

ELSTOW PARISH MAGAZINE



NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

Dear Parishioners,

I begin with some comments that I have read in our newspapers over recent months:

Speed cameras

Millions of motorists face a Nineteen Eighty-four-style nightmare in 2006 as thousands of high-tech roadside cameras track their every move. Authorities will be able to build up files on every driver in Britain in an echo of George Orwell's terrifying novel about a futuristic Big Brother state.....

The further erosion of our freedom

Civil Rights organisation Liberty said: "It is vital that the use of cameras is not just a method of surveying people's movements and whereabouts." "We are already walking a fine line between combating crime and intruding into people's private lives. We recognise the Government must fight crime but the question is whether the methods are proportionate to the needs."

Fear is increasing that the huge growth in surveillance equipment is moving Britain nearer to the world of Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-four", where the State controls its citizens through a system of closed-circuit cameras and spies.

At the beginning of the year I was invited by Channel Four to go on Celebrity Big Brother. The producer had spoken with the Diocesan Communications Team and they were happy that an Anglican Priest might be approached to enter the 'House' to be the 'non celebrity' guest. I was screen tested and I was interested: I have always wondered how it would feel to be in a house without books, television, and with a very diverse group of people, to be part of a game, and in all of this to be watched in everything that I do and say. It could have been a wonderful medium by which to have explained to millions of people my thoughts, beliefs and values. It could have also destroyed my life and work.

I was asked at the screen testing to explain how I would see God in Big Brother, and I explained that although many find Big Brother intrusive, and that this Big Brother style is becoming more of an intrusion into our daily lives, it also reminded me that God can see everything that we are and do. He can see us as others see us, but also how we really are deep down inside us, with our longings and our hurts, the silent thoughts that we have, and the cries of pain. "Nineteen Eighty-four" with its Big Brother is a good reminder that God is with us, alongside us and can share our deepest thoughts and our greatest joys.

I hope you are enjoying the new series!

With Best Wishes,

Jeremy

Bookworm writes:

Some of you might wish to be reminded of the passage to which Jeremy, in his powerful letter, alludes. George Orwell (real name Ian Blair) wrote “*Nineteen Eighty-four*” in the dark shadow of the recently concluded Hitler war and in the wake of the Spanish Civil war in which he had fought – and lost many of his illusions. It was published in 1949, four years after the publication of “*Animal Farm*” and one year before his premature death from tuberculosis. The passage comes near the beginning of chapter one and reads as follows:

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU ... The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live - did live, from habit that became instinct - in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and except in darkness, every movement scrutinised.

The hero, Winston Smith, falls victim of the Thought Police, is arrested and, unable to resist them, ends up, after betraying the love of his life, Julia, brainwashed and gin-sodden.

It has always been the greatest, if not the only, consolation of those who suffer at the hands of torturers that “Thought Police” are an impossibility. No matter how awful the physical and mental degradation inflicted, the aggressors can not reach into a person’s soul. But that person can still, in his agony, reach out to his God. Smith had no such consolation in Room 101.

EDITORIAL

The Press and the BBC have recently reported that the story of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee may have a simple explanation.

Apparently, the climate records for that part of Israel¹ have shown that it was a particularly cold period at the time of Our Lord. Thus it is not impossible that unusual water conditions in the Sea of Galilee may have allowed slabs of ice to form, here and there, just below the surface, thereby allowing Jesus to give the appearance of walking on the water whilst actually treading on an ice floe.

Poor Peter (Matthew 14:29ff), having screwed up his courage to walk out from the boat to meet Jesus, promptly sank like a stone before being plucked to safety by Our Lord.....

We can read about this miraculous event, in one form or another, in Matthew 14, Mark 6 and John 6. (St Luke does not mention it. There is no reference to it in the Pauline epistles). It is one of the most vivid and memorable incidents in the Bible. “Walking on water” has passed into our language as an expression denoting the achieving of the apparently impossible.

