

# Diversity in Unity

'Sumer is icumen in' as the poet says, and thoughts inevitably turn towards the more common sense of the word 'holidays'. Although two days before Pentecost the sky has just turned grey and louring, it is the annual escape from the crowds of the city to the crowds of the beach that will now be preoccupying many of us. Before that, however, there is June, and this month contains three great feasts of the Church, or holy-days: Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi on 7<sup>th</sup> and Ss Peter and Paul on 29<sup>th</sup>.

After the special celebrations of our salvation, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, Trinity Sunday sees us worshipping the fullness of Christian truth and heralds the daily living-out of our belief in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the BCP has it, by the 'confession of a true faith...(we) acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and... worship the Unity'.

This may be fashionably and tritely expressed as 'diversity in unity', but we have to be careful with this phrasing. 'Diversity' can suggest a healthy variety of approaches or routes to the same end, different styles of churchmanship preaching the one Gospel. But (as in being diverted) it can also indicate, or perhaps be used to disguise, either an entertaining distraction of our attention from the things that matter, or even the misdirection of our spiritual resources towards

what is really another purpose.

The three Persons of the Trinity share the same purpose, each being a way in which God is God. The Father initiates and brings order, the Son offers Himself in continual suffering for humanity and the Spirit binds us into the divine life and liberates our potential. With this as our model, we in the Church must live under teaching authority, prepared for costly, perhaps counter-cultural, sacrifice, and in active fellowship. There is no real Unity or wholeness without each of these three; and none of these three is real except in Unity with the others. Just as firm leadership would be empty without a sympathy with the weak, so fellowship without Gospel-truth would be deceptive.

Corpus Christi celebrates the gift of the Blessed Sacrament, through which we know our Maker's costly love for every one of us. And perhaps we should think about reviving the street processions that made this sign visible to the world. That would be one way of renewing ourselves in mission with the whole Body of the Church, as Petertide will once again call us to do.

It is still early for farewells but as this is likely to have been my last message in The Chronicle, I wish you all every blessing for the future.

Lorne.

# Chronicle

## Church Reports 2006-7

### ST FRANCIS'

'...that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy name': these words from the Collect for Purity indicate the proper intention of our worship and I hope that our services at St Francis' have continued to express such love and high praise to the living Lord.

The Sunday Eucharist has been enhanced by the ability and commitment of Sarah Lister, who became our year-round organist when Ben Woodgate began to find himself too busy for the trip to St Francis'. By him also we had been very well served. Indeed St Francis' has been blessed in having two organists of such high calibre, each a Scholar of their college. Recently Sarah has further lifted the tone of our worship with the establishment of a cassocked choir, who have been training with her before the service each Sunday and showing considerable potential. We have also just been treated to an excellent choral concert of Renaissance music by the Tyndale Singers, a real gift and grace note for St Francis', and indeed the parish, thanks again to Sarah; and our own choir now has a small fund for the purchase of music. The other development in worship that has, I think, taken root is that incense is now used at all the major Sunday Feasts (Christmas, Epiphany, Candlemas, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity, All Saints and the Patronal) as a mark of particular purity, holiness and devotional richness.

The midweek Eucharist has continued to be offered on Thursdays, and the Office on Saturday mornings, the latter dignified and enriched after the donation of a set of Common Worship Daily Prayer, as well as nourished by the breakfasts laid on afterwards by John and Marlene Shreeve (who also once again hosted the Lent course). We made the Stations of the Cross and then kept Evensong on the Sundays of Lent, oddly perhaps, the only period when Evensong takes place in the parish. We maintained the full range of Christmas and Holy Week services: with the

revival this year of the Advent Carol Service and the addition of the Stations and Meditation on the Wednesday of Holy Week; though with the rider that for the past three years, before the Stripping of the Altars and Vigil back at St Francis', we have joined St James' for a Eucharistic Supper on Maundy Thursday rather than keeping the Liturgy and the Washing of Feet. The Memorial Service at All Souls' Tide and the recently introduced Festal Evensong at Harvest Thanksgiving are now firmly established.

