

ELSTOW PARISH MAGAZINE



Dear Parishioners,

WHAT A YEAR!

I was listening to the radio this morning. Before I moved to Bedford, I used to enjoy Chris Tarrant on Capital FM, but now Beth has coaxed me into listening to Terry Wogan on Radio 2. I cannot complain because I have successfully managed to coax Beth into watching 'Emmerdale'! Radio 2 was beginning 'Faith Week', and after listening to the Chief Rabbi's thoughts on prayer, I sat down with a cup of coffee to begin writing this magazine article. As I began I was listening to the news and it continued to talk of the possible bird 'flu pandemic and the number of deaths in the South Asia earthquake - calculated at 54,000 - and hundreds of thousands of homeless survivors with the risk of hypothermia.

So, what a year! In the past 12 months our planet has been battered by devastating natural disasters that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. It started on Boxing Day last year, when up to 225,000 people were killed by the Tsunami disaster in Southern Asia. And in-between these two terrible events, the earth has been blighted by an earthquake in Iran Kerman Province, monsoon floods in India, mudslides in Guatemala, a typhoon in China and Vietnam, hurricanes in the USA and drought and plagues in Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso.

It has been recently argued that the world is currently facing disasters on an unprecedented scale. Statisticians compute that, on average, 255 million people were affected by them globally each year between 1994 and 2003. It is also argued that although it might seem like it, geological events such as earthquakes and volcanoes had not increased. But disasters such as floods, typhoons and hurricanes are becoming more common.

I would argue that some of the greater losses from earthquakes must be put down in part to the growth in the world's population and an increasing number of people living in unstable regions. I know from my geography studies, and my many travels, that, for example, many of the victims of Hurricane Katrina were drowned because much of New Orleans lies below the flood plain of the Mississippi River. And no human effort can prevent movement of the world's plates that cause earthquakes. But the international community can be better prepared to help the innocent people caught up in these natural disasters. In a recent report, the International Federation of the Red Cross commented on the rivalry that aid agencies have brought to some of these regions: i.e. 20 surgeons competing for one patient, and the setting up of ten field hospitals in Sumatra, in the wake of the Tsunami, with none of them working to full capacity - and so hampering immediate relief efforts.

So where does God fit into all that has happened in our world over the last 12 months? For me it makes a big difference whether we think of God the Creator personally or impersonally. If the Creator is not viewed personally, then the focus will be on 'nature', with broad generalisations to do with natural explanations. There will be little scope for providence in history, in miracles, and in our personal life. But if the providential God is seen as a personal Creator, then his goodness will be seen in what he does

within time – in miracles, in the intimacy of personal experiences, in historical actions. Such a God will be one who enters into a person's life, who responds to prayers, who suffers when we suffer and who rejoices when we rejoice.

God is with us in all that we face, in every day of our lives. God will never ask more of us than we can bear, and God will give us his strength and love in all that we do. All we have to do is pray, think and draw ourselves closer to God, and these feelings and promises will slowly come through.

With Best Wishes

Jeremy

CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

The Bishop of St Albans - Presidential Address - Diocesan Synod - October 2005

Miss Horwood had wavy, steel-grey hair and leaned forward slightly as she walked. She had lace-up shoes and a gentle voice, and first taught me about fire. I was seven. She was my primary-school teacher and we were crayoning. It led to that kind of quiet, soft reverie which children of that age relish. The pressure of learning by rote the multiplication tables was off; the back of the exercise book, provided by Gloucestershire County Council, with its curious lists about rods, poles and perches, had been put away and the classroom, a warm, wooden building, had that murmuring buzz created when children draw en masse.

It was November; our heads were full of 'Catherine Wheels', 'Jumping Jacks' and rockets that whooshed up into the night sky - and the thought that the Guy Fawkes bonfire would definitely be bigger this year than last. Unsurprisingly, given the time of year, Miss Horwood, with her wavy, steel-grey hair, asked us to draw a bonfire. We set to with a relish, though there was a sharp pang of recognition that the whiz-bang excitement of a real bonfire night could never quite be captured by the waxy crayons. Fire was bright red – and even when we made the accompanying noises of the sound of fireworks under our breath, our artistic efforts still did not, as it were, take off. It was then that Miss Horwood looked over my shoulder at my attempt at a bonfire: brown sticks, red flames – and put into one of my solid, waxy flames, a tiny pointed yellow shape. That was how flames should really look! It was a moment of revelation - remarkable.