As for other references to the weather in the New Testament, there are virtually none (beyond the weather which caused Paul’s shipwreck on his way to Rome - Acts 27); which suggests either that nothing untoward was happening or (less likely) that our long-lasting obsession with the weather did not exist in those days.....

¹ The source of this report is Doron Nof, Nansen Professor of Oceanography in the University of Florida. Professor Nof is the author or co-author of some 100 academic papers and, in 1998, was elected a fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society.

All this raises the bigger question as to whether we are better off with our myths or with iconoclastic or revisionist scientific research. Surely one of the major points about any religion is that it should be mysterious as well as logical, a blend of images and reality. To have things explained away is to belittle them. Whilst no doubt marginally interested in Professor Nof's novel theory, we cannot allow our embedded ideas to be so eroded as to cease to believe in miracles.

'PRAYING THE KEEILLS' on the Isle of Man

I have recently been working with a group of clergy and lay people planning a celebration of the island's Christian heritage. Monks (followers of St. Patrick) brought Christianity was brought to the Isle of Man during the 5th century. Some of these early Christians set up shelters in remote places, often on the sites of Bronze Age Cairns and here they lived, and prayed, in complete isolation. These recluses were known as *Culdees* (from '*Cele De*' which means servant of God) and their shelters or cells became known as *Keeills*. Eventually, as the news of the Gospel spread, the Manx people would gather at these places to hear the word of God and to receive their communion. There used to be about 250 keeills scattered across the island but the remains of only a small number are still visible above ground.



During the island's first ever '**Praying the Keeills**' week a series of events provided people with an opportunity to visit the keeill sites and to reconnect with their rich Celtic heritage. The children of All Saints even built a keeill inside the church and named it '*Keeill ny nooghyn*' (The Keeill of the Saints).

If you would like to read more about the Keeills, please visit the new website - which also provides some wonderful Celtic worship resources: <http://www.prayingthekeeills.org>.

I hope the website will give you a flavour of the spiritual side of life here. We have a wonderful Celtic heritage which is well worth celebrating.

Graham and I send you all our best wishes. Have you heard the good news that we have recently been blessed with our third Granddaughter? Her name is Hannah Keira and she is a sister for Rachel who many of you will remember.

Mary Railton-Crowder

Albantide Festival Pilgrimage – Saturday, June 24th at St. Albans Abbey

A coach trip to St. Albans Abbey for all the family.

9.10am: Coach leaves Elstow Abbey.

10.30am: Procession begins at the Verulamium

11.30 Holy Communion, with the Archbishop of Canterbury

We could share a picnic, or have lunch in St Albans. Many events have been planned for the children around the Abbey

4pm: Evensong and Procession to the Shrine, with the Archbishop of Canterbury preaching

5pm: Return by coach to Elstow Abbey.

Cost £5.00 per person (48 places are available).

Tickets: [Tracey Hinson](mailto:Tracey.Hinson@stalbansabbey.org) (01234-406061) or [Margaret Baron](mailto:Margaret.Baron@stalbansabbey.org) (01234-218762)

ATHEISM - 3

I have looked at how the Paradox appears under the separate scrutiny of logic and of what I termed human nature. I want now to assess Epicurus' statement from the Christian's angle of monotheism, the worshipping of one single and usually benevolent deity.

It is probably helpful at this point to remind ourselves of that Paradox. It goes like this:

If God existed, there would be no Evil in the world.

- **If the Premise that God exists is true, then the Conclusion must be true.**
- **However the Conclusion is false: there is Evil in the world. Therefore, the Premise is false: there can be no God. QED.**

Epicurus was active some 300 years before the birth of Christ, and he lived in a society that was pantheist – there was a god for everything. He was in essence playing mind games when creating his paradox. However, his other writings reveal a metaphysician who accepted the concept that gods existed, but who asserted that these gods were merely mental constructs or ethical ideals, thus arguing against the notion that the world is under the providential care of one single loving deity.

