd Sunday: 'Chapel Time':

Lead reflection and discussion

3rd Sunday: Holy Communion & CGS Juniors

4th Sunday: 'Morning Break':

Informal service with sermon and discussion.

Free pop-up café every Sunday from 9.45am

*Community Cafe every Wednesday at Astral Park
10am - 12noon with a Music, Rhythm and Rhyme
session from 10am - 10:30am.*

St. Leonard's, Heath & Reach

Sundays:

8.00am 1st & 3rd Sundays: Holy Communion

11.00am Holy Communion

1st Sundays: Family Service

Tuesdays: 7.00pm Holy Communion

Morning Prayer via Zoom:

9.00am Monday – Saturday

www.saintleonardschurch.com

St. Michael's, Eggington

9.30am 1st & 3rd Sundays: Holy Communion

4th Sundays: Café Church 3-4pm

St. Nicholas', Hockliffe

9.30am 2nd Sundays: Family Communion

4th Sundays: Holy Communion

Sunday Saints: for age 3+ year olds, meets during 9.30am Sunday service at All Saints.

All Saints Toddler Time: All Saints every Wednesday during term time, at 9.30am.

£1.50 per parent / carer & child; 50p extra per child; refreshments included.

Leighton Young Singers Club: for children in Years 2-6, meets on Fridays at 6.30 - 7.30pm.

Bereavement Café: a support group offering friendship and understanding.

1st Sunday of the month, 2.30-4pm The Spire Coffee Shop, All Saints

Choir Practice: Friday evenings, 6.30pm Trebles; 7.30 – 8.30pm Full choir.

Bellringers: Practice on Monday, 7.30 - 9.30pm.

Spire Coffee Shop: Tuesday & Friday 10am - 2pm.

Saturday 10am - 12noon for drinks & cakes only.

Contact Details on Page 2.



Worth a smile

There was a very gracious lady who was mailing the old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here?" asked the postal clerk.

The lady thought for a moment. "Only the Ten Commandments."



There are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good morning, Lord," and there are those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good Lord, it's morning."



A very deaf elderly man was finally fitted out with a hearing aid that really worked. A month later his doctor called him in for a check-up. "Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again."

The gentleman replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to the conversations. I've changed my will three times!"



A minister was approached by his small son who told him proudly, "I finally figured out what the Bible means!" The minister thought of his extensive theological library and smiled indulgently. He asked his young son what he thought the Bible meant.

"It's easy, Daddy," the boy replied. "It means: 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'"

When life gives you rain,
put on a cute umbrella
and matching boots.



**So today, in church,
a guy in a dress tried to drown me**

**And, I kid you not,
my family just stood there
taking pictures!**

liturgy.co.nz

Parish Registers

Holy Matrimony, September:

6: Andrew Carr & Hollie Frinton at All Saints

'Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate'

Holy Baptism, September:

13: Geoffrey Seale; 14: Indie-Mae Bush; 21: Christopher Baillon

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'

Funerals, September:

1: Pamela Jackson at Bierton; 2: Gilda Robinson at All Saints; 10: William Pike at St. Mary's;
12: Roger Collor at All Saints; 12: Norma Cook at Crownhill; 23: Dennis Broyd at Bierton;
30: Joan Bull at All Saints; David Longstaffe at St. Leonard's

'Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'

Years Mind, November:

1: Christopher Austin; 2: Doris Pughe; 3: Geoffrey Price;
4: Laurie Thompson, Revd. Len Lack, George Plenderleath; 5: Alistair Grant;
9: Charles Wallace; 10: Andrew Audas, Alistair Cursons, Geoffrey Stopford;
11: Harold Palmer, Margaret Prewett; 13: Edith Palmer; 14: Leah Perrott, Harry Jones;
15: Michael Munford; 16: Iain Smith; 17: Ray Croxford;
18: Eileen Sandifer, Canon John Payne-Cook; 19: Jim Jury, Snowie Mead;
23: Bessie Plummer, Revd. Peter Lymbery, Gillian Macfarlane, Alan Cross;
27: Beryl Liscoe; 28: Derek Dykes; 29: Joan Bester, Heather Morgan



LEIGHTON BUZZARD MUSIC

LIVE PROFESSIONAL CONCERTS

Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre, LU7 1RX

Saturday 8th November 2025

at 7.30pm

VICTOR LIM

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"Laughing & Crying"



Victor's imaginative programme alternates between humorous and sorrowful music ending with Schumann's "Humoreske" which has both.

