

# Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Summer 2023

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*Monet's garden at Giverny*

*May 2023*

***Special places, holy spaces***

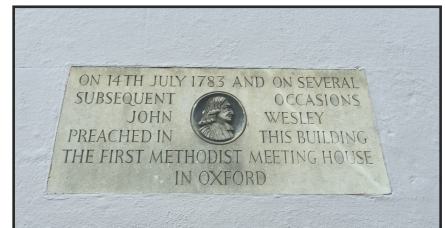
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Dear friends,

This will be my last contribution to the Wesley Memorial magazine. It is timely that our theme for this edition is 'Special Places, Holy Spaces', not least because I am moving from Oxford to a new place in which I shall live, work and discover. In fact I'll be working across two circuits for a year or so, and so I will have two new places to get to know.

Special places and holy spaces hold significant meaning and value for people around the world. Through cultures and religions people have established locations that are often considered sacred or imbued with spiritual energy, and they serve as gathering points for worship, meditation, and reflection. For people of faith, places of worship are dedicated to religious practices and rituals. Examples include churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and gurdwaras. Often our forebears have held such places as holy for many decades, centuries, even millennia. You may have churches you grew up in, or spent time in during former days, perhaps whilst studying or working in other parts of the country or world. I know that for many, Wesley Memorial has become one such special place, a holy space.

Many of you will have taken time to visit pilgrimage sites. Destinations that hold religious or spiritual significance. Even in our Methodist tradition, special places are visited around the UK. For some this includes our own Wesley Memorial. We welcome visitors from all over the world, who come to celebrate the life and ministry of the early Methodists here in Oxford.



Perhaps, like me, you know pilgrimage sites that are natural landscapes like mountains, rivers, or caves. Our family makes an annual trip to a small river in Warwickshire where we scattered the ashes of my mother and father. It is a lovely place. We visited it often as kids with our parents. We paddled, made dams and fished in the waters, and had picnics on the banks. It has taken on even more significance for us as a family in recent times, and our youngest family members know how important it is. I am sure they will visit with their families in the future, when I too, am long gone.

Some of you have been to Iona off the NW of Scotland, an island community founded in the footsteps of St. Columba. It has been described as the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland. St Columba and 12 companions arrived from Ireland in AD 563. The monastery they founded was one of the most important and influential in the British Isles. It sent missionaries to northern Britain to convert people to Christianity. In common with similar places, it is described as a 'thin place', one where the veil between earth and heaven is close at hand.

Among the most fascinating special places, holy spaces, I have visited are what we might call indigenous sacred sites: ancestral burial grounds, sacred mountains and rivers, natural springs and so on. They are found all over the globe, including in the UK. They often trace their roots back to before recorded history and many have been 'adopted' by following religions and cultures. One of my favourite places is the Malvern Hills. When we visit, we always make time to visit some of the wells that dot the hills. St Ann's Well, Holy Well and even Temperance Well, are among the 70 well springs in the area.

Special places and holy spaces play an essential role in providing a tangible connection to the divine or the transcendent. They offer a sense of sanctuary, serenity, and an opportunity for individuals to deepen their spiritual connection, seek guidance, or find solace. These spaces are often respected and revered by communities and visitors alike, creating a

# Editorial



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As Peter has said, our theme is *Special Places, Holy Spaces*. This picked up the theme of Wesley Memorial's contribution to Oxford's annual Art Weeks which were about to be launched when we discussed the summer issue of the magazine, and its theme.

The idea of showing art work in many forms reflecting on special or sacred places proved very fruitful, with contributions from church members, friends, people who come into our building week by week, and others further afield. The days of our exhibition, May 20-26, drew in many visitors, and instigated some interesting conversations, both about the art work and about our faith.

The course *Everyone an Evangelist* had prepared us not to be reticent about who we are, and why we want to share our experiences of faith.

This issue of the magazine is able to bring you some of the exhibition, with our compliments, and more news of our activities. We hope you will enjoy it while relaxing in the summer, and share with others the articles and the Good News that we seek to proclaim.