Teaching and discussion have taken place beyond worship in both the perennial Lent courses and the newly introduced Bible Study class, which began in the autumn with the exploration of St Paul's Letter to the Romans. Thanks particularly to the talents and energy of Shirley Costar and Lyn Lord, the Patronal Festival, Advent and Good Friday now each see a much appreciated Activities Morning in which children – and their parents – learn something of the Faith through cheerful practical work and play; each of these also includes an act of worship. Confirmation preparation took place at St Francis' in the weeks after Christmas, taught alternately by Beth Spence and myself, with three of the five candidates for the attention of the retired Bishop of Bermuda coming from St Francis'.

An especially happy day was October 8<sup>th</sup>, when one-year-old Theo Deakin was baptised, an event that had had to be postponed because of his illness. However, despite our prayers and the very best efforts of his parents and the doctors, baby Theo died in February at the JR Hospital; we were all greatly saddened by this, and full of admiration for the fortitude of Heather and Philip. I was also deeply impressed by the practical help and pastoral ministry offered to them by Helen House, where Theo's body rested between his death and burial. Taking the funeral at All Saints Convent was a profoundly moving experience.

Regular Sunday worship has seen numbers hold fairly steady overall but fluctuating from around thirty to the low forties. The imbalance between the sexes is less marked and

more men read lessons than formerly. Numbers midweek have been a little higher this year, as they were for the Holy Week Triduum. Although we have more youngish adults, we have fewer children. Parents may prefer churches where there is a concentration of young families: but perhaps in the future there will come a tipping point when a nucleus of children attracts more back to St. Francis'. In any event, it is preferable to speak of a church as a family rather than of a 'family church'. And for all this, numbers of children attending Activities Mornings and the Crib Service were very good indeed: would that the parents of most of these would take their children to any church at all for regular worship! A greater frequency of clergy attendance at St Francis' School than I have been able to manage, for obvious reasons, would probably help in this respect.

This past year has seen the long-awaited installation of a whole new heating system at the church and now a very big increase in our letting income from the Florence Park Family Centre's use of the hall and other rooms during the week. These matters are really the province of the Churchwarden but I must pay especial tribute to Norah herself, as well as to George, for all that she did to make the Afro-Caribbean Dinner Dance such a stylish and enjoyable occasion. It was gratifying to see the large amount of money raised for the church funds and wonderful to see the hall packed out with revellers and musicians.

St Francis' is in good shape, with room for growth. Long may it continue as a beacon of catholic spirituality and fellowship in the border territory...

**Revd Lorne Denny, Team Curate**

## **ST JAMES**

As I looked through the church diary from the past year, I was very grateful to God for guiding us through it. In his final sermon last July, Father Stephen reminded us of the words of Moses to Joshua in the Old Testament:

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid

or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"

The presence of the Lord our God with us through the year as we encountered many new things together— the long-standing warden retiring, the rector resigning, a new warden taking on a very big job, and a curate with very little experience performing clergy duties!

I learnt much about St James' over the past year. It is not a congregation which is easily discouraged. Stephen's departure surprised us all and it was obvious at his farewell that he was held in great regard by many. Yet, in spite of the sadness of his leaving, the church got behind the task of finding a new priest. There was much prayer and a deep sense that God would guide and help us through a period of change. The Link often included a prayer that we would be able to preserve the good of the past and look forward to changes in the future. This prayer expressed the willingness of the church to rely on the Spirit of God to sustain and guide through the interregnum.

The process of writing a parish profile gave us insight into our church as well. It helped us think about who we are at St James'—not only demographically, but also a Christian body. Themes definitely emerged and St James' was presented as a community that had worship at its centre. I found this to be very true throughout the year. I realise that people here put a lot of 'heart' into worship, especially in quietness and prayer for others. The parish prayer day in January and the Lenten quiet day only reinforced this for me. The parish profile also highlighted mission. St James' is keen to reach into the community and let them know about God's love. I have learned over the year that these were not empty words. I saw time and time again this church welcoming people at funerals, weddings and baptisms with food, flowers, care and conversation. I am thankful for all the practical care given this year to many in the parish who, although not regular attenders, want the church to be part of the major events in their lives. These people experienced the love of God through the hospitality

of this church and that is mission in action. In January, Howard was appointed as the new Rector. The committee clearly wanted someone with a heart for God and for Cowley and is convinced that they found that person in Howard. Again, we are thankful to God for guiding us through that whole process.

