



Parish News

St Michael, St Albans with St Mary, Childwick Green

June 2018

LETTER FROM THE VICARAGE

Kenneth is on extended study leave between 1 April and 1 July 2018. For information about the details of this sabbatical, please see his extended article in February's *Parish News*. During his absence, Kenneth would offer for your meditations this month these windows from St Michael's.



Among the more obscure glass in St Michael's are the windows of the clerestory (the high-level openings just below the nave ceiling). These windows are obscure in that the viewer's gaze rarely travels up so high, but their contents are fairly straightforward: four saints, appropriate for discussion in this month of June.



The left hand pair are Peter and Paul, the leading first-generation apostles. Peter led the Church's mission among the Jews, and Paul had a corresponding zeal for sharing the message of Jesus with Gentiles. Both men purportedly died in Rome.

Above both saints are crowns and palms of martyrdom. Paul is shown carrying a sword, the weapon by which he is said to have been killed. He also carries a quill and book, references to his famous letters in the New Testament. Peter is shown with a massive pair of keys – not that he was killed with these (!) but because Jesus promised him the keys of heaven (Matthew 16.19). This is the origin of the image of 'Peter at the pearly gates'. It has a venerable history: for instance, the drawing of the fifteenth-century Doom at the back of St Michael's shows Peter welcoming saints into the heavenly city.

The feast shared by Peter and Paul falls on 29 June. Many British cathedrals hold their ordination services close to this date. Please pray for those being ordained deacon and priest in St Albans and other cathedrals this Petertide – among them, Charles King, whom we look forward to welcoming as curate in early July.



The windows to the east of Peter and Paul show Stephen on the left and Alban on the right. The feast of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, falls in December (cf. Good King Wenceslas) but the account of his martyrdom in Acts 6 and 7 forms the model for accounts of later Christians' deaths, including Britain's first martyr, Alban. A window to Alban in St Michael's is most appropriate, since it is our connection with Alban that probably explains the construction of our church in the first place. St Michael's stands on the site of Verulamium's basilica, the likely location of Alban's trial before he was led out of the Roman town and killed, possibly on the site of the medieval abbey. May we copy Alban in his determination to stand up for truth, just as he – in turn – copied St Stephen.

Kenneth

YOUR MAGAZINE NEEDS YOU

Co-editor

The *Parish News* is looking for someone to co-edit the magazine, along with our very experienced Sandie North. Our co-editor would share the responsibility for commissioning articles and organising the magazine's production, which sounds official but really isn't at all onerous; you would be supported through the process as you find your way.

Copy-editor

Do you know your colons from your semicolons? Or maybe your possessive apostrophes from your, er, well, all the other kinds of apostrophes? If so, you might be able to help us edit the articles the magazine receives. Our lovely copy-editor, Katherine, will be stepping down for pastures new in September, and the magazine needs someone to fill her grammatically-correct shoes. If this might be you, please let us know. Your magazine needs you!

Editorial Committee

If you enjoy the *Parish News*, have you ever thought about joining the editorial committee? We are looking for enthusiastic people who would like to join us once a month for a meeting in the pub, a drink and a chat about what sort of thing to include in our next edition. If this might be you, then join us for a meeting to see how it all works.

For all enquiries please email Sandie North at sandrich2@btinternet.com



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ST MICHAEL'S COMMUNITY WEEKEND, 7-9 SEPTEMBER, 2018

In the April issue of the magazine, I gave a brief outline of the events for this particular weekend in September, but now, as plans are being finalised, I can give some more details of what will be happening.

Friday Evening, 7 September

The first element of the weekend event takes place in St Michael's Church on the evening of Friday 7 September. As the history exhibition and flower festival displays will be in place, ready to welcome the public over the following two days, those purchasing tickets for this event will have the first look at the displays. The evening event is entitled 'The Great War in Words and Music', and will tell the story of the war using music of the time, letters, poetry and newspaper reports, with some of the accounts featuring men from St Michael's and St Albans in general.

Doors will open at 6.30 p.m. for a 7.30 p.m. start, and a ticket for the evening costs £20 per person, which will include a glass of wine, or soft drink, and light refreshments. The price of the ticket also includes the £5 entry fee to visit the flower festival and exhibition, and entitles the purchaser to return to visit the festival the following day (Saturday), as people attending may have insufficient time to view every display within the church on the Friday evening. Tickets will go on sale from Sunday 10 June, and persons wishing to purchase tickets for the evening should send an email requesting the number required to l.w.f.092018@gmail.com as this has been specially set up so that we can deal with these requests. Alternatively, please contact the Parish Office on 01727 835037 between 9.00 a.m. and 12.00 p.m. to reserve your tickets. If you call outside of these hours, please leave your message on the answerphone and your call will be returned as soon as possible. There will also be some tickets on sale after church services at St Michael's on Sundays.

