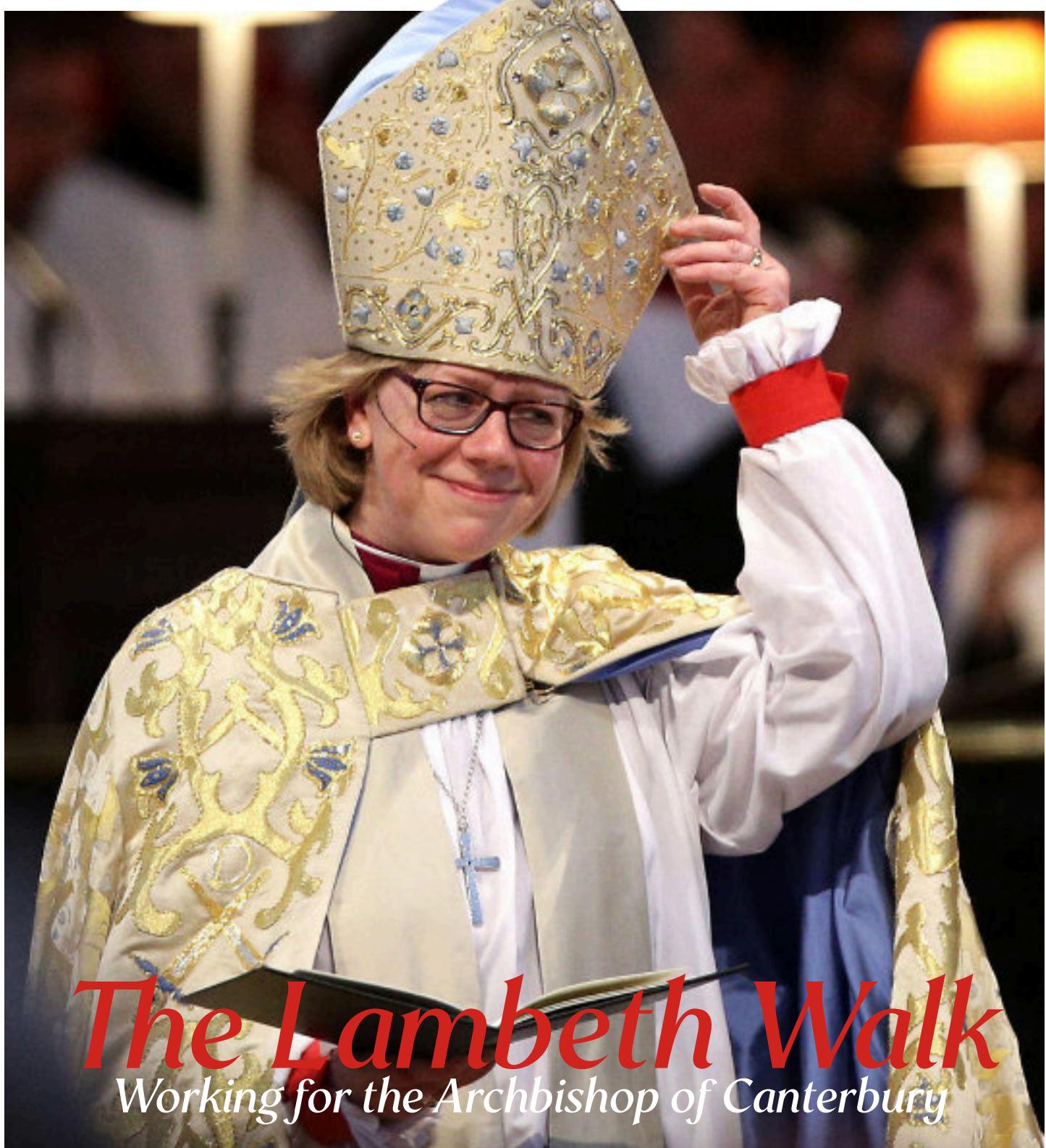


Spire

YOUR **FREE** COPY OF
HAMPTON HILL'S PARISH MAGAZINE



The Lambeth Walk
Working for the Archbishop of Canterbury

WHO'S WHO



Vicar Derek Winterburn

020 8241 5904

vicar@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk

Derek was born in Orpington, Kent, and ordained in 1986. He served in several

London parishes before arriving here in 2016. He is married to Sandra, a teacher, and has two children. A keen photographer, he posts a picture daily. He can be contacted at any time other than Mondays, his day off.