*The Editorial Team*

*June 2023*

## COVER PHOTO

Monet's garden, visited in May this year, is a really special place. Flowers crowd each other in a riot of colour, waterlilies float sleepily on the pond, and well-tended vegetables and seedlings flourish in beds near the house. But if you want a drink, make sure you see everything in the garden first, as all the cafés are outside in the village!

*Kate Dobson*

(Minister's letter continued )

shared sense of reverence and cultural identity. As we gather in such places over a period of time, we share something of ourselves with them and with one another. Oxford, especially Wesley Memorial, has become such a place for me. Though the itinerant life of the Methodist Ministry moves me on, I shall return to this particular special, holy place again.

With every blessing,

**Peter**

# Happy 100th Birthday!

Recently, the Methodist church in Poznań, Poland, celebrated 100 years of its existence. My father, Jan Kuś, was a minister there for forty years during the communist period, so it was a moving experience to go back. The theme of the celebration was 'Grateful for a new century'. To celebrate the jubilee, a pamphlet by Dr G. Pełczyński was published about the history of the parish in Poznań 1922-2022.

The main celebration lasted two days. On the first day there was a gathering at the local cemetery with reflections and memories shared by the congregation and former ministers, who specifically travelled from different parts of the country. It ended with candles being lit on every Methodist grave. In the afternoon there was a historical session in the church entitled 'Methodists in Poznań 1922-2022', when Dr G. Pełczyński and former ministers talked about the history of the parish. The session was chaired by the current minister, the Revd S. Rodaszyński, but it was not possible to bring together all the historical threads. There was also an exhibition of many historical photographs, liturgical vessels and other memorabilia, showing the history of the parish over the last 100 years.

The following day, Sunday, there was a special jubilee service led by the Head of the Polish Methodist church, Andrzej Malicki. There were many visitors from different parts of the country who travelled specifically to take part in the celebration. In addition, representatives of various other denominations took part in the service. At the end of the service a plaque commemorating '...all those who preceded us in faith...' was unveiled at the entrance to the church.

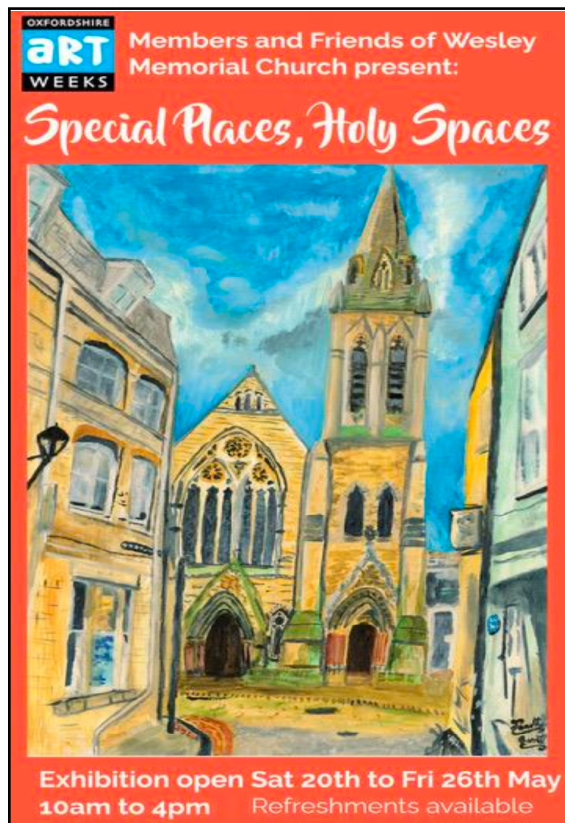
After the service, the whole congregation, including all the visitors, made their way to a nearby school, where a wonderful lunch was served. And, of course, there was a giant jubilee cake! After lunch everyone went back to church for one more meeting of thanksgiving. There was a lot of singing of hymns, those particularly liked by the Poznań congregation, and special greetings were passed on from the local authorities and other official bodies.

It was a very happy celebration but, nevertheless, the start of the new millennium brings with it enormous new challenges for the church.

Ewa (Kus) Turner



Day 28 of our Methodist Prayer Handbook 2022-23 encourages us to pray for Christians in Europe, and particularly Poland, among other East European countries.



