



Lent and Easter in the Team 2022

The season was so much better than Easter 2020 when there were no services, and Easter 2021, when places in church had to be booked for the main services and everyone was still socially distancing. Here is how Lent and Easter were marked in our three churches this year.

At St Mary Magdalene



Easter in St Mary Magdalene

Rev'd Canon Wilma Roest

a nearby shop kindly paused their work for the ten minutes that this part of the service lasted, which included the blessing of the palms. Then, in bright sunshine the clergy, choir and congregation processed up Church Court singing the traditional hymn 'All Glory Laud and Honour to Thee Redeemer King' and entered the church. The Passion Gospel was read and it was good that the people taking the speaking parts were able to stand nearer to each other than in the past. Things were beginning to return to normal.

This was confirmed when St Mary hosted the Maundy Thursday service with all its constituent parts, beginning with the reception of the Holy Oils which had been brought from a special service at Southwark Cathedral that morning – the oil of the sick, the oil of baptism and the oil of chrism. Movingly, the service was able to include the washing of feet which had not been possible during covid. After Communion the Reserved Sacrament was processed slowly

Lent began on Ash Wednesday with a morning service of Eucharist together with the imposition of ashes. On 5 March the Team's Lent course on the theme of 'Being a pilgrim – exploring holy places' began with five talks on weekly evenings in March. It was good to be able to use the overhead screen in St Mary's as part of the course (see separate article on this Lent course).

The Children's Monthly Saturday Service which is a team service for children from all our churches, in March considered the journey from ashes (which involved a fire) to egg (which involved chocolate). At the April service the children looked at the Easter story and built an Easter Garden, with a tomb made of salt-dough.

On Palm Sunday the main morning service began as was

customary outside Amanda's flower kiosk in George Street. Some workmen taking down scaffolding at

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At St John the Divine



Easter Candle & the Sanctuary
Revd Neil Summers

The **Easter flowers** were as stunning as always, thanks to a small but very dedicated and talented team of arrangers. Donations are collected in the weeks leading up to Easter, and those in whose memory they are given are named in the intercessions on Easter Morning.

This year, we were delighted to hold the Team's **Easter Dawn Service** at St John's. Getting up at 4.30am can be a challenge (!), but this service is well worth the effort, being one of the most beautiful and thrilling liturgies of the Christian year, as the New Fire is kindled outside the church, the Easter Candle is lit and processed into the darkness of the building, and the Exultet is sung – exquisitely by Wilma this time – the organ sounds out a fanfare and bells are rung to greet the Resurrection. Then the **First Eucharist of Easter** is celebrated, and the light is taken from the Easter Candle, via lanterns, to the other Team churches.

After all that, a superb **parish breakfast** (with kedgeree!) was held in the church hall, and we dispersed to our own churches for the Easter Morning services, to continue celebrating the joyful hope of a new dawn, following the long and demanding journey through Lent, Passiontide, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Christ is risen: he is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Revd Neil Summers

round the church to the Altar of Repose in All Souls Chapel to be surrounded by lights and flowers. (A watch or vigil was kept until midnight after which the church was closed.) The traditional stripping of the altars took place whilst Psalm 22 was sung by two cantors and the Gospel of the Watch was read aloud.

On the evening of Good Friday St Mary's Choir held its traditional concert of sacred music and readings including works by Chilcott and Casals and poems by R S Thomas and Christina Rossetti. Finally, it was with great joy that Easter Sunday was celebrated, and on a fine sunny day. As a further sign of a return to

It was the turn of St John's to host the Team's **Ash Wednesday** service this year, thus beginning the Lenten season. After the restrictions of the pandemic, it was good to return to the powerful act of physical ashing – making the sign of the Cross on the forehead – as a visible symbol of both repentance and mortality, reminding us that *'we are but dust....'*

We are very fortunate at St John's in having the carved **Stations of the Cross**, which date from 1955-1970, replacing the original painted Stations by Nathaniel Westlake (1833-1921). They are by Freda Skinner (1911-1993), who was Head of Sculpture at Wimbledon School of Art and a student of Henry Moore. These fourteen panels along the walls of the nave and narthex show scenes from Jesus's journey through Jerusalem towards Calvary. In Lent and Passiontide, we use a variety of devotional prayers and reflections in making our own spiritual journey around the church, and thanks go to the members of the congregation – and to our curate, Charlie - who led Stations this year.