Programme will include: Haydn, Sibelius, Grieg, Mompou and Schumann

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Pulford VA Lower School

Head Teacher: Rev'd Dave Heather, MBE

Office Manager: Mrs Alison Quick

Tel: 01525 372188

Website: www.pulfordschool.org

A church school for
a whole community



The Power of Inspiration: A Parent and Governor's Reflection



As both a parent and a school governor, I've had the privilege of witnessing many moments of growth and transformation in our children. But few have struck me as deeply as the immediate impact of one author and illustrator's visit, Peter Brown, on my child and hopefully other Pulford children also.

It was a typical Tuesday afternoon when the children gathered in the hall, buzzing with anticipation. The visiting author—warm, engaging, and full of stories—introduced his book, "The Wild Robot", and spoke of imagination, perseverance, and the joy of creating something from nothing. My daughter came home that day with a spark in her eyes and a notebook clutched tightly in her hands.

"I'm going to write a story," she declared. And she did.

Over the next hour, I watched her pour herself into her writing and drawings. Her story was simple yet inviting, mirroring the story plot that she'd been inspired by earlier. It was filled with characters and pictures that leapt off the page and included similes and metaphors that teachers would be proud of! But more than the story itself, it was the process that moved me—the way she believed in her own voice, the way she saw herself not just as a reader, but as a creator.

As a governor, I often think about the metrics - attendance, attainment, progress. But this moment reminded me of something deeper: the immeasurable value of inspiration. Peter Brown didn't just deliver a talk; he planted seeds. Seeds of confidence, creativity, and courage.

Inspiration is a sacred gift. It's what moves us to act, to dream, to become. And in a faith community, we understand its divine nature. Just as scripture inspires us to live with purpose and compassion, so too can a story inspire a child to discover their own.

I'm grateful to our school and Tring Bookshop for making space for these moments. And I'm grateful to that author - for reminding us that sometimes, all it takes is one voice to awaken another.

So I'll leave you with these thoughts: Who are you going to inspire today and from whom are you going to take your inspiration? Creativity has endless possibilities.

Beci J Morley

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Capacity approx 130
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stleonardheath@gmail.com

Bill Webb was licensed as a Reader on 28th September 2025

In 2022, after putting things off for several years, trying to ignore what people were telling me, I finally gave in and started the process of discernment to see if God was really calling me to be a licensed lay minister, or Reader. On September 28th, after two years of training, I was humbled to be admitted to the office of Reader and licensed by Bishop Jane of Hertford, the Warden of Readers for the Diocese of St Albans.

It was a beautiful service for the six of us who were licensed, surrounded by family, friends and our own clergy.

A part of the oaths which we were required to take before the service included the following:

I do hereby promise to endeavour, as far as in me lies, to promote peace and unity, and to conduct myself as becomes a worker for Christ, for the good of his church, and for the spiritual welfare of all people”.

I pray that I will be faithful to my promise and would encourage anyone feeling that they may be drawn to a licensed role, whether that be Reader or clergy, to have the conversation with their incumbent.

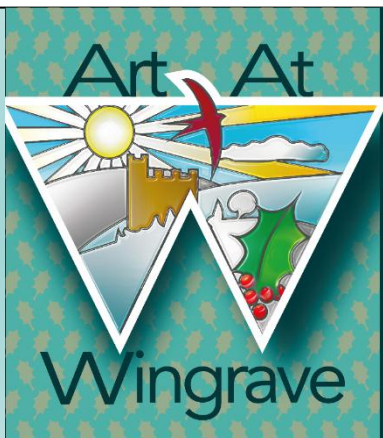
Bill Webb

[Many congratulations, Bill. We wish you much joy and fulfilment in this new role. Ed.]