It was many years later when I watched a grainy black and white television programme about teaching, that I began to feel a real desire to teach. It was about a schoolmaster in Liverpool who was shown blowing bubbles in a class of recalcitrant, defiant children - and capturing their imaginations with words like 'iridescent' and 'luminous'. It quickened my desire to teach.

I trained as a teacher at Bristol University and found myself being asked to do a child observation. I was told to do a child study in two ways: First, I was required to watch a child as though I were a visitor from another planet, and to send back a factual report. Second, I was required to write a piece as though I were that child. The fact that I have not forgotten the experience shows what an impact it made. It was a simple exercise but was transforming. I began to sense the beautiful and sometimes chaotic inner lives of children.

We did not use the word 'spirituality' then, but that is what we meant: a recognition of the uniqueness and value of each and every child. It was a dreamy, utopian vision, which had to be seriously re-

examined when later I taught 3C on a wet Friday afternoon after they had had a double lesson of 'games'. They were not enthralled by the journeys of St Paul.

However, in that school (now a Comprehensive, then a Secondary Modern) I retained my conviction about the worth and ultimate value of each child, even those who sat at the back looking eternally bored: disengaged, desperate for their faces not to register anything, it was more than their life's worth to show a flicker of interest. Later as an RE Adviser, I became much influenced by the work of Edward Robinson and the Religious Experience Research Unit – and this book, Johanna Klink's 'Your Child and Religion', because it, like Robinson's work, took the inner lives of children with immense seriousness. This led me to some research, in the late 1970s in Shropshire schools, about children's religious thinking, and the Primary Adviser, Mary Ellison, and I wrote a small book entitled 'Listening to Children'. The research, for those of us involved in it, was a revelation.

Let me explain what we did. We asked some children to talk about God and with their permission, tape-recorded all that they said. Of course, all of this was decades ago. I would be fascinated to know, if similar research were carried out now, what the level of discourse might be.

And here we are, thirty years later, in a Synod. What all this leads me to is this. I am delighted by much of what I see going on in our church schools. There have been some really significant developments in parish work with children, not least amongst those who have undertaken to help children and families learn about the reception of communion before confirmation. Then there are all those clubs and events for mothers and toddlers. Then there are robed choirs around the diocese where, through music, children are introduced to a rich theological, spiritual and musical repertoire. And then there are the pre-school clubs and the after-school clubs around the diocese, working with imagination and care with children.

The Church of England has recently produced a booklet, entitled 'Children in the Midst' which is an attempt in 2005 to get us, as a Church, to pay more attention to children – in our communities, in our schools, in our churches. Not surprisingly, it begins with the story of Jesus putting a child 'in the midst' and from there, works out a theology of where children should be.

I have painted a picture – and I have not put in any of the shadows. There are children who suffer abuse – and we have, as you know, very clear guidelines in the diocese about child-protection policies. There are other shadows: the children who witness domestic violence; children who are bullied; children who live in families of great complexity; children who have no spiritual inner home and therefore face the world perplexed and angry.

This address is a plea. It is a plea to us all to ask two simple questions at our PCCs: 'Where are the children?' and 'How can we serve them in Christ's name and for His sake?' Please ask both of those questions – and see where it may take the thinking and the practice of your church.

I return to my picture of Miss Horwood who, by one single stroke with a yellow crayon, transformed my understanding of the world. It was not the technique that was so enchanting, it was the gentle confidence-building kindness that she brought to her task, which was the key to the unlocking of my perception.

The children in our communities, the children in our churches – they are and should be our compassionate and liberating concern. Please help to ensure that they, and their families, are the focus of our attention.

THE MURDER OF ROGER SCHUTZ AT TAIZÉ

16th August, 2005

On the morning of 17 August, the world was horrified to hear and read of the murder of Roger Schutz, the 90-year-old founder of the Taizé Community at evensong in the Community's church. Archbishop Williams described him as "*one of the best-loved Christian leaders of our time*".

The following abbreviated text is based on a translation by Susan Helm of a retrospective article by Henri Tincq which appeared in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 29 September. The article's main objective was to tell us about Brother Roger's successor, Brother Aloïs Löser. The relevance to Elstow, quite apart from the relevance to ALL Christians, is that we are now, from time to time, using the Taizé chants.

The peace of the evening, the peace of the prayer, of the psalms and of the chants is shattered by the absurd violence against 90-year-old Brother Roger, stabbed by a mentally disturbed woman.

