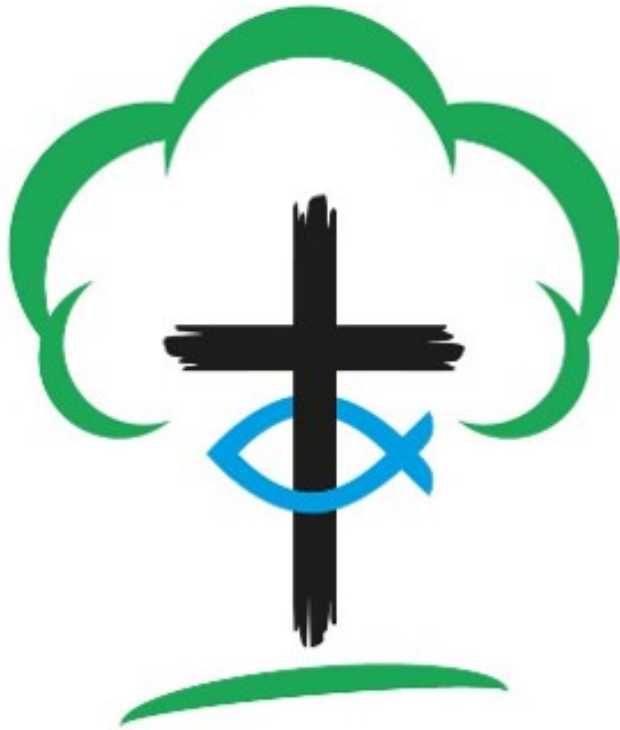


United Voices!



St Albans
**United
Reformed
Church**

The quarterly magazine of St. Albans United Reformed Church

Issue 6—January 2025

From the Editorial Team:

We wish everyone a very Peaceful and Happy New Year and welcome to this, our 6th edition of United Voices. We continue to thank all those who have sent in articles and photos and ask you to please keep them coming.

We hope that everyone had an enjoyable Christmas and went easy with the Christmas puddings and mince pies.

Thinking about the New Year brings to mind New Year Resolutions and the question "Did anyone make one"? And, more importantly, are they managing to keep them? It was said on the radio the other day that most people are only able to keep them until February. It would be very interesting to hear from anyone brave or daring enough to drop us a line about theirs. Have a go.

In the meantime we hope you enjoy reading this edition.

Maggie Snyder - maggiesnyder92@gmail.com; Sue Brooks: squirrel19@btinternet.com;
Gill Elliott

Reformed Reform

As many readers know, **Reform** is the "house magazine" of the URC. There have recently been some changes. This little article is to whet or re-whet your appetite for this excellent periodical and tell you how to get it.

Reform is a fresh and challenging magazine exploring theology, ethics, personal spirituality and Christian perspectives on social and current affairs. It is for people who enjoy reading about Christian ideas from a range of viewpoints. It features writing from journalists, academics, politicians, campaigners, scientists and religious leaders.

As well as high-profile interviews, religious news from around the UK and the rest of the world, stories from URC congregations, in-depth features, book, exhibition, music, TV and film reviews, **Reform** includes letters, a cryptic and quick crossword, articles from younger writers, a monthly editorial and much more, including light-hearted columns. Though published by the URC, it has readers of all faiths and none.



First published in 1972, the year the URC was formed, **Reform** is an editorially-independent subscription magazine published eight times a year by an editorial team based at URC Church House in London. The magazine was re-launched in September 2024 with a new look and expanded content.

In our former congregations typically one person ordered copies for members and friends who wanted to receive regular copies that were distributed at church. Things have changed and there are new ways to view it. It can be read either in hard copy or online, or both.

The costs are -

Printed and Posted - £29.50 per year

Digital (online only) - £18.00 per year

Both printed and digital - £35.50 per year

Details can be found at this online link here - <https://reformsubs.co.uk/our-plans>

You can order yours from that web page. Why not do it now!

For those who don't have access to the web, and don't mind waiting and sharing, as an experiment I have ordered two printed copies of each issue in 2025 to be delivered to the Homewood site to be borrowed by church members and friends. Once read, they should be returned to the back of the church. Depending on demand for this, one of the copies can be made available at Greenwood at some point during the month of issue.

Happy reading!