Pantheism's perhaps greatest role was to explain natural disasters: earthquake, plague, drought and so on. All had perfectly "logical" explanations in pantheism to make up for the natural explanations we can adduce nowadays from our scientific knowledge. The point was that someone had to be responsible for appalling catastrophes.

Thus the great pantheistic societies were never forced to face up to the quintessential requirement of religion, namely that of an individual confronting the conflict between Good and Evil. There was always a responsible god to praise or to blame for whatever went right or wrong.

Monotheism does not allow a person the luxury of not facing up to religious reality: there is that necessary and ever-present tension between Good and Evil which was the core issue in my first article. To take a modern comment, the late Russian Archbishop Anthony Bloom once said: *"To meet God is to enter into the cave with a tiger ... The realm of God is dangerous."* Archbishop Bloom was extolling moral courage, but the relevance is obvious. The logical conclusion is that pantheism has to be a form of cowardice because, through diffusion, it avoids requiring Man to have that face-to-face confrontation with his tigerish single deity.

The great religions of the world have all been monotheistic. In the last two thousand years, no major society has existed which did NOT have only one single deity.

In Deuteronomy, we read: *"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name"*.

People need divine support (Voltaire memorably wrote: *"If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."*). It was one of the greatest concerns in the Old Testament in which the tendency of the Israelites to stray from worshipping just one god was so frequently being noted and reigned in. In Exodus we read: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"* and Leviticus reinforces this: *"Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the Lord your God."* Malachi reminds us: *"Hath not one God created us?"* Time and again, the Israelites are brought to book for not focusing on the one God.

I now put it to you that Epicurus did not understand, and, I suggest, could not have been expected to understand, monotheism with all its implications. His Paradox could never have withstood scrutiny by Christians – or by any other of the great religious thinkers.

Tim Elliott

BOOK REVIEW

“The Last Days of Henry VIII” by Robert Hutchinson (Weidenfeld £20.00)

We all have a set idea as to what Henry VIII was like, something along the lines of a jolly if not exactly cuddly, John Bull-type figure who, Ho! Ho! Ho!, had 6 – or was it 8? – wives. Jingly mnemonics like “Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived” rattle around in our memories. He played tennis (what a frightfully sporting chap!); he broke away from Rome (a Good Thing, what?); he dissolved the Monasteries (we at Elstow may not be so comfortable with that).

Well, if this is what informs your approach, do not read this book.

The subtitle given by Hutchinson is more revealing: “Conspiracies, Treason and Heresy at the Court of the Dying Tyrant.”

Because it is not my intention to talk about Henry so much as about what I think is a superb first history book, I will merely whet your appetites with a few comments, taken from the book’s introduction, concerning his last years: “A bloated, hideously obese, black-humoured old man...” “bloody-handed tyrant...” “unpredictable, dangerous...” “Henry’s court was a terrifying world of murderous intrigue...”

Robert Hutchinson has a background as a journalist (defence correspondent for the Press Association 1976-83) and this contributes significantly to the easy readability of this book. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a tutor at the University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education. This is his first full-length work outside his earlier publications on weapons of mass destruction for Janes Defence Weekly and has been quickly followed, two months ago, by “Elizabeth’s Spymaster”, about Sir Francis Walsingham’s dramatic 1580s spy campaign.

What he manages to do is to present his subject with a force and modern fluency which have suffered little from the staid and multiple sources he has consulted in his researches, and this makes a welcome change from the many other history books that have been written about the period. Being an antiquarian rather than a historian, he has burrowed his way through thousands of documents not so much unknown to as ignored by more traditional historians. The result is a book which does not tell us much of substance that is new, but it does shift the emphasis from the cosmic to the more immediate and human level. For instance, he vividly brings to life the affectionate relationship between Katherine Parr and her young step-daughter, Elizabeth (he side-steps the interaction between Elizabeth and her half-sister, Mary). His treatment of Sir Anthony Denny, effectively Henry’s Chief Minister and “Minder” during his last few years is, given the facts, remarkably tolerant.