Always a highlight of the Easter season at St John's is the **Easter Garden**, which Gill Gregorowski creates. It is a wonderful combination of plants, flowers and animals in a Middle Eastern landscape, never failing to capture the interest and imagination of adults and children alike. It's also a good place to hide some of the eggs for the children's **Easter Day egg hunt!**



Easter Garden

Revd Neil Summers

normality, members of the congregation could once again receive wine as well as the wafer, if they wished to. Easter at St Mary's was immensely uplifting.

Speaking to Team Talk, Revd Canon Wilma Roest said 'Holy Week and Easter Day form the most holy time in the life of our church, with some of the greatest treasures of the church's liturgy. What a joy to make full use of those resources and to welcome as many as came to services in 2019. There is hope and confidence in new life and we pray that the joy of the Resurrection of Christ may continue in the life of our churches even beyond Easter.'

At St Matthias

FIRST COMMUNIONS: One of the highlights of our Lenten journey at St Matthias was the welcoming of three of our young people to holy communion. Robin Cannon, Emma Chukka and Leilah Allen prepared to take this next step during Lent, and on Mothering Sunday the moment came for them to hold out their hands and receive the sacrament for the first time. It was a joyful celebration of our Church's family life, a perfect way to mark Mothering Sunday as we gave thanks for the care and nurture of our Mother Church and the life we are born in to at our baptism. The children helped to shape and lead some of the liturgy, teaching the congregation to sign and sing the Diddy Disciple confession which they use in Junior Church each week (sung to the tune 'Molly Malone'), and Leilah read the Gospel beautifully. And afterwards there was a deliciously magnificent chocolate cake and pastries to enjoy with coffee and juice.

WILD CHURCH: The theme for our Lenten Wild Church was 'Stormy Weather'. After listening to St Mark's account of Jesus stilling of the storm (Mark 4:35-end), we remembered the recent stormy weather and the loss of so many trees in the Park which had been blown down, many of them already damaged by previous gales and some displaying signs of disease. But we celebrated the life which the wood continues to have when it is carved to make furniture or beautiful objects and sculptures, as well as making paper and other useful and

practical things. Rotting wood also creates a home for fungi, for insects and invertebrates. Nature is an expert at recycling! We heard about the annual spring pruning of the Holkham Oaks in Norfolk and the great leafy branches which are chopped off being taken to Whipsnade Zoo for the giraffes to enjoy, a practice which has been going on every year since 1960! We thought about the ash needed for our Ash Wednesday services, made from burning last year's palm crosses. Celebrating nature's ability to replenish and renew itself, and the power of the wind - which, like the



Leilah with her leaf weathervane made during Lent's Wild Church

Rev'd Anne Crawford



Some of the Easter lilies at St Matthias

Rev'd Anne Crawford

Holy Spirit we can't actually see, but we can see the effect it has - we made some very sturdy weathervanes to take home, using laurel leaves, sticks and cardboard straws. With Pentecost just around the corner, the wild church prayer we said together on a stormy day seems appropriate for this edition of Team Talk:

Creator God, thank you for the beauty and awesome power of the world you have made, for the miracle of nature, and the signs of your life blowing through, in and among all things. Today, as we remember the power of the wind, we recall the power of your Holy Spirit to bring peace and forgiveness, to sweep away death and disease, and to bring new life and hope where all seems to be death and destruction. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY AT ST MATTHIAS: The meditations for this year's Team Good Friday liturgy were based on the Stations of the Cross paintings by German artist and priest Fr Sieger Koder (1925-2015). Each Station's image was accompanied by a photograph taken from a recent event with so many powerful connections being made between the suffering of Christ on that first Good Friday, and the suffering of people across the world today especially in Ukraine. Music, poetry and prayer illuminated many of the Stations, interspersed with times of silence for contemplation and reflection.

EASTER DAY was a joyful celebration of our corporate life, with the chalice being offered for the first time in over 2 years. Enthusiastic hymn singing and church decorated gloriously by the flower ladies, with lilies given in memory of loved ones, their names displayed on boards beautifully created and illustrated by Glen MacNeil. The experiences of the last two years has taught us never to take the freedom to worship for granted, and Easter 2022 was celebrated with a heightened sense of togetherness and the blessings which come from being a part of God's Church in this place.