At 9.30 that Tuesday evening of the 16th of August, Brother Aloïs was in the church of St Agnes in distant Cologne, where he had come to take part in a World Youth Day gathering. Told about the death of the founder and prior of Taizé, he immediately took to the road, arriving at Taizé at daybreak. At 8.15 that morning, the time of morning prayer, he took Brother Roger's seat in the church without saying a word. The children, as if nothing had happened, came to sit around him. At the end of the service, he embraced each of his brothers.

With no conclave, speeches or enthronement, Aloïs Löser, a 51 year old German, had become the prior of Taizé, successor to Roger Schutz, the founder of the community. Everything had happened with the most extreme gentleness – the absolute opposite of Roger's death.

In 1970, at the age of 16, Aloïs first went to Taizé. 'At Taizé I discovered the simplicity of sung prayer' he says. At 20, he put on the habit, and at 24, in 1978, made his final vows. He then travelled with Brother Roger to Nairobi and then to Johannesburg, where the prior of Taizé had been invited by Desmond Tutu to speak out against apartheid. It was there that Roger privately designated Aloïs as his successor. It was only in January 1998 that the secret was disclosed .

Aloïs is a rock, a symbol of the quiet strength of Taizé, with the certainty that his path is beyond his own understanding and that he is led by someone other than himself. Try drawing out of him the details of his private life, and he retreats behind a beaming smile. Not out of shyness, or to remind you to respect his privacy, but because this is unimportant, because the only thing that matters in Taizé is the meeting with God, in the thrice daily community service.

As far as Protestant churches went, he knew only the one in the part of Stuttgart where he went to school and which he never, in those days, dared to enter. In Sweden he discovered the great Lutheran tradition. Taizé wishes to remain a sort of sign which prefigures the reunification of the Churches. 'But if you look on ecumenism as an end in itself' Aloïs warns, 'then you lose sight of the true goal which is the common meeting with Christ. It is to this meeting that we come three times a day here in our community service.'

Aloïs is a football fan and loves the classical guitar. He is one of the composers of the community's chants which have gone all round the world. He, also, has forgiven the murderer of his 'Father', repeating the words of Christ: 'Forgive her, for she knows not what she has done'.

Henri Tincq *LE MONDE* 29 September 2005 (<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3226,36-693674@51-683852,0.html>)

This article is based on Sue Helm's translation (<http://www.cliftondiocese.com/Articles/514/>)

The Cathar Heresy and the Albigensian Crusade

Arising out of the address I gave at Mattins on 23rd October, I have been asked to put something together for the Magazine on the Cathar Heresy and the Albigensian Crusade. Everything that has been written about the subject has been at great length and so you must excuse the many omissions which follow in this extremely brief article.

It was called “Albigensian” because the home of the Cathar movement was the city of Albi, the principal town of the modern Département of the Tarn et Garonne in France. The name “Cathar” derives from καθαροί (“catharoi”) or “pure ones”. The last Cathar was executed in 1321, but some of the ideas, carefully disguised, were to subsist well into Protestant times.

We are in southern France, in a rich Mediterranean area of leisure and culture and of intense commercialism. Nowhere else in the world, except perhaps in China, is there such a wealth of initiative and success in every aspect of life. Languedoc, the heresy’s home, was the beating heart of the much misunderstood and underrated 12th century Renaissance which flourished so strongly in Italy and Spain.

Catharism, in 1209, the start of the Albigensian Crusade, was neither new nor French; it seems to have originated centuries earlier in Eastern Europe and it even reached as far north as England. Briefly, the main plank of the heresy was “dualism”, namely that the world was essentially evil and that the God of the New Testament reigned over spiritual things and was in conflict with the evil god (or Satan), who ruled over material things. Therefore extreme asceticism had to be practised by “true” Christians (“*Les Parfaits*”) in order to achieve salvation and go to heaven. It was, of course, a lot more complicated and subtle than that, but this asceticism did not sit well with the increasingly sybaritic aspirations of the Roman Church of the day.

Modern research has shown that the Crusade was promoted by Pope Innocent III against the Cathars/Albigensians (call them what you will, it comes to the same) not so much for religious reasons as for cynically social, commercial and political ones. Individual Cathars had in fact been being put to death as far back as 1022 in that oh-so-Catholic city of Toulouse, but the 1209 invasion of southern France was strongly canvassed in Rome by the jealous and influential northern French (the descendants of Charlemagne and the Germanic Francians) who were casting covetous eyes southwards, from their uncomfortable, primitive and draughty homes, at the comfort, wealth (especially) and plenty of Latin Languedoc.