Associate Priest Jacky Cammidge

079 5012 2294

jackycammidge@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk

Jacky was born in Abertillery, South Wales, and ordained in 2015. She is a self-supporting minister, married to Alan, and has three children. During term times Jacky runs Hampton Hill Nursery School, based in the church hall, with her family.



Assistant Priest Tim Marwood

073 6928 0040

frtimmarwood@hotmail.com

Tim taught in London primary schools for 36 years. He was ordained priest in 1996 and spent 13 years at Petersham, retiring in 2021. He is now a part-time hospital chaplain. Married to Jane, a former headteacher, Tim supports Harlequins RFC and England cricket.

Choir Director and Organist

Thom Stanbury

thom.stanbury@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk



Thom has been at St James's since 2019.

He started his musical life in the church where he grew up in Staffordshire. He read music at Royal Holloway with organ as principle instrument. During the week he works in theatre production/management.

Church Office Nick Bagge

020 8941 6003

office@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk

Nick deals with general enquiries and church and hall bookings. The office is open 0930-1230 Mon, Wed and Fri, and 1230-1530 Tue and Thu.



Parish Safeguarding Officer

Annalea Gratton

grattonannalea@gmail.com

Annalea is the first person to speak to if you have any concerns about the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult. During the week she works as a teacher.



Churchwardens

Nick Bagge



office@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk

Susan Horner



smhorner5@yahoo.co.uk

St James's Church, St James's Road, Hampton Hill, TW12 1DQ
Charity Registration Number 1129286.

From the Editor

There's a new look to the Spire with this issue. We've upgraded our design software and used it to refresh the magazine. The cover is more vibrant and we have increased the font size to make it easier to read.

We have had to make the difficult decision to reduce the number of issues from 9 to 6, with each issue now covering two months. We are very grateful for the money raised each year by our appeal, but with this meeting only part of the printing cost, the church has previously covered the rest.

With stretched budgets, we took the decision to reduce the number of issues. This means we can maintain the number of pages in the magazine and continue to print the same number of copies, whilst reducing our costs.

This edition features a day in the life of Lambeth Palace, written by a member of Catherine Gash's family. It couldn't be more timely! And the back page now features hobbies and pastimes. Jamie Mortimer starts it with bird spotting.

We hope you will enjoy the new look.

Best wishes,

Janet



Cover photo: The new Archbishop of Canterbury. Sarah Mullally © PA Images/Alamy

The magazine is published six times a year. We don't charge for it, but if you enjoy reading it we hope you will help towards printing costs. It costs us £1.50 a copy, or £9 a year. If you are able to make a larger donation we can distribute more copies across the parish. Bank transfers can be made to our CAF Bank account: 00032595, 40-52-40, or you can scan the QR code. Please use the reference *Spire* so that it gets to us.



Spire

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Subs Catherine Gash, Susan Horner

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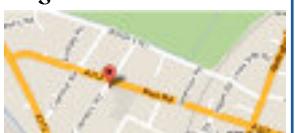
Paper Printed on paper sourced from well-managed forests.



'Richard's making a real effort for Lent,
Vicar - he's giving up the remote control
and is now walking to the TV.'

Finding the church

We are on the corner of St James's Road and Park Road. The hall is next door. Parking is unrestricted. Buses stopping nearby include R70, R68 and 285.



Church and Hall Hire

The church and hall are available to hire for concerts, public meetings, regular classes, and parties or wakes. The church's AV system includes projector, large screen, a range of microphones, stage lighting and five cameras.

Support Us

The church does not receive grants towards running costs. To donate, go to:

<https://bit.ly/Give2StJas>



DEREK WINTERBURN

Finally, a Bible that spoke to the people



Translator William Tyndale

In a Bible that I had in my childhood, there was on the inside cover a family tree: 'How our Bible came to us.' Right in the centre of the chart is written 'William Tyndale - first printed English New Testament 1526'. All other English Bibles trace their ancestry to this translation - 500 years old this year.

