

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Spring 2024



Unbounded love!



Editorial

Unbounded Love. God's love doesn't stay in the lines

Once again, writing the editorial for an Easter magazine has to be done in the penitential season of Lent, and as it happens, not long after Valentine's Day, the universal celebration of love!

Those of you who have followed the Methodist Church's Lent prayers will recognise the heart symbol on the issue's cover, and the headline above. This witty drawing illustrates the "unbounded love" quoted from the Wesley hymn *Love divine, all loves excelling*, by the inner colouring that strays outside the lines, and overflows. Subject of our Lent Bible study in the Circuit.

Such is the love presented in the hymn, the boundary-less, generous, unconditional love of God; the love that could not be confined in a sealed tomb in a Jerusalem garden, after the Crucifixion. We are committed to this vision at Wesley Memorial, and have declared it by joining the Inclusive Church movement.

We acknowledge that sometimes we try to put limits on God's love, as Frederick William Faber put it in the hymn, *There's a wideness in God's mercy* :

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,

and the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own,
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

(For man's mind read everyone's)

In this issue of our magazine, you will find a great variety of topics explored, some relating to Easter, some to *Unbounded Love*, and some connected to our journey along the way.

Many thanks to all our contributors for their writing, and for their kindness in delivering the pieces close to the deadline!

God's uncontainable love is what we celebrate at Easter, as we wish each other joy in the Resurrection of our Lord. We members of the body of Christ on earth are ready to share the good news and to work for justice and peace in 2024!.

HAPPY EASTER from the Editors!

The Editorial Team

In this issue

An Easter icon	3	Christine, Rainbow House	10	Two reviews	15
Letter from Rev Miriam Moul	4-5	Influencing 3Generate	11	Exhibitions	16
Walking the Camino	6-7	50 years of women in ministry	12	Helen Paige tribute	17-18
A New Life	8	The Wednesday Club	13	3Generate appeal	18
Holy Week	9	Victorian Preachers	14	Wesley Memorial details	19

The Resurrection



Joanna Tulloch

On the road to Emmaus

Dear Friends,

The road to Emmaus story in *Luke* chapter 24 is, for me, one of the most meaningful of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Two people journey away from the action, dejected and lost, after all that they had seen and encountered. They converse together, some commentators would suggest heatedly, before a stranger joins them and asks what it is they are speaking of.

The priest and poet Malcolm Guite beautifully captures this moment in his poem *Emmaus 1*.

“And do you ask what I am speaking of
Although you know the whole tale of my heart;
Its longing and its loss, its hopeless love?
You walk beside me now and take my part
As though a stranger, one who doesn't know
The pit of disappointment, the despair
The jolts and shudders of my letting go,
My aching for the one who isn't there.

And yet you know my darkness from within,
My cry of dereliction is your own,
You bore the isolation of my sin
Alone, that I need never be alone.

Now you reveal the meaning of my story
That I, who burn with shame, might blaze with glory.”

Often our Christian lives are referred to as our journey with God. As you know, journeys involve being prepared, having the right provisions, travelling with the right people, they involve bumps in the road or turbulence in the air, or ice on the tracks. Sometimes our journeys are smooth, the path is clear, we have the right companions on the road, but, at other times, it can feel like we have driven into a ditch or the car has broken down or we're stuck in the mud. We acknowledge that our Christian journeys are sometimes joyful, filled with hope and encouragement and at other times they can be heartbreaking, painful, distressing and lonely. Yet we remember that Jesus does journey with us, although, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we often don't recognise him on the way.



Ceri Richards, *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1958

Methodist Modern Art Collection

There is something powerful within this text about the way in which encounters with Jesus transform lives. It reminds me of some of those TV programmes like *The Repair Shop* and other antiques programmes or *Homes Under the Hammer*, where experts take something a bit tatty or dirty or broken and radically change it. They call it shabby chic. Who would really have thought that junk furniture would be declared vintage and worthy of being up-cycled or repurposed? Who would think that a broken shell of a property could be transformed into a beautiful home? When we encounter the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they are at a total loss, downcast and hurting, their identities as disciples and kingdom followers of Jesus, are like so much junk furniture thrown into a skip and discarded. And then the shabby chic miracle happens. These two disciples are up-cycled and repurposed. They are transformed and reclaimed by the presence of the risen Jesus. The gospel they believed and had witnessed in the ministry of Jesus finally and irrevocably becomes their own truth. The power of God's love in Christ literally turns them around, just as Jesus promised it would when he began his public ministry — and they set off back to Jerusalem without delay. The lives of the two disciples now bear clear testimony to this momentous encounter.

I leave us with a few questions to ponder. I wonder, do our lives bear clear testimony to our momentous encounters with Christ, to the Christ who walks with us, often unnoticed, often in the faces and words of others? Where is Christ revealed to us? How might we declare that we have been 'up-cycled' and repurposed for the kingdom of God? How might we as a Church speak to our community of the extravagant love of God?

I began by sharing Malcolm Guite's poem and I'd like to conclude with two stanzas from the poem *The Walk to Emmaus* written in 1899 by Olivia Ward Bush-Banks.

They said, with gladdened hearts, "It is our Lord,
Our risen Christ for whom we long have yearned;
We knew Him not when walking by the way,
And yet our hearts within us sweetly burned.