Payment for tickets can be made by cash, cheque (made payable to St Michael's PCC) or by electronic transfer to our bank account. The arrangements are as follows:

- Cash – please call into the Parish Office during the times shown above with your payment and your ticket(s) will be handed to you.
- Cheque – please *either* call into the Parish Office during the times shown above

with your payment and your ticket(s) will be handed to you, *or* send a cheque, a self-addressed envelope and a note requesting the number of tickets required to The Parish Office, The Vicarage, St Michael's Street, St Albans, AL3 4SL. Your tickets will then be posted to you.

- Electronic transfer – please send an email to l.w.f.092018@gmail.com to request the number of tickets required and to tell us that you intend to pay by electronic transfer. We will confirm that tickets have been allocated to you, pending receipt of payment.

Payment for the pre-allocated tickets should be made to St Michael's PCC using sort code 77-95-20 and account number 74199160, and, so that we can easily identify your payment on our statement, please use LWF and your name, e.g. LWFJSMITH, as the identifier.

Once you have made your payment, please send an email to l.w.f.092018@gmail.com and we will send the tickets to you by email for you to print.

Saturday, 8 September – Churchyard Fete

The churchyard fete will open to the public at 11.00 a.m. and there is no entry fee. There will be more information about the fete in the July/August issue of *Parish News*. To give you a taster, we have St Albans City Band providing music, St Albans Morris dancers will be in the churchyard, and we have a local children's theatre group performing excerpts from their July production of *Annie*. There will be a variety of stalls and activities for children over the course of the fete, taking place on the Saturday in the churchyard. There will be something for everyone.

Saturday and Sunday, 8 and 9 September – Flower Festival and History Exhibition

Entry to the flower festival and exhibition is £5 per adult, payable at the church door. It will be open from 11.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m. on Saturday 8 September, and from 12.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m. on Sunday 9 September.

Watch out for more information about the displays in St Michael's in the July/August issue of the magazine. In the meantime, although we have received a brilliant response to our appeal for hand-made poppies for inclusion in the displays, we would be grateful for some more. If you can provide a poppy or two, or feel that you could help to put together a display for our September event, please get in touch with Anita Lindeman by phone on 07906 655641, or by email to anita.lindeman@ntlworld.com

If you would like to offer your help in the churchyard or church on any of these days, or to give a donation towards this commemorative event, please get in touch. I can be reached in the Parish Office on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays on 01727 835037 or email admin.stmichaels@btconnect.com

Georgie Ray

THE SCIENCE (OR ART) OF COMMUNICATION

The other day, we had our *Parish News* team meeting, held as usual in another St Michael's meeting centre, the Six Bells. There, amid the hubbub of conversation – both human and canine – from all those enjoying the fellowship around us, we contrived to put the next issue of the *News* to bed.

During the course of our subsequent conversations over lunch, I realised that I had been on the committee in its various forms for over forty years. Having survived, so far, seven incumbencies in my time attending St Michael's, how many editors have I experienced since joining the team, and why was I still so embroiled? Originally, I became a member because Nan Harper asked me to join, but I soon enjoyed trying to write the odd piece about what was happening, or had happened, that affected either the worshipers or the parish as a whole. I was trying to formulate communication, without perhaps realising it at the time.

Communication at all levels seems to me to be paramount in any circumstance, even regarding pigeonholes. I believe reference has been made to their demise, and the loss of this facility, in the May issue of *Parish News*. To date, I have not seen a copy of the latest issue (which is printed for me), but I understand that the decision was criticised, as I feel it should have been. The pigeonholes had been around for 40 years, visible and well-used, before they were banished to virtual anonymity in the Lady Chapel aisle, waiting to obstruct the choir's processional route, a fact that contributed to their departure. I am told that the matter was considered, but was there proper consultation, i.e. communication?

To me – and I may not be alone – there is still a need for these pigeonholes near the south entrance, visible and adjacent to the cash box (this might have the effect of encouraging the making of payments, as appropriate). A non-obstructive design should be possible.

Whilst on the communication theme, I was pleased to hear that some magazine copies are being produced through the good offices of a parishioner. Three – no, many more – cheers for that person. I also heard that some parishioners (me included) would be happy to pay for such a service and to be able to hold a magazine in their hands, as opposed to consulting the computer with all its attributes and failings. I sometimes feel that much too much reliance is being placed on these wonderful machines, and I am no Luddite. They are almost treated as gods (still, so far, with a lower-case 'g'). They want an instant response, not always giving us time to think, communicate or to consult.

Peter Limebear

A VIEW FROM THE PEW ON ASCENSION DAY

We are here to commemorate Ascension Day, that time when Jesus Christ the Son of God left this world and returned to the kingdom of heaven.

Lord, you entered this world as a baby,

Were nourished as a child,

Blossomed into adulthood,

Cut down and perished,

Arose again transformed.

But all earthly life is transient, so your soul must leave this world and ascend into your kingdom in heaven.

But, Lord, we were not left alone, for you sent your holy spirit, to help and guide us on our own journey through life.