Rev'd Anne Crawford

Mary at the Royal Maundy Service



Mary and Revd Neil Summers at Windsor Castle
Revd Neil Summers

The number of recipients and the number of coins is linked to the Sovereign's age so 96 men and 96 women each received 96 coins in a white purse in silver 10p and 3p pieces. They also received a red purse containing a £5 coin and a 50p coin minted for the Platinum Jubilee.

The Revd Neil Summers attended the service and said 'I was honoured to be invited to be Mary's companion for the Maundy Service at St George's Chapel, Windsor. It was a unique experience. The Castle looked magnificent in the bright sunshine, and we were there at just the right time to see the spring flowers. We sat just across the nave from the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, so had a very good view of all aspects of the service, which ran like clockwork! Afterwards, there was a reception in St George's Hall in the State Apartments, where we met some very interesting people from around the U.K. – and had a personal introduction to the Dean of Windsor. I was delighted that Mary's church and community service over many years has been recognised in this way.'



Red and White Maundy Purses

Mary Ricketts

Each year, an important day in the Queen's calendar is the Royal Maundy Service on Maundy Thursday at which special Maundy coins are given to those who have been nominated by their Diocese as having provided Christian service to their local church or community. We were very pleased to hear that Mary Ricketts, Churchwarden at St John the Divine had been chosen to receive Maundy Money this year.

The Maundy money service is thought to have begun in the reign of King John in 1210 when gifts of clothing and food were given to the poor in Yorkshire. In the reign of Charles II these gifts became specially minted coins, a tradition that continues today. In normal times the Queen travels to a different cathedral or abbey around the country each year to give the Maundy gifts to local people. Covid however meant that the 2020 and 2021 services could not be held in person so the coins were blessed at the Chapel Royal at St James Palace before being sent to the recipients in the post. Thankfully in 2022 the service was able to be held in person, at St George's Chapel in Windsor on April 14. Sadly, because of health concerns, the Queen had to withdraw from the service at the last minute, but the Prince of Wales, accompanied by the Duchess of Cornwall, stepped in to represent his mother and to distribute the purses of coins on her behalf.



Maundy Coins

Mary Ricketts

The last word must go to Mary about her special day 'There were Beefeaters carrying massive and beautiful golden chargers piled high with the pairs of purses. The whole ceremony was full of colour and such a spectacle. A mixture of clergy and military, and children carrying nosegays. The Prince of Wales was charming and very smiley. He said something like 'I'm delighted to be giving this to you on behalf of the Queen.' And he clasped hands with each recipient.

The music was wonderful. There was a joint choir of St George's Chapel and the Chapel Royal - both men and boys. And several organists played in the almost two hours that we were sitting waiting for the service to begin.

I must say, I felt very much honoured and blessed by being selected. And well supported by my companion on the day!'

Peregrine Falcons - Feathered Pilgrims

by Revd Anne Crawford

This year our Team Lenten focus was on Pilgrimage, and we enjoyed some wonderful talks about the journeys made to sacred places by people from our congregations, including the Holy Land, Lourdes, and St Albans. I am looking forward to leading another pilgrimage to St Albans on 25 June and hope lots of you will feel encouraged to be part of this exciting and uplifting journey as we celebrate the life and witness of Alban, Britain's first Christian martyr. There will be one extra attraction at St Albans this year: a pair of Peregrine Falcons has chosen the tower of the Cathedral as a nesting site for the first time, and the community there are very excited at the hatching this week of the first chick.

We can understand their excitement and, if you have been on Richmond Hill lately, passing near St Matthias in the early morning, then you may have been lucky enough to spot our own resident Peregrine Falcons, feathered pilgrims who have made their way back to Richmond to nest for another year. You will hear them before seeing them – their high-pitched calls are unmistakable – and these beautiful birds can be easily seen perching high up at the top of the tower just below the base of the spire. They returned to St Matthias in March, nesting here for the fourth year in a row. We feel very privileged to have been chosen by these rare birds as a safe place to raise their chicks despite the mess they make – their eating habits leave a lot to be desired, and their first attempt at parenthood ended in disaster when the chicks were served up for supper! But practice obviously makes perfect, and the pair have raised chicks successfully since then.



