
Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Spring 2026



Now the green blade rises

Dear Friends,

As I write, Lent has just begun, and we are led again into the season of watching and waiting. In these Lenten weeks we have an opportunity to catch our breath in the midst of the busy world, to remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return and that we are called to turn and be faithful to God. This is a call to go out into the world gently, not to prove our goodness but to practise truth. To take a slower breath, a quieter pace, a steadier yes. To look for signs of new life, and to know that when we falter we will be met with grace and not with shame, as we go with the love of Christ and the companionship of the Spirit.

One of my favourite Easter hymns is *Now the green blade riseth*, the theme of this magazine. John MacLeod Campbell Crum's evocative words set to a hauntingly beautiful tune are often overlooked for the more triumphant *Thine be the glory* or *Christ the Lord is risen today*. This hymn speaks of hope, using the analogy of nature as a sign that God raised Jesus from death and will indeed raise us too.

*Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

One of my favourite places in the UK is Launde Abbey in the countryside bordering Leicestershire and Rutland. It is literally in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by sheep. In the grounds just beyond Launde is an old dead looking tree and a number of others that have been uprooted, lying on their sides, with roots clearly visible. It is in many ways a sad sight. However, what is fascinating is that despite their uprootedness and apparent death, they nevertheless sprout new leaves each year and are actually living and indeed thriving trees.



The gospels tell us that Jesus was laid in a tomb which was a newly hewn-out cave in which no-one had previously been laid. The tomb was in a garden. Gardens traditionally speak to us of the natural life cycle. There is Winter when all in the garden seems to have died; there is Spring where resurgence occurs and all the plants that lay dormant suddenly spring into life. Then comes Summer when the plants come into flower and are at their best, before the inevitable Autumn comes when the leaves on plants and trees turn beautiful colours before they drop off in the wind and Winter comes and all seems to have died again only for the cycle to repeat itself again and again.

Perhaps it is no accident that Jesus rose from the tomb in a garden. If gardens speak to us of resurgence and new life each spring, then it says something of God's loving purpose for his Son and for each and every one of us. If Mary Magdalene encountered God's loving purpose of resurrection and new life, then gardens too should be occasions for us to encounter God's purpose and remind us that, even in the darkest moments of despair that there is hope, and even in the shadow of death, there is to be new life and love.

It is this Love which springs up afresh for us each morning, not only on Easter Day. Every day is an opportunity to step into resurrection; to let the presence of Christ grow within us like a seed. Initially that growth may be unseen, but soon it pushes through and we witness the first tentative shoots of faith. If we nurture that faith, water it well and keep it facing towards the Son – perhaps we too will come to know what resurrection feels like. 'Love is come again like wheat that springeth green'.

With Lent and Easter blessings,
Rev Miriam Moul, February 2026



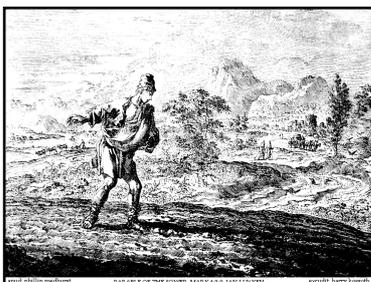
Now the green blade rises *Singing the Faith* 306

John Macleod Campbell Crum, an Anglican cleric who served as rector of Farnham and Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, wrote these words specifically for *Noël Nouvelet*, a fifteenth-century French Christmas carol tune. The carol was first published in the *Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928. The words have since been updated slightly (e.g. “riseth” has become “rises”).

Though clearly an ‘Easter hymn’, these are words that may encourage fruitful reflection at other times also, for example at funerals, memorial services, and as a way of touching on the realities of harvest.

Once described as “the only truly authentic Easter hymn”, *Now the green blade rises* takes as its starting point words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12: 23-24).

For many who live in Western urban settings, the full force of the imagery in this hymn is hard to grasp. Fields of growing crops are often remote from view; and outdoor burials are less common than indoor cremations. Picturing buried grain or open graves may require imagination. For Jesus, however, arable farming was part and parcel of everyday life – recall, for example, his parable of the sower, Mark 4: 2-8. He understood that there is both a mystery but also a tangible reality in what can live and grow out of the experience of death.



Etching by Jan Luyken illustrating Mark 4: 2-8 in the Bowyer Bible, Bolton, England. Photo by Harry Kossuth

Later in the same chapter in Mark, he observes:

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.” (Mark: 4: 26-29)

John Crum encapsulates the implications of these words in his deceptively simple depiction of Jesus (Love) in that dark hiatus between Good Friday and Easter morning: “laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen” (verse 2). Here, and throughout the hymn, Crum writes of hope (not optimism) present in all our Easter Saturdays of death and despair, ready to push through and grow once more in the shape of God’s love.

Adapted from:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/hymns/now-the-green-blade-rises-from-the-buried-grain-stf-306/>

Editorial

As we prepare the magazine at the beginning of Lent, we cannot ignore the pressing needs of the world, and the many places of war and oppression, hunger and deprivation. So we look forward to times of prayer and meditation, the Circuit Lenten Bible study, and our Lent and Holy Week services. We shall listen again to the gospel accounts of the Passion, and immerse ourselves in wonderful music.

Eventually the joy of Easter will break through, love will conquer, faith will be rekindled. We hope you will enjoy this varied collection of reflections around the theme of Easter, and news from our efforts to celebrate the Gospel news, and to make a difference in Oxford!

A very happy and blessed Easter 2026 to you all!

The Editorial team

Good Friday: Walking on Water

This painting confuses me. At first I assumed we must be in a boat – along with the disciples from the Bible reading who see Jesus walking towards them on the water. But somehow the waves at the front of the painting don't really look like the waves at the side of a boat. Then someone else suggested we were standing on the shore, some of the beach's pebbles and sand visible in the centre. That does make more sense, and yet somehow ... it doesn't seem quite right, either. The height of the waves producing a huge wall of water seems out of all proportion. Perhaps it's just that I haven't ever seen the seashore in a real storm like this before. But regardless of whether it is due to the artist's painting or my lack of experience and imagination – I'm still feeling confused.