And so, Lord, we pray today that all you taught us whilst on this earth we can inwardly digest and outwardly express, and to hold you in our mind's eye at all times.

That we can love all our neighbours, whomever and wherever they are.

Lord, we pray that, when our time to leave arrives, our souls might follow you and find their place in your celestial kingdom.

Amen.

Geoff Goodall



During



Before



After

Phillips - for more than just the funeral.

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AOTEAROA: THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

In February and March we spent nine weeks in Aotearoa, Land of the Long White Cloud, or New Zealand. Sandie asked me for my impressions, so this article is a kind of Part Two to Phillip's reflections last month. We went to spend time with our younger son in Auckland and to have a look at both islands, arriving at the beginning of February – the last month of summer – and leaving on 3 April, just after the hour changed to mark the approach to winter.

As Phillip noted, Kiwis (as they generally refer to themselves) are polite, friendly and relaxed. There is much about New Zealand that reminds me of this country when I was growing up, which is probably why we Brits like it so much. Here are some thoughts on what we really enjoyed.

Firstly, going out by boat into Doubtful Sound in South Island Fiordland, where members of Captain Cook's crew were sent to map the fiord. They were severely bitten by sandflies, so returned to the mother ship, saying that it was doubtful the area could be mapped – hence the name. The glacial scenery in the fiords is unique and spectacular, as are the temperate rainforest and towering waterfalls, fed by exceptionally high rainfall. This area was the backdrop that Peter Jackson used for Middle Earth in the film *Lord of the Rings*, thus boosting the number of visitors enormously. The whole southwestern area is national park and is geologically distinct from the rest of the country. Our boat took us out into the Tasman Sea, bringing home to us the feeling of being down at the bottom of the world, as well as reminding us of the courage of the early navigators and settlers in undertaking such voyages.

A walk along the Kepler Way near the lakes of Te Anau and Manapouri the following day took us into a world of ferns, lichens, mosses and strangely-shaped trees. There are magnificent forest walks all over New Zealand in the many national parks. They are very varied; in some areas the trees and countryside could be in Britain, or South Africa or Australia, but others only in New Zealand. The Scots who settled in this area must have been amazed to find their Highlands on a bigger scale, but were probably less delighted to discover that sandflies bit more frequently and fiercely than their midges.

Another pleasure was walking along the coast and on beaches that stretch for miles, which are found all over the country. We went on a boat with a foldable walkway on the prow, up the coast from Kaiteriteri into the Abel Tasman National Park, just north of Nelson. The boat picks up people on different beaches, allowing them to walk between them. Another memorable beach walk was in Kaikoura on the east coast, above Christchurch. This is a whale-watching area and, according to the Maori, the peninsula is shaped like a whale's tail. We were a bit late for whales, but were able to walk the coastal route around the rocks, where there were fur seals flopping about in the pools. They took little notice of us. NZ weather changes in a trice; we saw a cloud on the horizon and started walking back, when said cloud made rapid progress and turned into a serious downpour. More worrying are the cyclones that hit the coasts; we had to make extensive detours inland to get to Kaikoura from Christchurch, and then up to Blenheim, as parts of State Highway 1 had disappeared into the sea in early February. The stretches of road that had been rebuilt following the earthquake in 2016 had stood up well, but older parts succumbed.

The North Island beaches, along the east coast into the Bay of Plenty and the Coromandel

peninsula, are mostly sandy. We walked for miles on the sand at Gisborne – the town that is the first in the world to see the sun rise each day – and where there is a statue of Nick, the cabin boy, first spying land from Captain Cook's ship. One sees few people on all these forest and coastal walks. Locals appear after about 4.00 p.m., walking dogs (or – in one case in Gisborne – a horse), running, cycling, wind-surfing, swimming and kayaking after work. Many people live right on the coast or near a forest on the outskirts of small towns, and take full advantage of their surroundings.

We spent three separate weeks in Auckland, the only city of any size (with a population of 1.5 million), built around a ring of extinct volcanoes with water on all sides. Many people own boats, so water sports and fishing are very popular. My son goes out regularly with friends and catches fish and collects seafood, including crayfish and mussels, being careful to follow all the rules about what can be caught (fines are very heavy for transgressors). In contrast, Wellington – the capital – at the bottom of the North Island, is small but lively. It's known as Windy Welly, but we were fortunate to have four days of beautiful weather to enjoy the marina, the city sights and the coastal surroundings.

Most towns, particularly in the South Island, have a memorial hall, a bowls club, a rugby club, Lions club, Masonic hall, a sewing and knitting shop, plus Anglican and Presbyterian churches. The latter are built out of wood, as are most houses, and not all are in use any more. Dunedin has stone-built churches and we were able to go inside the First Presbyterian Church, built by the Scots, which maintains a thoroughly Celtic feel. Christchurch Cathedral was built of stone, against the advice of its Victorian architect, who had worked out wood was better in a seismic area. It finally fell in the earthquake of 2012 and is being rebuilt; in the meantime, there is a temporary cardboard cathedral (yes, built using cardboard tubes). I was able to attend evensong in the rather grim-looking cathedral in Nelson, where the main celebrant was a Brit, but I was reminded of where I was by a splendid reading from 'Ixodis'.