Did you know that Peregrines are the fastest creatures in the world? They can famously fly at speeds of up to 320 kilometres an hour as they dive to catch their prey, usually pigeons or parakeets. They are still highly protected creatures, being on the same conservation watch list as Pandas, which is why it's important that we provide these birds with a level of protection when they are nesting. Their nest, called an eyrie, is a flat affair, with 2-3 eggs laid on a gravel bed called a 'scrape', provided and placed in situ in towns and cities by Peregrine conservation charities to encourage a safe and successful breeding season – only around 50% of chicks which hatch will survive the first year of life. On a very narrow ledge the danger will be to chicks who tumble over the edge before they are fully fledged. The scrape might look uncomfortable compared to the delicate, feather-and-moss lined bird's nest we are used to seeing in the garden, but they resemble more closely the Peregrine's natural nesting site high on cliff and quarry ledges.

Taking a leaf out of St Alban's book, we will attempt to place a webcam next to the scrape next year so that we can share the excitement of welcoming these annual feathered pilgrims to our church on the hill. In the meantime, enjoy the aerial show around St Matthias, and look out for the first sightings of newly fledged chicks taking their first high-speed flight. Hopefully they will be back in a few years' time to raise their own little pilgrim chicks.

Teacher Training at Patience School

by Sue O'Toole



Annet at her graduation

I first visited Patience Junior School, Uganda in 2012, and since then there has been a close alliance between RTM and this school, both as a team and individually. Together we have brought the school on from very humble beginnings to a modern school fit for purpose.

In recent years, money donated by RTM's Away Giving Scheme has been used to develop the skills of the teachers at the school. The course covers 6 modules, each module is 2 weeks long and is for the most part residential. The tuition takes place during the 3 school holidays each year, making it a 2 year course. Covid-19 meant that the course was on hold during the 2 year lockdown but this April Annet Gwokyalaya, the head teacher, was able to complete her sixth module and her colleague Jackie Namuddu her fifth. It was a very proud moment for Annet as she graduated.

The course is run by Patrick Balidawa and his team at the National Education Resource Centre Entebbe, Uganda. Because of the generosity of RTM's Away Giving team, we shall be able to pay for Jackie's final module and her graduation at the end of this current term. We shall also send Catherine Nabaka on her first module. Catherine will also be able to complete her second module this year.

In a letter to RTM, Annet says that the course has 'changed our teaching approaches and the children too have benefited from the wonderful ideas and educational package instilled in us.' And Jackie writes to say 'Thank you for the good heart and support you have given to us at Patience Junior'.

Confirmation Service for the Churches of the Richmond & Barnes Deanery



Revd Simon Coupland, the Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham, the Bishop of Kingston, the RTM Clergy, together with the Confirmation Candidates

In the evening of Sunday 29 May the Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham, the Bishop of Kingston conducted the annual service of confirmation for the churches of the Richmond and Barnes Deanery, this year to be held at St Mary Magdalene. Two of the confirmation candidates were from St Mary's, two were from St John the Divine, one from St Matthias and one from St Richard's, Ham. The church was full of friends, relatives, and members of their congregations to support them.

In his sermon Bishop Richard said that the last two years with the Covid pandemic and now the war in Ukraine had been very challenging for everybody. But God is love and God's love is always there for us at all times. The candidates for confirmation were then presented to the congregation in the Liturgy of Initiation followed by the Profession of Faith by the Congregation as a whole. The candidates were making a further commitment to the Christian journey that began with their baptism, and in so doing were deepening their relationship with God. The sacrament of confirmation is conferred through the laying on of hands on each candidate's head by the Bishop, always a most moving part of the service as was the anointing with oil.

The rite of confirmation was followed by the Eucharist, whilst during the Giving of Communion, St Mary's choir sang the anthem by Herbert Howells 'Behold O God our defender' the words from Psalm 84. This

anthem had been originally written by Howells in 1952 as an Introit for the Coronation Service of Queen Elizabeth II and was so very appropriate as we celebrate the Platinum Jubilee this month. The music at the confirmation service was beautiful to listen to and also included the Gospel Acclamation the Celtic Alleluia.

Finally Bishop Richard led the newly confirmed candidates through the church, each holding a lighted candle lit from the Paschal Candle, and on to assemble outside the church where photographs were taken with much joy and congratulations. We wish David, James, Thomas, Burcin, Blandine and Peter the very best as they begin this next stage of their Christian life.