The resulting so-called crusade over the ensuing two decades was one of the great crimes of history, consisting as it did of the deliberate and systematic destruction of the finest culture and economic structure of the time in Europe, combined with an equally systematic and repellent early form of ethnic cleansing. Castles and homes of wonderful beauty were razed to the ground; blameless (and non-Cathar) nobles and merchants were callously murdered by the booty-hunting troops of Simon de Montfort (the grandfather of the England-based de Montfort credited with the creation of the English parliamentary system). And all in the name of Jesus Christ, the Roman Church and spiritual salvation.

This one black deed set Europe back perhaps 300 years.....

TJE

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Tomato tart

As I write, there are still tomatoes in the garden, so here is a recipe to use some of them.

Make pastry with 150 grams flour, 75 grams polenta, 120 grams butter, one tbsp Parmesan, an egg, some crumbled thyme, and enough olive oil to get the right consistency. Spread it in a flat dish, prick and brush with beaten egg. Cover with a layer of 60 grams each of Parmesan and Gruyère (or whatever hard grating cheese you have), some more thyme and then 800 grams of tomatoes which you have previously (¿skinned?) sliced, salted and drained a little. Sprinkle with salt and a little sugar, and bake at regulo 6 for about 20 minutes. **JMCE**

TUNES OF GLORY

We will be singing No, 36 *The First Nowell*, attributed as “Traditional” to an English melody harmonised by John Stainer. In fact, little is known about the origin of the hymn itself, however it is in six verses. These proclaim the announcement by the angels to the shepherds in the fields, of the birth of the King of Israel, that they saw a star shining in the east, whose light guided the three wise men to seek Him, the star resting over Bethlehem and the place where Jesus lay, They enter reverently, and offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and finally we are all encouraged to sing His praises. Interestingly, the East-wall stained glass windows at Elstow depict, on the left, the adoration of the newly born Jesus. Opposite this window is a framed inscription giving the account of the visit of the three wise men. The right window depicts The Ascension, and these are sometimes called Alpha and Omega windows.

John Stainer is well remembered and honoured for his services to church music. He started his musical life as a chorister at St. Paul's. His father's house had a small chamber organ. Much later, shortly before his death, John drew a picture of himself in a neat little frock playing this instrument with one leg firmly planted on the ground and the other pumping away at the bellows. The newly appointed young Stainer caused some commotion among the officials at St. Michael's College, Tenbury, which was founded by the Rev. Sir F A Gore Ouseley. The latter, in his search for an organist, visited St Paul's, heard young Stainer playing, and offered him the appointment. Stainer was made to get on with all kinds of people, even musicians, and his abilities were speedily recognised, so after two years at Tenbury, he was appointed organist of Magdalen College, Oxford. At Oxford he also found time to read for an arts degree, and was awarded his B.A. in 1864, as well as graduating Mus. Doc. the following year. In 1872 he was invited to become organist of St Paul's Cathedral, remaining there for sixteen years. But eventually failing eyesight and to gain respite from a strenuous life, he resigned to live at Oxford, being knighted by Queen Victoria shortly before leaving London. In the following year he succeeded his old friend Ouseley as Professor of Music at Oxford.

John Stainer's musical life, from boyhood to manhood, was to elevate music. A main work was in connection with the *Church Hymnary*, of which he was the musical editor. In 1890 three books were in use, namely *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, *The Scottish Hymnal*, and *The Free Church Hymnal*. After deliberations over nearly seven years, during which time representatives from the *Irish Presbyterian Church* joined in, the book was issued under the title of the *Church Hymnary (1901)*. In his famous choral work “*The Crucifixion*” Stainer incorporated five hymns and tunes, so that the congregation could take part. We sing some of these, for example, “*All for Jesus*”. He once said to a group of fellow musicians, “I was walking one Sunday at some seaside place, and on turning a corner I heard a number of Sunday-school children singing a tune I had composed”. I thought to myself “I want no higher reward than this for all my work. I can only tell you that I would not exchange it for the very finest monument in Westminster Abbey.” So we will be singing this Christmas *The First Nowell* to the English melody harmonised by John Stainer.

John Crookall



ELSTOW PARISH COUNCIL

We are pleased to welcome a new member, David Fudger onto the Parish Council. His telephone number is 01234-290443 if residents need to contact him.