Most towns have a museum featuring Maori history and the events that occurred when European settlers (Pakeha) arrived. Increased European settlement really began in the 1850s and the Gold Rush of the 1860s, so there is a lot of photographic evidence of this history. It emphasises just how young the country is and how tough life must have been for people. Emigration to NZ was a choice (which was not the case for early Australian settlers), often with the purpose of escaping urban and rural poverty in Europe. In the South Island, the first settlers were mainly whalers and sealers, living alongside and intermarrying with Maori, so many people today can trace their joint heritage. The first Maori arrived in the thirteenth century, settled and lived undisturbed until James Cook arrived to circumnavigate and map the islands in 1769. Land was usually acquired by agreement, but the introduction of guns and European diseases reduced the Maori population, as they frequently fought each other as well as the new settlers over land rights. Conflict in the 1850s over land culminated in the Maori Wars. The Maori tribes no longer own large tracts of land, but a lot of smaller areas across the country, which were returned by the Crown under covenant.

Maori presence and land ownership varies. We stayed at the Maori Maraehako Beach retreat in the Bay of Plenty; it is a series of wooden buildings that Pete, the owner, built on three levels against the rocks of a tiny cove, completely invisible from the road. It offers a couple of simple rooms or backpacker accommodation where one sleeps yards from the sea. There were only four

of us staying, but Pete's numerous family were well in evidence and had been out fishing that day, delighted to have seen a shark.

Rotorua on the North Island is the famous centre of geothermal activity – geysers, boiling mud and plumes of steam. Te Puia has the geysers that shoot up highest and is Maori-owned, so we had a guided tour and a *hangi* meal – their traditional way of cooking. Usually, a pit is dug and the meat – then vegetables – buried in layers of leaves and slow-cooked, but here they put everything in a hot box, to cook over the steaming water. We also went to Hell's Gate nearby, and experienced a natural mud bath and mineral spa – a nice change for a Monday morning. Te Puia was the most visited attraction in NZ until it was overtaken by Hobbiton – yes, *Lord of the Rings* again! Hobbiton is not far away (in Waikato) and is the one film-set left in place. It's on a dairy and sheep farm amongst the rolling green hills, which made it ideal for the Shire. I happily admit to having really enjoyed the visit and seeing all the hobbit holes and their gardens. One can't enter any of them, as the interiors were all filmed at studios in Wellington, but one can have a cider at the Green Dragon. Perhaps it is not surprising that artifice trumps nature in our modern world.

Val Chiesa



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JUMBLE SALE: A THANK YOU

St Michael's PTA would like to thank those in St Michael's village who kindly donated items for our jumble sale back in February. It was a huge success. We raised a massive £800 by selling some bigger items on eBay and running a very successful sale day. We will be holding our next jumble sale in the autumn, so please do think about having a pre-Christmas clear-out for us!

St Michael's Primary School PTA

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THE ROLE OF READER

I have been asked what readers are and what it is they do. This is a very good question, and one which puzzles even readers at times! First of all, the title 'reader' dates back to Elizabethan times, when only a few people could read – some were, therefore, appointed to help the overworked priests by reading the lessons in services. They were, literally, readers.

The problem is that this title has no bearing on what readers do or are in 2018. In many dioceses you will find that readers are known as licensed lay ministers, a title I often use when talking with folk who have no experience of church, for example during funeral visits. They may have no idea what a reader is, but recognise the word 'minister'.

So what can I, as a reader, do in 2018? The answer lies in the word 'lay': I am not ordained, so may not administer sacraments such as the Eucharist, marriage (although I can do wedding blessings) or baptism. For the same reason, we do not use the first person in the absolution or general blessing, but can bless one or two people at a time.

So, a reader is basically a lay person but one with three years' part-time training (while also working) and supervised practical experience in various churches, licensed by a bishop and usually serving in a specific church, although allowed to serve elsewhere in the diocese if needed. Once trained, we continue to be supervised by our priest and bishop; we have to do CME (continuing ministerial education) and keep up to date with DBS (disclosure and barring service).

Readers are particularly suited to work outside of the church as well, to share our faith in our daily work and lives, and out and about in the parish, while priests are often more restricted to their churches and congregations. All readers have different gifts and personalities, and will identify and use them, not necessarily in a church setting. However, most will preach and lead services.

They may take funerals and go on bereavement visits, or undertake general pastoral visiting and caring, leading groups – whatever is needed. We can bring reserved or extended sacrament to individuals at home or in nursing homes (as can other lay people who are specifically trained).

There are many readers who are street pastors, and also chaplains in hospitals, police stations, prisons, the fire service and even the waterways. I was a chaplain for several years at Luton Airport, which I really enjoyed, chatting to everyone in the airport (where there was a real buzz), including airside and in the associated airline and travel offices, the children's centre, etc. I was once taken up the control tower, but had to stay quiet (!) as the concentration needed is so intense. Everything below looked so small, as if it were a toy airport.

