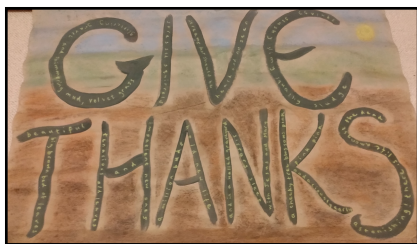


Special places, holy spaces

I am in the process of gradually discovering many holy spaces by going on retreats at different stages in my life. I do love a silent retreat, and since I discovered this about 25 years ago, I have tried to go every few years, or as often as life and family responsibilities allow. Sometimes it's just a day, and there are some great local options for this, including St Ethelwold's in Abingdon, which has a simple cabin by the river at the bottom of their beautiful garden, a lovely peaceful spot from which to contemplate life and faith. Also, The Old Parsonage at Freeland, where you can have the use of a room for the day or overnight, and enjoy the tranquil house and garden.

When time allows, I love to go away for longer. Two of the most special places where I've gone on retreat have, as it happens, been in Wales. In 2004 I spent about a week at St Beuno's, and I very much enjoyed Paul Spray's recent article in these pages as a reminder of what an amazing place it is. I went as the carer for my recently-disabled friend and hero, Ros Colwill, who ran the 'Centre for Mentally Ill Destitutes' at Amaudo in Nigeria where I had volunteered after graduating. Ros was yearning to go on a week-long silent retreat, but needed a carer to accompany her and attend to her physical needs. The combination of making my own, only slightly compromised retreat, while in the service of someone who had had such an impact on my life, was a profound experience for me.

A few years later, and still before we had children, I went to Llannerchwen in the Brecon Beacons. Here retreatants can stay in their own individual 'hermitage', a sort-of bedsit cabin in the woods. Your time is your own to think, write,



Jenny's artwork, rescued from the loft

pray, draw, walk, or just look at the trees. There is a chapel, a creative arts cabin and the option of meeting daily with a Spiritual Director. I found it extremely calming, totally restful and came away refreshed and serene. I hope to return to both of these special places one day.

The art work that I shared in Artweeks was from a long ago retreat in Essex, not an individual or silent one, but one with the young adults' group from Hinde Street, the church in London where Simeon and I met. One of the activities was to do a nature walk in the grounds, noticing everything around. As I walked, I wrote a poem in my head about what I saw. I almost never write poems but it was a way to capture the experience and hold onto it. Later, there was an opportunity to use the art room and I decided to combine the overall message I was taking from the retreat, 'Give thanks', with the poem. I don't have a very good memory but, because of the poem and the artwork, I remember that nature walk in great detail and can still picture each part. The experience and feelings have stayed with me (though the artwork lives in the loft, which is why it was so crumpled!).

Give Thanks

Glittering gravel and shimmering mud

Velvet grass, stressed squirrels

Streams that should be heard and not seen

Squidgy slushy slimy squashy sludge

Beautiful big brown bed of leaves

Tenacious old leaves and impatient new ones

A million buds hold new life

And in a walled graveyard sisters sleep with Jesus and Mary

A cheeky tree blossoms pink pink pink, audaciously early

Astonishing! There is life amongst the dead.

I'm thankful that there are still all manner of retreat houses around, often run by religious communities. Going to these special places is good for my spiritual life, and I know it also benefits my mental health. Taking time out in a holy space to be with God, and to reflect on where I am in life and where I'm going, is a blessing, a joy and, in many ways, a luxury. I'm already looking forward to the next opportunity...

Jenny Ayres

“Behold, the sea itself...”

Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* opens with these lines from a poem by Walt Whitman, a favourite of VW’s:

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind,
speckle the green and blue...

Immediately the listener (or singer!) is drawn into the timeless fascination of the sea, and the delight of simply watching the waves come and go. This was a pleasure I only discovered when we moved from the Midlands to the Solent, in my teens.

Our childhood seaside holidays had been in Skegness where the sea was always brown, from the wild churning up of the sand. It was – for a child – a very long way from where the spacious beach started; and cold.

The ‘green and blue’ came on the south coast, with views of the Isle of Wight and the distant Needles. Then it was easy to imagine the ‘sea-captains young or old’ keen to venture out and explore the vastness, the unknown regions.

Special places to stay and watch, breathe the salty air, listen to the rise and fall of the waves, and let the imagination wander – and wonder!

Kate Dobson



Two views of Milford on Sea, near Lymington



Welcome to Miriam

We are delighted that the Revd Miriam Moul has agreed to be minister of Wesley Memorial and Superintendent of the Oxford Circuit from 1st September 2023.