Tyndale was alive at a time of great importance to theology, the church and our country. He was born in rural Gloucestershire. While he was studying at Oxford, Henry VIII became king, and English society was gripped by the renaissance spirit. Henry instigated changes that moved England from being a sleepy backwater to a self-confident European nation.

It's all Greek

Studying at Oxford Tyndale developed a love for Greek and began to consider translating the New Testament into English. It is hard for us to appreciate how dramatic that development might have been. For nearly a thousand years the Bible (in the West) had been a Latin text.

Although English was spoken by the common people and fewer than one in ten men were able to read. Legal texts (and church documents) were in Latin, and French was the language of the court and diplomats. Providing a Bible for ordinary people would be 'casting pearls before swine'.

Martin Luther, who kickstarted the Reformation, had forged a path: he translated the Bible into his own German vernacular. (John Wycliffe was the first to create an English Bible, a translation of the Latin translation of the Hebrew and Greek in the 14th century - but all the copies had been destroyed).

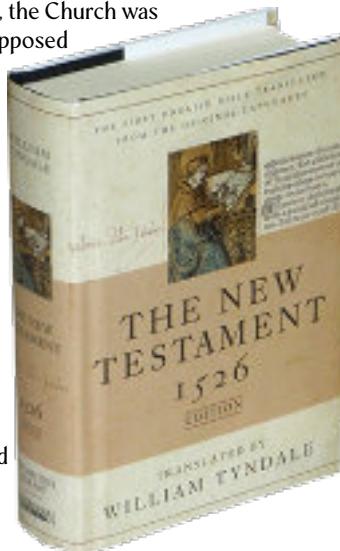
When he returned to Gloucestershire Tyndale famously argued with a friar: 'If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives the plough to know more of the scriptures than you do.'

Staying human

Of course, Tyndale was not primarily motivated by a desire to share literature, but to make accessible God's written word.

He was part of the swelling number of people who were sympathetic to Luther's reformation. He preached and wrote, inspired by Luther, though the rumbling trouble of Henry VIII's desire to put Queen Catherine aside and marry Anne Boleyn made talk of change perilous. Tyndale wrote materials that attacked the corruption of the Church, but was largely supportive of the King.

However, the Church was strongly opposed to putting the Bible into the hands of ordinary people. Tyndale fled to Cologne to finish his Bible, which was then printed and smuggled back into London.



Bishop's bonfire of Bibles

In 1526, outside St Paul's Cathedral, the Bishop of London lit a bonfire on which he burned as many copies of the New Testament in English as he could find. Eventually Tyndale was to be betrayed and martyred in 1536.

It is for his Bible that Tyndale is remembered and honoured. It was not long ago (2011) that the

400th anniversary of Authorised Version of the Bible was celebrated and many spoke of their love for its sonorous language.

However, about 80% of that translation was a 'copy and paste' from Tyndale's. It should be remembered that Tyndale began with great source material: it was Jesus who first spoke about pearls and swine!

Avoiding Latin

He was wise enough to stick close to the Bible text - not making it more like Latin. He more accurately translated words that had become churchy (penance, confession, priest, etc.) and, mindful that his texts would be read aloud, used alliteration and other ways of making the teaching memorable.

At a time when English was denigrated, Tyndale raised the status of our language and provided a corpus of books that was supremely influential. The Shakespearean scholar Professor David Daniell goes as far as to say: 'No Tyndale, no Shakespeare.'

Tyndale's vision was to put God's written word into everybody's hands so that they could read it and encounter God. Selling Bibles has not been a problem. The Bible Society reports that 50% of homes in the UK has a Bible, but then what? Two-thirds of the population have not read anything in the Bible in the past year.

However, there is cause for hope: it would seem that there are more people reading it more frequently and young people are much more likely to be reading the Bible.

So whichever translation you choose - celebrate what Tyndale gave us 500 years ago, at the cost of his life. Read your Bible!