O Christian! walking o'er Life's rugged road,
Thou too, like His disciples, oft shall say,—
"Did not our hearts within us sweetly burn
When Jesus talked with us beside the way?"

With Easter blessings,

Miriam



The road to Emmaus. A 6th century mosaic

Walking the Camino de Santiago

Putting one foot in front of the other

From the start I need to confess. (I was raised a Catholic, after all!) I haven't actually walked the Camino francés in its entirety. I've walked about a third of it from its starting point right in the foothills of the French Pyrenees to the city of Burgos –about 160 miles. The plan is to return in the Autumn of 2024 to walk another third and then complete the final section in 2025.

So, how did I hear about this in the first place? Growing up as a Catholic, I'd heard about the well known pilgrimage sites: Lourdes, Fatima and Medjugorje (Bosnia-Herzegovina), but had never really considered the notion of walking a sacred route. It was actually my father-in-law (a retired GP) who was so enthusiastic about it. Paul was a passionate walker and amateur botanist with a love of all things Spanish and he encouraged me to set the walk as a retirement project. As an aside, my wife tells me that as a GP his principal advice to patients was 1) go for a walk; 2) hit it with a big stick. Well, it's turned out that we've now woken up to the many benefits of walking. (I'm not so sure about hitting things with big sticks though!)

Back to the story...I planned to walk the whole route with Pauline, an ex-colleague of mine. We aimed to head off into the hills over the summer of 2020. Well, we all know what happened next! I stayed on at work and we didn't find ourselves in a small French town at some ungodly hour getting our Pilgrim Passports stamped until April 2022.

The first day was tough, even though we opted for the *easy* route. Heavy snowfall closes the more mountainous route. This is the route taken by the son in the film *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen. The son dies in an accident on the mountain and Sheen's character flies over from the states and ends up travelling the route carrying his son's ashes. We encountered snow on the ground, jagged pathways and tough inclines. I had, of course, made all the rookie errors (bringing too much stuff...more on that later) and not adjusting my backpack correctly. If nothing else, the experience heightened my admiration for pilgrims of yore

who probably did the route in crude sandals, a rough cloak and a stick to fend off brigands!

Then the Catholic guilt kicked in: isn't pilgrimage meant to involve hardship to assuage the demands of a severe God? – a God who in my mind was like an extreme version of the PE teacher at school standing at the end of a cross-country run telling you to go back to the start because your paltry efforts were not good enough? Well, as someone with their head screwed on commented, "Yes, by our standards the pilgrims of the past faced challenges we can't imagine. But most people in the past walked miles every day, carried out long hours of manual labour and didn't have Netflix or over twenty food outlets within a quarter of where they lived (as we do in Oxford). Yes, our comparatively sedentary lifestyle makes for a tougher challenge and a higher risk of injury."

This was particularly true on the first day. The stage covers about 15 miles and ends at an ancient Benedictine monastery at Roncesvalles. This huge complex was once home to a thriving religious community. In the true spirit of monastic hospitality part of the building houses a pilgrim hostel which we tried to access before realising we were booked to stay in the comfortable hotel also located within the monastery walls. As I soaked my tired body in the bath that night, I wasn't complaining, just deeply grateful. Accommodation on the route varies hugely from pilgrim dormitories where everything is shared and communal to bijou hotels in urban settings. We decided fairly early on that we would book ahead for accommodation to give us a point to aim for and also because our pace was quite slow. We wanted a firm guarantee of a bed for the night.

Many pilgrims set out in a spirit of trust that they'll find a bed somewhere, somehow. I think it would be fair to say it's unlikely you'd spend a night in a bus shelter! After all, pilgrims have been walking this route for more than 900 years so there's a strongly ingrained culture of hospitality even in the smallest village. Accommodation may be more sparse on the less popular routes to Santiago however.

Back to my father-in-law, Paul. He was a very fit, competitive walker who'd rise early (partly to beat the heat of the day) and get to the next destination around lunchtime, sort out his accommodation and spend the rest of the day enjoying the Spanish culture with his fellow travellers. He also walked between 12 and 18 miles every day without rest days. This approach would allow you to complete the journey in around a month. We, on the other hand, took a more relaxed approach, having a couple of rest days/sightseeing stopovers in Pamplona, Estella and Burgos. Also, in an effort to reduce the weight of our backpacks, we'd jettisoned articles of clothing along the way, so a functioning, coin-operated launderette became increasingly essential. Talking of clothing, a couple of t-shirts from *Decathlon* proved indispensable. Made from synthetic, breathable fabric, they were so much more effective than cotton versions. Thankfully, I'd left my hairshirt back in Oxford.

After the initial discomfort of the first few days, as the body adjusts and you shed anything superfluous, I found myself getting into a kind of glorious rhythm. Life becomes pared back to a few essentials. The route is extremely well marked, accommodation is easy to book via one of the Camino *apps* and your only focus becomes putting one foot in front of the other. There were long stretches walked in glorious isolation and busier routes through larger towns and cities. You'd fall in with various fellow pilgrims, lose them at some point and then meet again further down the route. We met all types; quite a few retirees, people taking career breaks from stressful occupations, as well as groups of 'uber' pilgrims who had walked from distant parts of Europe tracking ancient pilgrim routes.