The Clerk has also moved and can now be contacted at 31, Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, MK44 1SH, telephone 01234-824852.

Planning is still dominating the agenda with two new applications for Abbeyfields. Elstow Retail Centre has applied for fifty-six dwellings on the land to the west of the surgery at the junction of the Spine Road and Romsey Way and for three retail units with flats above on land to the east of the surgery. The Parish Council has objected to both on the grounds that the dwelling density is too high, access to both sites is too close to the roundabouts and the three storey flats and shops are out of keeping with the rest of the houses on the estate.

Planning applications for the sub-station and the road at the Allotment Site have yet to be determined by the Borough Council. In the meantime the Sales Office has been erected on the Public Open Space without planning consent and the Parish Council has asked Planning Enforcement to investigate. RMC has still to provide the additional information concerning the extraction of sand and gravel from Medbury Farm and the application is now unlikely to be considered by the County Council before January.

The Park and Ride Scheme is due to begin on 1st November and will run from 7.00am to 7.00pm Monday to Saturday. The service will be run by Stagecoach and adults will pay £1.30 with accompanied children under sixteen free. Unaccompanied children will be charged £1.00.

The next visit by the Mobile Police Unit will be on Wednesday, 9th November at the Playing Field car park from 10.00 – 11.30am.

Ann Paice. Clerk, Elstow Parish Council.

Barn Dance

Saturday, 19th November 2005 at 7.30pm

Elstow Playing Fields Hall

Tickets: **£6** (**£3** for children)

* includes a chicken/ fish and chip supper - bring own drinks *

Orders for food by Wednesday, 16th November, please.

Contact: Margaret Baron: **01234-218762**

ELSTOW POORS CHARITY

Elstow Pools Estate - Registered Charity No. 200119

Single pensioners and married couples who both receive state pensions, and who have resided in Elstow village continuously for over ten years, may be entitled to benefit from the Elstow Pools Charity at Christmas. Applications for benefit should be made in writing and addressed to:

Mr. R. Worthington-Ellis, 14, South Avenue, Elstow, Bedford. MK42 9YS

Applications should arrive no later than Saturday, November 19th 2005. Existing beneficiaries do not need to re-apply.

Secretary, Elstow Pools Charity.

 <p>Founded 1937</p>	<p>A performance of Handel's 'Messiah' on behalf of Marie Curie Cancer Care</p> <p>Saturday, November 26th 2005 7.30pm</p> <p>Bunyan Meeting Free Church, Mill Street, Bedford.</p>
<p>Details & tickets from Chris Knell (01234-214140)</p>	

Raffle  
 **Gifts** 
Christmas Stall **Cakes** 
Mulled Wine 
Cardington Village Shop 
Frost Fayre
 **Mince pies** 
Plants
 **Saturday December 3rd**
10-12noon
 **Children's**
Lucky Bags 

Bedford Choral Society

Richard Strauss
Four Last Songs

Johannes Brahms
A German Requiem

Saturday, November 12th 2005
7.30pm
Bedford Corn Exchange

Tickets: £12 or £10
Available at the door
or from

Bedford Central Box Office
01234-269519

BOOK REVIEW

“Arthur and George” by Julian Barnes (Jonathan Cape £17.99)

Julian Barnes’ latest novel has been widely and well reviewed. It tells the story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s attempt, starting in 1906, to restore the reputation of George Edalji in what came to be recognised as a notorious miscarriage of justice. However, the link that I would have expected between Conan Doyle (the “Arthur” of the title) and that great and influential writer and polemicist of an earlier age, Voltaire¹, is not made by Barnes, even though a specific parallel is drawn in the book with the notorious and contemporary 1890s Dreyfus case in France. George Edalji, like Dreyfus, was innocent and was never fully rehabilitated. The Establishment simply closed ranks in infuriating and frustrating self-defence, which is what gives this book much of its impetus. The point at issue to my mind is that there was massive support from the outset in France and, later, internationally for Dreyfus, but no-one, initially, was interested in the wretched Calas before Voltaire became involved. Conan Doyle, like Voltaire, was a powerful if lonely voice seeking justice. Émile Zola (in “*J’accuse*”, his defence of Dreyfus) was one of many.

