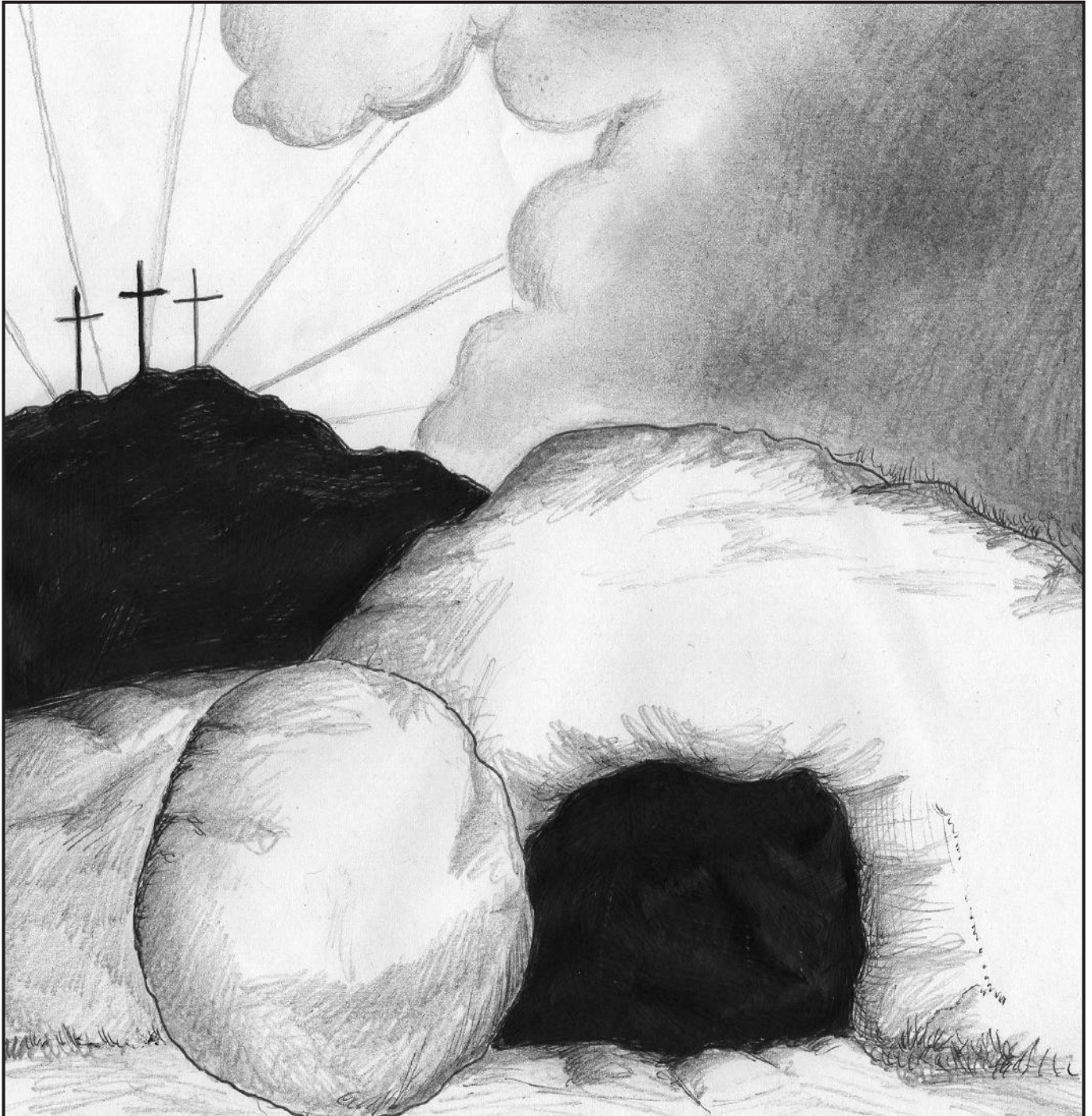


Wesley Memorial *news*

The magazine from Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford | Spring 2017



A living heritage

The Manse, 26 Upland Park Road, Oxford

Dear Friends,

I have been passionate about history ever since I can remember. I have always enjoyed visiting historic buildings, learning about the past, and reading sometimes alarmingly obscure books about people and events of long, long ago. As an exasperating teenager, I pointed out factual mistakes in historical dramas on television, much to my sister's annoyance ('Shut up, you're spoiling the programme!'). It has, therefore, been a delight and a privilege to be minister at Wesley Memorial at a time when we have been exploring our heritage and thinking together about how we can best use it to resource our church life and mission today.

So, what can our heritage do? Well, it can remind us of our roots, and help us to draw on the best of our traditions to nurture life and faith. A few years ago, a disgruntled vicar resigned from the Church of England, complaining that his congregations were like 'the Sealed Knot on Sundays' – a religious version of the people who dress up in period costume to re-enact the battles of the English Civil War. That's not what our heritage is about! We are the product of our history, inevitably so, and we want to learn from the wisdom of the past. We are not so arrogant as to think that we know better than every generation that has walked the Christian way before us. But we aren't committed to historical re-enactment. We want to explore what it means to follow Jesus today, and we want to learn from the examples of the past in order to answer the questions of the present.

Then our heritage can give us stability in a fast-changing world. For the first couple of months of the New Year we linked our Sunday morning sermons around the theme of 'marks of Methodism', looking at some of the characteristics of the Methodist way of being Christian. This was partly intended as a preparation for the musical *Amazing Love!*, but it was also designed to remind us of some of the life-giving elements of our tradition of faith. In uncertain times, politically, socially and ecumenically, it can be easy for us to lose our bearings and to lose our nerve. Without falling into denominational triumphalism, I want to celebrate the gifts that Methodism brings to the whole Church of Christ, and to say that we stand for an approach to Christianity that is authentic, biblical, sane, and effective. We have absolutely no need to apologise for who we are.

Finally, our heritage can give us points of contact with the wider community, with real potential for mission. As I write this, we are moving towards the appointment of a Mission and Heritage Officer, funded by a generous grant from Connexional funds. Our intention for this post is not that the new Officer will discover interesting things about our history (although they may!), or that they will turn Wesley Memorial into a museum (we certainly don't want that!), or even that they'll remind tourists that there's more to Oxford than Harry Potter, and encourage them to see something of Oxford's Methodist heritage. No, our intention is that the new Officer will help us as a church and congregation to find ways of telling the story of our faith as a living experience of the life-changing, world-transforming, grace-filled work of God today.

And that takes us to the Easter message. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, the Gospel of the Resurrection is rooted in history. To say that Jesus is alive isn't wishful thinking, or a clever way of saying that his influence somehow lives on, although he is long dead. The Resurrection is historical fact. But the fact needs to come to life in present experience, so that we can say: 'I know that my Redeemer lives.' And that knowledge then becomes the bedrock of life, as we seek to make God's new creation real in the world today. There's our living heritage, as the People of God.

Happy Easter!

Yours in Christ,

Martin Wellings.