At present, I am a day chaplain at the Abbey once or twice a month, being available to chat to people, pray with them or whatever it is they need. Each hour – on the hour – I welcome our visitors and say a prayer from the main pulpit. I meet all sorts of people, with all kinds of joys and sorrows, which is an enormous privilege.

Personally, I have recently had some time away from church and ministry, as my husband of 39 years died in 2015, and I have since moved to a smaller house at the bottom of Abbey Mill Lane – not quite in the parish, but almost – which is one of the reasons for my arrival at St Michael's. Thank you all for making me so welcome.

Liz Warren

DIARY FOR MAY 2018

27 TRINITY SUNDAY

- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
9.30 a.m. Parish Communion (St Michael's)
6.00 p.m. Evensong (St Mary's)
6.30 p.m. Choral Evensong (St Michael's)

DIARY FOR JUNE 2018

3 FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
9.30 a.m. Parish Communion (St Michael's)

We look forward to welcoming Ed Hardyman as speaker at the 9.30 a.m. service. Ed will be a familiar face to those who attended the Reformation evenings last autumn. He is on the Hatfield 'Root' scheme and is in the process of applying for ordination training.

- 6.00 p.m. Holy Communion (St Mary's)

5 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)

10 SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
9.30 a.m. All Age Communion (St Michael's)

We look forward to welcoming Helena Trent as preacher at the 9.30 a.m. service. Helena works for the St Albans and Harpenden Schools Project (STEP), and will be speaking about the amazing work that this charity does in secondary schools in our area. There will be a retiring collection in support of STEP after this service.

- 6.00 p.m. Compline (St Mary's)

12 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)

17 THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
9.30 a.m. Parish Communion (St Michael's)
6.00 p.m. Evensong (St Mary's)

19 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)

- 24 FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
- 9.30 a.m. Parish Communion (St Michael's)
- 6.00 p.m. Evensong (St Mary's)
- 6.30 p.m. Choral Evensong (St Michael's)
- 26 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)

DIARY FOR JULY 2018

- 1 FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
- 9.30 a.m. Parish Communion (St Michael's)
- 11.15 a.m. Ordination (Cathedral)
- During this service, Charles King (new curate in our parish) will be
 ordained deacon.
- 6.00 p.m. Holy Communion (St Mary's)
- 3 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)
- 4 8.00 p.m. Folk Night (St Michael's churchyard)
- 8 SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
- 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (St Michael's)
- 9.30 a.m. All Age Communion (St Michael's)
- 6.00 p.m. Evensong (St Mary's)
- 10 9.45 a.m. Tiny Tots (Parish Centre)
- 11 8.00 p.m. Parochial Church Council (Memorial Hall)
- 12 8.30 p.m. onwards Men's Night (Lower Red Lion)



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FAITH, TRUTH AND ART: A PERSONAL VIEW (PART ONE)

As an artist and designer, it won't surprise anyone that I've always had an affinity with the visual. I fell under the spell of the visual arts, and in particular what we call modern art, long before I was old enough to understand the ideas behind its innovations. I simply made a connection of some kind and absorbed it. I was fascinated by abstract paintings. They looked, literally, exciting. This was the Shiny New, just like I was then. It wasn't just that painting seemed a big thing to me. It seemed much bigger than everything else I was thinking about put together, except – of course – football and God. Over the years, and mostly while making paintings myself, I've metaphorically picked up the thought 'Is there a relationship between art and faith?', had a quick look at it, and then put it back down again, simply because I've always thought there is a relationship between them, and I never felt the need to reason it out to myself. And, anyway, I suspected it might be rather too complicated to put into words.

Of course, in the purely historical sense, art and faith have had an extremely close relationship for thousands of years. Religion of one kind or another has supplied much of art's narrative content as well as giving art its primary purpose. And in doing so, it helped drive the making of art to new heights of aesthetic achievement. Not least of these achievements, and amongst some of the earliest and most beautiful Christian works of art, are the Orthodox icons of the first and early second millennium. Painted using egg tempera techniques and incorporating burnished gold leaf and other precious materials, they are imbued with an intense sense of radiant light and inner luminosity. But these, like the graceful frescoes of Giotto and the Renaissance masterpieces that came after, were primarily about narrative. Their objective was to teach and explain by showing. A child could read them, if he or she knew how.



Left: Rublev, *Nativity of Jesus* (detail), 1405, Cathedral of the Annunciation,
The Kremlin, Moscow

Right: Giotto di Bondone, *The Virgin's Wedding Procession*, c.1305,
Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua

Even in the history of art's most recent past, there have been many celebrated artists who continued to incorporate religious imagery as a central narrative in their body of work. For instance, Stanley Spencer's complex representational paintings often fused everyday life with religious themes, to make extraordinary works that feel like modern versions of Renaissance frescoes, while Craigie Aitchison's many paintings of the crucifixion of Christ are deeply moving. And there are others, even today, whose work is grounded in a continuing tradition of religious iconography – Mark Wallinger and Bill Viola spring to mind.