‘Art At Wingrave’ 2025

a vibrant, joyful and free pre-Christmas Art Event showcasing the enthusiasm and talent of 20+ local Artists and Makers. Whether you’re an art enthusiast, a collector, someone hunting for original Christmas gifts or simply looking for inspiration, here’s your chance to enjoy a festive weekend of art.




December
Fri 5th 6.00-9.00
Sat 6th - Sun 7th
10.30-5.00
Community Centre,
Church St., Wingrave,
HP22 4PE

Including Refreshments
Cancer Research UK

Calendar of Events

2nd November

All Saints Sunday - Patronal Festival

Services as usual including Messy Mass All Saints 11.30am

Bereavement Support Café Coffee Shop, All Saints 2.30pm – 4pm



Festal Evensong with Commemoration of 40 years since the fire, with The Bishop of Bedford

All Saints 5pm followed by soup and fireworks



3rd November

Commemoration of All Souls All Souls' Service, All Saints 7.30pm

5th November

Lunch Club in the North Transept, All Saints 1pm.

Tickets £6.00 available from the Coffee Shop.



9th November

Remembrance Sunday Services as usual

including Remembrance Service All Saints 11am



11th November

Schools Remembrance Service War Memorial 11am

14th November (moved from 21st due to Tree Festival)

Crafty Natter All Saints 10am-2pm



16th November

Services as usual

including All Age Communion All Saints 11.30am

21st – 23rd November

Tree Festival All Saints

10.00am-5.00pm Friday and Saturday, 12.00pm – 5pm Sunday.



30th November

Advent Sunday Services as usual

including Advent Carol Service All Saints 6pm



ALL SAINTS CHURCH

CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL

HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE

Spectacular display of decorated trees
set in a beautiful 13th century church

FRIDAY 21st NOVEMBER

10.00am to 5.00pm

SATURDAY 22nd NOVEMBER

10.00am to 5.00pm

SUNDAY 23rd NOVEMBER

12.00pm to 5.00pm

FREE ADMISSION

REFRESHMENTS

LIVE MUSIC

All proceeds to All Saints Church
Registered Charity 1131221





on ...

The Growing Church

As you enter All Saints through the North door, the first thing you see is the font. It was put in its present position in 2005, but in its long life of nearly 1000 years, it has stood at the west end of the nave – when the West door was in regular use; and in the south transept, a traditional place for a baptistry. Today, baptisms are popular family occasions, so to help all to see, it was carefully moved into this more prominent position. The main entrance to the church is a fitting place – baptism symbolises the beginning of the Christian journey, the entry of a new member into the church family.

Our font is from the earlier church on this site, although its metal plug is more modern, dated only 1630. It's amazing to think just how many people have been baptised in it in during the last 1000 years.



All Saints welcomes all babies, children and families for baptism, whatever shape that family takes. Baptism is the amazing start of a journey of faith for you and your child and a special day for all your family and friends.

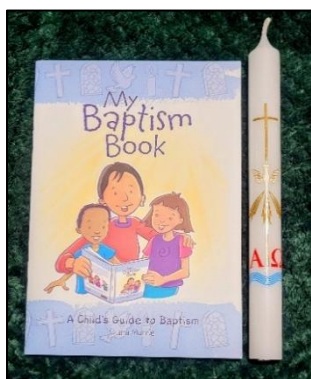
It is a celebration where parents and Godparents make promises to raise a child in the Christian faith.

Adults being baptised make these commitments themselves. You do not have to be baptised yourself or a regular church goer to have your child baptised.

A series looking at youth work in our churches.

This month: Baptism

The Baptism team at All Saints consists of 4 volunteers who welcome and prepare families for their child's baptism. Every family is invited to a Baptism Preparation evening, during which we show a short presentation explaining about the baptism service and outline the various services and groups that are available. This is an opportunity to book a date for the service, to ask questions and to look around the church, especially for newcomers. (Baptism Services at All Saints take place on a Sunday morning at 11.30am with up to three baptism families at each service.)



Families are invited to attend two church services: the first before baptism, for a Thanksgiving. Prayers are said for the child being baptised and their family and they are given a book with a bible story in. The second service is after the baptism when the newly baptised child is welcomed by the church congregation at one of our regular family services. We have 2 of these each month: Messy Mass with craft activities; and All Age Communion services. These are especially popular with young families and will help you explore faith and make new friends.