Looking into the distance, by comparison, all is clear: the wild waves of a storm, the threatening dark water and sky. I can see exactly what is going on. And then there is that small ghostly figure of someone walking on water. Someone wearing a long white robe and with just a hint of a halo above. Exactly how we might imagine Jesus walking across the water in a storm. Walking on a beam of light across the waves.

When the disciples see Jesus and cry out in fear because they think he is a ghost, Jesus replies with "It is I; do not be afraid." Except that he doesn't say "it is I", he says "I am". The gospel writers use the same expression that is God's name revealed to Moses in the burning bush. In Jesus we see God. That is what the gospel writers want to convey with this story – whether Jesus really ever walked on water or stilled a storm is neither here nor there.

So we're left with us standing in a confusing mess at the front of the painting and out there where God is, everything makes sense. That isn't what I was expecting. Navigating everyday life seems simple and contemplating God – who or what God is, how God relates to our world – that is usually what is confusing.

But perhaps the painting is right and I've got it the wrong way round. Perhaps contemplating God is easy: God is

Maggie Hambling 2006



Oil on board, 2006

© the artist / Bridgeman Images.

Image credit: Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes

simply love itself and we just need to love God and our neighbour as ourselves – that's all there is. And perhaps our life is a bit of a confused mess, because, of course, working out what loving means in practice constantly throws up moral dilemmas and conundrums we need to pick our way through: difficult or disintegrating relationships, pain and forgiveness, boundaries to be stood by or relaxed, new technologies throwing up new questions.

We can't tell whether that beam of light connecting Jesus with the shore emanates from the figure or whether it comes from a lighthouse somewhere behind us. I wonder if the light goes both ways: at times our understanding of Jesus enlightened even further by our everyday experience and practice of love, at other times, Jesus shedding light on the way forward in our confused and messy lives.

Vicky Davies

Bible References

Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, John 6:16-21)

Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15)

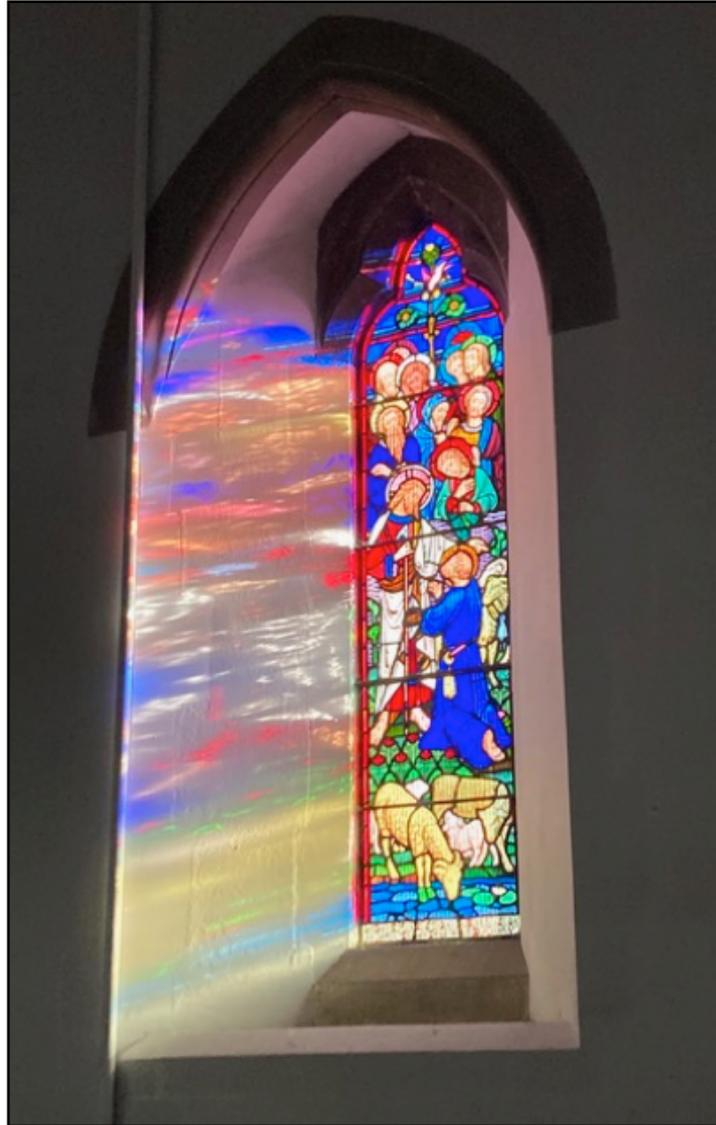
God is Love (1 John 4:8)

The greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40,

Mark 12:28-34)

www.seeingbeyond.org.uk © 2024

A glimpse of the Glory of God?



The Peter Window, To the Glory of God, MDCCCLX

Last December I paused for a few minutes in St Peter's, Wolvercote. The noonday sun 'painted' the Peter Window for fleeting seconds. Another moment and the image would have gone. Perhaps there are some images we are meant to see, and save...

Alan Dobson

1932 and All That: Why Bother with Methodist Union?



Celebrating the Union: Andover Town Hall

This was the question posed by the Revd Dr Martin Wellings in a seminar hosted in the Gibbs Library on 3 February 2026. Why indeed? Why did they bother? And does it bother us now, given that none of us can remember it?

These are my recollections of the hour we spent delving into the fascinating scene.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the people called Methodists found themselves fragmented into different groups, some large, some small. Some splits were on doctrinal grounds, but some occurred following disputes between strong personalities, and not a few arose from a powerful Superintendent minister's ruling that if a 'brother' was in the wrong somehow, he should be removed from the preaching plan, or handed some other humiliating sanction.

By the beginning of the last century, these various break-offs had resulted in a large surviving Wesleyan Church, a Primitive Methodist Church about half the size, and an even smaller United Methodist Church. Confusingly called United, it was born in 1907 from the union of the Methodist New Connexion (1797), the Bible Christians (1815), and the United Methodist Free Churches (1857).

