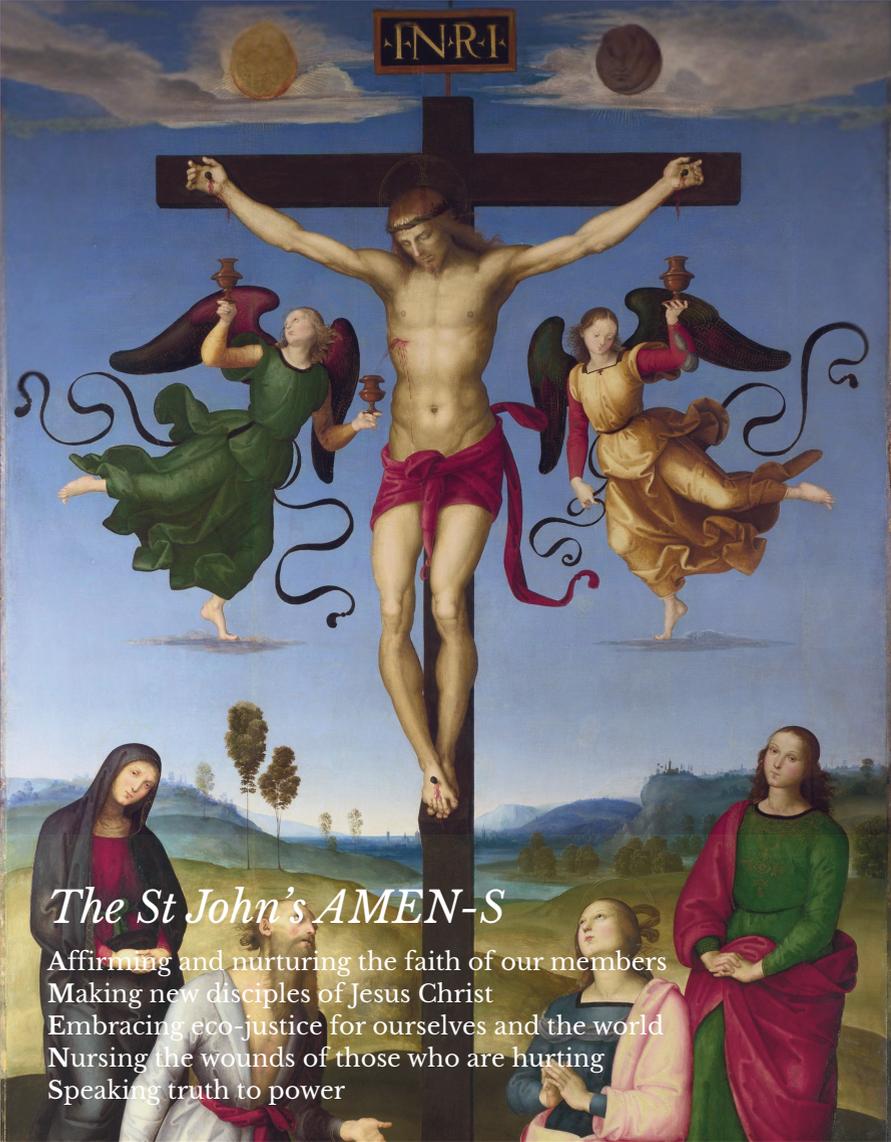


St John's

Cornerstone Magazine • March 2025

Cornerstone



The St John's AMEN-S

Affirming and nurturing the faith of our members
Making new disciples of Jesus Christ
Embracing eco-justice for ourselves and the world
Nursing the wounds of those who are hurting
Speaking truth to power

CONTENTS

Editorial	1
From the Rector	2
From the Operations Manager	3
Anglican ‘Saints’	5
Corinth — Crucifixion	7
Obituaries	9
From the Archive: The Beginnings of St John’s	12
A Layperson’s Guide to Anglican Worship: Pt.7 The Confession and Absolution	14
Sponsor Welcome Space Soup!	16
Pen Portraits	17
My Favourite Hymn	19
Jeeps for Peace	20
Getting to Know Edinburgh — A Review	22
“Service with a Smile” by DES	23

Cover Image: Mond Crucifixion, Raphael (1502-3)

EDITORIAL

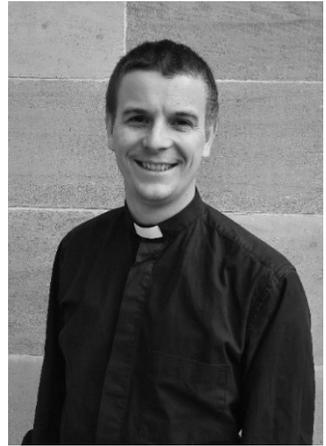
Lent at St John's has been a time of contemplation and, we hope, action. For many of us, thinking has been focused by the five Lent groups. These have helped us to get to know one another and explore some key themes, guided by the book *Easter in Disguise* by Liz Dodd, a Roman Catholic nun keen on social justice. She invites us in Lent to "do more than give up chocolate...Shake up your life, rattle your parish, and change the world". On the extent to which St John's needs to be rattled up, there may be an assortment of views, but our magazine does reflect a number of areas where there are 'signs of life'. You will find items to help you be better involved in worship, details about your fellow-worshippers, obituaries of loyal members who have enriched the life of our church over the years, and the first of a series on past thinkers and poets who have helped to create our the inheritance we have entered into.