David Martin

Letter from an Elder

– by Gill Elliott

New _____ ? New Year? New Start? New Life? New Opportunities? Does new equal exciting? Frightening? The month of January is named for the Roman God Janus, who looked both ways, forwards and backwards. Sometimes we want to turn our backs on a bad year; sometimes we might not like where we find ourselves (metaphorically or physically speaking) and we start looking back longingly at a time when things might have been better. It's a very tempting thing to do, remembering a time when we were maybe younger, slimmer(!), happier, the sun always shone, people were kinder, the church was full of children, prices were lower... STOP! It's all too easy to look back at the "good old days" and forget the bad things that went alongside them. Just like a woman can forget the pain of childbirth once the baby is born and the stitches have healed, we can all too easily forget how recently various rights were won. Homosexuality was illegal until 1967. It was not until 1975 that a woman could have a bank account in her own name, or take out a credit card; before then they needed a man to co-sign.

However, for many of us, moving forward takes us out of our comfort zone. How do we cope in a new and potentially confusing world, in which it seems change is accelerating? Zoom, cryptocurrency, AI, paying by smartphone – help! Even TVs, microwaves and fridges are smart nowadays, reminding us when we have run out of milk.

However frightened of future technology we might be, there are some things of which we can be certain. Peace, truth, justice and above all love never go out of fashion. Let us read the Gospels and ask ourselves what Jesus would do. The love of God is always with us, and there is nothing that can get in the way of that! And the Bible shows us that God is always willing to do something new – to think outside the box. And God wants us to be open to new ideas, new challenges, new ways of being, and to grow in faith. And as we go forward into a new year, and possibly an uncertain future, we know that God is with us always.

'When the wheels of fate are turning
And the mills of God grind slow
When the past is more attractive
Than the future we don't know.
When our confidence is waning
and we lack security
comes the timeless word of Jesus
that the truth will set us free.'

John Bell (1949 -)



Copyright: Wild Goose publications

Welcome home, Greenwood! Greenwood Open Day, 30th November 2024



I have observed when I have previously organized celebrations that often the event itself passes in a blur and the Open Day at Greenwood was no exception. So, this account will just contain the high points that I will hold close to my heart in the days to come.

I felt proud to be able to proudly display the beautiful hanging made to celebrate the reopening of the Church and the Oak tree we can see from the window. Thank you, Maggie Snyder and Jenny Hill,

The Revd. James Field comparing the opening of Greenwood to the opening of Notre Dame. For me the contrast was that thousands of ancient French Oaks were felled to form the roof or 'forest' of Notre Dame and, although the finished cathedral building is amazing, I feel happier that our build resulted in Tree Protection

Orders being put on our splendid 3 oak trees.

Hearing Raj Kaur, the Chair of the Residents' Association, who cut the ribbon to officially open the hall, speaking about her love for the Chiswell Green Community, the church site and her gratitude to "The Good Lord" for being part of it.

Introducing Debbie Hodge to my dear friends, Pat and Judith who helped me run the conversation group for the Noke Asylum seekers. Pat and Judith are both trained bereavement counsellors. Their mutual enthusiasm at the prospect of getting stuck into using our new buildings to support those who are experiencing any sort of loss, including those suffering from dementia, was heartwarming and exciting.



The many conversations I had with so many people expressing their appreciation of the site. None more than the one with two of my fellow Soroptimists as we gazed at the oak tree from the quiet of the church. They both agreed, without any prompting from me, it was a place filled with spirituality.



What more can we hope for!

Lastly, the amount of cake the church family produced; it was like the feeding of the 5,000! Oh, me of little faith! Thank you cake makers! What a jolly party it helped us have!

If you have not made a visit yet – do come soon.

Anna Barrett

Poetry corner

Cathedral Candles

*Ranks of lights rise and drift into still air; who knows
what soundless words they have been given to say
here in this place of pilgrimage and prayer; how goes
a fragile thought-flame on its way?*

*Each one ascends to move the heavens and earth;
and grows
and spreads itself and higher rising
imagination leaps to give it worth; endows
it with power beyond surmising.*

John Steele



Bats at Greenwood

Bats are amongst our most fascinating and enigmatic wild animals. But, sadly, the Herts and Middlesex Bat Group report that populations of all our commoner species have decreased greatly over the last 60 years. One species recently became extinct in Britain and others are now seriously endangered. In August 2022 we were fortunate to have a local bat enthusiast record the bat activity on the Greenwood site and reported that 5, possibly 6, species of common bat foraged on the site. These were: Common pipistrelles and Soprano pipistrelles, Brown long ear, Natterer's, Noctules and, possibly a Leisler's bat. How exciting to know that we provided such a rich hunting ground for these intriguing creatures!