Where perhaps the book is less effective, especially from the point of view of a Church of England Parish Magazine, is Hutchinson’s failure adequately to illustrate the religious tensions which simmered so viciously both below and above the surface of Tudor society especially after the break with Rome. But then, I guess, that is more a historian’s than an antiquarian’s concern.

Indeed, to the historian, there are clear signs elsewhere of selectiveness; but, given the wealth of intimate detail Hutchinson has had at his disposal, such selectiveness must be forgiven him – and time may even allow him a justified label of revisionism. Much will be made clearer once his next book has been assessed.

And, anyway, I for one open a book as much to be entertained as to be edified. My younger daughter, a scientist, found it a terrific read, which is as good a recommendation as you could wish for.



Bookworm

FURTHER GLIMPSES INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT - 1 THE FIRST THREE KINGS OF ISRAEL

Saul was the first King of Israel and was what I referred to as “*that troublesome man*” when we read of Samuel’s warning to the Israelites about appointing anyone as king.

The name “Saul” means “asked for” and it could be said by the cynical that the Israelites certainly got what they asked for. Inevitably, Saul constantly clashed with Samuel. But we do not hear Saul’s side of the conflict between what were evidently two very strong personalities. Samuel, remember, was not just a prophet: as I wrote in a previous article, he could be murderously violent. With Saul, he was impatient and disappointed; a psychiatrist would encourage us to recognise a strong element of jealousy in Samuel’s attitude towards him. However, Saul did eventually admit that he had got things wrong, as indeed he did, and he reluctantly allowed Samuel to introduce David into the equation as his successor.



David, who was no relation to Saul, twice spared his life and, to add to the complications, was the very close friend of Saul’s son and natural heir, Jonathan – and Jonathan, unlike Saul, showed no resentment at David’s preferment. But Saul was suffering from increasing self-doubts as Samuel’s constant carping and criticism eroded his self-confidence.

So we move on to David. David, the golden boy, the musician, the slayer of Goliath. He married Saul’s daughter, Michal. He was charismatic and successful, the man whom Yahweh had chosen; and yet he was deeply flawed. He succeeded Saul and was a unifying force among some ferociously independent tribes, a warrior hero, a man of wisdom and, we are told, a poet. He defeated the Philistines and he established Jerusalem as the capital of what was to become the southern kingdom of Judah.

And yet, and yet.....

What happened was that he went seriously off the rails. He coveted Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, legally slaughtered. (Bathsheba’s resulting son, incidentally, was to be our third king, Solomon.) Worse was to follow when he aided and abetted rape and incest by turning a blind, if not encouraging, eye to his son Amnon’s obsession with his sister Tamar.

Paradoxically, the most amazing fact about David is that he died effectively of old age and in his own bed.

So now we have Solomon on the throne, perhaps the most famous of all the kings of ancient Israel. With Solomon, myth seems to have overtaken reality to the extent that we do not really know all that much about him. He was proverbially wise. He is said to have created the great temple in Jerusalem. He is the reputed author or inspiration for several Old Testament books. He was fabulously rich and enjoyed the favours of the most beautiful women of his day, including, according to rather dubious legend, the Queen of Sheba. He married the Egyptian Pharaoh’s daughter. In short, he was a success politically, commercially, socially and culturally. A sort of model for all times.

The darker side of his systematic enslavement of his people which rendered all this possible is glossed over, as is the inevitable, inexorable and not always desirable subsequent shift away from tribalism towards centralisation. All dictatorships sooner or later go down this track.

After Solomon, the hitherto unified kingdom of the Jews disintegrated and subsequent history centred less on any kings than on the existence, destruction and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Tim Elliott

ELSTOW PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING

The clerk reported that there had been nine meetings of the Parish Council since the last Annual Parish Council Meeting, including the AGM at which Sam Clark had again been elected as Chairman and Joan Bailey as Vice-chairman. Cllrs Sharples and Oliver had resigned in September due to study and work commitments and David Fudger and Margaret Anderson were co-opted in October and November respectively. Councillors had continued in their roles on various outside committees although there is some doubt whether the Marston Vale Community Liaison Forum will continue as Mid Beds DC has withdrawn funding. Councillors Joan Bailey and Rowland Bartram were not seeking re-election in May and the Parish Council thanked them for their efforts on behalf of the village.