The Bishop of Kingston with the Confirmation candidates

Revd Canon Wilma Roest

Lent Course on Pilgrimage

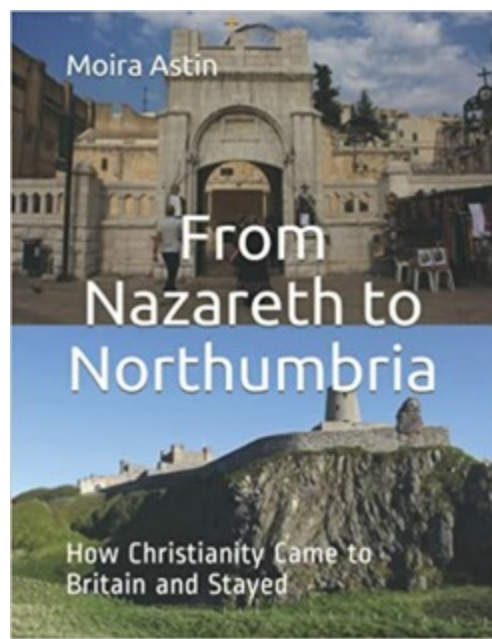
The theme of the 2022 Lent Course, this year held at St Mary's, was the concept of pilgrimage both being a pilgrim and the exploration of holy places. On Saturday 5 March the first talk was given by the Venerable Moira Astin, Archdeacon of Reigate on her book 'From Nazareth to Northumbria : How Christianity Came to Britain and Stayed'. The British/Irish/ Celtic faction in the early church looked to St John the Apostle and his gospel writings and believed that Johannine Christianity came to Britain in the very earliest centuries. Moira's book follows this Christianity across to Britain, visiting places that are mentioned in St John's Gospel, moving on to Ephesus where he was buried, and travelling across Gaul to the coast via Lyon. Then across the sea to Britain and the north to Lincoln and Skelleys and to Lindisfarne in Northumbria where it stayed. Water plays an important part featured both in the stories in St John's Gospel and the rivers and seas travelled across Gaul and to the British Isles.

On Wednesday 9 March the Very Revd Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral was due to speak on Pilgrimages in the Holy Land, but, sadly, had to isolate because of covid. At short notice Canon Dr Giles Fraser, Anglican priest, journalist and former Canon Chancellor at St Paul's Cathedral replaced him. There was a certain symmetry as Giles had been due to talk to RTM in 2021, an event which also had to be cancelled because of covid, but now we were able to hear him. Following personal crises after he had left St Paul's under difficult circumstances, he found healing by discovering his Jewish roots and began a special journey, a pilgrimage between two faiths. His second wife is Jewish and his children have been brought up to honour both the Christian and Jewish faiths. He has written the story of this journey in his book 'Chosen: Lost and Found Between Christianity and Judaism'. Although Andrew Nunn was unable to be at the talk, the reflective Evening Prayer service he had written was used to end the evening. The audience were also amongst the first to hear the news that Giles had been appointed to be the new Vicar of St Anne's at Kew Green.

Nick Mayhew-Smith, a research fellow in the Department of Humanities at Roehampton University spoke on 16 March about his book 'Britain's Holiest Places'. This is the culmination of a five year journey from Orkney to the Channel Islands looking at landscapes shaped by faith, and the great impact it has had on them. The book is the first complete survey of these holy places and ranges from large cathedrals to small holy pools in the countryside used for healing and spiritual regeneration. Nick's book reflects the renewed interest in pilgrimage and where spirituality may be found.



*Icon of St Alban presented by the
Orthodox Community* St Albans Cathedral



From Nazareth to Northumbria
Book by Moira Astin

Carole Cregeen spoke on 23 March about her involvement with the charity HCPT whose full name is Hosanna House and Children's Pilgrimage Trust. HCPT is a charity founded in 1956 that takes disabled and disadvantaged people of all ages to Lourdes on pilgrimage at Easter and summer each year. Carole who has been involved with HCPT for many years leads mixed groups of adults and children with a wide range of disabilities and challenges and explained the uplifting effect that the pilgrimages to Lourdes have both on the pilgrims and their carers. As Carole commented after her talk 'The inclusiveness of the Lourdes pilgrimage was, I think, a surprise to many. The opportunity during the Evening Prayer for private intentions to be offered, in an intimate, candle-lit setting, was very moving.'

On 30 March in the concluding talk the Revd Anne Crawford and Elspeth Fearn spoke about going on the Alban Pilgrimage which consists of a procession every June through the town of St Albans to commemorate the life and death of St Alban, the first British martyr. Re-enactment of his story and special services take place at St Albans Cathedral. As well as the history of the saint and the town with its Roman remains, both speakers spoke about their personal connection – Anne as a priest at St Albans Cathedral and Elspeth having lived in the town for some years. During Evening Prayer after the talk, the congregation processed around St Mary's before laying paper red petals at the foot of an icon of St Alban placed on the nave altar, a red rose being his symbol.