We were delighted that our planning conditions included an ecologist's demand for the inclusion of bat boxes as part of the project, as providing a haven for them to roost is just as important as providing a rich foraging ground. We have 3 Low Profile Bat Boxes on the back of the church that can each accommodate up to 15 common pipistrelle bats which are very sociable mammals and prefer to live in colonies and 2 tree mounted bat boxes designed to suit crevice and cavity dwelling bat species which will be put in place soon. If you have a garden, you can help too. Look at the Bat Conservation Trust Website for more information [Gardening for bats - Advice - Bat Conservation Trust](#).

Let's meet.....Carol Watkins

Carol shared that she was born in Edgware, where she lived with her parents and sister until she married Peter in 1972. As a child, her family attended the old Baptist Church in Borehamwood, where her father was the organist. Some of her earliest memories include sitting quietly with her sister beside their father as he played, and later, being allowed to operate the pump to keep the organ going.

At age 10, the family began attending Camrose Baptist Church in Edgware, where Carol's faith blossomed. She described it as a vibrant church with many young people and credited it with having a profound influence on her spiritual and personal life. She was baptized there in 1963.

At 13, Carol made her first visit to a hairdresser, where she had her long plaits cut off - which ended the "pudding basin" family haircuts and inspired her to become a hairdresser. After leaving Hendon County School, she took an apprenticeship in Green Park, London, where she loved the energy and buzz of the city.

In 1965, Carol and a friend left their jobs to live and work in Denmark for four months, a time she described as exciting and memorable. Though she considered staying permanently, it wasn't to be. The pair cycled through Germany, heading for Austria, but the terrain proved challenging. They reached Stuttgart by train and hitchhiked around Austria before returning to the UK via several European countries.

Back in London, Carol worked in Hendon for four years before deciding to start her own mobile hairdressing business. Buying a Mini Countryman, she fulfilled her ambition, and within six months, her diary was fully booked. This career served her well for decades, and though retired, she still sees a few clients.

Carol met Peter at French evening classes. After a brief engagement, they married in 1972 and spent their early years in Mill Hill, where their son Gareth and daughter Catherine were born. In 1979, the family, along with Carol's mother, moved to St Albans. They joined Chiswell Green URC, as Catherine wanted to attend Sunday School. This led Carol to volunteer with the Brownies, eventually becoming Brown Owl—a role she loved and held for 11 years. She stepped down to care for her mother's health but was delighted when Heather Webb and Anna Barrett took over.

In 2010, Carol travelled to Kathmandu to visit Catherine, who was volunteering at a home for disabled children. She described it as a wonderful yet thought-provoking experience, witnessing the joy and resilience of children despite their challenges. Carol has also enjoyed many holidays in Canada visiting her sister, who has lived there for 55 years, and in Yorkshire, where Gareth lives with his family.

Carol and Peter have a good marriage. They share the joy of laughter and singing, often being helpless with giggles and joining in spontaneous duets. Carol sings in a choir and enjoys walking in the countryside, reading, completing jigsaw puzzles, and practicing yoga. Despite leading an active life, she values her quiet time at home. She is thrilled with the changes at Greenwood and is grateful for the support from the wider Church community during the building times.



Let's meet Grazyna Bishop.



My name is Grazyna- which lots of people struggle to pronounce! The shortened version is Graza- and this might help! 'Gra' (as in grass)- 'z' (as in the ge at the end of mirage)- 'a' as the end of Emmaa.

I was born in Poland, where I lived with my younger brother Otmar and our family in a first-floor apartment. Many of you will

remember my mother Nula who was also a long-term member of Homewood Road church until her death.

At 7 years old I started primary school (this was the normal starting age in Poland). The school was nearby so I was able to walk there with my good friend who lived 2 streets away.

When I was 8 ½ years old the Second World War (WW2) broke out. Unfortunately, Nula lost her business (which was a kiosk where she used to sell things like newspapers, cigarettes and sweets) and some of the stocks came back to our apartment. One day I remember Otmar and I throwing sweets out of the window to other children in the street below, and the shock when Nula stopped us and explained 'that's all there is, there won't be any more'.

Nula's mother was Scottish, father Austrian and husband Polish, so we had a mixed heritage, which meant WW2 was a risky time for us. Nula's ability with languages helped us a lot.