Barnes adopts the technique of initially switching swiftly between his two very contrasting protagonists, Arthur (Conan Doyle) and George (Edalji [pronounced *Aydji* as we are repeatedly told by George] – a half-Indian son of an Indian-born-and-bred vicar). Arthur, for all his personal emotional problems, is a firmly-rooted sports-loving Establishment figure brought up in comfortable middle class England. George is the introspective, myopic, humourless, racially disadvantaged son of a committed priest-father. Arthur, an internationally famous person through his writings, is wracked by his love for another woman (ultimately to become his wife once his consumptive first wife had died). George, a victim of presumably well-intentioned and idiosyncratic parental repression, is a friendless outsider in the Midlands society of his day, even though he becomes a respected Birmingham solicitor before his Fall.

Once George goes on trial, the pace of the book changes as Barnes focuses at much greater length on each of his two protagonists in turn until George, by now pardoned for something he had not done and released early from prison, writes to Arthur seeking help in clearing his name. George’s trial is fully described, as is his subsequent prison career; he accepts things with an almost oriental fatalism. Arthur’s emotional problems are scrutinised in depth as is his sense of duty to his ailing wife and his children. It is a telling factor that Edalji’s letter, one of hundreds of such letters sent to the successful author, reached him just after his wife’s death and at a moment when he was at a loss as to how to handle his personal life. It provides Arthur with a Cause, a Heroic Objective, and, once he has met Edalji and decided that the man is innocent, he throws himself wholeheartedly into the attempt not just to prove his innocence (in which he succeeds) but to obtain financial reparation (in which he fails). Without official compensation, Edalji remains awkwardly both innocent and guilty, even though professionally rehabilitated by the then equivalent of the modern Law Society. The one outcome of which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could for ever be proud is that The Court of Appeal was created to deal with such miscarriages of justice. So, as with the Dreyfus case, something good came out of it all.

Up to this point, the book is a fascinating read. However, it undergoes a change after Arthur’s death when it brings to the fore the topic of the spiritualism in which Arthur so deeply believed. It slows to a crawl which may be artistically satisfactory, but I found it laborious.

Do not, though, be put off by this criticism: *Arthur & George* is one of the books of 2005. It has already featured on Radio 4 as Book at Bedtime, even if it failed to win The Man Booker Prize.

Bookworm

¹ Voltaire was appalled by the miscarriage of justice in 1762 which saw the innocent Calas brutally tortured and finally executed for the murder of his in fact suicidal son. “*Many people grandly announced that it was better to leave an innocent old Calvinist broken on the wheel than have eight judges confess they had been wrong.*”

G.F.Handel and the English Oratorio ‘Messiah’ (Mattins Group talk: August 28th 2005)

Georg Friederich Händel was born on February 23rd 1685 (the same year as J.S. Bach), in Halle in the state of Saxony, eastern Germany. Handel was baptised, the day after his birth, in the *Liebfrauenkirche*, the great church with its twin spires that dominates the centre of Halle. This beautiful church, now known generally as the *Marktkirche* (church in the market place), is now being extensively restored after years of neglect during the East German communist period. In it you can see the font in which George Frederick was baptised as well as the organ on which he practised as a boy.

He was born into household with six children who enjoyed a comfortable standard of living, but none, apart from George Frederick, had any special musical ability and his father was, by profession a barber-surgeon. Little is known of Handel’s childhood - apart from a story that he used to sneak upstairs to the attic in the middle of the night to practise on the clavichord – much against the wishes of his father who wanted his son to study for a career in the law. The house where Handel was born still stands in Halle – now called the Händel-Haus - and is a very interesting museum of music and of musical instruments.

At the age of 18, in 1703, he travelled to Hamburg, where he took a job as a violinist at the Hamburg Opera, gave private lessons to support himself and also visited the now elderly composer Buxtehude in Lübeck. 1705 saw him in Italy where he spent the next four years, in Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice and the influence of Italy was to show itself in Handel's lifelong enthusiasm for opera. In 1710 he visited London – and there composed his first Italian opera (‘Rinaldo’) in 1711. The opera was a considerable success and, after a short return visit to Germany, Handel came back England in 1712 - where he was to make his home for the remaining 47 years of his life. In 1727, shortly before the death of George I, he became a British subject, adopting an Anglicised version of his German name.