I was struck by the number of solo females who had made the trip, a sure sign of how safe and secure the region is. One we kept meeting was a young Korean wine lover walking the route in plimsolls (unsurprisingly she picked up an injury on day one and subsequently took the bus). We even met someone walking the route in high heels! Most intriguing of all, however, was a brief encounter just outside Los Arcos with a man leading a horse in the opposite direction away from Santiago. He asked us for directions to *The Way* and we obliged. Something about this must have sparked my interest because I took a couple of pictures and we

exchanged a few words. It wasn't until we reached the next village and the pilgrim hostel where he'd stayed the previous night that we discovered the full story. Apparently this man had flown in from China, bought a horse in Santiago and was spending the next two years walking home! I'm not sure how the horse felt about this. Hopefully, he'll be nearing the end of his mission in the next couple of months, and both the man (and the horse) can put their feet/hooves up.



Clearly there's something about the route that attracts people and draws them in: the stunning countryside dotted with ancient villages and cities, the frequent human encounters and connections to communities who are passionate about the Camino experience.

Personally, I found much of my mental clutter got jettisoned (along with the spare clothing and books) as each day on the route passed. As Graham Usher writes in his book *The Way Under Our Feet – A Spirituality of Walking*, "travelling light on a pilgrimage emphasises our frailty and need; as we declutter our life we move away from our security and that which we know, to journey in search of something deeper". I'm very much looking forward to returning to Northern Spain with Pauline later this year to complete another third of the route. I'll be carrying even less stuff (though I might treat myself to a set of hiking poles). There's no chance I'm bringing a horse though!!

Tom Walker
Wesley Memorial Staff

Pauline uses her scallop shell to drink from a wine fountain at the Irache Vineyard., near Estella.



A new life

This is a story about a little boy who was born at Easter time 2016. It is a story of new life and of hope, so perhaps in some ways connected to the theme of Easter.

In 2015 I was pregnant with my first child, news which came with a lot of joy. Quite quickly I discovered that the baby I was going to have was actually coming with some added extras, in the form of an extra chromosome 21. It was whilst I was adjusting to this news that Thomas began to be on the receiving end of discrimination in medical settings, with comments to us as parents like: “Never mind, you can have plenty of other children” and “Are you saying you want us to treat him as though he didn’t have Down’s Syndrome?” when discussing life-saving intervention. It quickly became clear that we were going to have to advocate for him in ways that should not be necessary. Thankfully, in contrast, news of Thomas’s extra chromosome was accepted and celebrated by family, friends and people here at Wesley Memorial Church.

Thomas entered the world dramatically, as is his style, and after 6 weeks in hospital came home. He quickly showed himself to be cheeky, determined and to have a unique ability to find joy in the small things in life that is quite contagious. His first two years were a rollercoaster of hospital admissions which Thomas took in his stride, with the Children’s ward at the Horton seeing more of us than most of our family and friends did. He even decided to celebrate his second birthday with a stay there. Once his heart surgery was completed, his health became more robust and his energy levels soared. He started to rush through the milestones of sitting, standing, some kind of unique hybrid crawl, walking and, his personal preference as a mode of moving about, running. Thomas has a boundless energy that I have developed a significant coffee-drinking habit to keep up with.

Other hurdles began to follow for him. Congenital hearing loss means he can’t hear well even with hearing aids, and a noticeable absence of speech can be a challenge for him in communicating. Thomas uses a mixture of Makaton signs,

visual symbols and his own body language to communicate. In practice this means that Thomas can find he accidentally isn’t included, when being included is one of his biggest wishes. Izzy puts it very well when she tells other children who approach him to play, “This is my brother Thomas, he has no words”. I like this, as it describes how he may be non-verbal but he still has things to say, just that they will be without words.

Despite the ups and downs of his 7 years, Thomas has remained the same cheeky, exuberant, joyful person, who is flourishing. He currently likes music, especially listening to classic *fm* and playing the drums, cooking (he will now unload the dishwasher for me – very useful), football, the cookie monster, playing with his sister, tractors and stealing other people’s cakes, and we are so proud of him. Except possibly the cake stealing.



Thomas has taught me so much about overcoming adversity, being unapologetically yourself, and the importance for each of us of being honoured and respected no matter what our needs are. We are so pleased to be part of such a welcoming church, and for the opportunity to celebrate all that Thomas brings as a member of the congregation, particularly his own brand of energy.

See you at coffee time!

Katie Ford

Holy Week, hymns and oratorio

My mother's favourite hymn was *There is a green hill far away*, which may explain why I could sing it from memory at the age of six. In Holy Week we share hymns that are at the core of the Christian faith.

Perhaps because Holy Week services are less frequent in a secular age, we sometimes jump too easily from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. One of our long-serving local preachers, sadly no longer with us, often said you have to confront the trauma of the Passion before you can move towards the rejoicing of Easter Day.

Hymns with wonderful words and music offer support in Holy Week, among them: *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* and *When I survey the wondrous cross*. Samuel Crossman's moving hymn *My song is love unknown* blends narrative with emotion to present the message of the Passion in the compass of seven verses.

