

Newsletter for SEPTEMBER 2013

August: the Rector reflects

Did you manage to get anywhere nice over the summer? Jan and I had a few days with her sister's family who live in northern Italy (including a visit to the amazing royal palace in Turin, and lots of good food and drink). Then came the excitement of our younger daughter Judith's wedding to Marty on 25 August at our former parish of Worsley, near Manchester, where she grew up - a marvellous day, with a reception in a giant tipi in the woods. It was a good paradigm for the following Sunday's gospel parable about where to sit at weddings - there was no seating plan! Pictures (several thousand were taken by Marty's documentary cameraman colleague) to follow.

Shortly after we went to a conference-cum-house party in Dublin, an event held every other year since the 1920s by what's now called the **Anglo-Nordic-Baltic Theological Conference**. The Porvoo Agreement between the Anglican and Lutheran churches of both regions is a formal 'ecumenical instrument' - which has enabled much common working; ANBTC continues as an informal body, answerable to no-one! Participants were from Finland, Sweden, Latvia, England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and some had Danish and Norwegian links too.

Education: ethos and social transformation was the theme, and in addition to papers from some of the participants (including Jan), Archbishop Michael Jackson of Dublin had invited a range of speakers from schools and universities in the Republic, of various denominations, plus Jewish and Muslim guests. The (Anglican) Church of Ireland is a minority church, but punches above its weight. We stayed at its College of Education [right] - a bit basic, but very hospitable.



As in England, but in very different ways, in the Republic of Ireland church involvement in education (where every school has a 'patron' - mostly one of the churches, but with some new secular players) is changing rapidly, in the wake of all that has happened there: loss of confidence in the institutional church following the various scandals, growing European consciousness and their economic ups and downs. There are many challenges both for small village schools and the increasingly 'inter-cultural' cities and their universities (interesting comparisons with the earlier approach of 'multi-culturalism' which Tower Hamlets exemplifies), and some creative projects are under foot, which maybe our gathering will help promote. It was fascinating to reflect on the very different contexts of each of our countries. And the Guinness in Dublin really does taste

better (the water comes, not from the River Liffey as is popularly believed, but from the Wicklow mountains.) It is a grand city.

September: the parish looks ahead



We return to normality, whatever that might be - the new school term, the building and other projects that we have embarked on. We're curious to discover what tenants the diocese has lined up for 'Crypt East', as licensees from us of this space, which they created for the North Thames Ministerial Training Course. For the last academic year it has been inhabited by [Wapping High School](#) (a new free school) - *first day outside the crypt, left* - which has now moved into newly-adapted premises on the Commercial Road; we have enjoyed their presence here, and wish them well.

Locally, the month begins with a possible incursion into our borough on 7 September by the **English Defence League**: it's not yet clear whether, and on what terms, the police will allow this provocative act, or what violence may result. Local readers of this newsletter will be updated nearer the time, but leaders of the various faith communities are very clear that we need to stand together, in a visible way, to show both our abhorrence and our support for those most threatened by such a visit.



Internationally, the world watches with horror at the escalation of violence in **Syria**, with the use of chemical weapons, and vast numbers of refugees (including children whose plight is particularly dire: remember Gill Newman's ongoing attempts to help them) and world leaders (always with an eye to their own political fortunes) in deadlock as to what response might best help the victims. Recent history shows the dangers both of intervention and of doing nothing. Meanwhile, the conflict in **Egypt** continues to fester; some of you will have read Bishop Mouneer's letter to his fellow-Anglicans about the situation.



Both these nations - and others in the middle east - have Muslim-majority populations, and concern for them is right and proper. But we should also be particularly aware of the vulnerable Christian minorities throughout the region. Far from being 'western' incomers with alien agenda, as some allege, they have been present from the earliest days of our faith; they represent the most ancient strand of Christian witness, that of [oriental orthodoxy](#).

(Left are some of the Coptic Christians who worship regularly at our church, including Father Peter Farrington and Abba [Bishop] Seraphim.) They are in danger of being squeezed, through violence, oppression and reluctant emigration, into extinction. That would be a tragedy, not just for them, but for the worldwide Christian family.

Marcus Cook

Another 'end of an era' event: in August, Marcus moved out of flat I (on the north-west corner of the church) after nearly 40 years there. Unmodernised - by his choice - since it was built in the 1960s, his flat has become something of a time capsule (and - archdeacon, shut your eyes if you see this - there was never any paperwork: things were done differently then!) The spiral staircase, and the cold, have become increasingly difficult, so he has moved to what seems like ideal sheltered accommodation in Bow, with novel facilities such as central heating, a fridge, a washing machine and (he's less sure about this) a wet room with walk-in shower.

We shall miss Marcus' courteous presence, and also his devoted tending of the colourful flowering tubs around the church entrance, and his careful pruning along the main drive. (Who will take this on?) He has been a devoted hospital visitor, and sender of beautifully-written postcards and letters to many of the congregation. He came here after training at Chichester Theological College, and a curacy at St James Friern Barnet, and with furniture and books inherited from one of his priestly mentors. For some years he assisted at services here, and elsewhere in the deanery, but his day jobs - including gardening - have been elsewhere. He would not welcome a public farewell, but we do plan to offer him a token of our affection, and wish him well in his new home.

Other news

- **Hot Potato** Sundays resume, on the 2nd Sunday of the month: discussion after church of topical and other issues, followed by real-life hot potatoes, with salad and pud.

- Detailed news next time of our **Harvest** plans: our next all-age service, on 6 October, linked to school celebrations.

- Condolences to our server Phil and his family on the death of his mother **Glenys Hogan**, of Luke House, at the age of 79. She had formerly attended our church, and was well-known around the borough, since she was the longest-serving lollipop lady - *right* is a picture from *East End Life* issue 974, with children from St Peter's School, Wapping. Her funeral was on 27 August at the City of London Cemetery.



- Our prayers too for Bernie and family of Portelet Street, on the death of his wife **Josie Long**, who as a foster carer and in other ways touched many lives. Of Jewish heritage, her funeral was at the City of London Crematorium on 30 August.

- **Ride+Stride** is on 14 September: a day when many churches are open to welcome visitors on bike and foot (look out for Prebendary Alan Green on his orange tourer). We are open every day anyway, but are keen supporters of this event.

- The **News UK** (formerly News International) **choir** return for practices in September, and we hope for the annual carol service in December. So too do the **Players of St Peter**, preparing for their presentation in December of parts of the Chester cycle of mystery plays.