

Newsletter for DECEMBER 2013

Advent and Christmas at St George's

We try to keep Advent properly, as a serious-minded season of preparation - despite Dave Walker's cartoon above [and they didn't actually light Advent candles in 1923]. *The meaning is in the waiting* - so we don't rush too soon into Christmas events, though this isn't always easy! At the **all-age service** on 1 December, children will be preparing our Advent crown, and we'll be thinking about the candles for each of its four weeks, marking

- 🕯 all God's people, watching and waiting
- 🕯 the prophets
- 🕯 John the Baptizer
- 🕯 Mary



Our parish **carol service** will be at 4.30pm on the Sunday before Christmas, which we hope will be a good time for all ages to come together. We'll have a choir, carols for children around the tree, and mince pies and mulled wine to follow. (No News UK service this year - they'll be at Southwark Cathedral, near to their new home, though their choir is still rehearsing here; but lots of school visits are planned in the last week of term.)

The Royal Foundation of St Katharine

spelt locally, unlike elsewhere, with a 'K' rather than a 'C' - however, the long-gone [Katharine buildings](#), pronounced to rhyme with wine rather than gin, which provided housing for the 'lowest class' in Cartwright Street, were not in fact named for her

was founded in 1147 by Mathilda (aka Maud), the French wife of King Stephen, as a place of prayer and a hospital serving the poor. Always under female royal patronage - with one disastrous exception - it survived Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, when church property was given to cronies and courtiers, and it became a Protestant house (connected with a brewery - which in those days was philanthropy, since water was not safe to drink!) But it failed to survive the commercial pressure for the building of St Katharine's Docks in the 1820's (the period when it was briefly under male patronage): many local residents were evicted, and the foundation moved to Regent's Park, where it became little more than a middle class almshouse. After the Second World War, there was pressure to move the Foundation back to the East End, where it belonged, to do its proper work, and the present premises in Butcher Row - based around the bombed rectory of St James Ratcliff, and with an innovative new chapel - were created, with Fr Groser (up till then Rector of this parish) as Master and Olive Wagstaff (still with us) a member of the original lay community there. The late Queen Mother was a keen patron, and since her death the Queen has visited; and daily prayers continue for the repose of the soul of Queen Mathilda.



The Katharine wheel, familiar to us as a firework, is the symbol of the saint - and of the Foundation - because of the legend that she was martyred on a revolving wheel. She was one of the popular female saints of medieval times. Nowadays we recognise her story as more fiction than fact (which is why the Roman Catholic church 'downgraded' her), but the baseline is that of a bright, well-educated young Christian convert in 4th century Alexandria who successfully (but fatally) took on a team of

philosophers. That resonates with the contemporary mission of the Royal Foundation as a centre of study and learning, for women and men, rejoicing particularly in its female patronage.

So on **St Katharine's Day**, 25 November, a small group of us gathered outside Starbucks in St Katharine's Docks, more or less the site of the ancient Hospital, where Mark Aitken, the present Master, led prayers of thanksgiving for the Foundation past and present (having hosted a dinner in Katharine's honour the previous evening). Although St Katharine's Dock is no longer in our parish (it was once, before boundary changes), your Rector was there, not only because of the Fr Groser connection, but also because of the



Danish link: our school, St Paul's, is built on the site of the former Danish church, and by a curious turning of the (Katharine) wheel Danes in London now worship at the Regent's Park church that bears her name, having taken it over from the Foundation when it moved back to the East End.

See more on our parish website [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#); and the Royal Foundation's site [here](#).

Looking back, and ahead



It was good to welcome representative of the political parties to lay wreaths at the war memorial on **Remembrance Sunday**. As explained last month, from the start all parties and faiths have been represented at our Act of Remembrance.

Congratulations to **Marta Powell** and **Craig Jackson**, confirmed at St Paul's Cathedral on Saturday 16 November along with 63 others, by the Bishop of Kensington. **Marta** has been a member of our congregation since her birth and baptism here. Her family has recently moved to Blackheath, which means that at our next annual meeting we will 'lose' Richard as our wonderful Treasurer; but we will still keep in touch.

Marta's mother Elisa is Spanish, so she is fully bilingual, and enjoys visiting family in Spain. **Craig** came from Zimbabwe two years ago to join his mother Jubilant, Louis, and sister Sienna: the family has worshipped with us since Sienna's baptism. Craig was baptized at the Good Shepherd Church Dangamvura, in the diocese of Manicaland, and had a good Christian education there. He misses his birth country, but has settled well here, enjoying sport and cinema, and making new friends; a sixth-former at Bishop Challoner - a charming young man who we're sure will go far.



The **Players of St Peter** have been busy rehearsing, and set-building, for their annual presentation of plays - this year from the Chester cycle. This is their second year here, and they hope that as well as continuing to attract their loyal audience, built up over many years, they will attract people from the local area. The event is great fun, with lots of audience participation, and gives an insight into how our medieval forbears shared the

gospel stories. (A recent project, laser-lighting the west front of Amiens cathedral, and the St Christopher statue at Norton Priory in Cheshire, show how churches then were full of colour, with gaudy saints and biblical scenes - a far cry from the austere stonework of ancient churches which we see today.)

Performances are from Monday 2 to Friday 6 December, at 6.30pm and 8.30pm each night. You can just turn up, or get tickets from their [website](#).

Olive Stubbs, the producer, offers us these words of Mary which sums up what it's all about:

*When the time is come entire
To prove his strength and power,
To my Son you shall be dear
Whom him today hath honoured here!*

Fred Thomas, multi-talented local musician who works with a variety of different groups, and regularly rehearses and performs in church - which he finds a wonderful venue - recently mounted an intimate concert, on 24 November, of songs which they were due to record here in the following days. They arrived to find the church set up for the mystery plays and the piano 'trapped' in the south aisle. But, nothing daunted - musicians are good at improvising - they decided to hold the concert in this space, amidst all the clutter of theatrical props. With subtle lighting it made an atmospheric venue for some wonderful music-making. His next concert here is on Wednesday 11 December, when their latest CD will be available.

