

Newsletter for JULY 2011

Parish outing to Elstow

The sun did not exactly shine, and the coach took a long time getting out of London, but we had a brilliant 'all-age' parish trip to Elstow Abbey in Bedfordshire, where Susan's brother Jeremy Crocker is Rector. Elstow is well-worth visiting for two reasons:

(1) The Abbey church was originally a Benedictine convent, founded in 1078 (inhabited by rich, and at times rather naughty, nuns until the Reformation); parts of the ancient buildings survive, including the vestry which currently serves as the parish room while an ambitious project goes ahead to create a new parish centre on the site of the former cloisters, ingeniously incorporating the ruins of a manor house built with stone from the former abbey. The adjacent timber-framed Moot Hall was where trading on behalf of the nuns took place, and is now a museum (many photos were taken on the upper floor amidst its collection of old furniture).

(2) John Bunyan lived in the village and was baptized in the parish church, where he worshipped until he was 'radicalised' - and imprisoned in Bedford jail for his preaching. The cottage where his family lived was, shamefully, demolished to make way for a road-widening scheme that never happened, but the local Bunyan chapel (where we attended the Guides' table-top sale and got some good bargains) has a large early-20th century stained glass window depicting scenes from his most famous book, *Pilgrim's Progress* (written in prison) which we attempted to identify. Nowadays this book is more widely read in the USA and the far East than in this country, so the village welcomes large numbers of pilgrims from overseas.

We were warmly welcomed by Jeremy and one of his churchwardens, and plied with tea and coffee throughout the day; we dodged the showers, managing to eat our lunches in the Rectory garden just before the heavens opened; we sampled the local pub (the Whitbread family are the local patrons); and had high tea back in church - scones, and strawberries and cream, plus a fine birthday cake, baked by John, for Fr Michael, since it was his birthday (and what better way to celebrate it than on a trip with friends?); and we left having eaten more than most of us are used to! And was there hearty singing on the coach on our return journey?

Our thanks to our generous hosts at Elstow, and to Susan, assisted by Alex, for making this event possible. (Susan even included a tradition from parish trips of bygone days - chalking the coach's front wheel with numbers for a roulette, won by the one whose number appeared at the top on arrival. The winner generously put her takings towards the round of drinks in the pub!) We enjoyed each others' company, and learnt more about aspects of our Christian heritage - and so fulfilled more than one of the objectives of our mission action plan! We all agreed that we should have more trips like this.

The Ambulator arrived

Why did a man in a tricorn hat, and other items of 18th century costume, arrive at church just after the morning service on Pentecost Sunday? The answer is, as explained last month, that this was to mark the exact 300th anniversary of the Fifty New Churches Act of 1711, of which we are one of the twelve that were in the event completed from this fund from a tax on coal. Peter Dodge, from Lincoln's Inn, devised a walk ('17 miles and two furlongs'), visiting all twelve, from Greenwich at 09.00 to Westminster at 17.11, with details provided in an amusing and informative brochure, to raise awareness of this aspect of our Georgian heritage, and in aid of the National Churches Trust, which has set up a special '1711 Fund' for our twelve churches, from which those still in regular use for worship will in due course benefit. Peter wondered how to describe himself, to show that this not a one-off event under his control, but an idea that people could take up in various ways over the coming months and years, and settled on the title 'the Ambulator, a Native of London'.

The day of the first walk was rather wet, so he, and a group of fellow-walkers, arrived with some rather non-18th century umbrellas. However, as this page on our website <<http://www.stgite.org.uk/magdalenhospital.html>> explains, they could have called them 'hanways', since this was their original mid-18th century name, after Jonas Hanway, the first man to use one in the streets of London (for which he was laughed at).

The wet weather - and a leisurely 18th-century pub lunch - meant that they did not make the 17.11 target at St John Smith Square; but the Rector, who was in the area at the time, stood on the steps at the appointed time, so due honour was done.