Easter performances of great oratorios, among them Handel's *Messiah*, offer an opportunity for extended reflection on the Passion story. For many, it is Bach's

Passion according to St Matthew that goes to the heart of Holy Week, as an affirmation of what Christians believe and why. At the same time, the narrative of injustice, inhumanity and suffering touches people of other faiths and none. It is likely only a minority of the singers and the audience in a concert will share the full range of Christian beliefs, but the performance will be no less moving. All can share in the majesty of Bach's oratorio, the beauty of the music and the emotions it conveys.

In Bach's time, it was the practice for the congregation to participate in the chorale; this tradition can be revisited and is valued. I shall never forget an evening some thirty years ago when the conductor conducted the audience in the Sheldonian. It was a privilege to share that experience, just as it is in churches across the country in Holy Week when the organ leads a congregation into *O Sacred Head*.

Great poetry and great music combine in Holy Week at the core of our spiritual and cultural heritage: a heritage we should be proud to share with future generations.

Alan Dobson



Thomas at the seaside



Thomas jumping for joy

Introducing Christine Strahan

Rainbow House's professional coordinator shares her story

Q. How did you hear about Rainbow House?

Christine: I had done work experience at Rainbow house in 1998 from The Cherwell school and then started volunteering around 2013/14 while my youngest child was at part- time nursery.

Q. And how long were you a volunteer?

Christine: I was a volunteer for around a year in 2013/14, maybe a little less.

Q. Was your work on leaving school in childcare?

Christine: After leaving Rainbow House, I started working in a childcare setting, with the help of Katherine and Pat who gave me a good reference.

Q. And when did you take the post at Rainbow House?

Christine: I took on the role of coordinator at Rainbow House in 2018.

Q. How did you find it in the early months?

Christine: The early months were hard but good, trying to figure out how it all worked from the coordinator's side. I didn't have any time with Bryony (Thomas) as the notice from my previous job didn't allow me to start before Bryony left. But with the help from Kate and the amazing volunteers, it all went very well. I soon got into the routine of how it all worked.

Q. Has it, in your opinion, remained much the same since then?

Christine: Rainbow House has definitely stayed the same throughout my time here. Customer numbers may change from term to term, but the consistency of how the group is run and what we offer is the same as when I started.

Q. What are the pleasures of the job?

The pleasures are the people I work with first of all – they definitely make Rainbow House a joy to be part of. Also, when a customer comes to tell you what a lovely experience they or their children have had, it always makes you realise what a wonderful setting Rainbow House is.

Q. And what do you see as the main challenges?

Christine: Challenges can be different week from week. The main challenge at the moment is having to disappoint customers when we are full. We are working on this with the use of the church (Sanctuary) as an overflow space where people can wait. Other challenges are getting extra volunteers to join, to help either in the hall or kitchen.

Q. How hard was it to come back after lockdown?

Christine: Personally I was glad to get back after lockdown, so for me very easy, and when I contacted the volunteers, they were also eager to get back. Numbers were very up and down when we first reopened, but that soon changed!

Q. And what hopes do you have for the project's future?

I hope the project doesn't change too much from what it already is. We speak to happy customers all the time and I believe it works so well as it has done for so long!



Influencing 3Generate, 4–6 October 2024

For the second year in a row, our young people were invited to join other young people, youth reps and the Youth President for the 3Generate Influencer Day at the NEC. The plan behind this was to explore some initial ideas being considered for the programme, as well as offering an opportunity for children and young people to reflect their own thoughts and views. It was wonderful that so many of our young people were keen to attend and, as it was half term, we were able to attend with the maximum number of children allowed without disappointing anyone. Our representatives were Laura, Alice, Jim, James and Jasper.

When we arrived there were pastries, fruit juice and coffee to tuck into. As anyone who has spent any time with our Fizzy group will guess, our young people did their best to get through as many as possible!

As we munched away, we spotted that one of the tables had an inflatable Jesus on it! I felt that this must be the table of a youth group with a proper youth worker who thinks of everything, but it turned out that each table carried an object linking to a theme to focus on, as the groups moved around the room. First though, there was a mascot-designing session. If the next 3Generate mascot is based on a Methodist orb with legs, then Wesley Memorial can claim to have played a part!

As we got more focussed on the actual content of the next weekend, there was the opportunity to share ideas about how to make 3Generate an easier place to make friends, with worship young people would like, and good physical activities. Our group's feedback included the need for more gym equipment, lots of football and a bigger tech hub. They also suggested more comfy relaxation areas in our camp, and access to their own tents whenever they want. One discussion was about age restrictions. Laura felt age restrictions for talks weren't helpful. "If you go to a talk and it's not for you, you can just leave". We managed to avoid excessive focus on food but James gave the team some good advice. He suggested they keep it simple and good: chips, mashed potato and burgers – perhaps not all at the same time.



The representatives

As well as discussing ways to improve what they have already experienced at 3Generate, the children were asked to put stickers by new ideas that appealed to them. Laura particularly liked the idea of a scratch choir.

The main theme of 3Generate is always about tuning into God, but the bible passage changes from year to year. Last year's reading was influenced by the Methodist Modern Art Collection, providing an immersive art experience which projected a slightly animated version of Eularia Clarke's painting *The 5000* onto the walls of a tent. The hope is to reuse this tech but with a different painting: the likelihood is that the work chosen will then provide a theme for other activities or zones. It will be interesting to see which of six paintings on offer was finally chosen, as it looked like quite an even spread to me! Not all the ideas will be used, but I know that no decisions about 2024's 3Generate programme were to be made until after the Influencer Day. The 3Generate team really do take the children's views seriously.