Left: Craigie Aitchison, *Crucifixion*, 1984–1986, oil on canvas
Right: Bill Viola, *Martyrs*, 2014, video, St Paul's Cathedral

However, I think there is a more rewarding line of enquiry. In the absence of any religious visual content whatsoever, can art simply by itself, and specifically that art made since the turn of the twentieth century (a period of artistic creativity, which, at least on the surface, seems to be purely secular) reveal something meaningful about truth, or shed light on ideas of faith and, ultimately, God?

Can a work of art have the capacity to reveal to us something beyond its own imagery? Can it point outside of its own self as object to show us something about ourselves as human beings, and can that something be as profound as truth or faith? To consider how this might be possible, I think we have to start by asking another question entirely: why does art exist at all, and why do we need to make it? We must go back approximately thirty thousand years, to the Late Palaeolithic and the earliest known figurative examples of humans leaving their mark on the world, through cave and rock paintings and the moulding of prehistoric figurines. These were not decorative pieces. We know this because they were not sited within spaces that were lived in. Their purpose was not to adorn. Often, they were made or placed in inaccessible voids, perhaps for reasons of privacy or privilege. It was art with a point to it, one that went beyond embellishment for its own sake, and, while interpretations are inevitably speculative, the very existence of these artworks, at sites throughout Europe, Africa and Asia, is not.

This making of visual things wasn't some chance aberration, local and unrepeated. The figurative representation of reality proliferated wherever humans existed. It suggests that the making of these visual marks was a profoundly deep-seated and universal human imperative, one that had meaning and, through that meaning, acquired function, perhaps one invested with shamanic and ritualistic power. We simply don't know. Interestingly, many of these artworks

are striking, reductive semi-abstractions. The process of transforming the real into a depiction of the real is clear evidence of intellectual flexibility, and these artworks often have a visual content and a formalised visual language that is aesthetically pleasing. An enormous amount of effort and energy would have been required to make them. This art must have been culturally important.



Cave painting from Lascaux, France

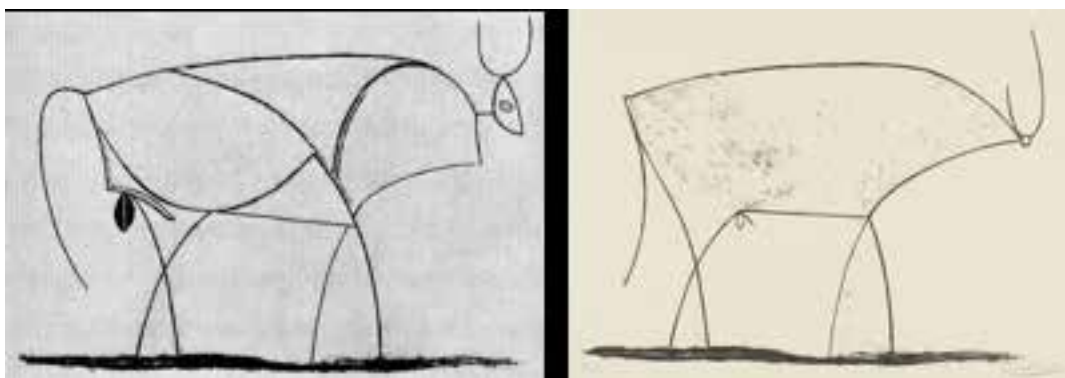
New thinking suggests that, over thousands of years, this early mark-making augmented humanity's capacity to represent thoughts, beings and events that are not actually present. The researchers involved call this capacity 'symbolic thinking'. It is suggested this development of symbolic thinking eventually allowed Homo sapiens to develop an entirely new way of relating to the world and themselves – the development of human language. The underlying rationale for this connection between symbolic thinking and the emergence of language is that the location of these artworks shows a relationship between subject matter and sound. Previous research has demonstrated that early humans purposefully chose where they would place their images on the basis of a cave's acoustic properties. In Lascaux, pictures of hoofed animals, such as bulls and bison, are located in chambers where reverberation and echo would combine to create sounds similar to hoof beats.

Other pictorializations of feline animals, dots and handprints are in acoustically quiet areas. In some caves, stalagmites and stalactites – which sound like musical notes when struck – are highlighted with paint. This connection between visual art and auditory sounds, which the researchers call 'cross-modality information transfer', is thought to have enhanced early humans' ability to convey symbolic thinking while foreshadowing elements of human language (MIT, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2018). Importantly, visual art not only predated language, but it was central in the development of symbolic thinking that necessarily preceded it. It would indicate that making art is both primal and necessary, a medium that allows us to structure and interpret the world around us intelligently and, moreover, directly without recourse to language. It also follows that humans are not just makers of visual artefacts, but that we must be responsive natural receivers and decoders of them too.