Miriam came to Oxford in 2020 to take up a joint appointment as minister of Cowley Road and Methodist Chaplain to students at Oxford Brookes University. The Circuit Welcome Service for Miriam’s new ministry will

take place at Wesley Memorial on Tuesday 29th August at 6.30 pm, and the preacher will be our Chair of District, the Revd Canon Helen Cameron.

If you are not away on holiday, please join friends from our church and the Oxford Circuit to worship, and welcome Miriam to her new roles.

The Church Stewards

Seeing the Spiritual

The Revd Rob Drost, Chaplain to Woodhouse Grove School, reflects on four splendid pieces from Frank Roper's *Stations of the Cross*, part of the Methodist Modern Art Collection, on loan to the school. (Discover more about the Collection at www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection/)



Station IV, Jesus meets his blessed Mother



Station VII, Jesus falls for the second time



Station XIII, The deposition (Jesus taken down from the cross)



Station XIV, The entombment (Jesus is laid in the sepulchre)

My former boss, the Rt Revd Nick Holtam, recently retired Bishop of Salisbury, was once struggling with a group of lads he was preparing for confirmation in East London. But then he took them to the National Gallery and showed them some of the rich art depicting the Christmas story, and they got it. Sometimes words just do not capture what we want to express, but a stroke of a brush and a dab of paint can. Most of us can find worth and meaning in art. In fact, sometimes people lose themselves in a work of art, becoming completely absorbed by what it is saying to them. You are probably thinking of a piece right now that is full of meaning and joy. Art is personal. It speaks to us differently, whether we are old or young, an artist or someone who can't even draw a straight line.

Roper sculptures

Frank Roper was a sculptor and the Methodist Modern Art Collection owns four aluminium reliefs from a set he made of Stations of the Cross. To mark its 60th anniversary last year, the Collection loaned these to Woodhouse Grove School, which is in Yorkshire where Roper was born. Stations of the Cross are 14 images depicting Jesus Christ on his way to his crucifixion. The 'stations' or stopping points, grew out of imitations of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, a traditional processional route symbolising the path Jesus is believed to have walked to Mount Calvary. It aims to help people imagine what contemporary passers-by must have felt. *Station IV* (top left) This shows Mary meeting her son Jesus on the road. The Bible does not actually mention Mary as

being on the road, but in Luke 2, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus as a child for a naming ceremony and the Temple priest prophesied that one day her emotions will be so shattered it will be like a sword piercing her soul. Perhaps he was alluding to what it would be like to encounter her son on the road to his death.

Station VII We are not sure how many times Jesus falls and stumbles. Matthew 27 reports there was a man called Simon who helped Jesus to carry his cross.

Station XIII In Roman tradition after someone died on a cross, the body was taken down and left and sometimes no one came to bury them. There is no mention of Jesus being taken down from the cross, perhaps because the early readers knew the tradition and did not need to be told. In Matthew 27 we read that there were people who knew Jesus at the foot of the cross, weeping for their friend. This is repeated in Mark 15 from verse 40 and in Luke 23:49.

Station XIV This final sculpture features the scene in Matthew 27:57 when Joseph from Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. He wrapped it in cloth and placed it in his own unused tomb, which was carved out of the side of a hill. A large stone was then placed over the entrance. This story is also told in Mark 15 and in Luke 23. Joseph is named as an important person who disagreed that Jesus should be killed. The story also features in John 19 with the extra detail that Nicodemus, who met Jesus when he was alive, was there, helping Joseph.

Value of art

As well as Frank Roper's sculptures, we are hugely blessed in our school chapel with wonderful stained glass in the choir area above the communion table. The windows tell the story of the birth of Jesus, through to his visit as a boy to the Temple, where he questioned the leaders.

Gazing on art like this can give a fresh perspective on the life of Jesus and of the Church. It can lead us on a private pilgrimage into belief and faith. That faith is expressed through worship, where we draw near to the divine, which in turn inspires us. We are then sent out into our communities to continue to be the Church in the same tradition as the early disciples, who broke bread, prayed, fed the hungry and championed the undervalued.

We try to teach these values to our students today, so they might become agents of change now and in the future. Our

daily chapel assembly worship challenges and celebrates our school community, asking big questions around what difference we as individuals and as a school can make in the world.

Our Methodist values speak of how our school can "do all the good we can" on a daily basis, believing that these words hold us firm to the teaching of God through the life of Jesus and the guidance of Scripture.

Rob Drost

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Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat

The show was written as far back as 1968, by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber in their youth! (Tim Rice was 24 and Andrew L W was 20.) It has never lost popularity, which is well demonstrated by the fact that the Junior Church members asked if they could perform it. The Junior Church plan to present a modest concert version of the songs soon gave way to the full-blown costumed, acted, spot-lit extravaganza that we all enjoyed on 2nd June.