This history inevitably resulted in a great deal of duplication of churches and chapels, and indeed, Wesley Memorial's nearest Methodist neighbour at the turn of the century was not, as might be imagined, the Walton Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, a prominent red-brick Gothic building opened in 1883 and whose war memorial we still

display. Nor was it the Primitive Methodist Chapel that existed in St Ebbe's at the time. It was in fact the United Methodist Free Church whose building, constructed in 1871, still stands in St Michael's Street as the North Gate Hall, Grade II listed. A stone's throw away! And as Martin observed, the metaphor could be said to reflect the animosity between the two close neighbours in the 1870s!

The Lambeth Conference of 1920 sounded a powerful call towards unity, even if given by Anglican bishops. *The Appeal to All Christian People* became a landmark in ecumenical relations, aiming to bridge divisions among different Christian traditions, and emphasising the need for reconciliation in the aftermath of World War I. Closer to home, Methodist leaders began to realise that mission might be more effective if resources were shared. Facing up to the challenges of the monolithic Church of England and its perceived drift towards Rome called for a united front, especially in villages where Methodists and their children might experience prejudice and even ill-treatment. Some of the 'family' animosities of the 19th century could now be forgotten in the recognition that it would be good to celebrate the shared heritage of the Wesley revival. And so, gradually, the idea of a union of Methodists emerged.

There were of course problem areas. Other groups considered the Wesleyan Conference to be too powerful, heavily ruled by the President and the other presbyters (all men!); the national meetings of the non-Wesleyans were deliberately called the assembly, conference being a

loaded word. Some other groups had seen women in their ministries but not the Wesleyans. The minorities resisted the idea of giving up some freedoms that lay people had enjoyed, including Local Preachers regularly presiding at Holy Communion. Some bitter memories were fading but not all, and the insistence of some to revert to the writings of John Wesley himself for guidance failed to resolve all their dilemmas!

Finally, after many meetings of the Committee for Union, 100 members, only two of whom were women, and the necessary Parliamentary legislation to free the moves to go ahead re buildings and processes, the Union Conference of 1932 was held in the Albert Hall, and all signed the Deed of Union, assisted by the Duke of York (later King George VI). The annually appointed President of the new church would be a presbyter, on the Wesley model, but the new role of Vice President was reserved for a lay member. (Though at the time, they may not have had much to do, unlike today's pattern where both leaders travel and meet people in a joint enterprise). Presiding at Holy Communion remained the role of the presbyter; however, a dispensation could be obtained for a Local Preacher in "areas of deprivation". All three of the uniting churches had deaconesses who were all accepted into the united church into a single order, named the Wesley Deaconess Order. (However, it would take another 41 years for women to be called to presbyteral ministry!) Societies could arrange to amalgamate if they felt called to, but no church would be obliged to close its doors contrary to the wishes of the congregation.

This is the basis of our church today. As we know, following optimistic times in the 1940s and '50s, there came hard years of falling numbers and many closures of churches, not always involving mergers, with the consent, however reluctant, of the church councils. Resisting the Church of England, or later uniting with it, went through various phases without realistically succeeding. In the 1970s, a proposal for unity failed narrowly. Our overseas districts which in 1932 were part of the Union, eventually became autonomous national churches or united with other denominations, as in the Church of South India. In our time, members and presbyters join us from those former 'overseas districts', which is a joy.

The Methodist Church in Britain is still renowned for its social mission, and works to bring justice in the face of oppression, exploitation and poverty. We still share our heritage and celebrate four national centres, trying not to forget the museum of Primitive Methodism at Englesea Brook. Three websites showcase our Wesleyan / Primitive / United Methodist roots. One interesting question hangs in the air - how will we in 2032 celebrate 100 years of surviving '1932 and all that'?

Many thanks to Martin for a fascinating hour!

Kate Dobson



The Gibbs Library, recently opened in Wesley Memorial, is the newest library in the oldest Methodist city, and is the only research collection in Britain which is solely dedicated to supporting Methodist mission. It has been fitted out to accommodate part of the library of the Wesley Historical Society and other material from the former Westminster College, all funded by the Westminster College Oxford Trust.

The Library is open to visitors and researchers, by arrangement, and people can consult around 4000 books on site or request other material from the larger collection (16,000 items) stored off-site, but easily recalled.

See: <https://woxresearch.co.uk/welcome/the-gibbs-library>

In every corner sing

Early May 2025 took me to the glamorous surroundings of Coventry, and in particular the Methodist Central Hall, for an exhibition and performance celebrating the 35th anniversary of *Rejoice and Sing*, the United Reformed Church's hymn-book.

Discussions on returning from the exhibition revealed a curiosity about hymn tunes which are named for places in Britain – is there a pattern?

That shouldn't be too hard, I thought. Download the index, note which are places, get latitudes and longitudes, place on map. Seven hours later I gave up for the evening and went to bed. There was night and there was morning, a first day. Progress remained gradual.

Not the least of my early challenges was the absence of a digital index of *Rejoice and Sing* in tabular format. I now have some approximation to it thanks to Gordon Woods, elder of St Columba's, but in the interests of efficiency and ecumenical relationships, I grabbed what was available: *Singing the Faith*. So, a Methodist map it is. I suspect the overlap is as considerable in hymns as it is in beliefs, and of course both hymnals only contain a fraction of the hymns and tunes in existence.

A combination of working by hand, Google, Wikipedia, and ChatGPT, eventually got me to approximately a 'good-enough' identification of hymn tunes which are places, and where those places are, albeit with some choices to be made. Are hymns named for individual churches, or schools, to be counted as places? Are counties places, and where is their centre point? The tune *Norfolk* does not appear in this hymn-book, sparing me the question whether it is named for the county or the dukes!

Generally, I went for inclusion and simplicity. *Cwm Rhondda*, yes. *Northumbria*, yes. *Regent Square*, yes. *Westminster Abbey*, yes. Though some are missing: *Duke Street*, *Falcon Street*, for time would be needed to identify

which streets are in question. Garelochside could presumably be placed on the shore of Gare Loch, but for now has not been.

Herewith, a map. A larger dot implies more hymns using the same tune, and the online version of the map enables the user to click on the dot and see the hymns:

<https://shorturl.at/WkYML>



There is, then, something of a bias to the south, though in particular against the East Coast. Within the vicinity of Wesley Memorial, the most local hymn tune is *Wolvercote*, for *O Jesus I have promised*, which can also be sung to a range of tunes, (*Thornbury*, *Hatherop Castle*, *Day of rest*).