The atmosphere was friendly and group leaders mingled and chatted. There was plenty to eat for lunch, and, when our group needed to stretch their legs, we were able to find space just outside the meeting room for a game of tag. We returned for the final worship and left the NEC having had a good day. We are looking forward to returning in October to see what 3Generate holds in store for everyone this year! (See also page 18)

50 years, and much more, of women in ministry

Three and a half years before I was born, and 30 years before I began my own circuit ministry, something momentous happened in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain. We took the radical step of ordaining our first female presbyters.

I mention my own dates, to recognise that I walked in the footsteps of my mothers and sisters in the faith, who had made my way so much smoother. I have had some small reminders at times that for some I am a deviation from what a 'normal' minister looks like, but in general I have had warmth, support, encouragement or, better still, a complete lack of my gender being worthy of note at all. Of course, those footsteps began much more than 50 years ago. In my current role, it is my frequent privilege to introduce women and girls to a number of our biblical foremothers, who were ministers in the Church, or whose leadership or discipleship was remarkable. There are far too many to name here, but here are some of my favourites.

Junia is among those greeted by Paul in *Romans* 16. She was apparently an apostle, though this was sufficiently disconcerting to later generations so that many manuscripts were 'corrected' to read Junias, a masculine name. Almost all modern English translations now accept her.

Phoebe was a deacon, also named in *Romans* and quite possibly the carrier of the epistle. Until recently, Bible translators have tended to call her a 'servant'; that is the root meaning of *diacone*, but oddly enough, many of the same translators took a different approach to the masculine form. We don't know exactly when 'deacon' or 'minister' became a recognised office, but it probably was before *Romans* was written. In any case, consistency is surely not too much to ask?

Deborah crops up in *Judges*. She was a prophetess, and a national leader, at a time when charismatic individuals would lead Israel. She was a successful military strategist, consulted by a (male) general, who wouldn't go to battle without her.

Priscilla, or Prisca, with her husband, taught a young, eloquent preacher some doctrine, before he embarked on mission to Achaia (*Acts* 18). It is interesting that, although she and her husband are generally named together, she is



Catrin & family at her ordination

usually, contrary to convention, named first.

Hagar was the Egyptian slave of Sarah and Abraham, used as a surrogate mother, then abused to the point where she ran away. In the wilderness, pregnant, desperate and alone, she met an angel, in whom she also met God. She is the only person in the Hebrew Bible to give God a name - El-roi, which means 'God who sees', because she, so used to being treated as a chattel, was seen by God in all her humanity. She returned to Sarah, but was later sent away with her son, Ishmael; they almost died, but having been rescued again by God, she became the mother of a nation.

With more space, I could have named Lydia, various Marys, Ruth, Esther, Naomi, Martha, and so many more. I could also have mentioned the many unnamed women whose part in the story is so often overlooked. (In their honour, I have decided not to name many men in this article.)

Back to today's church... There is still so much to be done, to bring about full gender equality (and even more to undo other injustices). There are still too few women in positions of national or regional leadership, and most women in ministry can list the micro (and sometimes macro) aggressions that they have endured. But there is also so much cause for celebration in the daughters of Phoebe, Junia and Priscilla!



Revd Catrin Harland-Davies
(John Wesley Society, 1996-99)

Director, Centre for Continuing Ministerial Development,
The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham

The Wednesday Club –

a hidden treasure in the heart of Marylebone

A few minutes' walk from Oxford Street in London, Hinde Street Methodist Church offers meals to people in need. The Club, as it is known, is open twice a week on Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Wednesdays hot food is cooked on the premises, while on Thursdays homemade sandwiches or those donated by local cafes are shared.

At 3.00pm, people have already arrived and are waiting for the volunteers to serve the food. Most of the clients are regulars and they know each other. Michelangelo has been coming to the Wednesday Club for the past six years. "It's good food and great people. We are still in touch with Belinda, the previous vicar, who is now in Scarborough. Sometimes we even have a video call with her from here," says Michelangelo as, with a friendly smile, he quickly picks up his food before going to sit in the room to carry on his conversation.

Michelangelo is one of many who have enjoyed the food, companionship and warmth of the Wednesday club since it moved to Hinde Street Methodist Church in 1986. "We provide food, small items of clothing, toiletries and sleeping bags. Many people who come here are homeless, some of them do have places to live, but they still come perhaps because they are in unsuitable accommodation, in places they don't like or they need some company. Getting out of the cold and having a meal helps save money. Most of the people who come are regulars," says Alan, who has been a member of the church for decades and has been a volunteer at The Club for over 10 years.

The Club runs independently from Hinde Street Methodist Church. It used to depend financially on the church but the Club is now supported by the charitable wing of a financial company. They currently have fifteen volunteers, half of them are from the church and the other half are good Samaritans who have come to London from around the world and work to help the church's outreach including Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela. Caroline, from the US, has been volunteering for the past five years, "I found

this place randomly and wanted to come back and see if I could help out."

Bantering with the attendees, the Wednesday Club's volunteers provide food, warmth and an ear to anyone who wishes to have a chat, but the volunteers don't pry. "The clients are a nice bunch, very friendly, but we don't go into people's backgrounds and ask them uncomfortable questions. Some of them are happy to talk a lot, some don't, and both are fine," adds Alan.