I enjoyed celebrating the church year with all of you since the last AGM: Pentecost, Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter. I have a much greater appreciation of the flow of the church year—of returning to the same themes in the Christian story again and again. The same stories, but not repetitive because you hear them differently from a new time in life, with new situations and new challenges. I have a stronger sense now of the verse in scripture that says, “Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever.” For all of this, I am thankful. Now we look forward to the challenge of getting to know a new Rector, of saying goodbye to Lorne and welcoming Michael as a priest. I trust that God will again guide us in that process. The parish faces a few challenges, particularly in its management. We need to think about our financial situation, about how we give and how we spend. This will be vital in the next

few years and I am confident that the treasurer and the church committee will provide leadership for the church in this area. There is also the challenge of how to tell the next generation about the love of Jesus and there needs to be careful thought about schools work and young people’s work in an ever-changing environment. Once again, I am glad that we are reminded to “be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, for the Lord our God is with us”.

I am thankful to the clergy who work with me here, Mark Oxbrow, Michael, John G-C and Tony Beetham. We are all grateful for the work of the church committee and PCC, for the work Alan did as warden until January and for Jeremy taking on the job now, for all the work Margaret Martin does as deputy warden and sacristan, for the work of Pat Giles as Treasurer until January and for Joan taking over from her, for the work of Gwen and the hall committee in keeping the hall running well and making it a popular place for bookings, for endless hospitality from those who work in the kitchen, for Lesley battling the photocopier each week and for Phil Hind taking the production and editing of the Chronicle.

**Beth**

# COWLEY

## Memories

*As we prepare to welcome a new rector we asked our members to give us their memories of rectors past*

In 1972 I organised a four-day festival at St James Church. We held a flower festival, two concerts and a son-et-lumiere performance involving about 50 people and ended on the Monday night with the Morris men

and Quarry musicians entertaining us at a celebration evening meal. A large marquee was in place outside the main church door. Inside it we had a cooker and fridge. We also had a small tent with a telephone so that we

could take bookings for the various events. Ken and I decided that we couldn’t leave the marquee unattended overnight so we slept there for four nights! On the Sunday morning we were surprised to have Edward

Walker, our priest at St James, shouting outside the tent to wake us up with a very welcome pot of tea before the 8.00 am service.

In the days when Doris Wilkinson typed 'The Link' each week, Ken photocopied at the United Reform Church and folded and delivered copies to each of the three churches. I remember the joke that the team Rector,

Ross Thompson, played on me. I returned home after attending an all-day Diocesan Synod and Ken gave me a copy of 'The Link' to read.

To my horror I read a notice in it which I felt would upset some people when they read it the next morning. After a lot of thought I decided to ring Ross to say that as churchwarden, I would stop this issue from going out the next morning. I rang Ross to

tell him of my decision. After a few minutes of serious conversation he suddenly broke out into his hearty laugh and I realised that he and Ken were 'winding me up' and had produced this one-off Link just for me. I had certainly been taken in for an hour or so but enjoyed the joke with much relief!

**Gwen Ranklin**

## Extraordinary conduct of Vicar of Cowley

### Disorderly proceedings at a funeral

I thought it might be fun this month to remind ourselves of the time when St James Church and its clergyman caused such a scandal that the story 'made' the national press with a full-page entry in the *London Times* on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1875. There was also a follow-up column in *The Oxford Times* on 17<sup>th</sup> April in the same year. So what was the 'scandal' all about? The funeral and burial in the churchyard of a certain Fred Merritt.

Fred was described as a well-known Oxford cricketer who was skilled at underarm bowling. He had a habit of quoting Scripture on any likely occasion and went by the nickname of Moses, so I suppose we can make a guess about his physical appearance! Apparently he had led a 'notoriously bad life' and had even been convicted several times for 'interrupting' church services. Consequently, the vicar, the Rev J. Coley, disliked Fred and when the time came to conduct his funeral, he refused to read or allow to have read the appropriate service either in the church or at the graveside. Even after repeated requests from the relatives, Coley was adamant and wrote a letter to Mrs Merrill hop-

ing that her family would bury her husband in the prepared grave without the funeral rites. He alleged that the deceased had led an immoral life and had, in fact made a presentment of him at the Bishop's visitation in 1872. However, the relatives refused to inter Fred without a Christian burial.