As only four councillors stood for re-election and one more was co-opted it was decided not to elect a Vice-Chairman. There are therefore, four vacancies on the Council.

⇒ ***If anyone is interested in joining, please contact the Clerk on (01234) 824852.***

The Planning Committee had met on five occasions and around thirty applications had been discussed.

- The Parish Council had strongly objected to the applications to place the Allotment Site electricity sub-station opposite houses in the High Street and to re-site the access road so that it encroached on to the public open space. But unfortunately, the Borough Planning Committee granted both applications. The Council had managed, however, to obtain compensation for the loss of green space and was awaiting payment.
- The Parish Council had strongly objected to the recent applications to build flats and shops next to the Health Centre together with 56 dwellings on the land between Romsey Way and the Health Centre. Although it did not object to some housing, 56 dwellings would over-develop the site, and the flats and shops would be out of keeping with the rest of Abbeyfields. The Borough Planning Committee approved the housing but refused the application for the flats and shops.
- The application to extract sand and gravel from Medbury Farm had been deferred several times as the County Council was still awaiting information from the developer.
- The Waste Transfer Station had been granted permission for twenty four hour working despite concerns about noise and litter, and an application had also been granted for it to be used as a civic amenity site at weekends while Barker's Lane is closed for re development. The County Council agreed to Parish Council requests for traffic to be kept out of the village by adequate signing, regular litter picking and additional CCTV cameras to prevent fly tipping. Additional rural skips would be visiting the village on 8th and 9th July and 18th and 19th November.
- The Parish Council had strongly objected to an application by the Red Lion for red and yellow illuminated signs on the front of the building. These would be inappropriate on a listed building in a conservation area and would also distract drivers on a dangerous bend. The Borough Planning Committee has approved an application by The Swan for trough lights at the front of the building.

Noise pollution from the A421 had been a problem for residents last summer and was once more causing concern. Residents had been advised to keep diaries of the dates and times that lorries are parking in the lay-by and leaving engines and refrigeration units running so that Environmental Health would then be able to take action.

The Parish Council had unfortunately been unable to proceed with a Parish Plan as an insufficient number of residents had volunteered to form a steering committee.

The Parish Council had helped to obtain a Rural Grant of £5000 and had given a grant of £2000 to the Playing Field Association towards the cost of a disabled toilet. The Council had also given £1000 towards the cost of repairing the churchyard paths and spent £1040 on four new seats. Three had been installed in the Playing Field and the fourth would shortly be placed on the Green.

The Parish Council has decided to set up a No Cold Calling Zone in Elstow. This will help to eliminate cold callers, rogue traders and distraction burglaries and has been shown in other areas to reduce the level of crime in general. Signs will be placed at the entrances to the village and in Bunyan's Mead and residents will shortly be receiving window stickers and leaflets explaining the scheme in detail. If anyone would like to help delivering the leaflets, please contact me on **01234-824852**.

Ann Paice - Clerk

PARISH PUMP

Major grant for Walsingham

The Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham has been awarded a grant of £630,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). News of the award has come as a massive boost to the Shrine, which is currently celebrating the 75th anniversary of its renovation.

An appeal for £2m was launched in August 2005 to fund improvements to the Shrine. The Heritage Lottery Fund grant will pay for a new Welcome Centre which will host a permanent exhibition about pilgrimage, together with a new Visitor Co-ordinator.

Walsingham was recently voted England's favourite spiritual place in a poll of BBC Radio 4 listeners. The Anglican Shrine at Walsingham is one of the most important Christian heritage sites in the UK, set in a medieval village in rural north Norfolk. Over 340,000 people visit every year, from all over the country and overseas, of all faiths and of no faith. Historically, its origins are 11th century, when organised pilgrimage to the Holy House began.