Joseph and his many brothers



Pharaoh worried about his dreams

On playing ‘Joseph’

Two weeks after I arrived back in the US for the spring vacation, I received an email from Mel asking if I would be willing to play title role in the Junior Church’s production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. I detected desperation: “Tom Ibbotson has played Joseph in the past but now feels he really is too old!”

I had two initial reactions. First, I am not Donny Osmond (who immortalized the role of Joseph in the 1999 film adaptation). Second, the situation must be dire if Mel is asking me, for she has never even heard me sing.

Last summer, the pastor at my Methodist church back home preached an entire sermon series on the Joseph story. Knowing that I loved musicals, she asked me if I would consider singing *Close Every Door* for the congregation. I started singing along in the car to one of the Joseph cast albums and was progressing well through the song until the phrase, ‘I know I shall find’ —and I croaked. The door to achieving the high notes just wasn’t opening. I declined the pastor’s invitation.

Reading Mel’s invitation, I was hesitant. I couldn’t sing *Close Every Door* eight months ago; what made me think I could sing the music eight months later? Giving due diligence to Mel’s offer, I decided to visit a friend of mine, a trained opera singer and teacher at the local community college in my hometown. I sang through *Close Every Door* and *Any Dream Will Do* and, once again, croaked on the high notes. The problem, she diagnosed, was not a lack of ability to sing the notes; it was my breathing. “Sustain the airflow over these notes,” she said. “You can do this. You should say yes to the role,” she smiled. I still wasn’t confident I could pull off these songs, but after much prayer and deliberation across seventeen days since Mel’s first email, I wrote back and agreed!

Throughout the rehearsal process, I delved into the story of Joseph, thinking about its many layers, including the narrative in Genesis, how Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber interpret the narrative in their musical, and how this story relates to a modern audience today. I gleaned

much wisdom from Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman, whose commentary on Genesis influenced my understanding of Joseph. Brueggeman argues that Joseph lives between the “hint of the dream and the doxology of the disclosure” (293). Joseph describes two dreams at the beginning of chapter 39 in Genesis, but he does not fully understand their meaning. It is only at the end of his story in chapter 50, and specifically verse 20, that the true meaning of these dreams is finally revealed, and God’s glory is manifested. Our life stories are just like Joseph’s: We all have hopes and dreams that God has placed directly into our hearts and minds. We await their disclosure, their revelation, their fulfillment, to understand how God (even when we think He is absent) has been at work in our story all along. This theology afforded me a blueprint for tracking Joseph’s arc throughout the musical as well as a message to anchor my interpretation of the character.

Despite this empowering theology, I struggled to understand the song *Close Every Door*. At first, I thought the song was about desperation (“Poor, poor Joseph, all the doors have closed, go and dig your grave!”), but the lyrics —“I know I shall find, my own peace of mind, for I have been promised a land of my own” — seemed to refute this interpretation. I owe a tremendous thanks to the Joseph before me who held the key to unlocking *Close Every Door*: Tom Ibbotson said to me one day in rehearsal, “The song is about faith.” How right he was, for faith sustains Joseph as lives between the hint of the dream, and the doxology of disclosure at the end when he saves his brothers’ lives.

Tom wasn’t the only person who helped me become Joseph. Under Kirstie’s expert musical guidance and persistent encouragement, I learned to hit those high Fs. Mary, our fearless and indefatigable director, gave me the space and support to find my own Joseph. Esther kept me hydrated with water and herbal tea with honey, always served with a smile. And I must give a shoutout to Simeon for suggesting I take selfies (the token artefact of narcissism in our present day) with Daniel, our wonderful Jacob, on stage in the opening number. I am grateful to have worked with such a talented and uplifting cast and

crew on this marvellous production which has been a radiant highlight of my first year in Oxford.

To the readers of this article, I close with an invitation: consider the dreams God has fulfilled in your life, the hints of dreams placed in your heart at this very moment – and be open to new dreams. Most importantly, remember that God will give us everything we need – including the high notes – to see these dreams brought to fulfillment for God’s purpose.

Shelby Knighten



Rehearsing



Triumphant



Curtain call

Mary Ronaldson 1925 – 2023

A tribute by her daughter

The first half of Mum's life is a story of journeys. She was the eldest child of Gladys and the Revd Oliver Roebuck, a Methodist Minister in what was then Southern Rhodesia and also, briefly, in Paris. She had a younger brother John and a much younger sister, Molly. They were constantly on the move – she went to over 10 schools. Ministers spent 2½ years in one place, then another 2½ years elsewhere and, after 5 years, they would go to England for a year on furlough. Mum's family were dependent on the charity of family members back in England, and this was not always given very willingly, so they had to move around, often without their mother who spent a lot of time in hospital.