The stalemate lasted a week and became the talk of Cowley. Despite the fact that February is a cold month, I should think that quite a smell would have begun to emanate from the coffin by now, wouldn't you? It also transpired, according to the *Times* reporter, that this was not the first time that Rev Coley had refused to bury parishioners on conscientious grounds.

On the next Sunday a group of relatives and friends tried to meet with the vicar after the children's service, but he locked himself in the church and stayed there for two hours. An angry crowd gathered outside and Mrs Coley had to call the police who escorted her husband to their home in Iffley Road, followed by the hooting, yelling mob. Because the body had lain in the house for a full eight days, it was obvious at this point that the sanitary department would soon

have to be alerted. Fred's sons tried pleading with the vicar, suggesting that another person be brought in, but Coley turned a deaf ear, barricaded himself and his wife in their house, and failed to turn up for the evening service.

The following day, Monday, both the Bishop and the sanitary authorities were approached. A letter came from the Bishop's Palace in Cuddesdon suggesting that Rev Coley just got on with the funeral. Mrs Merrill received a letter from the vicar the next day saying that since it had come to his ears that Fred had improved somewhat in his later years a burial service would be read at the grave, but it was still not appropriate for the body to enter the church. The Sanitary Authorities, having threatened to refer the whole affair to the local Magistrates, a burial was arranged for 3.00 pm on the following day (Wednesday).

Since he continued to insist that he would not officiate, Coley enlisted the help of a colleague, the chaplain of the Oxford Workhouse and Industrial School. He notified the good chaplain, Rev Best, that he should attend at 1.00 pm. Rev Best then stood around in the churchyard for nearly two hours. He then asked the vicar for the keys to the locked church so that the service could take place. By this time word had spread around the neighbourhood and even into the city itself, and hundreds (one estimate was over a thousand) of people were milling about waiting for the cortege to arrive.

Just before 3.00 pm, Coley sent a message to Rev Best to say that he had arranged for a friend to read the service so he would not be needed after all. Cold and very annoyed, the chaplain left. Promptly at 3.00 pm the cortege arrived and no clergyman appeared for another 10 minutes. The crowd began to turn nasty, and with shouts of "We'll have 'im in church" and "Where's the parson?", who should turn up at the churchyard gate

(yes, there was a gate in those days) but the Rev M. Green, the vicar of Littlemore.'

He was asked about his intentions to take the body into church. "I am a stranger and acting under the Bishop's orders" was the reply. "Never mind the Bishop, we'll 'ave 'is head off" someone yelled. There were more cries of "We'll 'ave 'im in church" while Rev Green walked slowly up the path reading the opening sentences of the service. By the time the reverend gentleman arrived at the porch on his way to the grave, his path was blocked by the crowd. Amid cries of "Break the door open" and "You fetch me a pick-axe" a huge argument ensued. While Rev Green insisted that he was simply acting for Rev Coley he was manhandled into the porch where some of the Merritt family protected him, declaring that really he was a "nice old gentleman". By this time some of the parishioners had spotted the parish clerk who should have had a church key. He denied this, so finally the belfry door in the side of the tower was forced open and entry was made into the church. Then, using crowbars, the main door's lock was wrenched off.

And so Fred's body was, at last, carried into St James for his funeral service to take place. It was reported that only his family and friends followed and after the melee outside they behaved quietly and reverently. Later, at the graveside, the Rev Green was offered a vote of thanks and it was suggested by all that he ought to be offered the living of Cowley parish.

By Easter of that year Rev Coley had moved on to take up the incumbency of the village of Somerton. The Bishop, much concerned with the disruption in Cowley, searched for someone suitable to replace him. He offered the living to the Rev 'Georgie' Moore but that's another story (or series of stories) and maybe we'll take a look at those another time!