What was true in the Stone Age is still true now, which is why these primeval artworks still have the power to resonate in our contemporary world. They are the products of our uniquely

human activity and, despite their separation from us by time, are nevertheless ‘of us’, using a method of communication that doesn’t need to be mediated through any other. Music is similar in this respect. It is thought music in some form also originated at about the same time. That these artworks still have power to move us, even though any ability to understand their meaning and function is lost to us, also introduces new questions. When we look at a piece of art, do we need to know why it was made in order for us to understand something about it, or for it to tell us something about us? What is the dynamic between artist, artwork and audience?

At some inexact point in time, fine art de-coupled itself from its historic function to act as history’s visual narrator. The invention of photography liberated both painting and sculpture from their futile quest for an increasingly life-like proxy for the real. This opened up new possibilities regarding the role of art in contemporary culture. As a result, the role of the artist also underwent significant transformation, from that of artisan, realising the requirements of patronage and dependent upon it, including that of the Church, to one of self-initiating individualist, innovating autonomously for purely personal reasons. By the middle of the twentieth century onwards, some artists even achieved the role of self-mythologizing celebrity (Dali, Picasso, Warhol, Koons, Hirst). Artists went from telling the stories of others to telling their own. The era of artist as mystic shaman had re-arrived many thousands of years after the last cave painters had left. And, like the cave and rock painters before them, these new art pioneers, scarred by at least one if not two world wars, were looking to express through their art very similar things: a deeper understanding of what it is to be human, ideas of the mythic and the eternal, of faith and the spiritual. Indeed, primitive art, the ancient and the mythological were all potent influences on the development of their own work. They were channelling some of the same visual approaches too: reduction, symbolism, and abstraction, to extract the essential from the extraneous. The very last two drawings in Picasso’s famous series of eleven lithographs of the bull (1946), itself the most symbolic and mythic of creatures in Spanish culture, are of staggering visual power, but they are also the most simplified and elegant. Rendered in just a few vital lines, the animals are reduced to their absolute essence.



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) *Bull*: plates X and XI, 1946 (lithographs). This series consists of 11 lithographs of a bull. The gradual process of abstraction culminates in a drawing (XI) that is highly minimalistic, the bull condensed into a seemingly simple set of lines, but which, in reality, is visually quite complex.

The period we call 'Modernism', the great watershed in the history of art, would create a stream of new innovations and visual vocabularies, all intended to evoke and provoke in equal measure. By the mid-twentieth century and, fittingly, in the New World, Modernism would finally pare visual art right back to the bare bone of its constituent parts, to just colour, form and surface. The abstract expressionist paintings of Rothko, Pollock, Mitchell and de Kooning, amongst many others, would represent the high-water mark of Modernism. As the Royal Academy of Art so aptly wrote about their 2016 exhibition: 'Often monumental in scale, their works are at times intense, spontaneous and deeply expressive. At others they are more contemplative, presenting large fields of colour that border on the sublime'.

These new concepts were spirituality in paint, forcing the viewer not only to reconsider what it was they were looking at, but what it was these artworks were supposed to mean or could mean. Here, painting fulfilled its purpose just by existing. It was challenging. Totally abstract and with no direct references to the physical world, these works did not imitate anything, but came into existence simply through the process of their own making, to engender and illuminate our own perceptions of the 'other', something beyond the physical. They didn't require explanation; they required viewing, in order that these paintings' integral 'otherness' could be experienced. It is this hard-to-pin-down quality that gives these artworks such emotive power.



Mark Rothko, The Rothko Chapel, Houston. 1971. 14 site-specific paintings on canvas. Rothko's later works had no direct references to the physical world and were about 'interior expression'. He wrote about his own work 'If you are only moved by colour relationships, you are missing the point. I am interested in expressing the big emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom.'



Joan Mitchell, *Salut Tom*, 1979, oil on four canvases. Her abstract paintings consist of lyrical compositional rhythms, bold colouration, and sweeping gestural marks, inspired by landscape, nature and poetry. These large-scale works enfold the viewer into the artwork's physical presence.

An essential requirement of a great work of art, of which the paintings by the above-mentioned artists are excellent exemplars, is that it must have integrity as an intrinsic value within itself, a kind of goodness and rightness, where the created object – in whatever final form – has aesthetic and physical completeness, an internal authenticity and visual logic. This might be described as beauty, but not in the sense of something that is pretty or decorative, rather a quality more fundamental and uplifting – transcendent, even. It is not easily achieved and neither is it about subject matter. Picasso's great masterpiece, *Guernica*, has all of the criteria for beauty, yet depicts an event of shocking brutality – the bombing of a Spanish town and the defenceless non-combatants within it. Its power is that it goes beyond the merely illustrative. Because we are moral beings, we can extrapolate from it deeper significance. Even if the surface truth is ugly and shaming, go beneath that surface and it is about survival, redemption, hope, and even forgiveness.



Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, mural, specially formulated matte house paint on canvas, Museo Raina Sofia, Madrid. Picasso's great masterpiece allows us to see beyond the tragedy of war, to question our own morality and culpability as human beings and ultimately to find hope and forgiveness.

The painting has goodness and rightness simply because it does not shy away from the difficult. That is what gives this artwork its own version of integrity and why it imprints itself indelibly on everyone who sees it. *Guernica* demonstrates how the physical presence of an art object establishes a mutual space within which meaning can be revealed and further interpretation can develop. This is so even where there is no evident pictorial story present, such as the Mark Rothko and Joan Mitchell paintings above. More broadly, one can argue that vision does not require further explanation in order to create meaning, nor does inherent meaning need to be articulated in conscious thought. What is seen is interpreted by the very act of seeing itself. No literal explanation is required.

Those things that inform the creation of an artwork – ideas, concepts, materials and a context with previous work – those things that would have been important to the artist during a particular work’s making and perhaps are critical, if not vital, to the finished work’s very appearance, become immaterial at the point the piece is viewed. Only its inherent ‘rightness’ really matters, its completeness and beauty. In other words, a work of art must speak to its audience by and on its own merits. Yet as viewers, if we interact with an artwork by attempting to give verbal shape to the ideas we think are within it, we might simply destroy these non-material realities. In order to receive, we have to engage in a more tangential approach to looking, and instead of questioning what we see, allow ourselves to be questioned, so the object can share itself with us. Only then can the viewer reciprocate by overlaying new ideas back onto the physical object to create rich new interconnections and unique meanings that, while purely personal and transitory, are just as valid as the artist’s own. It is a two-way conversation that requires engagement and contemplation. Art, like religion, ‘is there to question our answers, not answer our questions’ (Reverend Mark Oakley, canon chancellor of St Paul’s, London). He goes on to say neither art nor religion are information, but both might be informative. Do we need to know why a piece of art was made? No, it is not essential. What a painting or sculpture means is only what it means in that single moment, when its audience – the recipient of its ‘otherness’ – views it.

However, a work of art never exists in total isolation, but has its inevitable place in the history of all images within which it sits, an inevitable, unavoidable context that is both inescapable and revealing. So, while we do not need to know why an artist made something, experience of this shared visual ‘library’ can help our thought processes to decode or encode what we view. Over millennia, the image – once a rarity – has become commonplace everywhere we look. Gerard van Dam writes on this aspect of art and ubiquitous imagery: ‘If we move from very early examples, possibly specially sited for all sorts of reasons from acoustics to security and privilege, then of necessity we pass into an enormity of art or work with some artistic linkage. Most of these billions of enactments do not attract any comment but collectively create a world into which we are all born and from which we are all influenced. So perhaps we need to consider whether the exchange between art and viewer needs to acknowledge this environment’. Does this proliferation weaken or strengthen our ability to derive something from art? My personal view is that these innumerable visual cues in our everyday world help us to interpret for ourselves what we think we are seeing when we view art.

Nicholas Herbert

(To be continued. The second part of this article will appear in the next edition of *Parish News*)

NOTICES

Ordination of Charles King – Our New Curate

This will take place on Sunday 1 July at 11.15 a.m. in St Albans Abbey. This will also be Kenneth's first duty after his three-month sabbatical.

Welcome Party

On Sunday 8 July, there will be a welcome party in the Parish Centre for Charles and his wife, Anke, after the 9.30 a.m. service. Stephanie Rainbow is asking for volunteers to help on this day. If you can assist, please contact her at Stephanie.rainbow@venture.co.uk or by calling 07788 580519, or at church.

Folk Evening: Wednesday 4 July 2018

Please put the date in your diary for the annual folk evening, which is held in the village of St Michael's. The main street will be closed off from 8.00 p.m., and there will be folk-dancing groups, Morris men, etc. performing at different points in the street. The churchyard at St Michael's will buzz with the sound of the Swanvesta Social Club, and in the past we have had a hog roast, drinks from the Three Brewers and food from Carmen's Caribbean Kitchen, as well as our own St Michael's volunteers offering Prosecco, wine and soft drinks. The Inn on the Park have sold ice creams. The Friends of St Michael's will also have a stand, to encourage membership.

First World War Stories

We are hoping to publish a series of stories or articles about relatives or friends who experienced the First World War in the September, October and November editions of *Parish News*. Please ask around if anyone has stories to tell – we would love to include them.

The editors

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Articles for the Parish News

If you have an article or notice for the *Parish News*, the deadline for production for our July/August edition is **Wednesday 13th June 2018**

Please send contributions to the magazine's editors

Sandie North – sandrich2@btinternet.com

Kerry Wells – jkwells79@yahoo.com

with a copy to

Katherine Crowdell – parishnews-copy17@gmail.com

Or leave them for our attention at the Parish Office.

If you or anyone you know would like to advertise in the *Parish News*, please contact Kyna Mason – kyna.mason@gmail.com

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