Abingdon appears as the tune for two hymns, Brian Wren's *Great God, your love has called us here*, and the less well known, *Lord Christ we praise your sacrifice*, by Alan Gaunt, of *We pray for peace* fame.

After that we are on the fringes of the county and its neighbours, with the traditional melody *Shipston* (my grandfather's family home) featuring with *God whose farm is all creation*, and *Nuffield* (which I am crediting to the village in the Chilterns, not the college, but without absolute certainty) as the setting for *Come, wounded healer, your sufferings reveal*.

There is more I would like to do, when energy and time allow, but for now, I hope 'the story so far', if not quite wondrous or delightful, (the adjective *Hyfrydol* sounds like a place in Wales, but isn't) is of some interest.

John Courouble
St Columba's URC

[*Wolvercote* is loved by singers but notoriously tricky for organists! Ed.]

A letter from a friend

Dulcie Glassborow in Scotland



Dulcie, proving they have sunshine in Scotland

Since I came to live in Scotland, eight years ago, (it seems like yesterday), I have attended Dunfermline East Church of Scotland. It is a fairly young church situated in the midst of a development area. The majority of houses are less than fifteen years old and the area is still developing, with building of houses still going on. Dunfermline East Church has been in existence for less than twenty years. This means that there are a lot of young families living locally. The Church population is of all ages and we are fortunate that we have an all-age congregation. It's a very busy church. A recent census of the Sunday morning congregation confirmed this. There were 62 under 16s, a group of 16 to 25s, who are at school, college, or working. Huge variety of professionals: teachers, health care, accountants, 'techies'. We count ourselves lucky.

It is a bit like Wesley Mem but without the students. The Church building is modern, warm and cosy with plenty of small rooms, a church office, a part-time secretary, a large café area and the worship area which accommodates play areas in the week. The Church is open nearly all the time: evening activities, choir, meetings, etc. We have a productive relationship with the nearby primary school who hold beginning-of-term and end-of-term services. We are a community church. The café is open three days, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the staff are a combination of paid staff and volunteers kept in order by Sue who coordinates it all. Like Rainbow House.

We have home groups, a prayer group, a craft group, a gents' group, and activities for children and teenagers. All part of mission to the local community. Faith is at all levels,

from those who are beginning their faith journey to those who have experienced the love and patience of God through many years. It is a caring community.

I am part of the Ladies' group. We are all old, several in our 80s; we meet for lunch once a week and again at a local garden-centre café on Friday. Each year a group of all ages sleeps out in Edinburgh, others in their gardens, to raise funds for the homeless, a big problem in Edinburgh. We have a BSL class, a Tai-Chi Group, a widows' group, a community choir. Never a dull moment at Dunfermline East!

Our minister is a great asset. He is a passionate preacher and teacher who works very hard. Previously we had a trainee probationer during Covid and then for a further period, and between them they expanded the work in the local community. Since his ordination, Jack has become minister at two other churches over the other side of the bridge. From reports, Jack is doing a magnificent job there. We like to think it is because he was trained by us!

In addition to our minister's preaching on a Sunday, we have had talks and sermons by a couple of Ukrainian priests and other people. I do miss the variety of the Local Preacher system, but on the other hand having the same person each week means that a theme or a particular book of the Bible can be worked through, providing good teaching. We recently worked our way through *Exodus*. My home group has been exploring the book of *Daniel*, very interesting.

I hope this has given you a picture of Dunfermline East. Not very different to Wesley Mem! A lot goes on and the Church is part of the Community. Please feel welcome to come and visit, I have spare beds, it is a beautiful part of the country, close to Edinburgh and the fabulous east coast. Bring warm clothes, a raincoat, a hot water bottle and several jumpers! I have divided loyalties when it comes to football and the Six Nations rugby, but I like living in Scotland! Edinburgh is lovely, especially in the summer. Dundee (60 miles away), has the V&A museum and the Highlands are just up the road! So much to be grateful for. Praise the Lord!

Street Pastors in Oxford

in the streets of every city

Where the bruised and lonely dwell,

Let us show the Saviour's pity,

Let us of his mercy tell.

Hugh Sherlock [*Singing the Faith* 410]

In early January a group of current and former Street Pastors from Wesley Memorial shared some of their experiences of being out in Oxford's very busy night-time city centre.

Q: Who are the Street Pastors?

A: You will find Street Pastors in their recognisable blue uniform of warm jackets and hats, and carrying branded rucksacks, volunteering usually for one shift a month, to help people stay safe and find their way home. They are a non-threatening presence as they slowly walk the streets in teams of three or four, looking out for anyone alone or in trouble and chatting to door staff, kebab-van operators and the taxi marshals, all vital parts of the night-time economy. The Street Pastors are certainly encouraged by the city council and the police, but distinct from them, they are volunteers from different churches supported by Churches Together in Central Oxford, including Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Salvation Army, and United Reformed, with the founding chair being the former minister of Bonn Square Baptist Church. It is a national organisation but started here in 2010, since when there have always been volunteers from Wesley Memorial Church.

Q: How do Street Pastors use their rucksacks?

A: Everything in the bags shows the practical caring love of Jesus including:

Flip-flops, offered as gifts whenever they see someone with bare feet trying to make their way to the late buses or taxis, after abandoning tight dancing shoes, or high heels.

A dustpan and brush, for sweeping up broken glass.

Lots of lollipops – great conversation starters, and often opening up stories of loneliness and struggle. Calming

in fraught situations as well as helping to absorb the after effects of alcohol.

Bottles of water

Disposable vomit bowls – for protecting clothing and helping friends supporting someone to get home

Protein bars – particularly for those who are sleeping on the streets

Foil blankets – discreet covers if someone is unwell and exposed

Two-way radio – keeps contact with CCTV monitors

Phone charger.

Q Why did some of the Street Pastors from Wesley Mem first volunteer?