Most of the attendees are British and the average age is about 60 years old. The number of attendees remains constant during the year. "We could expect the numbers to go up because of the increase in the number of people sleeping rough. It doesn't for us which might be due to the fact that we don't really advertise our service, it's more by word of mouth," explains Alan. A drastic increase in attendees would be a struggle as the room used for the club can have no more than 50 people at a time and the volunteers could be overwhelmed.

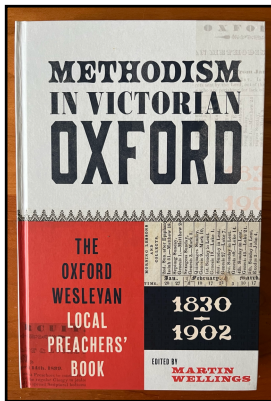
There was one young man who was working as a musician and security guard for a church at night but was living on the streets during the day. Despite lacking the funds to afford his accommodation, he invested his money in a camera to make a film that was previewed in the West End. Now, he is pursuing a degree in filmmaking, thanks to his determination and talent and the support of the West London Mission.

In his time of need, he could count on Hinde Street Methodist Church's Wednesday Club where he received meals and listening ears from volunteers and other attendees. "It's fantastic to hear stories like that. I can't say that we help, but he used to come here every week. So we helped in that sense, just by providing him somewhere to go. That's what we're doing and will keep on doing," concludes Alan.

Reprinted from the Methodist Church website's Blog, 8 February 2024

<https://www.hindestreet.org.uk>

Methodist preachers in Victorian Oxford



The fruits of Martin Wellings's last sabbatical, as well as much additional research and a good deal of hard work are evident in his fascinating recent publication: *Methodism in Victorian Oxford, The Oxford Wesleyan Preachers' Book* (Boydell Press on behalf of the Oxford Record Society 2023).

The bulk of the book consists of transcriptions of the minutes of the Oxford Wesleyan Circuit Local Preachers' meetings between 1830 and 1902. Why would anyone want to read those, one might well ask? In fact, they reveal a great deal about the dedicated service of Oxford's local (lay) preachers in the 19th century, the mistakes they occasionally made and the variety of challenges they faced. If they don't completely tell the story of Methodism in Victorian Oxford, they form an essential and influential part.

However, on their own, the minutes would be a hard read. What sets this book apart is Martin's excellent introduction and meticulous footnotes and index. His sixty-page introduction (invaluable to those unfamiliar with Methodism) sets the scene historically, explains the local context, and draws out some fascinating conclusions about the type of men (and they were all men at this time) who served the church as local preachers. The footnotes and index reveal that he has painstakingly researched the biography of every individual listed in the minutes. Some reveal fascinating life stories, while others have proved rather more elusive.

Here you will find that 'brothers', as the preachers referred to each other, occasionally 'disappointed'. This is not a reflection of the quality of their sermons but an indication of their failure to turn up to take the service for which they

had been appointed – the nightmare of every church steward! You will find that preachers were occasionally reprimanded for preaching eccentricities 'amounting to buffooneries', whatever those might have been. Backsliding was also reprimanded. Preachers were expected to attend their class meetings and always behave impeccably. The minutes reveal they, like the rest of us, were human beings quite capable of making mistakes. Usually, punishment involved being asked to explain their behaviour at the next meeting, being left off the preaching plan for a quarter, or being moved down the 'list' of preachers on the plan. The latter amounting to a public humiliation as the order of names on the plan did not just indicate seniority by years of preaching but by spiritual example.

The challenges around ministerial versus lay authority, which were besetting Methodism nationally, affected the Oxford Wesleyan Circuit very seriously and preaching was at the heart of the local dispute and eventual schism. Many preachers listed on the 1839 plan left over the next ten or so years, taking others with them, eventually coalescing to form a local United Methodist Circuit, much to the disappointment of the remaining Wesleyans. The changing social and political scene also caused some disquiet, when a wealthy Islip farmer objected to a brother who was involved in the National Agricultural Labour Union. His objection was not upheld by the meeting. Good for them!

Martin's book will be of great use to local historians, those interested in family history as well as Methodist heritage nerds like myself. I myself refer to it frequently, whether to help put a story behind someone buried in Headington Quarry churchyard, to augment the information in the Islip village archive where I live, or to deepen my understanding of Oxford's rich Methodist heritage.

Much of the information in this book has been available but buried in public record offices, registers of births, marriages and deaths and in census returns. Martin's great skill has been to combine these archives, creating something new and valuable. You might say, he has resurrected them!

Alison Butler



This moving and inspirational film is based on the true story of a British Stockbroker, Sir Nicholas (Nicky) Winton. He was born in London in 1909 to German-Jewish parents and was baptised in the Anglican Church. He became a socialist and humanitarian.