Despite the association of his name with the great oratorio, ‘Messiah’, for the first 20 years following his arrival in England, Handel was primarily a composer (at a prolific rate) of opera (sung in Italian) as well as of special (and rather well-known) works for the British royal family – water music and fireworks come to mind. Handel’s first “opera with a religious theme” was *Esther* in 1732 – although the work encountered some stiff opposition from the Bishop of London who spoke against the staging of a biblical work at a London theatre. From these beginnings a new musical form was born – the English oratorio - an un-staged and largely choral work with its theme (in the case of *Messiah*, its text) taken from the Bible.

Early in 1741 Handel received an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to compose what was termed a ‘sacred oratorio’. This work would be the centre-piece of a series of concerts to be given at the New Music Hall, Fishamble Street, in Dublin, in 1742. This commissioned work was ‘*Messiah*’.

In August 1741, in his London home at 24, Brooke Street (now the Handel House Museum) Handel began work on the oratorio. The libretto by Charles Jennens - a Leicestershire squire and friend of the composer - was based on the King James Bible, the Psalms and the Book of Common Prayer. Working with his usual speed and intensity, ‘*Messiah*’ was composed in just 24 days and completed on September 14th 1741. According to legend, whilst composing *Messiah*, the usually gregarious Handel refused to receive visitors, ate and slept little, and was so bad-tempered that some thought he was losing his mind. After completing the Hallelujah Chorus, he is said to have exclaimed, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God himself.”

From its first performances, in Dublin, in April 1742, ‘*Messiah*’ was a resounding success – although London audiences were somewhat cooler towards the new oratorio, than those who had heard it for the first time in Ireland. The 1741 version of *Messiah* was, incidentally, far from being the final version:

Handel made many alterations over the next ten years and even completely rewrote some of the arias and choruses. The original autographed score of 'Messiah' was held in the Royal Library from c. 1774 until our present Queen presented the whole collection to the British Museum in 1957. An autographed fair copy of Messiah is also on public display in the British Library.

Encountered for the first time, 'Messiah' might seem a disjointed set of biblical quotations. It is, in fact, a skilfully crafted statement of Christian faith in three parts - as well, of course, a majestic piece of music that can have an uplifting effect on those who sing it - as well as those who hear it - Christian or otherwise.

The theme of Part I is Prophecy – mainly as described in the book of Isaiah together with extracts from Haggai, Malachai and Matthew's Gospel - and tells us of the promise, coming, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah - although, in the whole oratorio, the name of Jesus is mentioned only once. The calm and lyrical 'Pastoral Symphony' sets the mood for the story of the Nativity. The soprano soloist sings those famous lines from Luke that begin: 'There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night...' and the choir responds with 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth, good will toward men!'

As Part I of Messiah draws to a close, the exuberant contralto aria 'Rejoice, greatly, O daughter of Zion' looks forward once more using text from the book of Zechariah. Part I concludes with a final chorus using words from St. Matthew's Gospel 'His yoke is easy, his burthen is light'. Part I of the oratorio began with prophecy and ends with the realization of that prophecy. The burden has been lifted and a promise fulfilled.

Part II narrates the Passion of Christ, beginning with the words of John the Baptist from St. John's Gospel and continuing, using texts from the Psalms, the Book of Lamentations and more extracts from Isaiah to tell (again in an indirect, rather than explicit way) the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The librettist chooses part of Psalm 24 to depict the resurrection - and uses indirect references from Psalm 68 to tell the story of the ascension rather than the narrative given in the Gospels. The sequence of arias and recitatives that follow then lead us to that exuberant 'Hallelujah Chorus' which ends Part II. Consisting of a mixture of quotations from the Book of Revelation, this chorus encourages us to look beyond the present and prepares for the third and final part of 'Messiah'.

Part III begins with that wonderful soprano aria: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' based on a skilful juxtaposition of extracts from the Book of Job and the 1st Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Affirming the Resurrection, the music soars with confidence and serenity. The theme of the Second Coming forms the remainder of this third and last part of 'Messiah'. The final chorus, 'Worthy is the Lamb' has text taken from the Book of Revelation and the oratorio ends with that long final 'Amen' - a stirring affirmation of the Christian faith.

Handel died in London on 14th April 1759 - just a few days after hearing, for the very last time, a performance of his wonderful oratorio, 'Messiah'.