At one point we moved to the mountains to help my brother's weak chest. Worryingly Nula was taken seriously ill with diphtheria (collapsing on the hospital steps), and when she recovered, she decided she must bring us to England to be near both our father who was with the Free Polish Army, and our lovely Scottish relatives who lived here. One day Nula said 'right, now you must learn English', and we started learning our next language to go with the two we already spoke! I really enjoy practicing different languages to this day.

We spent sometime in a relocation camp, waiting to come to England. All the children were given an afternoon snack of a drink and a cake- so long as they had a dose of cod liver oil first! As one of the eldest I was given a big white coat (to keep the smelly splashes off my clothes), a spoon and a bottle, and stationed at the entrance to dole out the noxious stuff!

We came to England soon after the war. I remember after crossing the channel travelling by train from the East Coast to London, and looking out at the various yards that backed onto the railway.



(Photo – from left: Otmar, Nula and Grazyna)

When we arrived in England, we went to stay with my Aunty and Uncle who were so kind. My Uncle paid for our education and often would give me money for lunch - I was always so careful to bring back every last bit of change! I would sometimes arrange nice flowers for them as a way of saying thank you.

Otmar was still of an age to fit in to the English schooling system but I had to do my matriculation by post and sat the exam at a local school in Watford. The requirement was for 5 subjects which had to include English, maths, a foreign language and 2 other subjects. I did not have to spend much time on the languages, which I knew already, but had to learn maths, biology and more English. I was relieved to pass the exams at my first attempt and remember feeling so pleased to have passed for the sake of those who had supported me!

After matriculation I studied Biology at a college in London, and then found a job at the Institute of Helminthology (later known as the Commonwealth Institute of Parasitology) in St Albans, and went to work there.

I was ideally suited as they needed someone with both languages and Biology. My job involved identifying international scientific publications that contained helminthology information. We would borrow these publications, read them, and then produce a summary of the paper in English. I did all the Polish and Russian, some German and a bit of Czech, so I was always busy!

When I first worked at the Institute our family lived in a council house in Garston, and I came to work by bus. My boss then told me about a small terraced cottage coming up for rent in Fishpool Street, (a characterful street near Verulamium park), and I moved into my first home.

Later the owner wanted to sell the house, so I looked into buying it. Unfortunately, in those days, the bank wouldn't give a young woman a mortgage. However, the new director of the institute kindly gave me her backing, so the bank gave me a mortgage, and I owned my first house!

I took tennis lessons for a while but found I really was no good at that! However, I met a lovely tennis coach called Martyn (who everyone called 'Mick')- and we were married.

The dust of the old buildings in Fishpool Street was bad for Mick's chest, so we moved and have lived in that house ever since! It needed an awful lot of renovation work, and Mick worked tirelessly on it. It was ready for us to move in just after the first of our daughters was born. Nula lived with us and was a great help in the family. When she became very ill, I was really happy to be able to look after her at home right until she died.

After I retired, I was never busier, becoming an elder at church for many years, while keeping fit with badminton, yoga and swimming, joining a German conversation group, and enjoying travelling with, and to see, friends and family.

Later I was blessed by the arrival of 4 grandchildren, and it has been a pleasure watching them grow up, and now all of them are adults too!

Let's meet Barbara Cooper

The first church I went to at the age of six was New Malden Congregational Church which became a second home to me. I joined the Girls' Brigade and stayed for more than ten years, working my way up as I grew. I sang in the choir, became a Sunday School teacher, took a leading role in the drama group and played my guitar on party days. The Boys' Brigade, on Church Parade Sundays, marched up the high street, playing bugles, drums and cymbals. We filled the church to bursting and sang hymns at the tops of our voices.



I attended Tolworth Girls' Secondary School, having failed the 11+, but there was a grammar stream and when I was thirteen I was promoted and took my O levels. Later I trained as a teacher. My first job was in a school next to the iron foundry in Dagenham where everything smelt of oil and the air was thick with soot. The children's hands and faces were grey with grime. They wore broken, mismatched shoes and ill-fitting, unwashed clothes but were endlessly cheerful.

Shortly after I'd met Robin he told me he was going to Zambia to study for a post-graduate certificate in education at the university in Lusaka and would I like to go with him? Three months later we were married. He spent a year in Lusaka studying. This took a bit of getting used to, especially as the Zambians stole most of our possessions – twice. After that we went to the little town of Monze, on the road to the Victoria Falls, where he had to teach for three years. We adopted a Zambian baby girl and had a baby boy of our own in Monze mission hospital. In Monze I taught in the primary school. I tried to bring the English, open-plan teaching methods of 1970 into a culture I knew nothing about. The Zambians wanted children sitting in rows facing the front. Let's say it was interesting, an education for me, if not the children.