**Rosanne Butler**



## *From the Registers*

Weddings: 7 April- Phillip Morrison and Heather Povey  
5 May John Castle and Alison Wheal

Funeral: 25 April Bernard Crook  
8 May David Beattie  
24 May Gwen King

Baptism: 6 May Ellie Ratcliffe

**Eric Uren's funeral will be on the 11th June at St James' church.**

### **The oldest church in England**

I suppose that it was just over a year ago that I've learned with dismay that our great Cathedral at Canterbury is in a poor state structurally. Stones that have withstood wind and weather for centuries are crumbling badly and a multimillion pound plan for repair and restoration has just begun.

We tend to think of it as our mother church, yet this is not strictly true – a short distance away lies the little church of St Martin which is much older in origin and in better shape.

It was built while the Romans were here and Roman stones are still in place in the walls. In fact, contrary to popular belief, Christianity was here before the much vaunted St Augustine came over here with his monks.

Queen Bertha of Kent, a Christian lady, obtained permission from her husband King Ethelburt to worship here. He worshipped his own gods at a temple nearby but was eventually converted to Christianity and baptised by St Augustine.

While St Augustine was building his first Abbey he obtained permission for his monks to worship here. The walls of St Martin's are nearly two feet thick and Roman brickwork in the chancel stands eight feet from the ground.

There is Roman plaster and Roman tiles, and there is a Roman doorway. We need not doubt that it is the oldest building in these islands used for worship, and it still plays a part as a parish church and services are still held there. It was probably built by British workmen 1600 years ago. It was already an ancient place when the first stones in Westminster were laid.

As Marlene and I stood before it, looking at its plain walls and squat tower (no fancy architecture here) we could not help but marvel at all it must have withstood over the years. And we wondered what the people looked like who first worshipped there, and what sort of lives they led. The Christian faith that first fired them up is still with us, and it is our duty to see that it does not die away in our time. We owe that much to them and to Christ.

**John Shreeve**



## Sunday Services

### ST JAMES' CHURCH, BEAUCHAMP LANE

8.00 am	Holy Communion
10.00 am	Sung Eucharist ( <i>exc 2nd Sunday</i> )
	All Age Eucharist ( <i>2nd Sunday</i> )

### ST FRANCIS' CHURCH, HOLLOW WAY

10.30 am	Parish Eucharist
	[ <i>Family Eucharist – 2nd Sunday of the month</i> ]

## Mid-Week Services & Meetings

Monday	9.00 am	Morning Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	10.00 am	Toddler Group – <i>St Francis</i>
	2.30 pm	Parish Mothers' Union – <i>St James (3<sup>rd</sup> Mon)</i>
	5.00 pm	Evening Prayer – <i>St James</i>
Tuesday	9.00 am	Morning Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	10.00 am	Seashells Toddler Group – <i>Church Centre</i>
	10.00 am	Toddler Service – <i>St Francis</i>
	12.00 pm	Eucharist – <i>St James</i>
	12.30 pm	Tuesday Lunch Club – <i>St James</i>
	2.30 pm	Friends of <i>St Francis</i> – <i>St Francis (2<sup>nd</sup> &amp; 4<sup>th</sup>)</i>
5.00 pm	Evening Prayer – <i>St James</i>	
Wednesday	9.00 am	Morning Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	2.30 pm	Tea Break – <i>St Francis (1st Wed)</i>
	5.00 pm	Evening Prayer – <i>St James</i>
Thursday	9.00 am	Morning Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	11.00 am	St Francis Prayer Group
	5.00 pm	Evening Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	7.00 pm	Eucharist – <i>St Francis</i>
Friday	9.00 am	Morning Prayer – <i>St James</i>
	5.00 pm	Evening Prayer – <i>St James</i>
Saturday	9.15 am	Morning Prayer & Breakfast – <i>St Francis</i>

### Day Off

Lorne and Michael can be contacted in the evenings and at weekends. Beth can be contacted during the day as well.

**Chronicle**

The next issue of the *Chronicle* will be a double summer edition. Please send in your stories and news by 24th June. Contact Philip on 01865 427523 or leave at St James. More *Cowley Memories* needed... don't be shy!

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