*The painting of Wesley Memorial viewed from St Michael's Street is the work of Jonathan Barrett, who presented it to the church in 2022.*

## A selection of exhibits from our Exhibition



### Pulpit Stairs

This watercolour painting shows the stairs leading up to the pulpit at Christ Church Cathedral. The pulpit itself is over 400 years old and has seen countless preachers (including John Wesley). In choosing to paint it from this angle, I was thinking about that moment before a sermon when the preacher is approaching the pulpit, perhaps a little anxious about the task ahead.

Beyond the pulpit is a view of the medieval chancel of the cathedral, with its elaborate ceiling. With its hanging pendants suspended 'miraculously' in mid-air, the ceiling is regarded as an image of heaven. Seen in this context the stairs lead not just to the pulpit but to something beyond us, something the preacher is about to point us to once they have climbed the stairs.

*Jim Godfrey*

## ‘Beside still waters ...’

At junior school we had to learn – among others – the 23rd Psalm by heart, reciting it in assembly with the headteacher. Much of the psalm’s significance was lost on us, but we could sense the poetry of the King James Bible and feel the reassurance of the second verse even then: ‘He leadeth me beside still waters ...’.

Decades later, I find that reassurance in many places. Oxford is blessed with many ‘still waters’, some are well known, others unheralded. People of all faiths and none can find tranquillity by a pond, lake or canal.

The five images I displayed in Art Week were selected from a wider range of photographs beside still waters; some were first exhibited at the Churchill Hospital in 2014.

At quiet times, the pond in Cutteslowe Park offers many moods and reflections through the changing seasons; a sunset in winter has a particular beauty.

The Wolvercote Lakes offer a haven of peace by a busy railway line. The beauty of the leaves as they flourish, fade and fall is enhanced by their reflections in the calm waters.

The still waters of the Oxford Canal link successive communities living by, and on, the water; the quieter northern stretches offer places of solitude. The tranquillity of the pool at the ‘Duke’s Cut’ junction was the inspiration for the ‘beside still waters’ series. In any season, the setting by the bridge at Shipton-on-Cherwell offers a scene of particular harmony with the little Church of the Holy Cross as the perfect backdrop.

The special places beside still waters are not always natural features of the landscape but through them human endeavour has complemented the wonder of God’s creation.



*Duke’s Cut*

*Alan Dobson*



*Shipton-on-Cherwell (left) , and Sunset at Cutteslowe*

# Meandering round the Exhibition

## MY MAP CHEST

I am in the process of painting the outside of the chest, with colours and patterns that I hope are reminiscent of different types of terrain that we find about the UK - rivers, forests, hills or meadows.

Inside the chest was a collection of maps, all of them of parts of the UK, with journeys I have undertaken and often enjoyed in the beauty of creation, memories of places and spaces that are special and some in which I have had moments that have seemed especially holy.

I left with the chest an invitation for people to look through or into the maps if they would like to, which gave an opportunity for all to enjoy remembering special places and holy spaces and perhaps to consider looking for new ones.

## THE TENT

I invited my friend Martin to come along. He was glad to be about for some of the week and enjoyed being amongst the places and people of Wesley Memorial. Cheekily he brought along a tent, which you may have seen pitched near the organ. The tent represented the Tabernacle, the cloth over it the torn veil. Inside, projected onto the back wall of the tent, an image. Martin had drawn the outlines of a sheep's carcass he came across while out walking. This represented Christ, the Lamb of God.

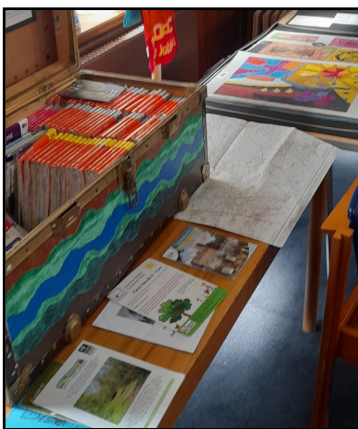
The Tabernacle, in this case, is a movable dwelling, somewhere for God to reside in the Old Testament nomadic times. And now our access to God because of Christ is also like a tent, movable, and with the torn veil, always open.