Donations can be sent to the Walsingham Appeal, 6 Common Place, Walsingham, Norfolk, NR22 6BW. 01328-824214

Churches opening – and closing

One of the first results of the 2005 English Church Census was published recently. The press release indicated that over 1,000 churches have started in England in the seven years 1998 to 2005. There were 37,500 churches in England in May 2005. Over two-fifths, 43%, of these were Anglican and almost a further fifth, 16%, were Methodist. All the other denominations make up the remaining two-fifths, 41%.

However, while 1,100 churches opened, 1,300 churches closed, so that there were 200 fewer churches altogether in 2005 than there were in 1998. The denominations which saw the most churches opening were the Independent churches, Pentecostal and Smaller denominations, all of which benefited from the explosive growth of black majority churches and those of other ethnic origins.

Archbishop of Canterbury speaks out on climate change

In a recent interview with BBC Radio 4, The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken of the dangers of complacency over the issue of climate change. "I think in the first instance the moral responsibility lies with absolutely everybody, not only in terms of examining our own lifestyle and asking what concretely can be done, but also in sending a message to governments that this is recognised as a priority by the public," he said.

Pentecost:

Fifty days on from Easter Sunday the Church celebrates Pentecost. It marks the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and believers who were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. The event is recorded in Acts 2 and it tells of the Spirit coming with dramatic signs; a sound like a rushing wind, the appearance of flames of fire and the ability given to the apostles to preach the Good News in languages they had not learned.

When Jesus had earlier spoken to his disciples about the coming of the Spirit, he emphasised spiritual power. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8). And that promise was marvellously fulfilled. When the Spirit came on that Pentecost morning, the apostles began to witness boldly. They preached salvation in the name of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus (Acts 2:37-42). On that day some three thousand men and women believed in Jesus as Lord and Messiah and were baptised (v.41).

Later it is recorded that the apostles gave testimony to Christ’s resurrection ‘with great power’ (Acts 4:33). All through the book of Acts we see the Christian church preaching and witnessing, suffering and serving with great spiritual power. Even their enemies spoke of them as ‘turning the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6).

At this Pentecost season we need to recapture the power of the Spirit. Perhaps our lack of power is because something has gone wrong with our spiritual connections. Maybe we are not ‘linked up’ to the Spirit as those early Christians were.

Often in the church we are like that. We have the services, the programmes, the plans, the personnel – but not the power of the Spirit that convicts sinners and brings them to faith in Jesus. There is little danger that we will turn even the parish upside down, much less the world. This Pentecost celebration is a time to get ‘linked up’ with the Holy Spirit.

Dr H. McGonigle (Nazarene Theological College, Manchester).

Fighting leprosy around the world

The Leprosy Mission (TLM) is a leading international Christian development agency active in 30 countries. It has served people affected by leprosy since 1874. Nowadays, its work covers education, detection, medical treatment, rehabilitation and the reintegration of people into their communities.

Leprosy is still a huge problem worldwide. TLM employs 2,000 national and international field staff and work in partnership with communities, churches, national governments and other NGOs. Its annual budget is over £10 million, and it relies on the contributions of individuals, churches, trusts and government agencies to support its work.

Leprosy has been called ‘a disease apart’ because of the physical impairments, stigma and poverty associated with it. Every year more than 400,000 new patients are diagnosed and registered for treatment. But because of the stigma associated with leprosy and consequent reluctance to seek medical care, it is estimated that many more cases go undetected. Although leprosy is found in all sectors of society, it often traps the most vulnerable in a cycle of poverty. It is no coincidence that it is found in predominantly poor countries. Leprosy is still endemic in India, Brazil, Myanmar, Madagascar, Nepal and Mozambique. TLM focuses on three areas: south Asia, South East Asia (including Bangladesh) and Africa. Would you like to support The Leprosy Mission’s work in over 30 countries? Visit the website: www.leprosymission.org.uk or e-mail post@tlmew.org.uk.