Editorial

In recent months our Methodist heritage has been much in the air, from a musical presenting the life of John Wesley to the appointment of a heritage officer to explore how the wonderful new spaces provided by the *Open Doors* project might be used to tell our story. It was natural then to take heritage as our theme for this issue of *Wesley Memorial News*.

Yet to the editorial team, heritage did not speak of something fixed in time; what can seem to belong in the past is actually always alive, evolving into new patterns and shapes as we remember, re-tell, and perhaps question and challenge, the things we have inherited. The articles that follow look back to history but always also

forwards, recognising the creativity and renewal that is a part of every individual life, faith journey and church community.

The Easter story too is both a remembering and an invitation again to be remade, to carry the hope of risen life to others.

After many years on the team, Judith Atkinson, Glenda Lane and Robert Protherough are retiring from the *Wesley Memorial News*. We thank them for all their hard work and wish them well. We welcome Kate Dobson and Jonathan Wood who are joining the team.

Happy Easter from the *Wesley Memorial News* team.

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Helping writers write right

As the newest member of the *Wesley Memorial News* team, I've been asked to write something to say hello. So: Hi there.

I'm delighted to have been asked to join the team and help out with some of the proofreading. It was an easy thing to say yes to, as I've been impressed as a reader. The newsletter is far superior to many. It's full of original, thoughtful content that prompts reflection. There's a clear theme to each issue and good design. It definitely adds something extra to the worship, praise and fellowship found at Wesley Memorial. And now I'll get a sneak early read.

And me? I came to Oxford in 2002 for my first proper job after, well, quite a few years as a student in Cambridge and then Leeds. I quickly found Wesley Memorial was the place for me, enjoying the quality of music, sermons and a congregation full of people giving a great deal to the church. Though never making church every week, and still forgetting far too many people's names in between (for which I really am sorry), I have

felt welcomed and at home.

In the years since, there has been marriage (Justinia), two kids (Eloise and Aidan), buying a house, jobs in London – life has a funny habit of continuing to move on. After a recent job move, I'm now putting together

a press office at one of the most exciting projects in UK science – a giant new biomedical research institute next to St Pancras called the Francis Crick Institute.

What else? I still check Heart of Midlothian's results, having been born in Edinburgh. And most of my family has strong Methodist roots on both sides of the Pennines. A living heritage? I don't know. It's certainly a full life and can leave me feeling my age!

Jonathan Wood



Do not lose heart. We are Methodists!

Mary Yee writes about her experience of the American Methodist tradition, a Wesleyan understanding of grace and finding a response to the political upheavals in the USA.

“Well, what do I know about that?” That was my first thought when asked to write about the American Methodist tradition.

The fact is that I was baptized in the Episcopal Church, my husband in the German Baptist Church and the two of us, after we married, chose to join a Presbyterian congregation in our Washington DC neighborhood. After we moved to Minnesota in 1999, we set about finding a new church home. We visited different nearby churches every Sunday and, one day, I suggested that we visit the Methodist church in whose building our son was taking piano lessons. We did, and have now been members at Lake Harriet United Methodist Church for the past 17 years.

We were attracted by a welcoming community and pastors whose sermons we found inspiring. It was only after we became members of a Methodist church that we began to learn something about Methodism.

The Minnesota chapter of the United Methodist Women’s organization offers a week-long school of Christian mission every summer and, one year, one of the study topics being economic globalization, I was asked to be a teacher. I am an economist by profession so the globalization part was easy but I also had to bone up on theology. That was the beginning of a more intensive immersion in the Wesleyan tradition for me.

Social justice

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of Methodism for our family of four is the Wesleyan emphasis on social justice. My children participated in a number of mission trips where they learned about the problems faced by poor communities and undertook activities to help improve conditions in some of those communities. Much to my surprise, as I am entirely lacking in practical skills, my children learned to dig foundations, put up wooden siding and paint houses on their mission trips. As they grew older, they joined my husband and me in lobbying the state legislature on behalf of those whose voices are rarely heard by policymakers and politicians.

In recent years we have visited our legislators and advocated for increased financial support for child care subsidies and affordable housing, and pushed for regulation of the predatory lenders who push vulnerable people into ‘debt traps’. Our daughter, following her college graduation, spent a year as a volunteer at an interfaith organization that advocated for disadvantaged communities with our state government. We have also participated in activities to raise funds for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) which offers assistance in emergency situations all over the world.

God’s grace to people everywhere

Recently, our pastor began a series of sermons on the Methodist understanding of grace. The sermons provided a balm for my bruised spirit after the results of our national election last November left me feeling as though I had been hit by a truck. As our pastor said at the beginning of the first sermon, “With the topsy-turvy storminess of our current political and cultural climate, it’s going to be more important than ever for us to be grounded in grace this year.” I remember nodding when I heard this. In speaking of John Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace, the pastor told us, “We don’t need to understand or know the concept of God for God to be present and working in our lives. God takes initiative with every human being.” Wesley spoke of “the outreach of God’s grace to people everywhere” and “this supernatural assistance is available to Christian and non-Christian alike.”

Well, that last statement made me sit up a little straighter. My son and I had just participated in a demonstration against the travel ban issued against citizens of seven primarily Muslim countries. We believed the ban was not based on evidence of security risks, was arbitrary in its proposed application and caused havoc in the lives of refugees and others who had previously been granted permission to enter the US. To hear about Wesley’s openness to the idea of God reaching out to all of God’s people made me feel I belonged to the ‘right’ church.

One of the things I found most dispiriting about what has transpired in our nation is the fact that so many self-proclaimed Christians had voted for someone who had made no attempt to hide his apparent racism, sexism, disdain for disabled people and others he regarded as ‘losers’. I found myself wondering: if those voters were Christians, could I still call myself a Christian? Frederick Douglass, the former slave who became an abolitionist wrote that, “Between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference.” This statement encapsulated my feelings.

Wesley spoke of justifying grace as the grace that “restores us to the relationship with God for which we were created”. Hearing this called me back to the understanding that my being a Christian has to do with my relationship with God. It is from that relationship that my actions should flow. My task is not to decide how ‘Christian’ other people are but to live out my Christian faith as a voter, as a citizen and as a neighbour.

Balm to a bruised spirit

The pastor preached: “In the meantime, do not lose heart. We are Methodists! We will keep asking one another important

questions, like ‘How is it with your spirit?’, ‘Where are you experiencing God?’. And, we’ll also keep inviting you to put your faith into action because our faith calls us to care for the least, the lost and the left out.” As I said, the words of her sermons on grace were a balm to my bruised spirit.

In his sermon *On God’s Vineyard*, Wesley says that just as a person is born and they grow larger and stronger with age, in baptism, there is a spiritual birth, from which we gradually increase in stature and strength over time. He said, “When God has enabled you to love Him with all your heart and all your soul, think not of resting there.” That is apparently how Wesley understood the scripture passage that Paul wrote to the Philippians: “Go forward, until your actions reflect, more and more, the love of God.”

Our pastor asked, “Which Christianity are we part of?” Our family has to continue to wrestle with this question as we face the upheaval in our communal life. How good it is to be guided by the Wesleyan understandings of grace at this difficult time.