When they lived in Paris, she was sent to Trinity Hall school for the daughters of Methodist ministers, in Southport. The journey involved travelling there from the Gare du Nord via Folkestone, London and Crewe. It was nevertheless a very happy time in her life and she made lifelong friends there. Then the family went back to Salisbury (as it then was) and Mum continued her education in Southern Rhodesia.

Mum's Dad was a military chaplain during WWII and, when he was away from home, he would ask nice young soldiers to look after the family by sleeping on the veranda. Dad was one of those young men: Mum remembered him once hurrying back to base on her younger brother John's bike with his knees round his ears.

When she left school, Mum got a job in a power station which she really loved, but then she was given a bursary at age 17 to study at Rhodes University in South Africa, a 3-day journey by train. Her pre-graduation escapades included climbing into the dormitory at night, climbing trees and riding motor bikes, stories which delight the grandchildren!

Shortly after her return to Salisbury (as it then was), to start work, Dad proposed. They got married and she followed him to Tanganyika. In the 12 years they lived in



that beautiful country, they moved 6 times: each time Mum had to pack up and move their growing family to another home. When the family finally moved to Oxford, Mum settled in Linkside Avenue and, for the next 46 years, they lived in 13 and 13A Linkside Avenue, the latter a house designed by Mum herself. In a display of unexpected talent, she remained firm with the architect and made friends with the foreman and workmen until everything came out exactly as she wanted.

Mum's last home was Ritchie Court, in Banbury Road, where she lived very happily for the last 14 years of her life, only spending a month or so in the care home before she died. She leaves three children, 8 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren— quite a legacy.

Apart from her family, there were two other factors that featured large in Mum's life in Oxford. One was the Summertown Oxfam shop, and the other was, of course, Methodism, and particularly Wesley Memorial church. She was a stalwart member of this church, at first with Dad and then for 15 of the 18 years after he died. Sadly, the pandemic put paid to church attendance and, although she struggled at the beginning with ZOOM, it all became too much for her and she would rely instead on the radio or television to provide her with a service on Sunday mornings. She was always here in spirit.

Kathryn McNicoll

A poem for Mary Ronaldson

The face of a friend

The lines that crease your face
express the deep caring
of your nature.
Never use anti-ageing cream:
you wouldn't be the same
without those canyons.
When I was lost in the depths
far, far down in the darkness
you reached out and drew me
to yourself, tentatively,
shyly at first, but always
dogged and unflinching.
I know I drew a few more lines
on your weathered visage
but still you came and sat
letting me carve your face
as if in stone.
And out of the sculpture,
however much I gouged from it,
searching, smiling, looking for signs of life,
shone your enduring eyes.

Joanna Tulloch

Recited at the Thanksgiving service for Mary's life
24 March 2023

Remembering Carol

Carol Mankelow was a founder member of the knitting group based at Wesley Memorial Church which was started many years ago to knit blankets and scarves for Syrian refugees. Over the years she has shown her design skills many times, notably adding a combine harvester and hay bales to her panel included in the Harvest banner the group made.

This was recently on display for the Oxford Art week exhibition.

We also have a knitting stitch she showed us known as 'Carol's stitch' which we use regularly. Her upbeat attitude to life was a joy to experience as was her quirky humour. Our conversations were regularly interrupted by a railway anecdote or more often a football one when we ended up in fits of laughter. She was often knitting a bobble hat for a friend, in their team colours, or a prayer shawl for someone needing comfort.

She is greatly missed by us all but we have lasting memories of a dear friend and companion knitter.

From the Knitting and Craft Group

JOINING the group

The group meets each Tuesday to knit and chat, and drink tea and coffee. New members are welcome at any time.

Talk to Mel McCulloch



Goodbye to Peter!

Dear Peter

We are so sorry to be losing you, but we understand that this decision was made with heart-searching and prayer.



All the Methodist ministers who moved in 2020 faced a really impossible task of getting to know new congregations and circuits in lockdown. We did our best with Zoom, and you kept smiling. You embraced meetings on Zoom, gave us Breadchurch, drumming, technical wizardry and gear, recorded and live worship, and took it all in your stride. As the situation eased, we saw you in supercharged mode, seeming – or sometimes being – in two places at once. You led us through *Everyone an Evangelist*, and left us with the challenge to be more open about our faith, and our church.

Thank you for all of this, for all the unseen tasks, easy and difficult, that you undertook, for your constant encouragement, and of course for the unforgettable Thespian moment: Potiphar ‘letting out a mighty roar’!

Go forward to your next circuits with our love and prayers!

All at Wesley Memorial

Wesley Memorial Church



New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul (from 1st September 2023)

Church and circuit administrator: Jo Godfrey

Children’s, families’ & outreach worker: Mel McCulloch

Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

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Wednesday prayers 12.30 pm

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