When we returned to England we had another baby so there were five of us living off Robin's meagre salary. I started to do piano lessons to help out. I also taught part-time at the local primary school then later I took up a full-time job in Enfield. When I retired I studied a diploma course for piano teaching and taught piano, while Robin spent 25 years teaching maths at Beaumont School. A couple of years after Robin died of prostate cancer, I studied for an Open University Humanities degree.

When we managed to buy a car, we visited a different church each Sunday, wondering if we'd ever fit it in. Then we came to Trinity, which was different from the others. We were impressed by Rev. John Sutcliffe. His services were intelligent, thought-provoking, relevant and challenging. He spoke our language. We stayed.

I've been a member of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth ever since the early seventies when our children were small and when concerns about global warming were beginning to emerge. I was dubbed a 'dippy-hippy' then, ridiculed, as were many others, when I expressed my views. I now live in the same house which used to hold all of us. I read a lot, I play the piano, though not as well as I used to, I have a go at writing, I enjoy listening to radio 3, I watch the news even if I don't like it. I belong to a U3A. I have a garden and an aged cat. I still drive but struggle with arthritis so walking isn't easy. But, hey ho, that's life!



A Festive Host of Angels

Our very own Topper, part of the World record attempt for the largest number of postbox toppers (102) in a town. St Albans Postboxes display these to collect for local charities by asking for sponsorship and donations, this year to **'Gaddesden Place Riding for the Disabled'** and **'Up on Downs'**.

Homewood Charity Knitters decided, in September, to make a postbox topper and arrange to have it displayed on the postbox on the corner of Marshal's Drive and Homewood Road. That was the fun bit! Then we discovered the amount of organisation involved in making this happen.

To secure the postbox we had to find sponsorship. The knitting Group collect throughout the year and donate funds as well as knitted items to charities and in addition we approached the church as Friends of St Albans URC to help with the sponsorship. Many thanks to all who contributed and I believe that jointly we have collected well over £150 towards these good causes.

Homewood Charity Knitters are a small group that have met for many years to provide knitted items for charities, both local and further afield – this year – baby blankets, fish and chip jumpers and school uniforms. Fish and chip jumpers are so called as many babies in African countries, originally those whose mothers were affected by Aids, would be wrapped in newspapers due to lack of ability to buy clothes for them. I believe ours go to somewhere in Malawi.

We meet on alternate Wednesday evenings in the Back Hall – at 7.30. New members would be welcome – just come along for a knit and natter evening. Our next session will be 8 January.

For more information contact Anona. noni195@gmail.com Tel 07531 368731.

The Airbrained Archivist

Peter Elliott has been fascinated by aviation for his whole life. As a boy he wanted to become a pilot. Sadly the RAF didn't share this vision for him, and he became a librarian, eventually spending 30 years as the librarian and then the archivist of the Royal Air Force Museum in Hendon. For some of this time he and Gill were glider pilots, flying first from Farnborough then from RAF Halton.



Three University of Hertfordshire graduates: Gill (BSc Computer Science, 2004), Phil (BSc Aerospace Technology, 2014) and Peter (PhD History) 2024.

When he first retired in April 2017, he started work on a part-time doctorate in History, despite having given up History aged 14! Having searched for a supervisor, he finally found one prepared to take him on at the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield. Covid made life rather difficult, as he was still at the research stage; this meant that rather than visiting museums and interviewing people in person it all had to be done over Zoom. This had its own issues; when transcribing the interviews, he asked for the transcript as created by the Zoom or Teams apps. The apps did not always cope well with the technical subject matter, and especially with strong regional accents, resulting in some very funny conversations! However, despite losing several supervisors en route, he was finally awarded his doctorate in December 2023, on the topic of "The development of aviation museums in the United Kingdom".

The graduation took place this September at St Albans Cathedral.

When not studying for the Doctorate, Peter was working to gain his private pilot's license, after which he was entitled to become a member of the of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. He quickly made himself useful to the Company, becoming Honorary Archivist.

In June he became a Freeman of the City of London, in a short ceremony at Guildhall, which means he can now drive sheep over London Bridge. And then, having become a Freeman, he was then able to be elevated to a Liveryman of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots in October.