Support for Ukraine



Crocheted Hearts for Ukraine

Elspeth Fearn

laid alongside the poppy wreaths on the war memorials. A moving display was in Chipping Norton where someone had taken the trouble to crochet small woollen hearts in blue and yellow and suspend them from a tree. In Tallin and Riga, the capitals of Estonia and Latvia, nearly every country's embassy flew the Ukrainian flag alongside its own flag and blue and yellow were *everywhere* in these cities. The outpouring of sympathy, support, love and prayer shows that people both here and across the world care very much for Ukraine and her people.

Elspeth Fearn

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February I have been on holiday twice, once to the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire and the second to the Baltic States of Estonia and Latvia. Two very different destinations and different peoples but united in horror at what has been happening in Ukraine. For those in the Baltic States the war on Ukraine is a particularly menacing situation to be in, although they seem remarkably calm and stoical considering how close they are to the war.

In charity shops in small English high streets I saw models in the windows dressed, with careful thought, entirely in the Ukrainian colours of blue and yellow. Wreaths of flowers in these colours or sunflowers were



At the War Memorial in Cirencester

Elspeth Fearn

Practical Help for Refugees

Molly Switek, a member of the SJD congregation has fairly recently come to live in Richmond after more than 50 years in Warsaw. There she was a member of the Church of England church in Warsaw - the Anglican Chaplaincy which is part of the Diocese of Europe. Fr David visited St John's last summer while he was on holiday in England.

When the refugees started flooding out of Ukraine, as



The Ukrainian Flag - The blue represents the wide open skies of Ukraine and the yellow the wheatfields that feed much of Europe and the world

we know, many of them made their way to Warsaw and we heard from Molly herself and from Fr David Brown about how the Anglican Chaplaincy had become involved. It began with meeting arrivals at the railway station with cups of tea and so on but quickly expanded, as these things do.

We have all heard about visa applications to the UK taking a long time, and of course, the applicants have nowhere to live. So the Chaplaincy has been helping by funding hotel accommodation for waiting families - for up to 6 weeks! It is all new work, with no guidebook telling them what to do, so very much a hands on ministry. Now they are also getting involved with longer term projects helping Ukrainian children settle into local Polish schools, for example.

Richmond Team Ministry is happy to be offering some support to our friends in Warsaw and we have made a grant to them as part of our annual Away Giving. Of course, they welcome our prayers for their work and for the refugees they are assisting.

Mary Ricketts

#Cook for Ukraine - Richmond Dinner & Raffle

#Cook for Ukraine is an initiative of food writers Alissa Timoschkina and Olia Hercules - one is Russian and one is Ukrainian - which was launched immediately after the invasion of Ukraine in February. It encourages everyone to celebrate Ukrainian and East European culture by cooking traditional meals, whether in restaurants, organisations or individuals in their own home to raise money. All proceeds go to UNICEF to help children and families in Ukraine displaced by the war.

A special event - #Cook for Ukraine meal - Richmond Dinner and Raffle

- was held in the hall at St John the Divine on 28 May. The evening was organised by Isabelle Swann and Tim Brandwood. (Isabelle with Pat Johnstone and Sarah Percival is responsible for the leadership of the Glass Door Project and the Richmond Soup Kitchen within Richmond Team Ministry.) There were two long tables of guests. Much appreciated was that an individual's choice of dishes was set out in a little paper note where you sat. So often you go to functions and can't remember what you ordered several weeks before! The food was excellent with the choice of starters either borscht or rye bread with three different spreads. The main course was chicken in crème fraîche sauce with crushed potatoes or a red pepper stuffed with rice and



the dessert was a slice of cake followed by coffee. The meal was delicious. Before it began there was live folk music from Ukraine, emphasising how important culture is, especially when that culture is under threat. The two musicians, both called Sofia, played the Ukrainian plucked string instrument the bandura. After the meal a raffle was held with generous prizes donated by local businesses, such as afternoon tea and books signed by the authors.

Thanks must go to Isabelle and Tim and their very hard working team both in the kitchen and at the front of house. It was a lovely evening and the cherry on the cake is that an amazing £2,034 was raised for UNICEF and their vital work in Ukraine.