During the baptism, water is blessed in the font and poured over the candidate, symbolising cleansing from sin and spiritual rebirth in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Towards the end of the service the newly baptised child or adult is presented with a lighted candle which represents the light of Christ. On the first anniversary of the baptism each child receives a baptism anniversary card. If you, or anyone you know is thinking about baptism please speak to any member of the clergy or contact the parish office for more details.

Julie Dolton, Baptism Co-ordinator All Saints Church

Good Shepherd, Sandhills

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Stuart Blofeld; Katharine Reedy



**CHURCH of the
GOOD SHEPHERD**

Christmas events in and around CGS

Our thoughts are turning towards Christmas and at CGS we are excited about the many opportunities this time of year offers to engage with our community.

Here are some of our main events, to which all are welcome, plus Sunday mornings of course:

- ☀ Sunday 30th November 3:30pm:
Carol Singing at Greenfields Retirement Development
- ☀ Saturday 6th December 3pm
Carol Singing on the Green at Astral Park, together with other churches
- ☀ Sunday 7th December 5:30pm,
Christingle for adults with learning disabilities at Astral Park Community Centre
- ☀ Thursday 11th December 3pm,
Cake and Carols at Norton Court
- ☀ Saturday 13th December 5:30pm,
Family Carols at Astral Park Community Centre
- ☀ Wednesday 24th December 11:15pm:
Midnight Mass at St Michael and All Angels, Billington
- ☀ Thursday 25th December 9:45am:
Christmas Day service at Astral Park Community Centre.



And don't forget to look out for us at the Tree Festival in All Saints
from 21st – 23rd November!



St. Michael's, Eggington: Diary dates

Remembrance Sunday service at the war memorial
9 Nov at 2.30pm,
followed by tea and cake in the village hall.

Christmas Carol service: Wednesday 10 December at 7pm
Christmas Eve: service with Christingle 24 December at 3pm.



St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Tel: 01525 237633

***There are no churchwardens at present.
For all information, please contact the vicar.***



I am writing this article having just returned from my Autumn retreat which this year I shared with some of my fellow Readers from across the St. Alban's Diocese. The retreat was one of the events scheduled as part of our Diocese's 'Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing'. Our venue was the Chelmsford's Diocesan Retreat House at Pleshey in Essex. For me it was to be my third retreat there and I soon relaxed into the tranquillity of the house and gardens, even though it had been eight years since I last spent time there. It is a place where people from all walks of life come to seek God and to search for the spirituality in their lives.

Over the course of the weekend, I enjoyed precious moments strolling through the gardens. There, as I ducked and dived the overhanging branches of trees laden heavily with their huge ripe apples, I was invited on by their sweet aroma to explore further, treading carefully as fallen fruit covered my pathway. There were signs of flowers that were vibrant in telling their time of colour and life present; there were signs of gardening from times past where the structure of the garden had been sustained with flowerbeds from years past. The arbours and summer houses were still inviting for time to reflect and pray in the warm autumn sunshine.

So, I returned home to the families that I had left behind: at home; at the church in the Ouzel Valley Team Ministry; at the Greensand Trust volunteers group - refreshed spiritually at the threshold of this transition into autumn with all it means for us. In all we do, seasons change in our created world and in our life of the church as it now seeks to worship God through this Kingdom season.

This year, the dates in our 'own' diaries for the month of November frame the Liturgical Calendar and the liturgy of All Saints through to Advent Sunday. Then we move into Year A of the Lectionary where we draw our gospel readings from Matthew's Gospel.

Café Church for children aged 4 to 9 now meets at St. Nicholas Church on the second Sunday of the month from 3pm to 4pm. We look forward to welcoming our regular families back following the break for the summer months. We are hoping to attract more families through the links the church is seeking to strengthen with the village Lower School.

May God bless us at St. Nicholas during this Kingdom season as we yearn to grow His Kingdom in the village.