'Inspired!' – a campaign to save historic churches

'Inspired!' is the name of a campaign that has been launched by English Heritage to save historic church buildings which, despite the continuing efforts of conservationists, are facing an uncertain future. Many such churches across England are maintained by dedicated but ageing congregations, while the bill for needed repairs creeps steadily higher. The new campaign is designed to draw attention to the problem and to put forward an action plan to help secure a future for these precious buildings.

A Selection of Book Reviews

Show me the Way

By Wendy Craig with Chris Gidney, £9.99, Hodders.

Wendy Craig had a strong faith from an early age but fame and the demands of show business led her away from God. Then, later in life, an emptiness and loneliness led her to a spiritual experience that took her back to her faith. Show Me the Way is a collection of inspirational writing that has encouraged her own journey through life. She explores why these writings are important to her and provides a book of reassurance and insight for others.

Faith Like Potatoes

By Angus Buchan and Jan Greenough, £6.99, Monarch.

Angus Buchan is a straight-talking South African farmer of Scottish extraction. His abrupt conversion startled friends of the explosive hard-drinking man. Angus's bold faith has carried him through droughts, family tragedies and financial crisis. He has seen wonderful miracles of provision and healing. In obedience to God's call he started preaching, which led into a healing ministry. He has also set up an AIDS orphanage and a 500-seat auditorium on his land. Still a farmer, he is now an international evangelist, travelling through Africa in a refitted yellow fire engine, and filling the largest venues in South Africa. He has visited Scotland several times in recent years on speaking tours. In July 2006 he undertakes a UK-wide tour.

Angus Buchan is a farmer in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, with a remarkable evangelistic and healing ministry.

Being Single

By Philip Wilson, £14.95, Church House Publishing.

It is predicted that by 2010 some 40% of British homes will be single households, comprising those who have never had any relationships as well as those who have had very many relationships. In this original and challenging book, Philip Wilson examines the phenomenon of singleness in contemporary society and its implications for ministry.

He begins by examining the history of the family, from pre-modern and modern lifestyles to the point where singleness has become a desirable post-modern choice for many people. The history of the church's views on sexuality and marriage is also considered (with special emphases on Celtic Christianity, Monasticism and the Reformation). In the second part of the book, Wilson interviews church-goers of all ages and types from across the UK. The results of his research are disquieting, revealing that many feel isolated and yet frequently over-used in church life. Many speak of the church as the worst place of all for a single person to be.

This book goes beyond offering self-help therapy for Christian single people. Rather, it is for anyone who wants to know how the contemporary church can offer a relevant community for the spiritual and practical needs of today and for the future.

Philip B Wilson is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, currently based in Belfast.

FROM THE BELL TOWER

A ¼ peal of 1440 changes of Plain Bob Minor was rung on Saturday 11th March 2006 by the following band:

Treble	Lorraine Andrews
2	Eric Headland
3	Ann Desics
4	Colin Payne
5	Jenny Thompson (conductor)
6	Richard Entwistle

The peal was rung for Bedford District Quarter Peal Week.

Also, a ¼ peal of Doubles (600 changes of Grandsire and 660 changes of Bob Doubles) was rung on Saturday 18th March, by the following band:

Treble	Susan Entwistle
2	Dorothy Kirby
3	Jenny Thompson
4	Ann Desics
5	Richard Entwistle (conductor)
6	Roger Framp

The peal was rung for the ruby wedding of Susan and Richard Entwistle.

On Saturday 20th May 2006 in 46 minutes - a ¼ peal of 1296 changes of Cambridge Surprise Minor:

Treble	Ann Desics
2	Sarah-Louise Ward
3	Andrew J Spencer
4	Richard J Hillson
5	Clifford W Izzard
6	Stephen H Stanford

Conducted by Stephen Stanford

The peal was rung at the beginning of the Elstow May Festival.

Miriam Clark and Stephen Stanford