Mary Yee

A letter out of the blue

The most helpful image of Jesus’s experience on the cross for me, is that of God’s will cutting across the big ‘I’ (what I want) and choosing God’s way rather than mine.

My most vivid experience of this was when I was deciding what to do after university. I was studying music but without knowing what to do after it. I had a scholarship for a postgraduate course at the Royal Academy of Music, but was still in doubt whether to take it up at Easter in my last year. Then I came across a quote from someone that he had ‘no preconception of what he would or would not do’, and therefore was open to the guidance of the Almighty.

I realised that I had a couple of major preconceptions: that I wanted to be a performer, and that I did not want to be a teacher! So I felt I should accept not being a performer and be ready to be a teacher, whichever seemed right. It

felt scary taking my hands off the reins of my life, but I was peaceful, trusting I would be shown.

Then a few weeks later, I received a letter out of the blue from a man who had led a student delegation to Egypt which I had been on. He invited me to work with him to develop student exchanges as part of a healing process with Arab and Muslim communities. It felt like a gift from God. It was not something I had engineered for myself.

Though I didn’t decide immediately, it made me feel that if I accepted the scholarship I would be putting my feet on a wrong path. I spent part of that summer hosting a delegation of Egyptian student leaders on a return visit to Britain, and by the end of the summer had decided that this was what I was meant to do with my life. Though it has evolved, that calling has remained constant with me ever since.

Peter Riddell

Zimbabwe Methodism

Zimbabwe Methodism is a living heritage that constitutes Christian practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills handed down from generation to generation since its establishment in Zimbabwe in the year 1891. This was a century after the founder John Wesley died in 1791. We consider the Zimbabwe Methodism to be a living heritage which has provided us with a sense of identity and relationships with other members in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world, shaping our quality of life as Christians.

The living heritage of Zimbabwe Methodism is manifested in the following: education, music, classes, weekly cell/home prayer groups, orphanage, annual conventions, annual conferences, evangelism, bible schools, revival ceremonies, all night prayers, fundraising, pastoralship, the organisations: Ruwadzano/Manyano, men's Christian union, senior and junior boys'

Christian union, Tsungari (junior girls) and girls Christian union.

The word of God in Galatians 3:28 says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Therefore, on our arrival in Oxford, we looked for a Methodist Church so that we could continue to share the Zimbabwe Methodism here in the UK as members of the church and the Women's Organisation (Ruwadzano/Manyano). Note, that Ruwadzano/Manyano is the most potent evangelistic agency of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

Highlights:

At the time of putting this together, the UK Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) Fellowship is gathering and supporting the family of the late Rev Chibi, retired Minister and former MCZ Conference secretary – an example of many reasons



Oxford Branch Chaplain's visit January 2017.

why we continue to gather together as Zimbabwean Methodists. We may not have known him personally, but we believe that he is one of our wider family and as such we join the family in their grief and celebration of his life.

"This is one of the tenets of ubuntu/hunhuism which when this cultural belief meets the Gospel teachings for 'all', I am able to say 'I am proud to be a Methodist'."

Wednesday evening is a 'cell class meeting day' which we call "Kokorodzano". Classes are also held on Sunday mornings 1 hour before the main service. Each quarter, lessons for study are put together for bible study



2016 Conference: Yanfield.

and discussion. Again, the spirit of oneness and belonging is built through these study groups and pastoral support is strengthened.

We are most grateful to Wesley Memorial Church for continuing to open the doors for us to meet. We can continue to uphold our traditional ways of worship

and fostering the “Methodism Heritage”, which we are also passing on to our children and grandchildren and we give Glory to God for that!

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe is celebrating 40 years of autonomy, 17th – 20th August at the National Sports Stadium in Harare. A large number of

people will be travelling to Zim for this event.

“A Century of Methodism in Zimbabwe: 1891 to 1991” by Cnaan Sodindo Banana is a useful resource to know more about Zimbabwe Methodism!

Abigail Tevera and Grace Samkange

Oxford Community Church

While at University here in Oxford, I had one close friend who was from a small town in Iowa. Even months into his stay, John would walk down the street marvelling at almost every building he saw. “You have to realise”, he would say, “where I come from, the oldest building is less than a century old!”

Being part of a church tradition that dates back to the '70s, it can be tempting to feel that way when surrounded by established churches with centuries of history in their very fabric. However, in the diverse economy of God, a “younger” history can also be a positive state of affairs.

Born out of the charismatic revival of the '60s and '70s, Oxford Community Church began with the goal of imitating the early Church of the book of Acts. It has sometimes been said that ‘The Acts of the Apostles’ might more accurately be titled ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit’. The accounts of Pentecost, of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, and of Saul’s rebuke and commission on the Damascus Road present a picture of a group of Jesus-followers having all their expectations and preconceptions blown away as they discovered a new life in the power of the Spirit and a call to renew not only their nation but the whole world. This experience of discovery is the most significant tradition guiding us today. We express this in a pattern of living and meeting in which we expect that “in God there is more!” Every gap we see between our current experience and the glorious Kingdom of God that Jesus taught about can at least be narrowed in our lifetime as God is at work by His Spirit to fulfil His mission to the world. That hope sustains us daily.

Another tradition of the early Church which we treasure is the community life expressed in Acts 2, in which there was a “commonality”, a “one-anothering” that was more akin to a close-knit family than a group meeting. Again, our roots are in “house churches” and some of the founders of OCC had previously lived in community in a shared property in Witney (now a care home) called Merryfield House. This heritage is most often expressed today in the practices of home-based hospitality, providing lodging for those in need and working hard to develop radical transparency in relationships. We often speak about being family together: one family within the great family-of-families that is the worldwide Christian community.

One advantage of a physical edifice is its constant reminder of heritage. Our heritage is less physically tangible, and so greater effort is required to convey it to new members of the church community. For us, this has meant adopting what might in corporate-speak be called a “vision statement”, an ever-present phrase that reminds us of who we are and the common purpose we share. Although there have been many iterations over the years, they have all been variants on perhaps the most succinct summary of our corporate heritage: “a family on mission”. As we remember this, we remember the early Church from which all churches have stemmed, the desire of God throughout human history to create loving community, and the Great Commission with which we have all been left until Jesus returns.

Al McNicoll, Assistant Pastor, Oxford Community Church

Celebrating our Easter Heritage

Most families and communities tell stories. Stories of past adventures. Stories of triumphs and stories of disasters. Stories to raise a smile. Stories to evoke a nod of recognition. Stories to remember and to honour people who have mattered to us. Those stories carry our corporate memory, and they affirm and shape our identity. Given time, most of us will be able to recall the characteristic stories we shared as children, and the ones we've told in our turn with our closest friends. Stories matter. And stories matter too within a community of faith. In the Bible, God's People were encouraged to pass on to future generations the stories of calling and promise, rebellion and rescue. As the Psalmist says: 'We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.' (Psalm 78.4) The rhythm of the Jewish year provided opportunities to do just that, with festivals focussing on the great events in the nation's history.