Dates for your diaries:

Service of Remembrance, St. Nicholas Church, Sunday 9th November 2025 11am

St. Nick's Supper at the Grange, Hockliffe, Saturday 6th December 2025 from 7.30pm

Geoff Marchant

St. Michael & All Angels, Billington

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Julia Haviland 850380; Tina Thompson 378411



Colin Gibbs-Jones 1958 - 2025

On 1st September we received the dreadful news that Colin had died suddenly while on his way to a business appointment in London. It came as a huge shock and all his many friends and acquaintances in Billington are deeply saddened by his passing.

Colin and Tanya together with their two children, Chantal and Jason, emigrated to the UK from South Africa in 2002. They lived initially in Berkhamsted but then moved to Great Billington in 2012 where Colin's positive outlook and wish to become involved in village life made an immediate impact.

He needed to remove a tree from their new front garden and contacted me as Tree Warden at that time to check on any regulations. As they were within the conservation area, I explained that permission was needed from CBC, which Colin duly received.

However, that initial contact led to a firm and lasting friendship and we cooperated on many village volunteer projects over the years. Colin's first thought was always 'how can I help?' whenever there was a job to be done in the village. He was in the forefront of footpath tidying, community orchard tree pruning, village gates painting and grass cutting in the churchyard. He was the one who climbed the tree in the churchyard to fix Sandra Brewin's owl nesting box gift on her standing down as church warden! He also organised the village Apple Day in 2014 and put up the Village Hall Christmas tree lights each December. There was always a 'next project' on his mind, and he tried to revitalise both the village Welcome Pack and The Bugle newsletter as well as something entirely new, namely a village War Memorial and name plaque. But he couldn't do it all himself and lack of funds or support sadly ended several of his ideas.

However, he made friends all along the way and that is the important part. We will all miss him terribly; he was a wonderful husband to Tanya and father to Chantal and Jason and had so much to give them and his three grandchildren. We send them our love and sincere condolences. I regret very much not spending more time chatting with him on tales of the sea as his insights after 20 years' service with the South African Navy, in which he rose to the rank of Commander, and my own father's seagoing experiences in both World Wars would have been a fascinating topic.



Above: Colin enthusiastically mowing the churchyard grass. This photo is scanned from a collection of Michael Grant's old newsletters.

Rest in peace dear friend.

Geoff Haviland

Fire at All Saints:

***Extracts from a personal account
of the night of 13 April 1985***

by Terry Warburton, churchwarden 1982-1990



This is the only known eye-witness account of that fateful night 40 years ago, written while the memory was still fresh. The cause of the fire has never been established, but criminal damage has not been ruled out.

11pm: a telephone call from the vicarage. "Come quick. The church is on fire!"

Church Square full of fire engines. Hoses criss-crossing the roadway. Flashing blue lights reflected in office windows; radios squawking; an acrid smell of burning. Spotlights illuminating the north side of the building. Fire visible through the upper windows of the vestry; smoke streaming off the vestry roof; and through the stained-glass windows at the east end, orange flames belching out of the organ up into the roof. An awesome and eerie sight.



Photo: David Smith of Church Avenue

The vicar Peter Whittaker and I stood transfixed.

The most dreadful thing imaginable was happening. Our beautiful parish church, physical and spiritual centre of the community for over 700 years, was in deep trouble. Thoughts of all the efforts put in by so many people during the last two years of restoration flashed through my mind. Also thoughts of the countless numbers of people who had loved the church and cared for it over the centuries. Was this to be the end?

The story went on – more fire engines arrived from all over the county, so many that water pressure became a problem. Showers of sparks; dense smoke; the noise of crackling, of bits crashing from the roof, of people calling for keys, doors jammed; the frustrations; the fear ...

Yellow flames streaking through broken glass, fanned to enormous ferocity by the wind. Flames sharp, roaring in the wind, turning from orange to bright blue in the lantern windows at the top of the spire, nearly 190 feet up. Smoke streaming the full length of the spire, silhouetted by the fire brigade's searchlights ... it looked like a veil on a medieval lady's hat ...

The organ a ball of fire.

Water everywhere.

We watched in horror.

I spoke to a group of firemen:

"We must save the silver, the records, the 13th century eagle lectern."

A fireman with breathing apparatus said he would look for it. (Church Surveyor Paul Reynolds slipped in and carried the eagle out, unscathed – an astonishing feat in those conditions.)