Why words matter in my job

As Head of Digital Communications for the Archbishop of Canterbury, **Pete Richardson**, has found the past year eventful. Now, as Sarah Mullally starts work as the first woman and 106th leader of the Church of England, he reveals what surprises him most about working at Lambeth Palace... and it probably isn't what you think.

Before I joined Lambeth Palace, I worked for the London Fire Brigade. My days were spent helping people understand how not to burn their homes down and occasionally navigating the communications fallout when they did. So, when I took on the role of Head of Digital Communications for the Archbishop of Canterbury, I thought: 'Well, how different can it be?' It turns out, quite a bit, though, pleasingly, still not entirely without firefighting. Just the metaphorical kind.

At least Lambeth Palace itself is unlikely to combust anytime soon. A historic riverside complex dating back 800 years, it's one of those places where even the walls seem to carry a sense of purpose.

Until recently, large parts of it were wrapped in scaffolding as a major refurbishment project unfolded. Now, after three years of careful restoration, the palace has been returned to its full, slightly awe-inducing glory - and we're finally back inside, working under actual stone vaults rather than beside them.

Centuries of history

It's no small thing, starting your workday in a place where kings and archbishops have met for centuries.



The work itself is anything but medieval. The Archbishop of Canterbury may be a religious leader, but they're also a statesperson, a diplomat, and a voice in global conversations about war, peace, and reconciliation.

Outfoxed The 500-year-old Arundel Choir Book

Communicating all of that clearly, and digitally, has been a fascinating challenge. At the Fire Brigade, messaging was generally urgent, safety-focused, free of theological nuance. 'Don't deep-fry a frozen turkey' is unambiguous. 'What is

the Anglican Communion's position on geopolitical peace-building?' less so.

And then there's the language. Working with a team of theologians means you quickly learn that every word matters. There's a tension between accessibility - so people outside the Church understand what you're talking about - and the need to use precise liturgical language, which has deep meaning and tradition.

On a bad day, writing a tweet can feel like drafting the Magna Carta. Fortunately, everyone has been incredibly supportive, and we're building in plenty of checks and balances to make sure we're saying the right thing - and in the right way.

Joys of the job

One of the joys of the job has been the people. The palace is full of them, all extraordinary. There's Lindsay, our brilliant Head Gardener, who makes you care about the gardens' rejuvenating power before you've even had your morning coffee.

There's the hospitality team, who manage everything from intimate interfaith breakfasts to state-level receptions, all while adjusting to their newly refurbished surroundings.

And there's the library team, who oversee one of the most extraordinary collections I've ever encountered - from new theology texts right back to the Arundel Choir Book, a 500-year-old, metre-wide manuscript, hand-crafted for choirs of the time. It features intricately illuminated letters, including a particularly striking *V* depicting a fox playing the bagpipes.



Yes, really. The vibe here might be solemn Anglican tradition, but there's clearly always been room for a little mischief in the margins.

And then there are the surreal moments. Tea with bishops first thing in the morning; podcasting with Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart; brushing shoulders with faith leaders from Ukraine, Jerusalem and everywhere in between.

There's a particular kind of cognitive dissonance involved in discussing editing specs for an Instagram Reel while surrounded by stained glass and the scent of freshly extinguished candles. It's not a complaint, it's a privilege – just an odd one.

Staying human

What keeps all of this human – and keeps me going – is the variety of people I meet every day. Not just the high-profile figures, but the ones who keep the palace running. The correspondence team, who deal with hundreds of letters every week and still find time to laugh; the Chemin Neuf nuns who live on site; the volunteers; the guards at the gatehouse; the people who bring the soul to a place.

It's easy to assume that working for the Church of England might be staid or overly reverent. In reality, it's dynamic, challenging, and occasionally surreal in the best possible way. I came here to help tell stories – now, as Bishop Sarah moves into the palace to begin her ministry as Archbishop of Canterbury, I'm excited to see which ones come next.

■ Palace tours, including those for the library and the gardens, can be found on the Lambeth Palace website.