The Church calendar is structured in the same way, as we work through the year from Advent to Pentecost. And the weekly pattern of Sunday worship also serves to remind us of the event at the heart of our faith: the Resurrection of Jesus, celebrated of course at Easter, but also brought consciously to mind on the first day of every week (see Matthew 28.1). Every Sunday is the 'Day of Resurrection', when we proclaim our Easter faith. On Easter Day we light our new Easter Candle for the first time, but then we'll continue to use it every week for the rest of the year. In story, sign, and song we

remember that we are 'Easter People', a true community of the Resurrection.

Heritage can be a rich source of encouragement and inspiration for us in all sorts of ways. The example of the past can inform the present. Stories of courage, commitment and generosity can move us to action today. A sense of being heirs to a great tradition can stir us to play our part in handing on our heritage to those who will come after us. In all these senses, heritage 'comes alive' and makes a difference. But the Easter story isn't just about reflecting on the past for the sake of the present and the future. Easter is much more than a founding myth for the Christian Church, more than a well-rehearsed tale of long, long ago. Easter affirms that Jesus is alive today, and that he can be encountered in the world we know. Easter affirms that the love of God won a decisive victory through the Cross and Resurrection, and that the victory of life and love is still real and effective today. As Brian Wren puts it:

*'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;
His cross stands empty to the sky;
Let streets & homes with praises ring;
His love in death shall never die.'*
(Hymns & Psalms 190).

Or, making this universal truth powerfully personal, in the words of an older hymn:-

*'I know that my Redeemer lives -
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.'*
(Hymns & Psalms 196).

And thus heritage comes to life for us. *Martin Wellings.*

The chairs

Growing up in our family of five, money was short, so my mum used to supplement my dad's wages by sewing curtains at home. Our former living room became her sewing space, with the dining kitchen at the heart of our home.

Every day we feasted on homemade food and American TV imports. After lunch, with no video player or (of course) internet, it was either an afternoon western (my mum's choice on a Saturday) or weekday American imports, from *Falcon Crest* to *Knight Rider*.

Being the youngest came with special privileges, like extra time on the one comfy lounge chair, feeling all cosy under a homemade quilt in winter, with nothing much to worry about – as it should be when you are a child. Hindsight is a wonderful thing; despite my rose-tinted glasses, I recognise that my childhood was different from the one I would have given my children: too much overprotection, too many hours indoors watching TV, not enough responsibilities. But we were never short of the magic ingredient: love.

One summer, you could tell one of the dining chairs was on its way out. They got termites, so the wood was falling apart. My parents were working-class folks: no holidays abroad, no unnecessary expenses, and my sister was the first one in our family to go to university. So it should come as no surprise that they had no savings or contingency plans to buy a new furniture set, and were also wary of bank loans or overdrafts.

What to do about the chairs? My mum bought a spray and used it on the chairs. It was supposed to stop the unwanted invasion (but only temporarily halted it). Then we waited and adapted to the new circumstances: avoided using the most damaged chair, sat carefully on the other chairs. A few years later, we inherited second-hand furniture from close relatives, and with that, we said goodbye to the chairs – except that as a symbol, they live in my memory. From those beginnings came a horror of living beyond

my means. It planted the seed of buying reduced food and supermarket own brands, getting bargain toys in charity shops, wearing my coat until it falls apart and owning just three pairs of shoes: one for winter, one for summer, one for the rest of the year. Saving up to purchase things is still an impossible dream, but one I always strive towards. And having married someone brought up in a middle-class household, whose views are no less entrenched than mine, money, unsurprisingly, is a sticking point in arguments.

Rightly or wrongly, our upbringing has shaped who we are and we must acknowledge this; because our paths have converged but our pasts will never disappear from sight; because history is well and truly alive in everything we do; because erasing the past would be an impossible task, so we can only aim for a clear mind, open heart and flexible compass that will allow us to negotiate our present and build our future every day.

Eva Oliver

Being Christians together

I had a fairly non-denominational upbringing: my family attended an evangelical church while in Canada, and when we went to China for five years, it was with a Mennonite aid organisation. While in China, we mainly attended government-approved churches, but were also involved with the missionary community (which was mostly Americans from the charismatic tradition).

My parents always emphasised the importance of the Bible, but encouraging me to read (age-appropriate) Christian literature. I grew up with a sense that it didn't really matter what denominational label one fell under, but rather, whether one took the Bible seriously and read it for oneself – a Protestant perspective, I suppose, but one allowing for the value of diverse Christian traditions. So when Antony and I started looking for a church in Oxford, we visited quite a variety – Anglican both high and low, Catholic – until we found Wesley Memorial.

I met Antony when I was still in school, and started going with him to a Russian Orthodox Church for special services. I had never experienced liturgy, and I loved the way it drew together all the different parts of scripture. I think that in some ways I got more out of it than Antony, because he had never been to Sunday school or been taught about the Bible, so what for me were meaningful allusions, he simply didn't hear. While we both liked liturgy (at least occasionally), we agreed that Bible teaching was also important (of course, no reason why these have to

be exclusive; this was just our experience at the time).

When we got married, we were married twice: both in the Orthodox Church and by my

grandpa, an Alliance minister. We aren't quite energetic enough to keep that up for regular Sunday services, so when we moved to Oxford we were looking for a tradition that took the importance of the Bible seriously, and also didn't eschew liturgy.

Wesley Memorial has been such a blessing to us; it is a place where we both feel at home. We love the variety of church services, and the fact that members come in all ages and walks of life. One thing in particular that I have learned is the importance of speaking about social justice issues within the church (and I gather that this is a particularly strong tradition in the Methodist church). The churches I have gone to have tended to focus on personal character, which while vital is also not enough. While we don't feel like we have converted or left the traditions that we grew up in, we think that our time at Wesley Memorial has taught us a lot about being a church and about being Christians together.

Elana Kalashnikov



Two thousand years in Oxfordshire: a living history in past and present

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,” is one perspective on time and events which have passed. It acknowledges a chronology that most of us fall back upon to explain our lives in terms of world events and progress. This reminds me of the historian Mary Beard’s comment that until the Romans built roads, complete with milestones measuring the distance to Rome, our European ancestors just didn’t know where they were.

But my own view is that time is three dimensional, and actually we live in a country where the past, present and future are the villages, towns and cities scattered across our landscape.

Kay Mander’s 1946 film survey of 24 square miles of rural Oxfordshire shows in detail the use made of the land for farming and industry, and the social fabric of the towns and villages and how they were managed. This was filmed within two decades of my birth, and yet the living conditions it records are unrecognisable: simple houses, poor sanitation, running water only obtainable from the pump in the street, limited variety of diet.

1,867 years earlier, an average town in an average landscape 1,369 miles away on the Bay of Naples was destroyed and preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Fortunately our knowledge of living conditions in Roman Pompeii are as complete as of 1946 rural Oxfordshire.

We know these townfolk ate broad beans, olives, peaches, dates, almonds, sour cherries, crab apples, pears and walnuts, octopus, squid, lobster, prawn, eel, bass, red mullet, dogfish, ray, and a salty fish sauce called garum, similar to Thai fish sauce, peppercorns ... need I go on? And we mustn’t forget the excellent sanitation, engineering, interior decoration and design, entertainment and social offices.