He remains busy as Honorary Archivist to the Air Pilots, Chair of the RAF Club's Library Committee, and Consultant Archivist to the Royal Aeronautical Society. The RAeS gave him a Distinguished Service Award recognising 25 years' membership of the Historical Group committee, eight of them as Chairman.



Gill Elliott

Trinity: Stations on our Way

The Lent Project 2011



When the Trinity church building was being stripped of all its belongings, prior to the sale, much of the art work could not find a home. One of these was the Lent project, titled 'Trinity: Stations on our Way'.

During Lent in 2011, members of the congregation at Trinity were invited to take part in this project. It took place within the services over the seven weeks of Lent, mirrored the lectionary for that year, and connected to the content of the service.

Each week the congregation was asked to write on small slips of paper their recollections and stories of Trinity, connected to the theme of each week. The themes were: Truth, Spirit, Community, Justice, Renewal, Love, Hope. What resulted was a wonderful archive of memories, impressions and a celebration of the Trinity family and all its work in the community.

The slips of paper were put into small cardboard boxes, rather like a Mezuzah. A Mezuzah is a small box containing a tiny scroll of parchment, inscribed with the Shema prayer, which is hung on the doorpost of many Jewish homes, is a symbol of Jewish faith and a reminder of God's presence.

The boxes were then fixed to seven canvasses, a symbol to reflect the theme of each week was added, and the boxes arranged so that they might link together as one collective art work.

The photos which accompany this article were taken during the services while the thinking and writing was happening.

This archive was too valuable historically, and too touching to be lost. I decided to paste the slips of paper into a scrap book for anyone to read. Please ask to borrow it.

Fiona Smith



“Alternative Jewish Voices” meeting at Homewood, Oct 2024



We are so used to mainstream Jewish opinion giving unquestioning support to Israel that it is surprising and refreshing to hear from individuals and organisations within the Jewish community who differ. On the afternoon of Saturday 19th October St Albans URC hosted a meeting organised by St Albans Friends of Palestine that gave voice to members of the Jewish community who are acting in solidarity with the Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza.

The meeting attracted a lot of interest, and the church was well filled. The afternoon was led by a member of the local Jewish community. He explained how complex and difficult this topic is for Jewish people; nearly everyone will have friends or relatives in Israel, and know people impacted by the events of 7 October 2023. Yet for people like himself the core Jewish principles of justice (tzedek) and loving kindness (chesed) inspire them to show empathy and support to the people of Gaza.

Our first speaker was David, from Na’amod, an activist movement of UK Jews who stand against the occupation and apartheid in Israel-Palestine. He gave a heartfelt presentation, telling how he had been brought up to believe in Israel as the rightful refuge and homeland for Jews worldwide. As a young man, he ‘made Aliyah’ (immigrated to Israel) and had served in the IDF. However, the successive attacks on Gaza and the deaths of thousands of Palestinians had brought the realisation that establishing a homeland for Jews on land taken by force from the indigenous inhabitants was a betrayal of the best Jewish principles. Since returning to the UK, he had become active in promoting Na’amod as a place where Jews who thought like him could express their beliefs in a practical way.

After some excellent Palestinian-themed refreshments provided by Glynis and her team, we heard from Naomi from the British Shalom-Salaam Trust (BSST). This is a small Jewish charity devoted to assisting community projects in Israel and Occupied Palestine, typically those mounted by the smaller charities and community groups. They are wholly dependent on donations, and she was very proud of the fact that 98% of monies donated went to support such projects. Applications are kept simple and informal. She told of an almost unintelligible funding bid received from Gaza, which turned out to have been written in short bursts when the intermittent electricity came on. BSST were able to take up a reference in the UK, sort out the facts, and help. Naomi noted that besides the practical difference BSST funding made, it was very meaningful to recipients that the support was coming from a Jewish organisation. That was to her a most powerful reason for the BSST’s existence.

Overall this was an interesting and encouraging evening, and our collection for BSST produced £700 in donations for their continued work. Thank you to all present! If you missed this meeting – ask to hear our recording!

Philip Nixon

News Roundup by Anne Goldsmith

Autumn Fun



Making an owl picture



Autumn tree painting



Decorating a biscuit

Autumn Fun was attended by more than 40 children accompanied by a parent or carer. A variety of art and craft activities were offered which the children thoroughly enjoyed. The morning concluded with a few songs in the church, a prayer and chocolate to take home. About £65 was raised for the Woodland Trust. Thanks to all who made it so successful.