One of the oldest gardens



Alex Baker

Founded in 1197, Lambeth Palace garden covers just over 10 acres and is one of the oldest gardens in England. The extraordinary micro-climate of central London means that as well as species native to England, it has plants from all over the world to reflect the breadth of the Anglican Communion.

Trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals from Europe mix happily with a wide range of plants from the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia. Two full-time gardeners are supported by a team of volunteers who help with weeding, pruning and planting as well as collecting leaves in the autumn. They look after the garden organically, without chemical pesticides or weed killers. This helps encourage natural predators. Lacewings and ladybirds help keep aphid numbers down, while the hundreds of toads who have made the garden their home are partial to slugs!

It is the third largest private garden in London after Buckingham Palace and Winifred House (US Ambassador's home), and is usually open once a month, May to September.

Refurbishment's green credentials

The extensive refurbishment of Lambeth Palace, the Archbishop of Canterbury's residence, cost £40 million, marking the first major works in nearly 70 years, focusing on sustainability, accessibility, and preserving heritage, including new energy systems and restoration of stonework and floors.

The three-year project is aimed to meet net-zero goals while upgrading infrastructure and uncovering historical features. A new energy centre, powered by three air source heat pumps, now supplies the entire site – replacing gas heating. More than 160 windows are now double-glazed, roofs and walls are insulated, rainwater is harvested for flushing toilets, and solar panels are installed on the roof.



Meeting Pete with Hosam Naoum, the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem.

Sarah's historic moment for the Church

Sarah Mullally will be installed as Archbishop of Canterbury at Canterbury Cathedral on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation.

Speaking ahead of the service, she told listeners to BBC Radio 4, that she had received 'hundreds and hundreds of letters of support, particularly from women.'

'I had a wonderful letter from an ordained woman who said my appointment was the first time that she felt affirmed as a priest.'

There had been 'difficult moments' in the Church as a woman, just as she experienced in the NHS when she was chief nursing officer for England.

There is some opposition not just to a woman leading the Church, but to women becoming priests at all in the wider Anglican Communion, both in the UK and abroad.

Sarah said her approach had always been to encourage clergy in their ministries, even if they were opposed to the ordination of women.

Safeguarding apology

She also apologised for the 'significant safeguarding failures' within the Church, but said progress had been made in the past decade, and she supported the introduction of some independence into Church safeguarding procedures.

'I think that we still have to work to restore trust in us and I think that independent safeguarding professionals would be a significant step.'

Changing chairs

Sarah's installation, historically known as an enthronement, marks the start of her public ministry in the Church of England and across the Anglican Communion.

She will be installed on the Cathedral Chair (Cathedra) as the Diocesan Bishop of the See of Canterbury, the oldest diocese in the English church. Following this, she will be installed on the Chair of St Augustine (St Augustine Cathedra) as Primate of All England, which also symbolises her ministry in the Anglican Communion.

The Feast of the Annunciation celebrates the day the Angel Gabriel told Mary she would be the mother of Jesus. Sarah legally became Archbishop on 28 January following the Confirmation of Election at St Paul's Cathedral.

Now the search begins for a new Bishop of London. It's certainly a time of change.



From church to Coldplay!

The words of this hymn were originally a poem written in 1664 by Samuel Crossman (1624-1683), a clergyman who became Dean of Bristol Cathedral.

The words were intended originally to be used as a meditation on the love shown by Jesus towards humankind. Each verse refers to an episode in Jesus's life that reveals more about his love. Throughout, the writer contrasts the love of Jesus with the reception that that love receives.

Jesus loves people despite not being recognised as Saviour, he heals the sick, but by doing so is criticised by the religious elite.

Fractions humanity

The verses reveal that Jesus loves on a scale previously 'unknown' by fractious humanity. It is a poem of praise in which Jesus is described as friend, Saviour, Prince of life, Lord and King, this range of titles is part of the inclusive appeal of the hymn.

The words might have remained an obscure devotional poem, valued only by those who found it (in 1863 in a hymn book matched with a serviceable tune).

However, in 1925 John Ireland (1865- 1962) composed a new tune, *Love Unknown*, which so complimented the text that the hymn became much more popular.