The film begins in 1988 with Nicky, played by Anthony Hopkins, as an elderly family man, humble, unassuming and somewhat troubled. Whilst sorting out his paperwork, he and, subsequently, his wife come across all the paperwork for the remarkable story which unfolds and which Nicky has kept to himself for decades. Flashbacks come from 50 years earlier when Nicky (Johnny Flynn) had gone to Prague in December 1938 to help a friend with welfare work. There he saw for himself the terrible conditions Jewish Czech refugee children were enduring under the Nazis. The rescue of Austrian and German Jews had already begun, but there were no systems in place to rescue these children. Nicky spearheaded a very ambitious scheme to transport these desperate children to Britain. He was encouraged and supported by his mother (played by Helena Bonham Carter), who campaigned tirelessly for the cause. During the next 8 months, the work of Nicky and his friends in Czechoslovakia brought 669 children to Britain, until it was tragically ended with the onset of the War in September 1939. Coming back to 1988, Nicky learns about the impact his work had on so many.

This is an emotional film which highlights compassion, humility and determination. Hopkins, Flynn and Bonham Carter are outstanding in their roles. It is a story of courage and love in action; and, as a tribute, the BBC have put 2 old programmes on *iPlayer*: *That's Life* with Esther Rantzen and *This is your Life* with Michael Aspel.

www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer

THIS IS A LOVE STORY: A POP MUSICAL

On the 2nd February I was privileged to go to a workshop at the Birmingham Hippodrome to see musical theatre in the making. Jack Godfrey, known to many of us, is working extremely hard writing music and lyrics for his musical theatre projects. *This is a Love Story* was the first public workshop produced by the Hippodrome's recently established New Musical Theatre department. The musical had previously been performed in Dundee in November 2021 as part of COP26, and is now being reworked. Jack is the composer and lyricist, working with Ellie Coote who has written a book, and additional lyrics. There are two characters, Earth and Humanity, who form a romantic relationship. The musical explores how their relationship becomes toxic as Humanity begins to misuse Earth. Having seen the original performance, which was streamed from Dundee, I could see how much effort had gone into the changes they have made. The added dialogue made a real difference for me. The band were excellent and the music is high energy and catchy. The message about the Climate Change crisis comes across powerfully and presents a fresh approach to raising awareness of the damage earth is suffering because of humanity's actions. People were encouraged to leave notes of thoughts and Jack and Ellie will continue to make changes based on these and, hopefully, the workshops will lead to a theatre run in the future.

Jack has also written four other musicals: *Babies* was performed at the Lyric Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue last November with great success; *Free Solo* was performed at the Drayton Arms Theatre in April 2018; excitingly, *42 Balloons* will run at The Lowry, Salford from April to May 2024; not forgetting *Amazing Love*, in which many of you will have participated when it was performed at Wesley Memorial in February 2017.

Congratulations, Jack! We are so pleased to see your hard work and talent bearing fruit. Keep composing!

Both reviews by Janet Forsaith

Exhibitions

Oxford is a marvellous place for exhibitions. Prestigious institutions have the power to bring together artefacts and treasures which ordinary folk would never see in the normal run of things. This week, for instance, we sampled *Chaucer here and now* in the Bodleian Weston Library and *Colour Revolution: Victorian Art, Fashion & Design* at the Ashmolean Museum.

I have to confess that the latter exhibition is due to close on February 18th, so apologies that as you read this, you may have missed it! This does not prevent me from saying how surprising and impressive it was. Subtitled *Victorian Art, Fashion and Design*, its aim seemed to be to dispel the prevailing image of Victorian gentlemen dressed in black with black top hats, Queen Victoria dressed in black (after the untimely demise of Prince Albert), and the general industrial grime and poverty that kept the populace down, and made Charles Dickens a household name.

To combat this monochrome view, we were treated to Turner's vision of Venice, Ruskin's exquisite kingfisher in watercolour, a stunning portrait of Scheherazade by French-born Sophie Anderson, and a Toulouse-Lautrec poster for the famous Moulin Rouge dancer Jane Avril. Nor could we forget the Pre-Raphaelites and their richly coloured tributes to Mediaeval art, in painting and stained glass. There was sumptuous jewellery, there were ancient terra cotta statuettes, and larger sculptures showing that the pre-Christian world's art was not all white.



Victorian jewels



Ruskin's kingfisher

We saw fascinating insights into how an artist's colours were sourced before the 19th century and then, with the help of industrial chemistry, how the range was vastly increased. It turns out that the story that only processing thousands of Murex snails could produce purple dye may be an exaggeration. Lydia, the seller of purple in Acts 16, would

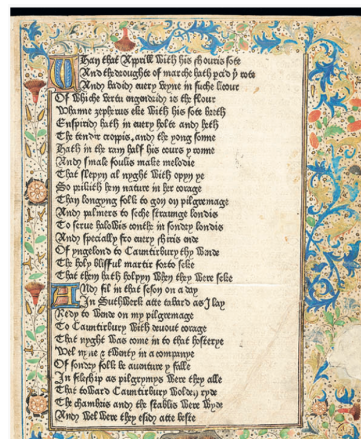
have known! It's quite possible that plants provided some of the purple well before 1856, when a young chemist called William Perkin discovered by chance that from coal tar he could synthesise mauve or purple, and completely revolutionised the history of colour.

Chaucer Here and Now is displayed in the Weston Library in the room that consists of one large space with cases round the wall and in the middle, in contrast to the three spacious rooms in the Ashmolean. Chaucer the enigma comes across as a misogynist or a feminist, a conformist or a radical, a solid Englishman and a genuine European, a moraliser or a teller of bawdy tales!