Anniversary of Consecration

This year we will be keeping the 282nd anniversary of the consecration of our church on the nearest Sunday, 17 July, with a parish barbecue after the service in the Rectory garden (with 'Plan B' wet-weather arrangements, since nowadays this seems to be essential at all times of the year). All are very welcome to come and celebrate with us.

Ride + Stride

'Take the bus, cycle or walk to discover London's amazing churches!' reads the poster for Ride + Stride day, which this year has sensibly been re-scheduled from September, when it comes too close to the 'Open House London' weekend (which includes churches) to Saturday 23 July. Last year's planning was rather last-minute, so we only had a handful of biking visitors; this year information has gone out earlier. Our church will be open all day (as it is anyway), and it would be good to have some members of the congregation around to greet visitors. The event provides funds for the National Churches Trust (see above), so it is more than a 'heritage event'.

Coming soon: the welcome table re-launch

We have long been clear that the quality of the welcome that we offer on Sundays, to visitors and regulars alike, is one of the hallmarks of our fellowship. Since we ourselves are quite a diverse bunch, we are careful about this, and many of our regulars are good at facilitating conversations with newcomers over coffee after the service, taking care not to overwhelm them with attention on their first visit, but showing that their presence is noticed and valued. And in the process we find that many of our one-off and occasional visitors have fascinating stories to tell about their Christian journeys.

But what about greeting people appropriately when they first come through the door and are given a service leaflet and hymnbook, and if they come with children explaining what we provide for them? The rota for this 'ministry of welcome' often gets left blank, yet it is both a simple and a vital task. So one Sunday soon we will focus on our welcome table, and challenge all our members to play their part in extending Christ's own welcome to everyone who joins us for worship. To use the old term, we need more sidesmen (and women).

Rosamund Stocks

Rosamund is a prospective ordinand from Gateshead who, as part of the process of 'discerning' her vocation, is very keen to have some experience of life in a London parish; so by agreement with her diocesan director of ordinands she will be spending a week here, from 9-17 July, staying at the Rectory and exploring the parish and its ministry. The Rector has assured her of a warm welcome, and will be arranging for her to visit some members of the congregation, in addition to exploring the parish in other ways.

St Paul's School news

Every term at our school is busy and incident-packed, but because of the major building programme at St Paul's this has been particularly true this term. Years 1 and 2 have now moved into their purpose-built block and are delighted with the result; the upper floor has now been taken over by the builders for re-modelling; and all the other classes have been shuffled around the

remaining spaces. This has gone amazingly smoothly - even for year 6 in the portakabin on the playground (but perhaps they are demob-happy?) All credit to the governors who are overseeing the programme of works, to the staff who have to deal with the repercussions, and above all to our remarkable children. All this alongside a full programme of special activities throughout the term. Terry Bennett, the headteacher, will be coming to the July meeting of the PCC to update us on all that is happening.

This month, on Thursday 7 July, our church will be hosting the annual service for the top classes of all the church schools in Tower Hamlets Deanery, as they leave to transfer to various secondary schools. This is always an enjoyable event, and important, as it gives our year 6 children a chance to meet up with those from other church schools who will be going with them to a wide range of secondary schools within and beyond the borough.

Last year's service was at St Botolph Aldgate, the church of Sir John Cass Primary (which of course is in the City rather than Tower Hamlets, but has traditionally been part of this network), and Bishop Graeme Knowles, the Dean of St Paul's, gave a splendid address. We put in a bid to host this year's service, and to have Jan as the speaker, because it is the bicentenary of the National Society, some of whose founders were based in East London, and which funded the building of so many schools (including our own). It will be a bit of a squeeze, but all are welcome to come along on that day, when each school will make a special contribution to the event.