The point is, many of us today have a greater familiarity with the trappings of life in the 1st century Bay of Naples than in

19th century Oxfordshire. OK, I acknowledge the issue of slavery. But as Mary Beard points out, our 2017 slaves live out of sight in South-East Asia making T-shirts for just a few pence.

History is indeed, living. The stories in today’s newspapers have been told many time before as people do not change. We have the same needs, aspirations and failings as our ancestors, and for this reason the plays of Sophocles, Seneca or Shakespeare can seem as fresh and relevant as the day they were written.

Methodism must consider itself within the context of the 2,000 years of Christianity – both the events and their interpretation, through Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The Christian tradition is punctuated by real events and places. Who cannot be moved by the fact that the

apostle St Peter is buried beneath the St Peter’s Basilica, close to the Circus of Nero where he was crucified in 64 AD? I guess the 7 million people who visit St Peter’s each year agree.

Methodism must consider itself within the context of the 2,000 years of Christianity

A new Roman villa was discovered recently not far from Banbury, close to another villa that produced an early Christian font. The Christian residents of this fine house decorated their home with frescoes, mosaic floors and enjoyed excellent bathing facilities and underfloor heating. This fine home was like many hundreds of others in comfortable rural Oxfordshire. And yet in 400 AD Britain withdrew from Europe – although in this case against its will – and the Romans left, taking their administration, engineering skills and currency with them. Within only a few years the pottery kilns on Headington Hill closed, as their trade with continental Europe collapsed. It took over 1,500 years for rural Oxfordshire to reach the standards set by the Romans. Let’s hope this story isn’t repeated.

*Simon Townsend,
Museum Director, Banbury Museum*

What is the Methodist Church's 'L.B.A.C.'?

The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee, a cynic might say, exists to defend Methodism from itself. In fact there is only one reason for its existence: it is statutory. In the 1990s the government tightened requirements around the churches' operation of 'Ecclesiastical Exemption' (we'll come to that), so relevant denominations were required to put in place a structure and procedures parallel to those which operate for listed buildings through Local Authorities planning.

When the listing of historic buildings was introduced from the 1940s, places of worship represented a significant part of the total (and a disproportionate number Grade 1 or 2*). The churches then occupied a very different position in British society and were allowed to administer their own systems. This was known as 'Ecclesiastical Exemption'. Gradually, as the system generally became more rigorous, the liberty allowed to churches was also tightened, but by the 1990s much had changed. In a multi-cultural society the churches were not the privileged bodies they had been, moreover although 'ecclesiastical exemption' had generally worked well there had been a number of serious breaches.

Various denominations operate 'ecclesiastical exemption' differently: Anglicans and Catholics, for instance, operate by diocese or area. Some, like Methodism, have a national ('connexional') structure (though the Scottish listing system works differently from England and Wales, and the L.B.A.C. has a different role). The L.B.A.C. was set up in 1994, and a denominational Conservation Officer appointed, who deals with Methodism's 600 or so listed churches.

The L.B.A.C.'s function, put very simply, is to advise the Methodist Church on those listed buildings (also buildings in 'Conservation Areas') which fall under Ecclesiastical Exemption. Essentially (though it's not that simple) this means places of worship, but including other buildings such as halls which form part of the property. Schools, for instance, are not included unless they are integral to a listed place of worship.

The main part of the Committee's work is considering projects – such as Wesley Memorial's *Open Doors* development. These

vary enormously, from major works on highly significant buildings to minor adjustments (maybe a new boiler, or replacing a noticeboard). Many schemes do not come to the Committee, if they are straightforward cases on which the Conservation Officer can make a judgement, though it does see all Grade 1 and 2* cases. They also go out to other consultees, including local planning authorities.

Occasionally there are infringements; mostly due to ignorance when it was not realised permission is needed for something, generally minor. Usually this can be resolved by granting retrospective permission: in more than two decades there have been only a very few cases which have become contentious or gone to appeal.

The other part of its work is more general, keeping Methodism abreast of developments in Listed Buildings statutory policy and practice. The Committee is composed of a range of building professionals, academics, and others who bring an interest or expertise. And the key word is 'Advisory': the Committee does not make the final decisions. That responsibility rests firmly with the Connexion.

The Methodist Church is a mission body: increasingly viewing its heritage as integral to this. Too often old buildings are seen as a hindrance, a millstone – although think about how the railways are now using their historic stations (St. Pancras, King's Cross, Sheffield). The L.B.A.C. is not there to help churches 'get round' the legislation, but tries hard to find ways that they can both fulfil their mission while complying with legal requirements, which is sometimes painful.

Finally, is it working reasonably? Always the L.B.A.C. is conscious that it does its best in sometimes imperfect or difficult situations. People outside not infrequently mistake its purpose (hence this article – which is very broad brush!). But we do our best, if only helping Methodism to fulfil its mission simply in terms of staying legal.

Peter Forsaith, Research Fellow, The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, and member of the L.B.A.C..

Our living heritage

We were honoured that the Vice President of the Methodist Conference, Rachel Lampard, was able to cut the ribbon in church on 15 January and lead our procession into the Hall singing:

*Now we are building our hope for the future,
And we're building our trust in the past,
And we're building our faith in a gospel,
Which speaks out of a love that will last.*

as part of our celebration and dedication of Phases One to Three of our *Open Doors* project.

These words remind us that we are indeed custodians of a living heritage which involves us looking forward and making our premises more welcoming, hospitable and flexible.

For example, our new automatic doors help wheelchair users to move around the premises more independently than before.

At that celebration in January, we were reminded that Church Council set up the



Rachel Lampard, Vice President of the Methodist Conference, cut the ribbon to mark the completion of Phases One to Three.

project in March 2009, the steering group had met on 93 occasions since and we had held 175 fund raising events raising over £61,000. We thanked the congregation and friends for their generosity by giving everyone a celebration mug, and further mugs can be purchased with the purchase price of £8 going to *Open Doors*.

Since 2009, we have also made over 240 applications to external funders for grants and one of these, to the Methodist

Church Connexional Fund for Property, has resulted in a grant offer of £180,000 towards Phase Four (the Heritage Atrium, which will cost £451,000) provided that we raise £100,000 ourselves by the end of March 2017.

We have made a good start with £18,500 raised (see table) since December 2016 with a further £3,000 from *Amazing Love*.

We have been proud to show several external friends and funders our refurbished and extended premises and some of the grants above came as a result of those visits. We are also thrilled with the installation of the *Amazing Love* window in the Hall a few days before the performances.

We now need to raise the rest of the funds to complete the Heritage Atrium to share our living heritage with all who come through our building.

Derek Rawson

Funder	Amount (£)	Comment/date received
Lucy Engineering	2,500	Pledge from the Big Give Christmas Challenge in which we raised over £7,000 in total
Sandra Charitable Trust	5,000	February 2017
Roundton Trust	1,000	January 2017
Ormonde Charitable Trust	1,000	February 2017
Allchurches Trust	7,000	Expect cheque in March 2017
Tanner Trust	2,000	Expect cheque in March 2017
Total	18,500	

The Amazing Love window

Having known and admired his work, John and I approached local artist Vital Peeters about designing this window.