Sources:

- "The Gospel According to Handel's Messiah", Roger A. Bullard Hodder & Stoughton 1995 (ISBN: 0340642491)
- "Forty Days with the Messiah (Day-by-day reflections of Handel's oratorio)". David Winter. The Bible Reading Fellowship 1996 (ISBN: 1841011142)
- "The Story of Handel's Messiah (1741-1784)", Watkins Shaw, Novello & Co. 1963
- "Handel" Wendy Thompson Omnibus Press 1994 (ISBN: 0711929971)
- "Handel's Messiah - A Celebration" Richard Luckett Victor Gollancz 1992 (ISBN: 0575052864)

CJK

THE CHURCH CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 1st	Feast of All Saints	
	10.00am	Visit by Southlands Lower School, Biggleswade
	7.00pm	First Confirmation Class at St. Michael's Church
Wednesday 2nd	All Souls Day	
	11.00am	Launch of new mid-week coffee morning in Elstow Church Hall, followed by lunch in the Red Lion. All welcome
Thursday 3rd	10.00am	Visit by Southlands Lower School, Biggleswade
	11.00am	Holy Communion. (Revd Jeremy Crocker – "JRC")
	8.00pm	Meeting of the Finance and Standing Committee at 43, Armstrong Close, Wilstead.
Saturday 5th	10.00am	Working Party to help build the bonfire
	3.30pm	Pantomime rehearsal in Elstow Church Hall
	5.30pm	Firework Night celebration in field behind Church Hall
Sunday 6th	3rd Before Advent	
	9.30am	Family Communion with Children's Groups (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (Mattins Group)
		T.J.E. 'The Seven Deadly Sins' (Mattins Group talk).
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
Monday 7th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.45pm	Bereavement Course in Elstow Church Hall
Tuesday 8th	10.00am	Visit by Southlands Lower School, Biggleswade
	7.45pm	Planning Meeting for Elstow May Festival (Rectory)
Wednesday 9th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in Elstow Church Hall. All welcome
	7.45pm	Meeting of all Chalice Bearers to give guidance as you prepare for this new ministry (Rectory)
Thursday 10th	10.00am	Visit by Southlands Lower School, Biggleswade
	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Sunday 13th	2nd Before Advent - Remembrance Sunday	
	<u>10.55am</u>	Service of Remembrance (JRC) Preacher Mr Douglas Gautrey followed by an Act of Remembrance at Noon at the memorial in front of the old Elstow Lower School
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
Monday 14th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.45pm	Bereavement Course at Elstow Church Hall
<i>DEADLINE FOR MATERIAL FOR DECEMBER/JANUARY 2006 MAGAZINE</i>		
Wednesday 16th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in Elstow Church Hall, all welcome



Thursday 17 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
	7.30pm	Meeting of the Parochial Church Council in the Church Hall
Saturday 19 th	3.30pm	Pantomime Rehearsal in Elstow Church Hall
	7.30pm	Barn Dance at the Elstow Playing Fields Pavilion with Fish and Chip Supper (tel. 218762 for details)

Sunday 20th Next Before Advent – Christ the King

	9.30am	Family Communion with Children’s Groups (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (Mattins Group)
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
Monday 21 st	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.45pm	Bereavement Course in Elstow Church Hall
Wednesday 23 rd	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in Elstow Church Hall, all welcome
Thursday 24 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Saturday 26 th	2.00pm	Children’s Workshop. Design and make your own Christmas cards, decorations and Advent Calendars

Sunday 27th Advent 1

	9.30am	Young People’s Service with the lighting of the first Advent candle. The “Love in a Box” collection will end at this service. (Music Group)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (Mattins Group)
	12.00 Noon	Bring and Share lunch in Elstow Church Hall, organised by the Young People’s Service, all welcome
	3.00pm	Baptism of Grace Killick
	3.45pm	Baptism of Mason Thomas
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer followed by Holy Communion with the laying on of Hands for Healing (JRC)
Monday 28 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.45pm	Bereavement Course in Elstow Church Hall

Wednesday 30th Andrew the Apostle

	11.30am	Coffee morning followed by light lunch in Elstow Church Hall, all welcome
--	---------	---

DECEMBER

Thursday 1 st	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
	7.30pm	Joint meeting of Benefice Parochial Church Councils at Cardington Village Hall
Saturday 3 rd	2.00pm	Elstow Christmas Bazaar in the Church Hall

Sunday 4th Advent 2

	9.30am	Family Communion with Children’s Groups and the Lighting of the Second Advent Candle (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (JRC)
	3.30pm	Christingle Service (JRC and the Music Group) Preacher Tony Brookes of the Children’s Society
	6.00pm	Advent Praise at St Michael’s Church NO EVENING PRAYER AT ELSTOW