More popular tune

The circumstances surrounding Ireland's composition make an interesting story. Geoffrey Shaw, the editor of a new hymn book, asked Ireland to compose a new tune and he did so in 15 minutes on the back of a lunch menu!

A century on, this hymn, sung

Zuma Press/Alamy



Coldplay Chris Martin's hit songs were influenced by hymn singing

to Ireland's tune, remains a popular choice at church services in Lent and Holy Week.

Chris Martin

Coldplay referenced it in their song *The Message* on their album X&Y (2005) and Chris Martin explained how he grew up singing hymns and how this experience has influenced his songwriting.

Over the years I have had the privilege of working with many church organists. I am always alert to the spiritual insights that these musicians gain from a prolonged experience of church music.

At what turned out to be his last service, a vastly experienced organist played this hymn faultlessly from memory. As the notes died away, he turned and said to me, 'That says it all really! I have to confess, I agreed.'

Some of the verses

*My song is love unknown,
my Saviour's love to me;
love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be.
O who am I,
that for my sake
my Lord should take
frail flesh, and die?*

*He came from his blest throne
salvation to bestow;
but men made strange, and none
the longed-for Christ woudknow.
But O, my Friend,
my Friend indeed,
who at my need
his life did spend!*

*Sometimes they strew his way,
and his sweet praises sing;
resounding all the day
hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify'
is all their breath,
and for His death
they thirst and cry.*

*They rise, and needs will have
my dear Lord made away;
a murderer they save,
the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful he
to suffering goes,
that he his foes
from thence might free.*

*Here might I stay and sing:
no story so divine;
never was love, dear King,
never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend,
in whose sweet praise
I all my days
could gladly spend.*

DECEMBER

Funeral
11 Luke Richard Allen North, 35,
East Molesley

Finding peace in difficult times



George Appleton (1902-1993) was ordained priest in 1926 and served the Church of England in a number of roles in Burma, Britain, Australia and finally as Archbishop in Jerusalem. However, it is for his writing on prayer that he is perhaps best known.

From 1974-1992 he wrote a meditation for the Saturday edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, and he wrote 18 books on prayer and edited two editions of *The Oxford Book of Prayer*.

In his long and fruitful life Appleton served through many difficult times and I chose this prayer for that reason.

*O Spirit of God,
Set at rest the crowded, hurrying
conscious thoughts within our minds
and hearts.
Let the peace and quiet of your presence
take possession of us.
Help us to relax, to rest, to become open
and receptive to you.
You know our inmost spirits,
the hidden unconscious life within us,
the forgotten memories of hurts and fears,
the frustrated desires,
the unresolved tensions and dilemmas.
Cleanse and sweeten the springs of our
being that freedom, life and love may
flow into both our conscious and
hidden life.
Lord we lie open before you, waiting for
your healing, your peace and your word.
Amen.*

REGISTERS

NOVEMBER

Baptism
9 Otis Obinna Noakes
Ifeobu-Zubis, Teddington



DECEMBER

Funeral
11 Luke Richard Allen North, 35,
East Molesley



Welcare Helping families in London

Help us to continue support for charities

Last year was a success - let's make 2026 another!

Last year's fundraising for charity is a success story worth celebrating. With your help we raised £10,307.

That represents a 30% increase and an all-time high, even slightly higher than when the church paid **Dennis Wilmot** all charitable donations from church funds.

The church still gives £1500 from its budget, with £1250 going to Welcare, a charity supporting families in the area, and £250 to Bishop Wand Church of England School.

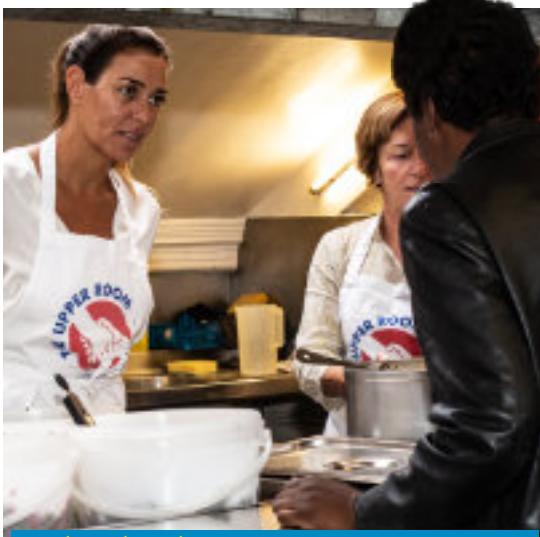
Spectacular Lent Appeal

The 2025 Lent Appeal, supporting the Diocese of London's *Climate Justice* project raised £3,950, a spectacular result and much higher than the previous year.