Trip to the Royal Albert Hall



On Tuesday 5th November, instead of watching fireworks, many church friends and members boarded a coach to the Royal Albert Hall and enjoyed musical fireworks! The concert entitled 'Let's Face the Music' was a selection of songs from the musicals such as *Oklahoma*, *My Fair Lady*, *Hello Dolly* and many more. The songs were sung by four stars of Westend musicals accompanied by the superb Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and presented by the bubbly and vivacious Bonnie Langford. A great time was had by all. Many thanks again to Ray for organising such an uplifting event.



Breakfast Club

In November the speaker at the Breakfast Club was Rev Fiona Souter, the Chaplain to the University of Hertfordshire.

October Strollers

Thanks to Jim and Marion for leading a great walk in excellent weather through Rothamsted Estate and along part of the Nicky Line. A good lunch was enjoyed at The White Horse afterwards.



November Strollers

And thanks to the Blackets for leading a walk on a beautiful November morning through Sandridge and Heartwood Forest, finishing with lunch at the Green Man.



COSY CAFÉ

On Thursday 21st November the first Cosy Café of the season was very well attended, and included a workshop for those who wanted to learn how to make a 'Rag Wreath'. Many thanks to Charlie, Helen and Jenny.



Ramblers

The Chiswell Ramblers are pictured at Whitwell in October.



Lunch party

The former coffee club members from Homewood Road having lunch at the Green Man in Sandridge at the end of November.



December Strollers

In order to avoid muddy trackways, the December stroll was through Verulamium Park, where we viewed the hypocaust, and into the Abbey for quick refreshment where we were able to admire the illuminated high altar screen. We finished the walk with a good lunch at the King Harry. Thanks to Ray for organising the walk and providing us with nuggets of interesting information.



Carols Around the Tree

Our annual Carols Around the Tree was held on 7th December in the church, rather than outside, due to storm Darragh. A good sing was followed by mulled wine and mince pies.



Toy Collection



During the Worship Group's service for the 2nd Sunday in Advent, gifts of toys for FEED (Verso Care at the Vineyard) were made. Thanks to the generosity of all those who gave – they will be greatly appreciated.

A warming memory of summer - Four Islands and a Friary



Rathlin harbour

Greylag, our 31ft LM30 wheelhouse yacht, left her base at Ardfern, Argyll, on July 12th. Crew - Philip and Hilary and brother Michael. After a good passage south we crossed the North Channel to Northern Ireland and our first Irish Island, Rathlin. This is the only inhabited island in Northern Ireland, about six miles off the mainland, across Rathlin Sound with its very strong tides. Its particular interest is the RSPB site at the western lighthouse, surrounded by rock stacks and cliffs - the breeding place for thousands of sea birds; guillemot, kittiwake, fulmar, razorbills and puffin.



Rathlin bird cliffs

From Rathlin, Greylag headed west for Portrush, and then northwest, to Inistrahull, our second island, about 8 miles north of Malin Head.

Portmore, Inistrahull. Greylag anchored in background

We anchored in Portmore, the tiny inlet on the north of the island, watched by curious seals and noisy arctic terns. Inistrahull was the smallest island we visited, perhaps a mile and a half by a quarter of a mile. There is a lighthouse at each end, the old, demolished one, at the east and the working one at the west. Today the island is only inhabited by seals, seabirds and, strangely, one red deer hind. Until 1927 it was home



to 12 families. That afternoon, with the sun shining and wildflowers among the verdant grass, it was beautiful but it was easy to imagine how different it would be in the winter storms.



Aranmore on the horizon

After a rather restless night with the Atlantic swell and the close rocks, Greylag set off west again. In Loch Swilly Michael departed for Derry airport and brother Nick, living in Northern Ireland, joined Greylag - with welcome groceries.

From Loch Swilly Greylag headed west again. Taking advantage of light winds we motor sailed round Bloody Foreland, the most northwesterly point of Ireland, to reach Aranmore, our third island, picking up a mooring in Aran Roads after a 35nm voyage. Now we were definitely on the west coast. Aranmore was the biggest island we visited, perhaps some ten miles across. Most habitation is on the east, where the seafront has been developed into a rather elegant little seaside resort. Inland is moorland and the west has impressive cliffs facing the open Atlantic. We would have liked to stay longer but the weather forecast



Peat drying, Aranmore

was changing to a more typical southwest/westerly airflow with stronger winds, so we reluctantly decided it was time to point for home.