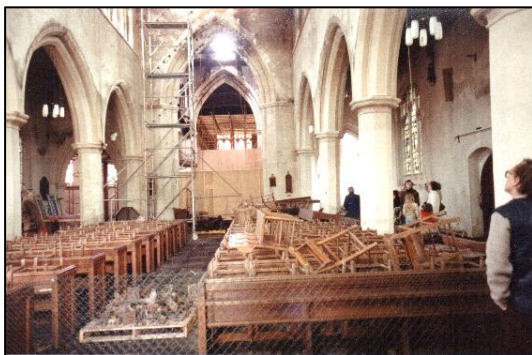
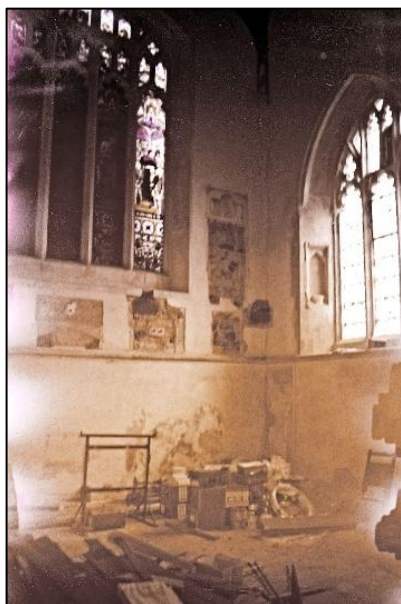
I rescued armfuls of silver, records, documents ... borrowed a fireman's helmet and looked into the chancel ... saw ribbons of glowing embers, the choir organ gone, stalactites of molten metal hanging from its remains. Through the steam and streaming water, the Easter flowers still under the high altar.

The bells, clock, organ, much of the chancel roof were lost. Paul Reynolds was working out the danger zone if the spire were to fall.

We just stood and stared.

Churchwarden Jean Rumbelow dispensed tea.

I cannot describe the despair I felt.



By daylight, the fire had spent its force, exhausting itself in fury in the spire. Salvage could start – anything portable was rescued and carried to the vicarage which looked like a religious jumble sale – piles of robes, music, silver; the vicar's carpets thick with walked-in charcoal and mud.

Back in the Square, a policeman said: *“my children were christened here. I hope you will re-build it as it was, and not put up a modern building.”*

A resolve was formed that night. All Saints would be rebuilt, to the glory of God, and to the best of our abilities.

It was re-hallowed on 7th May 1989. In his sermon at the reconsecration service the Bishop of St Albans, John Taylor, said this:

“This restored building will be for many a sermon in stone. Cherish it. Use it well. Visit it often. And keep going out of it, to be the pilgrim Church, the witnessing Church, the triumphant Church.”

Despite the devastation and loss, much did survive – the 13C eagle lectern, complete with chain; the 14C misericords; Alice de la Pole's 15C roof with angels; the 17C Wilkes pulpit; 19C Kempe windows; medieval graffiti on the pillars.

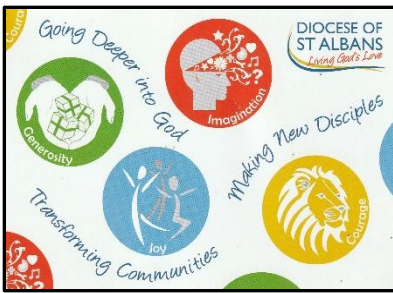
What was lost or damaged was repaired or replaced. Bright and shiny angels, new organ, new clock, new ring of 12 bells, (with a 13th ‘sharp second’) to join the surviving 12C ‘ting-tang’ Sanctus bell ...



While this is Terry's story of that night, a whole team of dedicated, devoted, determined people was involved in the rebuilding process: Peter Whittaker, Paul Reynolds, Jimmie Honour, so many more, too many to name here. They shared the vision, and the work, to bring this tragedy to a happy conclusion. The post-fire restoration is only one chapter in a long story. A 2-year restoration programme had been finished just weeks before the fire; and 10 years later, serious structural faults were found in the tower, giving rise to yet another, even bigger, programme of repair. Through all this, opportunities have been seized, not only to repair and restore, but to improve – adding meeting rooms, offices, toilets, and the coffee shop – valuable space for outreach.