The Upper Room also saw a big increase to £2,000, which was doubled with match-funding by The Big Give. The charity primarily supports homeless people in west London, not only providing meals, but enabling them to rebuild their lives.

The November Quiz raised £1,578, split equally between the London Churches' Refugee Fund and our link parish in Mecuburi in Mozambique.

The Children's Society was also a big winner, as donations at our Christingle service and money



Food for thought More support for Upper Room

given by individual collectors hit £1,688 - a 47% increase on the year before.

As you can see, all our charities saw substantial increases. This was not a big increase for just one charity, but an across-the-board uplift indicative of overall increased generosity.

I'm grateful to all those involved in the fundraising events for their time and generosity, but my largest thanks goes to you for digging deep to support all the good causes.

Let's make 2026 another success story!

NEWS

Brian Leathard is made an MBE

We send our congratulations to a former vicar of St James's who was made an MBE in the New Year Honours list.

Rev Preb Dr Brian Leathard, who recently retired as Rector of St Luke's and Christ Church, Chelsea, received the award for services to the community in Kensington and Chelsea.

Among his activities was chairing the charity Glass Door, which operates London's largest emergency winter night shelters. He was vicar of St James's from 1989-2006, before moving to Chelsea. He became a Prebendary at St Paul's Cathedral in 2005, and retired in May last year.



WHAT'S ON

Services Sundays

Holy Communion (Said) 8am
Parish Communion 9.30am
1, 8, 15, 22 February; 1, 8, 22, 29 March
Streamed on our Facebook page

Together 3.30pm
1, 22 February; 1, 22 March
Our shorter, all age service, particularly for young families

Messy Church 3.30pm
8 February; 8 March
Songs, stories, crafts and food!

Compline (night prayer) 8pm
22 February; 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 March

World Day of Prayer 2pm
Friday 6 March, St James's Church
The worldwide service comes from the women of Nigeria

Tue, Thu, Fri
Morning Prayer 9am

Wednesdays

Midweek Communion 9.30am

Mondays

Ark Playgroup 10am-12noon
2, 9, 23 Feb; 2, 9, 16, 23 Mar

Tuesdays

Connections Cafe 10.30am-12.30pm
3, 10, 17, 24 Feb; 3, 10, 17, 24 Mar

Lent

Ash Wednesday 9.30am & 8pm
Wed 17 February

Holy Communion with ashing

Let Me Go There

Wed 25 Feb; 4, 11, 18 Mar 2pm
Paula Gooder's Lent course takes on the main themes of the season

Defying Gravity

Thu 26 Feb; 5, 12, 19, 26 Mar 7.30pm
Rachel Mann's Lent course based on the film, Wicked

Mothering Sunday 10am

Sunday 15 March
An all age service

Palm Sunday 9.30am

Sunday 29 March

Beginning with parade of palms

Sung Compline 8pm

Mon, Tue, 30, 31 March; Wed 1 Apr

Events

Mondays

Lifelike Theatre presents

Circle Mirror Transformation

Wed 18-Sat 21 Feb 7.45pm

Five friends meet for a drama class. Performed in our hall. Tickets £16.85
<https://bit.ly/StJCircle>



St James's presents
Winter Ceilidh

Fri 27 February 7.30pm

Join us for a night of good music and dancing. Tickets £18
<https://bit.ly/StJCeilidh>





Murmurs of enjoyment

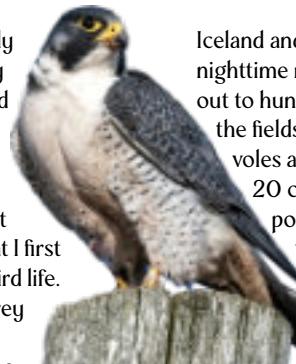
Until I was in my early forties, I had hardly ever looked at a bird or even listened to bird song. I knew the names of a handful of common garden birds, but that was all. It was around 1990 that I first started to take an interest in bird life. I remember looking at a tall grey bird in Bushy Park, wondering what it was (it must have been a grey heron). And I recall a holiday in Venezuela with my wife, Lesley, when exotic birds were pointed out to us. It was about this time I bought my first pair of binoculars.