Mel McCulloch had made some sketches which were used for the initial discussion with Vital about possible images that could be incorporated into the design. Through the whole process Vital has come up with original ideas in his designs to represent the concepts we wished to include. The final design was agreed and he was commissioned to make the window. The window is made

using a range of techniques including glass fusing, painted glass and leaded panels to create texture and different forms.

God is at the centre of the window as He is at the centre of our lives. God is represented by a vibrant light, as in the sun, and the light radiates out across the whole window. On one side Jesus is represented in grapes and ears of wheat, with a very subtle cross in the lead lines on this side. Below these symbols the glass is painted representing the scope of creation from the very small to the very large. On the other side the Holy Spirit is represented by a dove. Below this is painted glass representing the Living Water. There is an overarching Rainbow as a symbol of God's covenant with the earth.

The window was installed during the week we were rehearsing and performing *Amazing Love!* and it's a symbol of the love we all feel for this church family and community and the love we all receive when we are together.

Mary and John Lines



Mel McCulloch, Derek Rawson and John and Mary Lines very proudly showed off the window when the Oxford Mail came to visit.
Photo courtesy Jon Lewis/Oxford Mail.



The Bradbury room above the hall, with the new window in place.
Photo courtesy Jon Lewis/Oxford Mail.

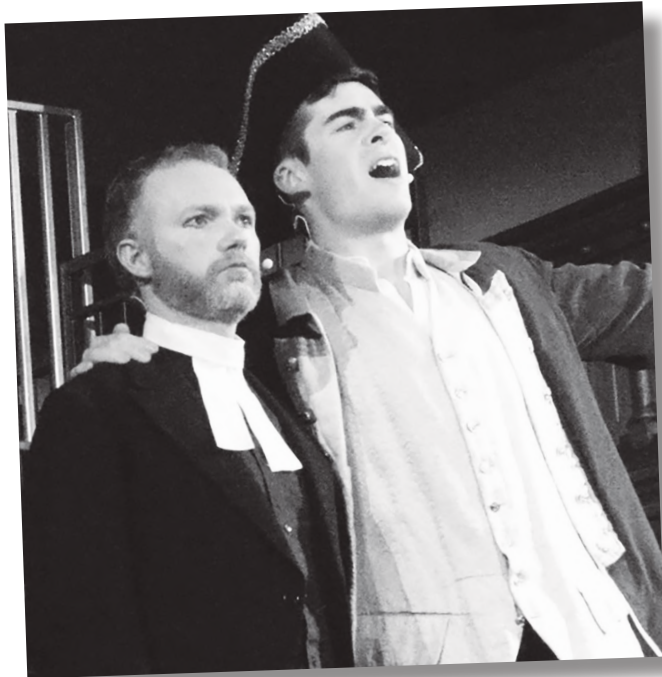


The new Amazing Love window, seen from the Bradbury Room.
Photo courtesy Jon Lewis/Oxford Mail.

That's a musical!

I wish I had a cooler way to start this story, but the idea to write *Amazing Love!* came to me as I was writing my undergraduate dissertation in early 2015.

I ended up doing some background reading about John and Charles Wesley's voyage across the ocean to the colony of Georgia, where they hoped to work as priests in the New World.



Colonel Oglethorpe, played by the composer himself, Jack Godfrey, setting out to John Wesley (Tom Ibbotson) how to "give the people what they want".

When a terrible storm broke out, John Wesley subsequently described his amazement at a group of Moravian missionaries on the boat, who calmly began to sing together, despite the panic all around. As soon as I read this, I thought, "that's a musical".

Further, slightly less academic research persuaded me that the Wesley brothers' story was practically made for a theatrical telling. The devout father figure of Samuel Wesley and his long-suffering wife Susanna instantly brought to mind Tevye and Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof*, whilst the political ambition of James Oglethorpe reminded me of the wizard in *Wicked*.

But more than anything, *Amazing Love!* is an attempt to show that John and Charles Wesley were real people, with real hopes and real fears. Their own personal struggles with faith, and at times with each other, are a vital part of the story of Methodism, and I think also why their lives still resonate with Christians around the world to this day.

Finally, I would like to say a massive 'Thank you' to everyone at Wesley Memorial Church who has worked so hard to turn my crazy idea into a reality.

Jack Godfrey

Article republished from the programme for *Amazing Love!*

Some comments from the audience straight after the show:

"An absolute triumph!"

"A brilliant performance, so exciting to watch!"

"A very moving performance. It was a privilege to experience it!"

"Jack was brilliant!"

"Very funny! A wonderful show!"

"Flaming performance!! Terrific!!"

"What a great stage set. Only Wesley Mem would go to such trouble!"

"Loved the songs!"

"Fantastic energy from the cast!"

"Tom – what an amazing voice!"

"My favourite was the horse!"

"My favourite was the storm!"

"Sophy's song was my favourite!"

"Clare and Huw were perfect for the parts of Susanna and Samuel."

"A marvellous show. Well worth travelling to see!"

"Charles and John complemented each other so well!"

"Great show tonight... continuing a great tradition in this place. Well done to all cast, production team, musicians, etc."



The youngest cast members: (from left to right) Laura Ibbotson, Alice Mitchell, Rowan Mitchell and Jasper Mitchell.

What can we say about *Amazing Love!* the musical?

Direction, staging, lighting, costumes, singing, acting, organisation – all were absolutely splendid. And all arose out of Jack’s ‘crazy idea’. His attempt to show that the Wesleys were ‘real people’ succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Songs, characters, scenes and jokes flowed from his pen, telling the story.

And all was true to life. Samuel Wesley really did see himself as a leading poet; John, as we know, upset the establishment in Oxford more than once, and was completely clueless with romance; Charles wrote hymns even more prolifically than Jack

writes songs; and Colonel, later General, Oglethorpe governed the new colony of Georgia according to his ‘plan’. We travelled from Epworth to Oxford, across the Atlantic on a very realistic voyage to Georgia, and back to London with the bitter taste of failure, before finding the way to Aldersgate Street, and the immensely moving final scene.

The great good news is that 400 people came ‘willingly to a society’ in New Inn Hall Street and went home with their hearts stirred by the assurance that this Amazing Love is still for all!

Kate Dobson

The story in pictures:

Thanks to Alan Dobson for the photographs and to all the cast, crew and helpers for the two fantastic shows on 18 and 19 February.



The show opens with Samuel Wesley (Huw Morgan) telling young John and Charles (Rowan and Jasper Mitchell) the story of the Epworth fire.



While in America, John begins a disastrous relationship with Miss Sophy Hopkey (Livi Ridley) and later flees back to England.



Aboard ship and sailing to the New World, John and his brother Charles (Simeon Mitchell) record events in their journals.



After John’s heart is touched by God in Aldersgate, the brothers and the ensemble close the show, singing of God’s amazing love.

Telling our story: Wesley Memorial's Mission and Heritage project

Our heritage is not our history.

*Our heritage is what we learn and take forward
from our history.*

Our faith is not in the past.