A: “A stranger had once helped me when I was out and in trouble”, “I heard about it from preachers at our church”, “Conversations with people who knew me”, “My wife was a Street Pastor. She inspired me to find out more about what was going on at night, which would give me more insight as a judge”, “I had worked with students”.

Q: What have been some of your memorable experiences?

A: “On my first shift, club staff radioed saying they were concerned about a young woman they had excluded because she was too drunk. We saw her climb into a random nearby car, but the driver pushed her out; and we took her to a nearby kebab-van for something to eat. When she was sober enough to walk, we supported her all the way to her college. When her friends met her there, they said it was a regular occurrence and she had a serious problem. She had certainly been extremely vulnerable, especially had the car driver been predatory”.

A: “We met a young woman who didn't know where she was and had lost her friends. We weren't sure what to do, except to stay with her and reassure her. After a while, her phone rang and it was her mum, and we discovered that they were in Oxford for a young friend's memorial service that afternoon and had had a tough day. We were able to



tell her mum that she was not alone and when the phone rang again, it was one of their group looking for another friend. We were able to explain where we were and slowly some of the others turned up who actually knew where they were staying. We were able to spend time just listening and then directing them to their accommodation”.

Q: Has being a Street Pastor made a difference to you?

A: “Seeing Christianity in action and my conversations with volunteers from other denominations has increased my faith.” “I am more confident to talk about my faith in other

parts of my life”.

A: “I have a greater sense of God’s presence. Each shift is underpinned by prayer, before leaving, during and at the end. Without it, I am sure we could not be where we need to be when we are needed, nor would answers emerge to seemingly impossible situations”.

Q: What would you like to say about being a Street Pastor?

A: “ It is not just about going out at night. Oxford Street Pastors need people committed to pray for them as well as more volunteers so that they can cover more weekends. To be a Street Pastor, you do not have to be a superhero or indeed a saint! In fact, the most important thing is to have mixed teams of all ages, genders, church backgrounds, skills and life experience who can work together for God in our city.”

We need more volunteers so please consider becoming a Street Pastor. You can find out more from:

<https://streetpastors.org/locations/oxford/>

OWNS at Wesley Mem

At Wesley Memorial we have been hosting the Oxford Winter Night Shelter one evening a week for the last 6 years. We cover Saturday nights and this shift is staffed entirely by Wesley Mem volunteers, who help to set up, lead shifts, stay overnight, clear away in the morning or make cakes. Our wonderful caretakers also deal with the washing every week.

This year we have had 30 volunteers, many of whom have done several shifts and we have welcomed five new volunteers. Thank you to everyone who gives up their time to take part in this wonderful ecumenical project. Your support really does make a difference to those who need it. More information can be found about OWNS here:

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

Jo Godfrey



The hall ready to receive guests

Introducing Zoe Wright

Kate: Zoe, Thank you for agreeing to do a live interview for the *Wesley Memorial Magazine*. How long have you been working in *The Gatehouse*?

Zoe: This is my sixteenth year. I started as a volunteer and became a paid worker in 2019.

Kate: And what is your role?

Zoe: As Services Manager, I manage the cafe, the staff there, the counselling and casework, and LEAF: the Lived Experience Advisory Forum. As it says on our website, the Casework Team work with individual guests to provide a wide range of personal support. The key areas are tenancy sustainment, homelessness prevention, health, mental health, wellbeing and addictions, benefits and budgeting, accessing education, work and training, and building support networks. And the LEAF project conducts research among people who have ‘lived experience’ of the problems our clients face. The findings can influence policies which are generally made by people who do **not** have the experience! We have worked this with King’s College, London, and Manchester University. We hold workshops and training programmes, and our strapline is “Collective voices for positive change”.

Kate: How many staff do you manage, and how many are there in all?

Zoe: I manage four, and we have 20 paid colleagues, including two fundraisers.

Kate: And how many volunteers are there?

Zoe: There are 200 who work in the cafe, and another 250-300 who give food. There’s even a Soup group of 100 folk who give soup during the winter months. And of course Wesley Mem figures among the food donors.

Kate: What are the best parts of the job for you?

Zoe: I think interacting with the clients: giving out phones and SIM cards; giving bus passes recently provided by the Council; helping people to apply for passports and driving licences online.

Kate: Yes! so much has to be done online, and it’s not always straightforward!

Zoe: Exactly – even taking your own photo for the driving licence can be very tricky!

Kate: How many visitors do you welcome each day?

Zoe: Usually 40-60 in a day, some sitting in the cafe, some



*The team:
Zoe here on
the right*

in the garden if it’s warm enough. In 2025 we gave out 15,000 meals, saw 393 visitors (approx) in a week, one evening we had as many 84 guests at one time; and we saw 700 individuals in that year! Realistically 95% of the ‘customers’ are men. Women are much more reticent about being homeless, and much more likely to be ‘sofa-surfing’ or staying with relatives. Not all the guests are rough sleepers, but many are in precarious housing situations.

Kate: Do guests have to make an appointment ?

Zoe: Only for certain services. It’s ‘open door’ for the café, everyone is welcome. No need to prove that you are registered as homeless or have a local connection in order to get support.

Kate: And do you have a set of rules?

Zoe: Oh yes, basically no drink or drugs on the premises; dogs must be left outside; and we have a zero-tolerance policy on rudeness to staff and volunteers. We do impose bans on people who flout these guidelines.

Kate: Does that happen often?

Zoe: Not really, I think last year we had 25 bans in the year – not too bad! Times of stress for the guests are often around Christmas , or near the two-week August closure, when they don’t know what they’re going to do while we’re taking our holiday!

Kate: What would you like to say to the people of Wesley Memorial? Is there anything you need right now?

Zoe: First, a big ‘thank you’ for all the support you give us. And we are always happy to take men’s clothing, if you phone up and tell us you’re coming. One thing we need is a good supply of plastic carrier bags, ‘bags for life!’ We get through a lot, giving out clothes and meals. And of course donations of money are enormously helpful!

Kate: Thankyou Zoe, and thanks to *The Gatehouse* for its excellent work, and successful survival since 1988!