A few months ago Diana Woodbridge became a PCC-nominated governor of St Paul's School. She was anxious about 'stepping into the shoes' of Edith Wyeth, who had been involved for so long and in such detail, but we made it clear that she should make her own contribution, and that is exactly what she is doing, and she is enjoying being part of the life of our school. Now the term of office of our other PCC-nominated governor, John Allison, has come to an end, and he has said that because of his many other commitments he does not wish to continue. We respect this, even though John has made a really valuable, and committed, contribution and could certainly have continued to do so.

So the search is now on for a governor to replace him, representing the parish alongside the other foundation governors who are appointed by the deanery and the diocese, all of whom have a particular responsibility to uphold the distinctive ethos of St Paul's as a voluntary-aided church school. Some people do not understand how this can work, with an overwhelmingly Muslim pupil intake; but in fact it works astonishingly well, because we have staff and governors who are sensitive to the issues, and parents who want what we can offer. Bear in mind our school, and all that it achieves, as you follow the public debates about so-called 'faith' schools and the rapidly-changing educational climate. If what is being said does not hold true for St Paul CE Whitechapel Primary School, perhaps it is not true at all! And if you'd like to rise to the challenge of becoming a school governor, please get in touch with the Rector.

Bishop Adrian, Archdeacon Rachel

Please pray for Adrian Newman, who will be consecrated as Bishop of Stepney at St Paul's Cathedral on 22 July, St Mary Magdalene's Day (bishops are always consecrated on feast days or Sundays), together with Nick Holtham, formerly of the Isle of Dogs and St Martin-in-the-Fields, who is to become Bishop of Salisbury. Bishop Adrian, and Rachel Treweek, the next Archdeacon of Hackney, will officially be in post from that date, but will be working 'in earnest' from the start of September, ending East London's long wait for permanent episcopal and archidiaconal provision.

Hannah Brewer

Sunday 3 July will be Hannah's last Sunday as our organist, as she has now completed her course at the Courtauld Institute and will be returning home to California that week, where she hopes to find another church post and, and other employment where her musical and artistic skills can be employed.

We have greatly appreciated her time with us. She has accompanied our services impeccably - the result of meticulous practice. She has a strongly-developed sense of the liturgical calendar, and so her voluntaries have been chosen to reflect the moods and seasons of the church's year. We hope she will take home with her a positive experience of the Church of England - including some of its peculiar (or distinctive) traditions which are not part of church life elsewhere (for example, Mothering Sunday), and a sense of the particular and proud history of church life in East London.

We shall be welcoming Robert Langston (formerly of St Bride Fleet Street, returning for the summer from working in Hong Kong) to play for us during most of July and August, and have a prospective permanent organist in view from September onwards.

Concerts

The third of the five concerts in the series by F-IRE Klang Codex, curated by Fred Thomas, will be on Saturday 14 July, with music by Bach, Messiaen, Webern and Fred himself. Tickets are available on the door (£8, £5 concessions) and the performance begins at 8pm.

St Matthew Bethnal Green

marks in July the 50th anniversary of the rededication of their church after the Blitz - and we know something of what that means! From 11-15 July there will be exhibitions and school visits, and on 16 July a 'History Day' with a talk at 12 noon about Joshua King, cousin of Bryan King who was Rector here at the time of the Ritualism Riots, a parish walk or tour of the bells at 2.00pm and a talk by Ken Leech at 3.30pm about the Christian Socialist tradition at St Matthew's (where he was once Rector himself). On Monday 18 July they have a celebration eucharist with the Bishop of London at 7.30pm. Although this is our own anniversary weekend, let's try and support some of their special events, in the spirit of Tower Hamlets deanery at its best!

Remembering the departed, and praying for the bereaved

Please remember the families and friends of:

- Michael Sweeney (funeral 23 May), who died in police custody, triggering an investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission; his brother lives in the parish
- David Watts (funeral 3 June), a taxi driver with a close-knit East End family
- Bridget Cooper (funeral in church 5 July), a doughty Glaswegian well-known on the St George's Estate for her support of the Swedenborg Gardens pensioners' club, leaving her husband of 54 years Bill