## SHARING A SPECIAL PLACE

In the spirit of Open Church, and along with the invitation those of us who planned and put together the exhibition always intended, there would be space for anyone who wished to create some art during the week to do so. To this end we had a range of materials available, and people who felt comfortable doing so would encourage others who might like to do some art. There were also those who welcomed, made cakes, washed up, set up and took down the displays at the end of the week.

It was lovely to see people colouring in icons, drawing bits of the sanctuary, delighting in model trains and thoughtfully walking the labyrinth. There was a lovely, gentle, vibrant, uplifting feel about the place throughout the week. People clearly enjoyed it. A number of people commented that they had walked straight past the church many times previously but were glad that they had actually looked in on this occasion.

*Rob Elliott*



*The map chest*



*The tent*

## Some of my special places and holy spaces

During Art Week I exhibited four watercolours and one icon, accompanied in some cases by poems that expressed experiences that I had had while on retreat. I also led workshops, involving explaining how icons are made and getting people to colour in outlines of icons that I had painted, as well as offering three books of poetry about nature, icons, and my spiritual journey.

The only watercolour that was not accompanied by a poem was of Bohinj in Slovenia, special because it was where George and I spent our honeymoon in 1979. It was in a mountainous area, and our hotel was at the top of a steep hill. It was an ideal place to stay: quiet, beautiful and peaceful, before the troubles came to the former Yugoslavia.

The first retreat I ever went on was to Glastonbury Abbey House, and it was so special that I went back for several more retreats there, including two Benedictine Experience retreats (led by Esther de Waal and Sister Mary Jean of Tymawr Convent – two special people), as well as a number of themed retreats (led by Charles and Anne Shells – also special). I recently met up with Esther again, and we have renewed our friendship now that she is in Oxford.

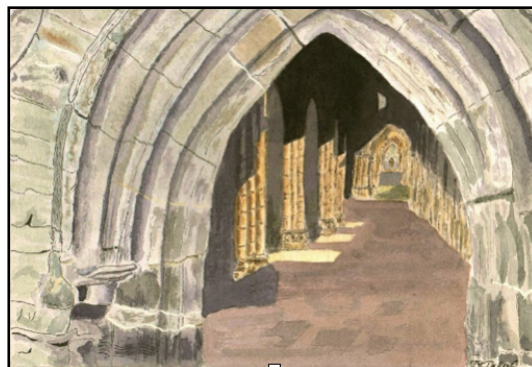
There were two watercolours of Glastonbury, including one of the grey-green stones of the ruined abbey, where we were allowed to roam in the evenings after the tourists had left. I had a special prayer experience there, which is summed up in the poem *Grey-green*:

We met in the abbey cloister  
among the slow, cool shadows  
and gazed at pools of light.  
The stones looked down grey-greenly.  
I tried to speak my failure,  
my poverty of loving,  
the thinness of my friendship  
and the courage I have lacked.  
And then we both fell silent  
while the stones looked down grey-greenly,  
raising their algal eyebrows  
at the story I had told.  
I didn't hear you speaking

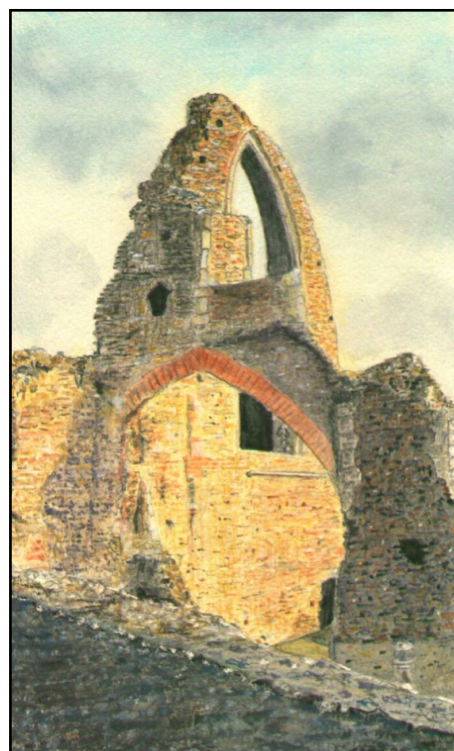
but the light-pools grew before us  
and the stones looked down grey-greenly  
with benevolence and peace.