We still had one more island to visit, Tory island, off the northwest coast of Ireland. With the wind astern Greylag sped along and in late afternoon we moored against the wall in the tiny harbour. The island was threatened with evacuation in the 1920s but an energetic priest revitalised it. Its name is perhaps its main claim to fame. In the 18th century, when the English political parties were forming, it was notorious for its lawless, violent population and the Whigs nicknamed the more conservative and royal opposition “Tories”.



The harbour wall, Tory Island

After a very restless night tending to our mooring lines we were ready to move on. The wind had risen but we left midmorning and ran down-wind, under headsail only, into a large inlet on the mainland, Sheephaven. Here we found a delightful bay to anchor in, a beautiful sandy beach surrounded by rocky headlands and backed by pine trees. Ashore we found a Franciscan Friary, with real brown coated friars, a fine chapel and an excellent café with freshly baked scones. Then a circular walk amongst the trees back to our bay.

Next day Greylag headed east again, overnighing in Loch Swilly, Inistrahull again and Greencastle on the Irish side of Loch Foyle, a busy fishing port, with an impressive maritime museum. Back at Portrush Nick left

us and, before crossing to Scotland, we made a day train trip to Derry. We found a much more relaxed city than our previous visit, some ten years ago, and now the murals commemorating the “troubles” have been joined by one of the Derry Girls. Our crossing to Port Ellen, Islay, was pleasant. Next day, however, the weather showed how fortunate we had been, as wind against tide kicked up an unpleasant sea and rain squalls came and went. We were glad to pick up a buoy off



Craighouses, Jura.

For the last lap we had a good passage and Greylag berthed in Ardfern in late afternoon 3rd August. We had phoned the village shop to reserve a Guardian and one of their excellent homecooked takeaway meals so walking round to collect these and having a celebratory ice cream made a good homecoming. 400 nm, 25 days sailing and five days on land. A good trip.



Murals in the Bogside, Derry

A Franciscan Blessing

MAY GOD BLESS YOU with discomfort, at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

A poem with memories by Sheila Knopp

My Great Uncle, Andrew Dodds, was born into a mining family in Midlothian. He channelled his talent for writing into newspaper articles supporting Labour politics and the work of agricultural unions, and five books of poetry, from *The Lothian Land* in 1917 to *The Lady April* in 1951, which gave an unsentimental picture of the life of farm labourers.

I like this poem because I am very familiar with the area. My Grandfather on my mother's side of the family had the market garden by the water tower in Dalkeith. My Grandmother on my father's side of the family was the organist at Crichton Church, a beautiful spot nestled in hills beside the ruins of Crichton Castle. I find this a very spiritual place, remembering my ancestors who walked or rode their bikes many miles to get there.

Ower the hills by Lauderdale
The road swings lang and free;
And, eastart by Pencaitland,
It brings ye to the sea;
By Dalkeith and the northart
There's mony a break and bend;
But the road that gangs by Crichton
Has a kirkyaird at the end.

Ye may take the road by Lauderdale,
Where hills and muirs are free;
Or, eastart by Pencaitland,
The gold rim o' the sea;
Or, north, among the Hieland hills,
Your wand'ring feet may wend –
They're jist roond-aboots to Crichton,
Wi' a kirkyaird at the end.

Andrew Dodds

Date		At Homewood Road		At Greenwood
		10.30 am	6.30 pm	10:30 am
Jan	5	HC: Rev'd Simon Carver		Revd Debbie Hodge
	12	Worship Group		Mike Findley
	19	WPCU Candle Exchange? Martyn Macphee		Harry Smith 10.30 CTSA Service 4pm Revd Debbie
	26	Rev'd Jenny Mills	HC	Revd Robert Fletcher
Feb	2	HC: Mike Findley		Revd Debbie Hodge
	9	Worship Group		Gill Elliott
	16	Karen Campbell	HC: Sheila	Revd Debbie Hodge
	23	Stephen De Silva		Revd David Ronco
Mar	2	Welsh Service HC: Rev'd John Steele		Revd Geoff Lackey
	9	Worship Group		Johnny
	16	Parade Service Geoff Sutton	HC	Revd Simon Carver
	23	Mike Bramwell		Revd Debbie Hodge
	30	Mothering Sunday Rev'd Maggie Hindley		Joint Service at HR

HC = Holy Communion; CTiM = Christians Together in Marshalswick CTSA = Christians together in St Albans

Coloured sections indicate school holidays and half-terms

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