*Our faith is in the living power of Jesus Christ and
the present reality of God's kingdom.*

*This is the heritage of good news which is now ours
to celebrate and pass on.*

Amazing Love! was the best possible start to our Mission and Heritage project. It was about our Methodist history, but had a vital timeless message: that it's God that matters, and not our endless work and guilt. God is with us, as we sang with the storm raging about us. Secondly, with its great tunes and sense of humour, *Amazing Love!* has a popular appeal far beyond those who are already Methodists. And finally it was an effort of the whole Wesley Memorial community – so many different skills brought together to produce a play so much more than the sum of its parts. To God be the glory!



We have a story to tell. We have our own experiences, varied as they are, of the love of Jesus. It would be good to share that story, and we are in a great place to do so:

- Thousands of people, especially young people, come in through our Open Doors to use our premises, for events ranging from Rainbow House to salsa dancing. Could we catch their attention?
- Millions of tourists visit Oxford, and some stop to take photos of our spire – and sometimes of the messages we put outside, like the one on the EU referendum. Could we tempt them in?
- Methodists come to Oxford – can we engage with them?

We don't want to ram a message intemperately home. Rather, we want to intrigue and entice, to start conversations and relationships. One way to do that is to tell stories of how the

love of Jesus has been reflected in the lives of Methodists – Methodists extraordinary and Methodists ordinary. We are uniquely placed to do that in Oxford because Methodism was born here, with both Wesley brothers. As Church Council said, nobody else could have such a project. Just along New Inn Hall Street is a plaque on the first Methodist meeting house. And then two centuries of Methodist experience up to the present. Our heritage booklet (on the church website if you haven't seen it) identified themes that run through our history – worship, global outreach, education, science, music, social service.

There is so much to tell – not just in Oxford, but from the history of our families. To take an example, Grace Samkange's grandfather, Thompson Samkange, was one of the first Zimbabwean Methodist ministers, ordained in 1936. Her grandmother, also called Grace, was a great leader of the Methodist Ruwadzano women's movement which won many converts: "On Good Friday, the Ruwadzano bands came in from all the outstations, marching to their drums".

Church Council has agreed that mission and heritage should be a main focus for Wesley Memorial over the next few years. Central Methodism is fully funding a Mission and Heritage Officer, not to do all the work themselves, but to engage and enthuse us in the congregation to carry forward our mission and heritage project. By the time you read this, we should have appointed somebody and the project should be rolling forward.

18 February 2018 is the 200th anniversary of the first Methodist chapel built on our site. It was highly controversial – the Rector of Lincoln College tried to get it stopped; the family of the man who sold us the land argued that he was insane. So we should ask ourselves: how can we use this anniversary as an opportunity, not (just) for history, but for mission?

Paul Spray

Obituary — Margaret Mary Protherough

1928 – 2017

Margaret Protherough, née Feeney, was born in Rochdale in 1928. Educated at Rochdale High School for Girls, in 1947 Margaret was awarded a place at St Hugh's College, Oxford, to read German. She explained that this was a pragmatic decision, taken during her schooldays, just in case Germany won the war. Through Wesley Memorial and the John Wesley Society, Margaret met Robert, and they married in 1951. Working life took them first to Retford, and then to Nottingham, to Birmingham and finally to Hull, where they lived for forty years before returning to Oxford in 2012. Margaret was a highly organised and capable manager, running the household, raising two sons, Hugh and Mark, continuing with teaching and translation work, and typing Robert's articles and books. Her outgoing and cheerful personality brought long-standing friendships wherever she lived. By the time Margaret came back to Wesley Memorial, she was already

suffering from the onset of Alzheimer's disease. This did not impede her friendliness, and the warm welcome she gave to visitors and newcomers to the church made a lasting impact. Increasing frailty eventually made it necessary for Margaret to move to St Andrew's Home, and she died there peacefully on 19 February 2017.

Martin Wellings

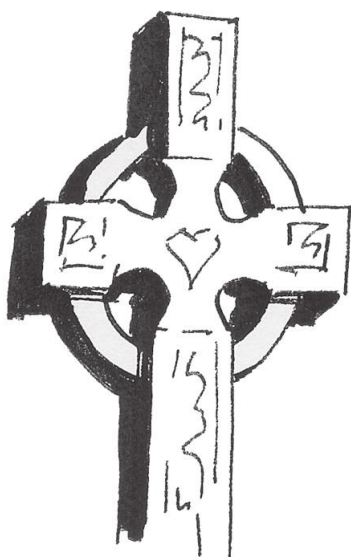


The last enemy

Last issue's very honest articles about death carried two most moving contributions. St Francis is said to have talked of 'sister death'. But St Paul spoke of death as 'the last enemy'. For Paul, evil (Sin with a capital S) and death went together. They were the work, as John puts it in *Revelation*, of 'the Destroyer'. And for both John and Paul the point was that evil and death have been overcome. 'Death has lost its sting', says Paul. Or as a modern writer puts it: in the resurrection of Jesus entropy was reversed.

Both my parents lived to 102, so I suppose I may have similar genes. But it's not because my death may not be imminent (perhaps!), that I don't bother about it. It's because I pray constantly 'your kingdom come on earth'. So my commitment is to let all that I am be used to that end. I hope that's how I

shall live until death. That involves 'being' as much as 'doing', so I trust I can still continue to 'be', when I am no longer able to do anything.



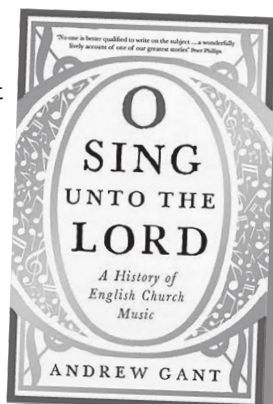
Since 2003 when NT Wright published *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, the evidence has forced me to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. So I now take it as inevitable, as St Paul says, that 'we shall rise too'. And therefore we must start living now, Paul says, as if we were already resurrected people. For me that's quite enough. I am happy to leave the rest in God's hands. 'Preparation' for death simply means getting my things ready for those who have to sort them afterwards!

Leslie Marsh

An enjoyable survey of English church music

O Sing unto the Lord: A History of English Church Music – Andrew Gant, Profile Books, 2015

According to conductor Peter Phillips, this book on English church music is a ‘wonderfully lively account of one of our greatest stories.’ Andrew Gant leads us from plainsong to polyphony, from Reformation to Restoration, from the Enlightenment to the 20th century, not forgetting the Wesleys and Methodism.



This may not be a book to read systematically from beginning to end, but every chapter offers some fascinating history, amusing anecdote, or interesting insight. Folksong, church choirs, west gallery music, psalm singing, literature and social history all fill out the author’s very readable and enthusiastic account. Even Graham Kendrick has a brief appearance!

An earlier chapter recounts that John Wesley went to St Paul’s where the anthem was *Out of the depth have I called*. Later the same day he went “to a meeting in Aldersgate Street” with the result that we know so well. In the author’s opinion, “Monarchs apart, Isaac Watts and the Wesleys are the most important people in this story who were not themselves musicians.”

Needless to say, our church music heritage is so much more than one vital part, and we are invited to cherish it all in this comprehensive and enjoyable survey.