The exhibits lead us through Chaucer's life and passions, including an illuminated manuscript of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, various manuscript copies of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* and other works by Chaucer, and a Caxton printed edition of the *Canterbury Tales* dated 1476. More recent treatments of the tales following their inspiration include "contemporary adaptations in theatre and film", not forgetting the extravagant William Morris *Kelmscott Chaucer*, often referred to as one of the most beautiful printed books in existence.

Fortunately you still have time to visit the Chaucer exhibition after Easter, until 28th April. Admission is free – don't miss it!

Kate Dobson



The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Caxton)

Helen Paige (née Gill) 1932–2023

Helen was one of four children, born in Beckley, Sussex. From a young age, she was taken to church and Sunday School by her mother. One of her early memories was of standing in the pulpit at her church, reciting a poem on a Sunday School Anniversary, and wondering whether one day she would actually preach from a pulpit herself.

She first attended the village school and then went to Rye Grammar School in 1943, when the school had been evacuated to Bedford. New pupils were billeted with families within the Bedford area during term-time but were allowed home at holiday times. Helen was billeted with a young widow, whom she remembered as extremely kind and who kept her well fed considering the lack of provisions at the time. The school moved back to Rye in 1944, and Helen sat School Certificate exams in 1948 and Higher School Certificate in 1950.

After leaving school Helen moved to London, where she started working for the *Invalid Children's Aid Association*. She lived in a hostel in Chelsea, attending Chelsea Methodist Church and enjoying the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. She worked in London until 1953, when she married Ted Paige, whom she knew from childhood days. They lived in Reading while Ted completed his postgraduate research at the University, and in 1955 they moved to Malvern, where Ted then took up a post with the Radar Research Establishment.

Helen and Ted lived in Malvern for 22 years, during which time their four children – two girls and two boys – were born. In 1977 the family moved to Horton-cum-Studley when Ted took up the post of Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Oxford. During this period, Helen completed her training as a Local Preacher, becoming fully accredited in 1980.

Helen's sermons were clear and straightforward, and I was delighted when I was told that she would be my mentor



when I received a 'note to preach' in 1983. She was patient and kind, always ready to listen to what I had to say and to help me work my way through a tricky passage or tune.

Later, she became involved in the 'Nettle-graspers' group, guiding local preachers 'on trial'. Jean King told me that Helen was a valued member of the group who often had interesting insights to contribute.

In the 1980s the then Superintendent Minister, Revd Nigel Collinson, spearheaded the opening of the church during the week, and Helen was involved in this from the beginning. Open Church became a regular feature of Wesley Memorial from then on.

Quite soon after her arrival in Oxford, Helen also became involved in voluntary lay work for the church and the wider circuit. She retired from lay work in 2000, but remained active in the church. Helen was a member of various house groups over the years, most recently attending the Monday Evening Group and an ecumenical group at Ritchie Court in Summertown, before the pandemic.

After Ted died in 2004, Helen remained in Horton-cum-Studley, where she continued to be an active member of the community and a busy hostess to the growing family that included five grandchildren; and to friends from the community and the church. She was also an occasional helper at Wesley Memorial's 'Friday Lunchbreak'.

Helen Paige

Helen enjoyed music in all its forms, especially opera. Every January, when the rest of the world were booking their summer holidays, Helen was making plans for the upcoming Glyndebourne season. She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the England cricket team, and was delighted to see them playing at Lords in the 2023 Ashes series. She and Ted shared a common interest in the natural world and this would shape their holiday destinations and mid-week day trips; Helen always with a pair of binoculars dangling around her neck.

She was a quiet, self-contained person, but one with a great deal of faith, always ready to encourage those worse off than herself. I will remember her as a thoughtful mentor, a true friend, and a good companion, never slow to serve, dependable and sure.



Helen at her 90th birthday party, May 2022

I feel privileged to have known Helen, whose goodness shone out of her, and I am sure that she will be greatly missed at Wesley Memorial.

Joanna Tulloch, with contributions from Helen's daughters Sadie and Clare

An appeal for helpers for 3Generate

3Generate, the children's and youth assembly of the Methodist Church, aims to create an inclusive and diverse space for the prophetic voice of children and young people to emerge and be heard.

This year **3Generate** needs to grow the team of volunteers by 25%, and they want to encourage everyone in Methodist churches to consider getting involved!

There are three prime ways in which people can serve as part of the event: through a care, help or engage 'team' – so finding a role that fits shouldn't be too hard!

Depending on your skills, experience and gifts, which team best suits you?

- Care: night stewards, youth support, village hosts, team lounge hospitality, additional needs/accessibility team?
- Help: reception, registration and stewards?
- Engage: working in a range of venues across site that cater for a variety of passions and interests, including The Arts Centre, The Theatre, The Rec, The Health & Wellbeing Centre and many more?

If you are interested in finding out more please talk to Mel McCulloch. Several of our Church members have volunteered in different roles over the last few years and it's a great experience!

Go to <https://www.methodist.org.uk> and search for **3Generate**, to watch a video about volunteering, by Jude Levermore.

Wesley Memorial Church



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Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul

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

Lay chaplain: Libby Hawkness-Smith

Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

Church & circuit administrator: Jo Godfrey

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Wednesday prayers 12.30 pm

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews
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