And then I knew your message:

'If you cannot find the courage  
and your love goes cold within you,  
do not worry—just take mine.'



The other retreat that was illustrated by a watercolour was the only one I ever went to with my mother, just after my father died in 1996. It was led by Charles and Anne Shells and was held at Leiston Abbey in Suffolk. Like Glastonbury, Leiston Abbey has endured the destruction of the Reformation but still stands as a palpably sacred space.



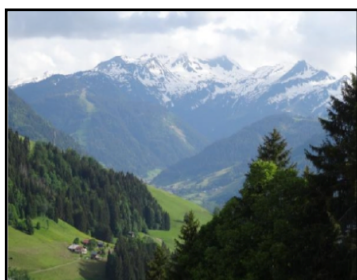


# Hauteluce: A Special Place

In May 1985, our daughter was 11 months old, and we needed a holiday. We found we could fly to Geneva, hire a car, and drive to the village of Hauteluce, in the French Alps. It was a magical place and spring a magical time. There were gentians flowering in the high pastures, and cows with bells round their necks. There was delicious cheese, and a restaurant which positively welcomed an 11-month-old. For the next thirty years, Hauteluce was an abiding memory - a place to dream about when times were tough, or the world looked ugly.

But by 2018, I had retired, and we decided to go back. Higher up the mountains, a ski resort had been developed. But the village itself was much the same. The one shop, the two restaurants – which now positively welcomed folk in their 60s. Across the valley from our chalet, there were small farms, each with a few cows and a mobile milking parlour. Every morning and evening, we could see a little tanker drive from the farm to pick up milk to take to the creamery, to make Beaufort cheese.

That could be done by train, I thought. I started with the backscene – in this case, a panoramic view of the



mountainside opposite our chalet. The hills drop down to the line, which runs along the side of the mountain, with sidings for two farms. And so our special place is now a special place with a railway.

I needed a layout that would fit in our small car, so I chose the smallest readily available scale – Z gauge, or 1:240. Märklin is the Z gauge manufacturer – and since Märklin doesn't have French locomotives, carriages or trucks, Hauteluce has been gently transferred over the border to Switzerland. Though how three flamingos arrived, let alone a walrus, is a mystery.

In addition to the trains, there are some animations for visitors to operate at exhibitions - Push a button to chop down one of the trees, and, less plausibly, to resurrect it. Two cows move into a milking parlour. A wild boar runs along a field - moved by a surprising amount of 70-year-old Meccano under the baseboard.

*Paul Spray*

*During the week Paul's model train delighted little customers of Rainbow House and their parents/carers.*

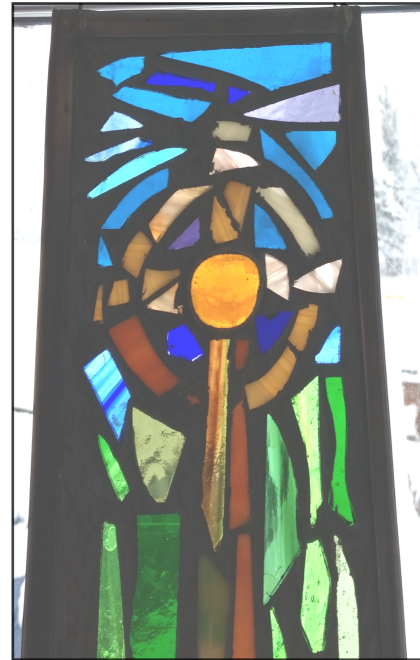


## Celtic Cross

I made the Celtic cross on a stained-glass course, as my first attempt at appliqué. It reminds me of Kilmartin Glen in Argyll, where we had many holidays when I was younger - it has been a special place since prehistoric times, and Kilmartin Kirk has a cross which dates to AD 900, although that one does not have the distinctive circle of the true Celtic cross.