Across the world

Since then, I have been hooked on bird spotting. Lesley and I have devoted a day or more to it in holidays all over the world, including Africa, Central and Southern America and South Asia, though some of the best bird spotting has been in the UK. New sightings are carefully recorded in my bird list.

There are physical, mental and social benefits of bird spotting. On the mental side, a day's bird spotting can reduce stress and anxiety, promote focus and concentration and encourage respect for the countryside and the natural world. On the physical side, there are the benefits of a day in the fresh air. You might walk three or four miles. It is a hobby that can be shared by people of all ages. And it can be sociable if performed in groups.

The highs can be quite something. I recall, for example, the thrill of standing in some fields in Norfolk at dusk watching huge skeins of pink footed geese (they are a winter visitor from



Above Peregrine Falcon

Iceland and Greenland) flying in towards their nighttime roosting grounds. Barn owls had come out to hunt - and were swooping silently over the fields looking for small mammals such as voles and mice. And before us were perhaps

20 common cranes (out of a total UK population of some 250). Cranes are wonderful to look at. They are the UK's tallest bird, at nearly four feet, mostly grey, with a long neck, a black-and-white face and a red crown. They are making a

comeback after being extinct in the UK for 400 years! Wonderful!

Three favourites

One of the best things for me about bird spotting is being out in some lovely parts of the country. Here are three of our favourite places, and the birds we associate with them:

Symonds Yat Rock towers over the Wye Valley on the borders of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. It is famous for its views and wildlife. And it is the place to see peregrine falcons. The peregrine is the UK's largest falcon with lovely markings - blue-grey back and barred white underparts. Black tears fall from its eyes. It is renowned for its speed. The one we spotted was sitting on a ledge high up on the sheer rock face with panoramic views over the river and surrounding countryside.

Skomer Island lies off the Pembrokeshire coast, and a 15-minute boat ride is required to

get there. It is home to a large population of shearwaters, guillemots, razorbills and puffins. It was the puffins that drew us to the island. There were around 40,000 on the island in 2025. And what a sight!

Although primarily black and white, their multi-coloured beaks make them a photographer's dream. They nest in burrows in the ground. They are as bold as brass. We were able to get very close to them for an excellent view.

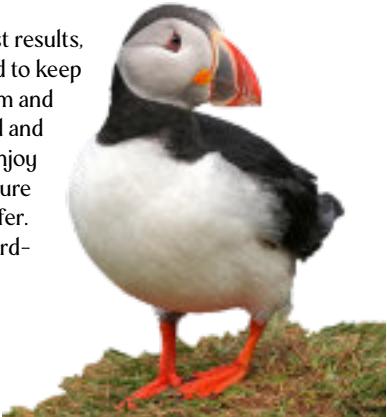
Breathtaking patterns

We went to the Avalon Marshes on the Somerset Levels to see the starling murmurations. The starlings fly in at dusk before roosting in the reed beds. For half an hour or so they murmur - fly together in breathtaking, intricate, shape-shifting patterns designed to confuse predators.

The number of starlings can reach hundreds of thousands, and sometimes up to half a million (one of the largest in western Europe). On a winter evening, up to 1000 enthusiasts can gather to watch the sight. Who needs fireworks when nature can provide displays like this?

One word of warning, Lesley says, tongue in cheek, she is not sure whether bird spotting is good for me because I get too excited!

For best results, you need to keep cool, calm and collected and simply enjoy what nature has to offer. Happy bird-spotting.



Right A comical puffin



Above Crane