Kate Dobson

Weather for ducks

After the exceptionally wet, yet relatively warm weather of the first weeks of 2026, precocious plants like aconites, snowdrops and daffodils have risen from “the dark earth”, lifting our spirits with their colourful displays. But our feathered friends have fared rather poorly, it would seem, from my own observations.

Each year at the end of January, over half a million people participate in the RSPB’s garden birdwatch which started in 1979. They are invited to spend an hour observing what they see in their garden or local park, thus providing a useful, if unscientific record of bird numbers. Adhering to the one-hour rule can disappoint some enthusiasts, like the friend whose views I sympathise with. She wrote in an email: “It’s so annoying when birds we see regularly – e.g. a little coal tit who is a frequent visitor on the nuts, and a merry gang of long-tailed tits – refuse to appear in the given hour”!

Don Manley and I, for whom the count is an unmissable tradition, have certainly experienced similar frustrations. This year a coal tit was indeed the star of a meagre tally. Species we would have expected to tick off, like a magpie seen after the hour’s watch while we relaxed over conversation and refreshments, either did not appear or could not strictly be included in the allotted time.

Full results of the 2026 birdwatch are not in yet, but it would seem that the six birds most commonly spotted this year are likely to be: House Sparrow, Blue Tit, Starling, Wood Pigeon, Great Tit, and Blackbird, in that order, with Robin seventh. I personally derive more satisfaction from participating in the Garden BirdWatch (GBW) for the British



A coal tit. (RSPB photo)

Trust for Ornithology, which I have done for some years. The GBW was launched in 1995 and, thanks to the regular recording of birds and other wildlife in gardens by thousands of volunteers throughout the UK, a detailed national picture is built up, providing data for researchers working on conservation and population trends. It’s an example of citizen-powered science!

House sparrow and starling are commonly absent from my GBW list, but in the first weeks of this year the most striking absentees have been blackbirds. Climate change, predation, avian flu might plausibly account for their non-appearance, or even a mosquito-borne virus which has been affecting blackbirds in London and parts of the South of England.

Seeking “green shoots” in our relationship with the world of nature may often seem elusive and end in disappointment. All the more reason to take note of what is in front of our eyes as we look out of a kitchen window or take a stroll outside. The companionship of a robin as one digs the garden can in its way be as rewarding as spotting a pair of goshawks in courtship display over Wytham Wood.

Chris Lane

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



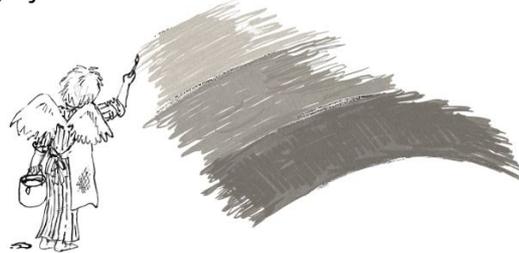
Preaching to the birds!

Giotto’s famous fresco of St Francis preaching to the birds, in the Spoleto Valley near Bevagna, around 1220!

Location of the fresco: Upper Church, Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Italy. It is the 15th scene in the *Legend of St. Francis* cycle, painted between 1297 and 1299.

The Just in Time Angel

The Just in time Angel was only ever just in time!
He was never early. He was sometimes nearly late.
But it was ok because in the end he always managed
to do things just in time.



'Just in time' said Noah
as he left the smelly ark
and saw the rainbow
the angel had painted.

'Just in time!' said Daniel as the angel arrived
to have words with some lions



'Just in time' sang the angel choir
as he joined them to sing about a new baby.

'Just in time!' said a very hungry man as the angel delivered his sandwiches.



'One day,' said Gabriel, 'you will be too late!'
But the little angel somehow always
got where he needed to be, just in time,

except for once.

The little angel realised that something bad was happening.

The other angels were very upset.

'They are going to hurt our Jesus' the angels were whispering.

The little angel was shocked!

Jesus was the baby they had sung

about to the shepherds,

Jesus was the man he had

given the sandwiches to.

'They mustn't hurt Jesus!' he thought



The angel tried to dress up in the most impressive outfit he could,
but it didn't fit at all.

He tried to paint a rainbow to remind everyone there was a better way,
but the sky had gone too dark.
so he went,
as he was,
to the hill with the cross.

But he was too late.



The little angel sat at the foot of the cross all that Friday night.
And on the Saturday, a day that was cold and grey,
he sat there, alone and sad.

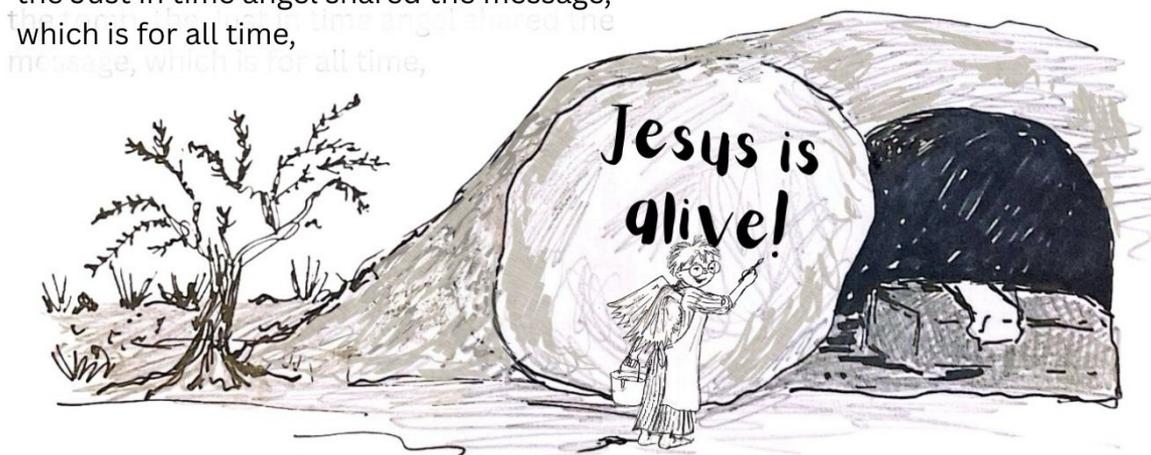
Until, on the Sunday morning, when the sky was still as dark as the night
he suddenly thought, 'I will go to where they have taken him'
and he flew to the garden with the tomb.