Apart from the glass 'pebble' at the centre, the cross is made entirely of glass from the 'scraps box'. This connects it not only to the Eco-church recycling but to a favourite hymn, Graham Kendrick's 'God of the Poor', which starts 'Beauty for brokenness, Hope for despair'.

*John Lines*



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## More variations on the theme

### A Journey to Palestine

As part of my role as Community Chaplain and Outreach Worker with Cowley Road Methodist Church, I've started to get to know the local community on Cowley Road over the last year. It's a fascinating place to be and I'm regularly reminded of how diverse and multifaith its context is. The church borders the Chabad House, where the rabbi to the Jewish Students is based, and it's just down the road from three mosques - Medina Masjid, Oxford Central Mosque, and the Bangladeshi Islamic Centre. It's also in a very ethnically diverse area where people from all round the world live, work and play.

As I've been out and about, I'm aware of how many different stories one street carries, and some of the concerns particular to the area. Like with many things, the more I see and learn, the more I'm aware that there is more to see and explore. Mindful as I am that there are ideas to unpack, things to wrestle with, and insights to gain,

I've been looking for ways that I might be guided in my explorations and was delighted when I found that Cliff College is running a short course in contextual theology at the end of June; a short course led by two senior mission and ministry consultants, both with extensive experience in the Holy Land, amongst other multifaith areas, and a course that takes place in the Holy Land - in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem.

Each day will be packed out with workshops, classes, and lectures from 7.30am to 9.30pm. I'll be there to learn about mission and ministry in a multifaith context, and I've already learnt a lot in the pre-trip briefing that I'm able to use in my outreach on the Cowley Road.

For many, the holy spaces of Israel and Palestine are special places. They're where Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have their roots (think Ishmael, Israel, and Jesus), and places

which many consider to be ‘thin places’, that is, places where heaven touches earth, and where history, story and myth become tangible and touchable as the sites recorded in these holy texts can be seen and touched.

I’ve been to Israel twice before - once when I was two years old and once half a lifetime ago when I was twenty. The last time I went to Israel was with the Council of Christians and Jews on a peace and reconciliation trip, and we journeyed to communities in conflict, heard stories from displaced people, and saw first-hand some of the effects of war. This time, we’re journeying further, to places we weren’t able to go to before, and hearing stories of people actively engaged in trying to bring peace and hope to some very difficult places.

I’m mindful that the last time I went, I found the trip quite challenging. I saw and heard things that I’m still unpacking now. I’m hopeful that, this time, I’ll be able to continue unpacking those stories while adding to them insights that will help our mission and ministry on the Cowley Road. I’m conscious that Israel, despite the challenges its people face, is a special place for many. We engage with it in a way that we don’t with most other places. Its stories resonate in a deeper way than most stories do. It looks different. It smells different. Even its grass looks different.

Often, when we think of ‘special places’, we remember spaces that make us feel comfortable, relaxed, joyful, and well we might. It helps to have happy places to go to in our minds when life gets tough as it has a habit of doing. But I think if we only think of ‘positive places’, we miss a lot of richness that life has to offer. It’s in darker places that we learn more about who we are and what we’re capable of. It’s in conflict that we learn to not only find peace, but be the peace that others yearn for. It’s in situations of despair that we discover real hope.

I think sometimes those places that take us on a journey into ourselves tend to be more significant and profound than other spaces. They stick with you. They change you. They grow you. I’m rather apprehensive about this upcoming trip, but I’m also excited about what I’ll learn and see. I’m hopeful for the changes that being there will make in my life and the lives of people I work with. I’m eagerly awaiting the stories I’ll hear and the places I’ll see. I’m pretty sure that this will be a tough trip, but I know that I’ll be going there in God’s strength, and I look forward to seeing more of God on the journey ahead.

*Libby Hawkness-Smith*

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## A message from Worzel



My special place is my large domain. The big creatures who live here call it their ‘garden’, but it’s really all mine. I can spend the whole daylight time just eating and sleeping.

Hot days here are my favourite, with plenty of lettuce and beans, and snacks to nibble in the grass. One of the big ones called me a ‘lawnmower’ just now. I don’t know why! I like to hide in the bushes and pretend I’m asleep: then they try to find me, but don’t always win!

Have a good summer everyone. See you soon!