Jubilee Flowers at St Mary Magdalene

Sarah Garrett



The Queen visiting NASA (National Aeronautics & Space Administration) at Greenbelt, Maryland USA May 2007

NASA

Margery Kempe – An English Mystic

by Elspeth Fearn

In 1934 a group of young people were playing table tennis in a Georgian mansion in Derbyshire belonging to an old Roman Catholic family, the Butler-Bowdens. The table tennis ball was damaged, so everyone went looking for a replacement in various cupboards. None were found but a large number of small leather-bound books tumbled out of one cupboard. Fortuitously, a house guest was Charles Gibbs-Smith, an assistant keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum and he identified one of these leather books as of interest and asked for permission to take it back to the Museum. The book turned out to be the lost 'Book of Margery Kempe', described as the first piece of autobiographical writing in England.

Margery Kempe (c 1373-1438) was the daughter of a successful merchant in Kings Lynn in Norfolk, a busy trading port at that time. Her father was Mayor and also MP for Kings Lynn. Margery married John Kempe, from a mercantile Lynn family who owned a brewing business. Margery herself was involved in brewing and milling, which were activities women could engage in at that

time. After the birth of her first child she went through a mental crisis. During this time demons appeared mocking her but eventually Margery had a vision of Christ reassuring her that he had forgiven her sins. She devoted herself subsequently to a spiritual life but did not join a religious order and kept her family life (she went on to have at least 13 more children). Margery dressed always in white and in later years travelled widely on pilgrimage. Her devotions and travels were accompanied by public displays of crying and wailing which sometimes alarmed or annoyed people especially her fellow pilgrims and she was often the object of suspicion by the bishops and clergy who thought that she might be a Lollard sympathiser.

The Book of Margery Kempe was an account of her life and travels. As with other upper or middle class women at that time she could not read or write so she dictated her story, her book, to a priest who wrote it down. Margery Kempe always refers to herself in the third person and in a derogatory way as 'the creature'. At a time when most people did not venture further than five miles from their village, to travel as Margery Kempe did, was most unusual, particularly her overseas trips. Pilgrimage was expensive and often dangerous. Yet Margery visited Santiago da Compostella, Jerusalem, Wilsnack, Aachen, Danzig, Norway, Venice and Rome. She spent nearly a year living in Rome following the example of her role model the Swedish St Bridget (or Birgitta in Swedish) who had spent 23 years there.

St Bridget (1308-1373) was a very influential mystic of royal connections who had 8 children and, following the death of her husband, she established a religious community the Order of the Most Holy Saviour or the Bridgettines as they were known. Its monasteries unusually combined communities of both monks and nuns, living in separate accommodation and generally under the control of an abbess.

Whilst reading the book of Margery Kempe I was pleased to find a reference in Chapter 10 of Book II to her having visited our area. This says 'From London she went to Sheen three days before Lammas Day in order to purchase her pardon through her Lord's mercy. And when she was in the church at Sheen, she had great devotion and

... continued on page 11



Medieval Woman from a detail in a British Library manuscript

Margery Kempe – An English Mystic - continued

very high contemplation. She had plentiful tears of compunction and of compassion'. This church would not be St Mary Magdalene. Instead in the Sheen area was the Bridgettine house of Syon Abbey at Isleworth. It had been established by Henry V in 1414. In view of Margery's absolute devotion to St Bridget that would be where she would be likely to go for her Lammas pardon. Lammas was a Christian holiday which marked the blessing of the first fruits of the harvest and Syon in particular was famous for what was called 'The Pardon of Syon' pilgrimage under which special plenary indulgences were granted to the pilgrims. Margery was a most interesting person who defied the stereotypes for the time for women. Although she was known about before 1934, the discovery of her book through the chance incident of the damaged table tennis ball, has given us a much more rounded and human picture of her. A good edition (2015) of her book is available from Oxford World Classics with translation and notes by Anthony Bale. ISBN 978-0-19-968664-3



'The seal of Syon Abbey contains the Virgin and Child and at the bottom appears the figure of Henry V the abbey's founder together with St Bridget as his intercessor

APCM RESULTS - 22 May 2022

	St John the Divine	St Mary Magdalene	St Matthias
Church Wardens	Fiona Morgan Mary Ricketts	Emma Meredith John Buckingham	Gill Doling Sally Gill
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St John the Divine



St Mary Magdalene



St Matthias

Our Churches