He was....

Just in time!

'Hello Friend!' said Jesus, 'You're just in time! I have a job for you.'

And so when Jesus's friends came to visit the tomb,
the Just in time angel shared the message,
which is for all time,



Mel McCulloch

By the time the magazine has been printed and is in your hands, our concert of songs from *Time and Again* will have happened. At the moment we are in the midst of rehearsals, and I have been asking some of the many singers (and some who are not singing) what their favourite songs from the Wesley Mem musicals are. Here is what I discovered.

Penny, a friend from *Phab* club who loves joining in our musicals and being a part of our church community when she can, says, "My favourite song is *Amazing Love* because it always makes me feel close to God. Being in the musicals at Wesley Mem is very special to me. I just love the way people welcome me and treat me as one of them."

Anna and Amy sign the songs rather than singing them. Anna had to think hard about how to sign some of the concepts within the songs. "I found doing *Vanity of Vanities* quite moving. I know the words/context are about harsh times, but love the way this becomes a duet, and not only by singing words but also in British Sign Language (BSL) where you can see different signs being used simultaneously to represent the words of each group." Carolyn also loves *Vanity of Vanities*. "It brings back memories of Anna singing the solo and duet with Anne T."

Jim McC's favourite song is *Fire* from *Amazing Love*. It is a song he remembers from when we performed the full musical. He also remembers the buckets and how much fun it was. Tomas and Aaron both like *Patriarchs, Prophets and Kings* as it's funny and one they remember being in.

Strange to recall is Malcolm's favourite. It is from the musical *Mark my words* which Malcolm directed, with a little help from his friends! It reminds him of our daughter Emily, our friend Jim Godfrey, who wrote the music and would sing the part of Jairus, and of Me!

Esther's favourite song is *Give me a faith* from *Amazing Love*. "I really think this could be used as a worship song or hymn! A lovely memory is that, even though when we put *Amazing Love* on, I wasn't singing, as I was producing the show and this song was one of the rare moments when Tom wasn't on the stage, and we were able to sing together off stage.'



Liz says, "The song that really moves me in *Time and Again* is *Woman* from *Barleytime*, particularly the 2nd part. The words are so relevant to life even today and the music is really, really beautiful. Every time I sing it, I am almost moved to tears by the words and music, both so well written."

And Jenny has lots of songs she loves. "It's almost impossible to choose a favourite! I love both the beautiful duets *Time to Go* and *Strange to Recall*. *Treasure in Heaven* holds a special place in my heart for being the song the choir sang on my very first time at Wesley Mem when I was a new student. I was absolutely bowled over by it, and so excited that this was a church I would get to be part of for three years (now more like 23!). *Woman* is so beautiful, and simultaneously makes me angry at the way the world is, and sad, having lost two babies in pregnancies. *The Wedding Feast* takes me straight back to playing Ruth in *Time and Again* opposite Jim Godfrey as Boaz. So there are usually tears in my eyes, but also a smile on my face remembering us trying to look solemnly into each other's eyes without laughing. I love the humour of *Man with a Plan*, and the film of our children singing it with gusto at the ages of eight, five and three is hilarious."

Writing this has made me (Mel) fully realise how much these songs are woven into the fabric of my life, and I'm sure this will be true for others too. So it is glorious to be singing them again. If really pushed for a favourite, I'd say it would have to be *Give me a faith* which is an absolute joy to sing and declares an eternal and deeply comforting truth about God: "Let my soul declare, God is with us".

Mel McCulloch

Lord of the Flies BBC TV



Ralph and Piggy

It's not a good idea to read press reviews of a new tv series, I watched part 1, and waited eagerly for the review in *The i paper*. The headline dubbed it "a psychedelic, scary brutal attack on the senses" and commented on the slow speed and over-detailed photography of caterpillars and birds.

Many of us will remember that the story of *Lord of the Flies* follows a group of schoolboys stranded on an uninhabited island after a plane crash. They have to fend for themselves, and maintain a civilised 'society', while waiting to be rescued, at some very uncertain point in the future. All begins well with agreed meetings and leadership, but soon deteriorates into anarchy and violence, conflicts for power, and a mass hysteria for hunting.

The creator of this TV series, Jack Thorne, who recently won much acclaim for the Netflix series *Adolescence*, had for many years wanted to adapt Golding's book for tv. Each of the four episodes bears the name of one of the main characters and sees events through their eyes. Not much liberty is taken with the book, just a few extra family details, sad or stressful, are given in flashbacks for each boy. Was this really necessary? Golding's point was surely that anyone could get caught up in the mania that in 1954 was defeated less than a decade ago. However, Golding's daughter said she was sure her father would have been pleased with the production.

It is powerful and scary: not recommended for anyone of a nervous disposition. Although it's about children, it was not,

in my opinion, written for children, despite the many years that exam boards held it on the GCSE syllabus.

The acting is very impressive, natural and, like *Adolescence*, filmed in 'one take'. Complaints that the action moves too slowly, or that the dialogue is stilted don't carry any weight: life on a remote island is slow; and if some dialogue seems less than natural, some is nevertheless taken straight from the book!

The wildlife documentary 'feel' disappears after episode one, and the beautiful scenery contrasts vividly with the dark moments where the boys struggle through the dense jungle-type forest, either trying to find each other or escape from the howling mob of hunters.

Interestingly we heard more than one snippet of Benjamin Britten's music. In the background at the opening, the choir marches along the beach, robed in black, singing the *Kyrie* from the *Missa Brevis for Boys' voices*; and episode three opens with the *Sanctus*; a view of the seashore comes accompanied by one of the *Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*; and at a dizzying moment in the forest, voices can be heard singing *I cannot grow*, from the *Hymn to St Cecilia*. All of which seems entirely appropriate for the 1950s.

So much beauty further underlines Golding's point, that the ugly and cruel behaviour ought not to have emerged from 'well-brought up British' boys! As the officer who meets them in the last scene, sensing that something very odd has been going on, asks: "What have you boys been doing? Have you been having a war?...You are all British, aren't you?"