2 years hence, in 2027, we will mark 750 years since the foundation stone was laid. In those 750 years, needs have changed, new congregations have dreamt ... it will continue.

Deo gratias.



Living God's Love

A series exploring
the St. Alban's Diocese Vision Statement
This month:

"Send us"

By Geoff Marchant

This is the penultimate article in our series reflecting on the prayer that supports our Diocesan vision of 'Living God's Love'. We pray this prayer to seek God's help as followers of Jesus to go *deeper* into God, *transform* the communities in which our churches are situated and *make* new disciples. This '*threefold*' thread running through this vision requires our action and for me this is encapsulated in the fact that we are people who have been 'sent'. We have responded to God's calling, so we pray for his help to 'send us'. Our sending is God's graceful commission to our calling. As we are sent, we are therefore on a journey as 21st century disciples of Jesus Christ - special – because the same God who calls us, sends us.

In the words of the Nicene Creed which we affirm afresh during our worship each Sunday, we proclaim our faith including the following words: 'We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.' *Catholic* is literally a term from the Greek word meaning universal or worldwide. *Apostolic* (*apostle*) is derived from the Greek term 'apostolos', an apostle is basically a 'sent one', as we understand the twelve apostles commissioned at Pentecost.

The church is for all. We are entrusted with the faith passed onto us from the apostles, those disciples of Jesus that he sent out to be the first missionaries. We stand, then, in a long lineage, one that began when Jesus gathered his first disciples and continues right up to today. We stand with all those who, through two thousand years, have heard Jesus' words and tried to understand them and apply them in their own time.

It is clear then that God does not grow his Kingdom on earth by sending letters, emails or text messages. He sends followers of his Son, Jesus Christ, who have through faith accepted his calling. He has sent us - the Ouzel Valley Team, part of the Diocese of St. Albans, one cog in a wheel that is the great universal church of God.

We actually pray in this prayer for God to: 'send us to care and serve'. We are acting for a compassionate God whose Son Jesus Christ came to serve, not to be served. I mentioned earlier that being a people sent requires our action. Ours then are the feet that follow in the footsteps of Jesus. So also, ours are the hands that greet those we meet during our daily lives out in the community; the lips that share the Good News stories; the eyes and ears that sense where God's kingdom needs growing; the hearts and minds that have that same mind that was at work in Jesus Christ.

There are several derivatives of the word 'send' in the Bible which characterize how the Church is founded on people of God being sent. Each of the four gospels have what we might call 'hinge' points which provide scriptural evidence of being sent – God's mission in action.

Let's just look at these:

Firstly, right at the end of Matthew's gospel: *'Now the eleven disciples [Judas had earlier betrayed Jesus] went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.'* Jesus says to them: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."* '. Matthew is unique in relating this story of Jesus sending out the disciples. [Matthew 28. 16,19]

Turning to Mark's gospel, right at the beginning, we read *'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,"'*. [Mark 1. 1, 2]

Here we have the link of the Old and New Testaments. In Isaiah 40.3, Isaiah prophesies that God is sending his messenger John the Baptist. This is affirmed in the opening 'Prologue' to John's gospel: *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."* [John 1. 6]

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, Luke tells us of Jesus going to the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus stands up to read. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* [Luke 4. 18]

Unique to John's gospel, we read about the first appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples in the upper room. *"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'*" [John 20. 21]

Earlier in his gospel, John records the solemn prayer that Jesus makes to his Father for his disciples during the Last Supper: *"As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* [John 17. 18, 21]

I want to close by sharing the following words from the post communion hymn by Omer Westendorf (b. 1916). They speak fittingly of a Living God who sends us:

*Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith confessing,
the people of God from his dwelling take leave.*

*The supper is ended: O now be extended
the fruits of his service in all who believe.*

*The seed of his teaching, our hungry souls reaching,
shall blossom in action for God and for man.*

*His grace shall incite us, his love shall unite us
to work for his kingdom and further his plan.*

Geoff Marchant.



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