Kate Dobson

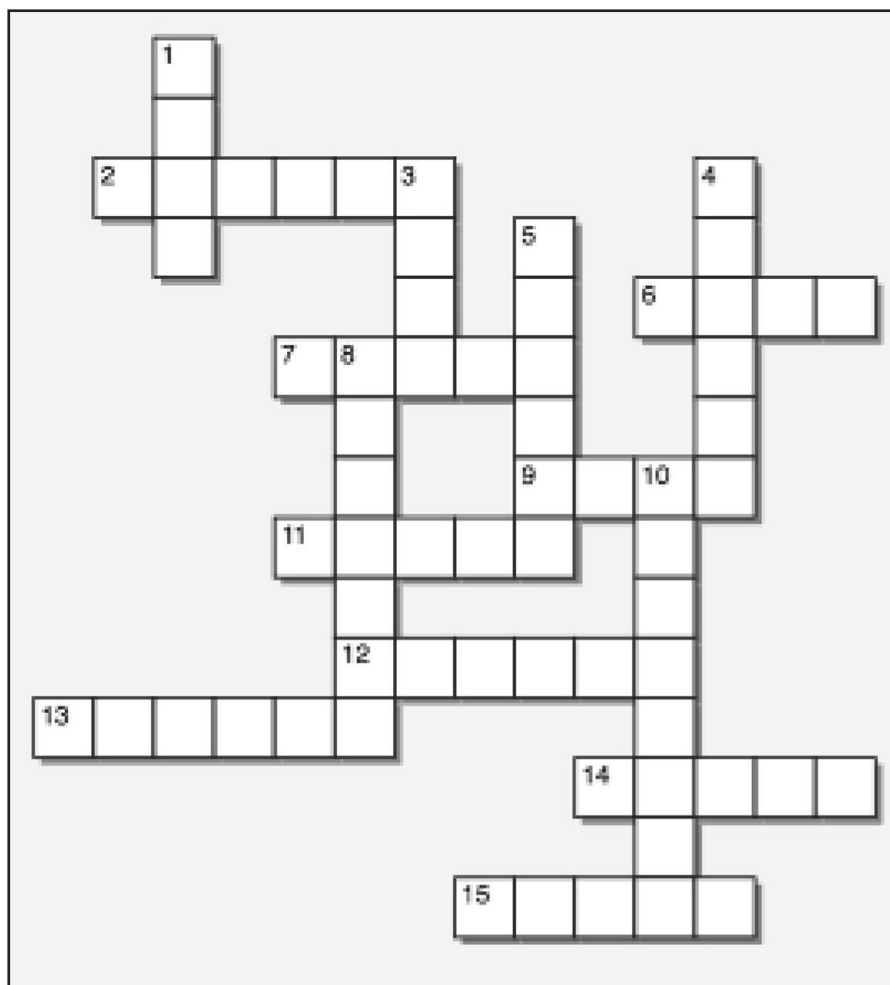
Easter puzzle

Across

2. Two friends met Jesus on the way home to
6. Easter flower
7. His accent gave him away, in the High Priest’s courtyard
9. An Easter treat
11. Roman soldiers forced him to carry the cross
12. A welcome season
13. Governor of Judaea 26-26 AD
14. Did angels move this from the tomb?
15. He could not keep the 30 pieces of silver

Down

1. Traditional meat for Passover meal
3. You are the ---- of the earth
4. Easter cards often picture these
5. Mary met Jesus here but did not know Him
8. This happened at 12 o’clock on Good Friday.
10. Where three crosses were erected.





Heard it on the grapevine...

Births:

Edmund John Blainey, 1 March 2017

Baptisms:

Cavell Alfred Oswald De Souza George, 19 February 2017

Deaths:

Margaret Mary Protherough, 19 February 2017

New Members:

Antony and Elana Kalashnikov

David Phillips, from St Paul's Methodist Church, Aberystwyth

Transferred to other churches:

Simon and Amy Pillinger, to St Francis LEP, Banbury (Banbury Circuit)

Grace Riddell, to Magdalen Road Church, Oxford

JWS pudding party

It is slightly embarrassing to admit that, for me, the pudding party is one of the highlights of the Church Year. I am sure there are much more worthy and holy events I should appreciate more and yet still the pudding party stands out.

I love the joyful coming together of Church as family, all ages equally able to enjoy and partake; I love the frugal start as we share a very simple meal of soup, chatting and anticipating. I love the queuing knowing the whole point is to try just a spoonful of as many puds as you can. I love the glorious sight of tables straining with the weight of multitudes of special desserts, and I love the anonymity of the puddings – who made which? When the chefs are finally revealed there are always roars of approval and appreciation.

This year I didn't manage to taste any of the winning entry, Tom's white chocolate truffle cake, (though presentation-wise I could see it stood apart as particularly amazing!) as it had been scooped by the time I went back for my second round. I really enjoyed Dulcie's lemon pudding, Malcolm's favourite was Wendy's almond damson pudding and my little Jim loved.... the soup!



Wordsearch

Can you find 10 words that come in the story of St Paul?
The first one is done for you – St Paul's home town.

B	A	T	A	R	S	U	S
S	L	X	T	L	P	U	A
S	T	I	G	H	C	O	U
H	C	R	N	S	G	F	L
I	S	R	A	D	E	I	E
P	V	M	N	I	O	A	L
W	A	T	E	N	T	S	B
D	E	L	I	T	N	E	G

So roll on next year. The great challenge is, is there anyone who can compete with Tom for first place? Tom has won multiple times and we've got only just under a year to come up with something... or we could just relax and look forward to another great concoction from the Ibbotson household with just one proviso, can you make it bigger next year please Tom?!

Tom's winning entry.



Mel McCulloch

Dates for the diary

Maundy Thursday	7.30pm	United service at New Road Baptist Church
Good Friday	10.45am	United service at St Columba's URC
Easter Sunday	10.30am	Easter morning worship
Friday 21 April	10am-2pm	Junior Church Easter Activity Day
Sunday 7 May	after morning service	Church AGM
Saturday 13 May		Big Day Out at Dorchester
14-20 May		Christian Aid week
Saturday 20 May		Christian Aid Street Market
Sunday 21 May	10.30am	United Morning Service at St Michael at the North Gate
Tuesday 23 May	5pm	John Wesley Lecture at Lincoln College
Sunday 23 July	6.30pm	Circuit Service at Rose Hill
Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 July		Wesley Memorial Lectures, given by Lord Griffiths
Monday 7 August		Starfire UMC Choir at Wesley Memorial
Tuesday 29 August to Friday 1 September		Junior Church Holiday Club

Wesley Memorial Church

New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Minister: *The Revd Dr Martin Wellings*

Children, families' & outreach worker: *Mel McCulloch*
Church Manager: *Nikos Paplomatas*

Services: Sunday mornings 10.30am
monthly Sunday evenings 6.30pm
Wednesdays 12.30pm

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable material for publication are always welcome. Please pass them to the editorial team by hand or by email, stating if you are unwilling for them to appear on the church website. Articles may be edited. Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of Wesley Memorial or the Methodist Church as a whole.

Deadline for the next issue

9 June 2017

WESLEY MEMBRAIN