BBC iplayer will hold the show for a while. I hope that it will be more than 30 days, for it deserves to be seen – by those who can 'endure to the end'!

Kate Dobson

Registering to vote

Eight million people are excluded from the electoral register. What can we do about it?

The Electoral Commission estimates that eight million people are missing from the electoral register. The people missing are disproportionately those who are young, private renters and from minority ethnic communities. This is because the registration system was designed in a way which makes it easier for long-term residents, especially more affluent homeowners, to register. We could and should design a better system, without these biases.

If you are not registered to vote, you should register (and encourage anyone else not on the register too!) There are local elections in Oxford on 7 May. You can register online or with a downloaded paper form, which takes about five minutes, and those registering will need to give their address and National Insurance number. The deadline for registering to vote is 11:59pm on Monday 20 April. AND don't forget that you need to take photo ID (passport, driving licence, or equivalent) when you go to vote, or that you can register for a postal vote – by 21 April to vote in the 7 May local elections.

Who are we missing?

In 2000, the estimated gap between the number entitled to vote and registered to vote was between 0.5 and 1 million – a number that was viewed as scandalous at the time. Today, the gap is around 8 million, and it is disadvantaged groups who are excluded.

It is worth noting that each of the characteristics that are linked with being absent from the electoral roll – being a young adult, living in private rented accommodation and having a non-white ethnicity – are also associated with higher levels of poverty, food insecurity and destitution. These are the people whom politics is serving badly, whose voice is often absent when policy is being discussed, and who are missing from the electoral rolls, therefore unable to vote for their preferred political representative. All too often, the first instinct is to assume the people

absent from the roll just can't be bothered. The problem with that hypothesis is you must believe people have got 8 to 16 times less bothered over the past 25 years, since under-registration has soared from all the way to 8 million. You also must believe that multiple rounds of reforms have had no effect, particularly which have added complexity to registration procedures for those moving house.

Why does it matter?

There is an obvious fairness issue. Why should we design registration systems that disadvantage the already disadvantaged? Why should some have an easier pathway to their vote than others?

The view held by our Churches, that all are made equally in God's image, is a key reason to support a democratic system. That reasoning is undermined if the system denies or impedes the votes of some – especially the disadvantaged.

What can we do?

The UK's electoral system is an outlier in many ways. Most liberal democracies have an automatic registration system. You don't need to register to vote: the government uses the data it already has (benefits, pensions, local taxation, etc) to register you automatically. For those who think they may be missed off, there are often ways of checking and of simply registering when an election is called. For countries where registration is not automatic, the process is often simpler and with more assistance. For example, unlike many other nations, there is currently no immediate way of checking if you are on the register. This can create uncertainty for voters as well as problems for registrars who try to prevent people's registrations being duplicated.

Last year, some areas in Wales trialled automatic voter registration, which resulted in the numbers registered increasing by between 2 and 8 per cent. These results encourage a wider roll-out of such a system.

For too long, our politicians have focused on the minuscule problem of fraud by impersonation at polling stations, while ignoring the growing problem of an increasingly biased and incomplete electoral roll. Please register to vote, encourage your friends and other members of your church to register to vote – but then demand we get a better registration system.

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Notes from the Church Council meeting

The Church Council met on Wednesday 11th February.

Revd Miriam Moul updated us on Oxford Circuit matters: Luke McCloud will be joining us in September as a probationer minister with responsibility for Kidlington, Woodstock and Bladon. It is hoped that the merger between Kidlington and Tackley will have been completed by then. We were pleased to celebrate the signs of growth in churches across the circuit.

The Wesley Mem stewards were thanked for a splendid Church Party in January which was much enjoyed by around 100 people of all ages.

Stewards are looking for people who would like to be involved in leading future 'Local Arrangement' services. Please speak to a steward if you are interested.

We were delighted to hear that the Junior Church have 30 children/young people attending regularly on a Sunday. Mel McCulloch, Children's, families' and outreach worker, is very grateful to all those involved.

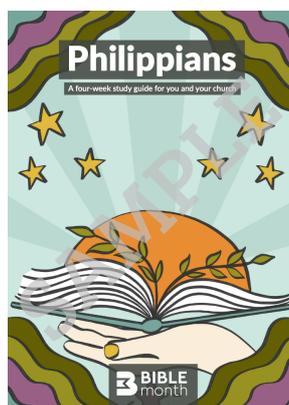
Alistair Jackson, our new Treasurer, spoke to his report and the budget. Lawrie Coupland, chair of the Property and Finance committee, explained the current property situation: the most urgent matter is to get started with the Quinquennial Report repairs to the roof as soon as possible. An Eco-Project to install Solar Panels is also planned.

The church's membership now stands at 177.

The future of the Ecumenical Student Outreach post, shared with New Road Baptists & St Columba's URC, was discussed briefly.

Janet Forsaith Secretary to the Council

Bible Month 2026 – Philipians



See: <https://www.preachweb.org/biblemonth>

Dates for the diary

Holy Week:

2 April, Maundy Thursday – New Road Baptist 7.30pm,

3 April, Good Friday – St Columba’s URC 10.30am

5 April, Easter Day – Wesley Memorial 10.30 Revd Miriam Moul Holy Communion

1 May May morning breakfast

10 May Joint Service with New Road Baptist and St Columba’s URC -- Wesley Memorial

16 May 2026 Christian Aid Street Market

17 May Circuit Celebration : *Anticipate* – Wesley Memorial

23rd May: A Day Seminar 10.30am-4.00pm

Women and Methodism: Contested Identities.

29-31 May 2026 Church Weekend Break at Highgate

Christian Conference Centre, Northants NN6 8NN

6 June Oxford *Pride March*

12 Sept Oxford Open Doors weekend

NOTE: free music recitals in the church each Tuesday at 1.10 pm. Programme tbc.

This magazine online

You can view the magazine with the colour photos on the church’s website:

<https://www.wesleymem.org.uk/resources/wesley-memorial-magazine.html>

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable items for publication are always welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating if you are also willing for them to appear on the church website. Please include photos (separately) and check that anyone displayed is happy to be included in the publication.

All items may be edited by the team.

Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, nor of the Methodist Church as a whole.