As Lent marches towards its conclusion, and the great drama of the last days works itself out, the light of Easter will seem more welcome than ever. If you are weighed down by the compromises, the half-truths, the aggression and self-interest that can often seem to face our world at every turn, open your hearts to the dawning of the new era of Resurrection.



FROM THE RECTOR

As some of you will recall, many of us gathered together last autumn on a wet and windy November's evening to begin thinking in earnest about writing a Vision Plan for the next five years at St John's. At this meeting, a huge number of responses were gathered from members of the congregation, and all through the winter members of the vestry have been working away, sifting through piles of information and crafting it all into a cohesive Vision Plan. The result is *St John's 2031*, our vision for flourishing, which will be published just after Easter, and I'm enormously grateful to all who have fed into the process in one way or another.



Vision documents come and go in the life of a church, and, of course, this is partly the whole point. For, at its heart, a Vision is simply a considered and prayerful attempt on the part of a congregation to listen to God's call upon them at a particular point in time, and thereby to follow. Visions aren't heaven-sent silver bullets: they won't fix all of our problems overnight or lead us straight into the sunlit uplands of ecclesiastical perfection; but neither are they mere PR exercises, designed to look flashy but disappear from consciousness and memory within a few short months. Rather, Visions are *processes*. They're means by which we, as a congregation, can think deliberately and seriously about the sort of church we are called to be and how it is therefore that we might grow to become that church.

By pure coincidence, the name of our Vision document itself — *St John's 2031* — is also when said aloud a biblical reference — John 20.31 — which is the very last verse in the gospels, and which reads as follows:

These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

At its heart, the vision we have written together as a church is precisely that: it has been written so that we and the world around us might come to believe in Jesus Christ, and that in doing so we might have life. Thank you again to all who have been part of writing this Vision, and my prayer for us all is that, in seeking to live it out and make it a reality, we might come to know Jesus Christ more deeply, have life in his name, and share this life with a world in desperate need.



FROM THE OPERATIONS MANAGER

HEADING SOUTH!

One of the fun parts of my role at St Johns is the wide variety of jobs that comes my way. Earlier this week was a good example as I had been trawling through emails dealing with numerous issues relating to energy consumption and the best ‘green’ energy solutions, updating trustee information with the Bank to satisfy some new governance they have in place and when walking through the church realised we have a problem!

In the south aisle we had noticed several tiles had cracked and a



dip in the floor was becoming evident. In investigating, we could also see the floor moving when any weight was applied - something was very wrong. We started by trying to access the area from underneath; sadly, however, this area of flooring was firmly encased behind the ceiling in the public toilets, so the only option was to lift the tiles in the south aisle.



Having lifted the tiles, we found it easy to see that the underfill of cement had also cracked, indicating a failure of the wooden substructure. We dug down and found that two planks had failed and were only supported at one end, which, if left, would have collapsed. We were able to clear the damage and insert a new section of joist to provide a secure base and then re-lay a new cement base. Once this had dried, the tiles were replaced the next day in time for the busy memorial service for Lord Campbell a few days later.



Further checks are underway for the early signs of any other areas failing where access is possible, and an endoscope deployed for those where it is harder to reach. As usual, a big thanks to the team for all the interesting jobs we take on and lastly, of course, to you for your support and understanding as we carry them out.

Iain Herbert

ANGLICAN ‘SAINTS’

This is the first of an occasional series in which David McNaughton looks at poets and philosophers in our tradition.

The Anglican Calendar includes a list of Holy Days on which we are invited to celebrate the lives of various Christians. The list is pleasingly diverse: as well as the Apostles, Mary, and other early Christians, along with church fathers and theologians, there are missionaries, martyrs, social reformers, mystics, poets, literary giants, and philosophers. (My source here is the Church of England Calendar. The list in the Episcopal Church of Scotland is noticeably different, particularly in omitting the poets and three major philosophers. All the more reason, one may think, for finding out more about them.)

My favourite among the poets in the C of E list is George Herbert (1593-1633). I had the good fortune to take my English A-level in a year when Herbert was the set ‘minor’ poet, and he has been my constant spiritual companion since. Herbert was born into a wealthy aristocratic family, related to the Earls of Pembroke. He was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, with the intention of becoming a priest. However, his prowess in Greek and Latin led to a fellowship and thence to an appointment as the University’s Public Orator. In 1624-5 he was an MP, and was noticed favourably by James VI and I. A glittering career awaited but he eventually chose to become a priest. After his marriage, in 1629, he was appointed rector to the rural parish of Fugglestone St. Peter with Bemerton, where he remained until his death four years later from tuberculosis. While at Bemerton he wrote a classic guide to his job entitled *The Country Parson, His Character and Rule of Holy Life* — a rule by which he appears to have lived. Izaak Walton (the author of *The Compleat Angler*) tells this anecdote. Herbert was an accomplished musician, who liked to play with an ensemble. One night he turned up late, dirty and dishevelled. It transpired that he had met a poor man whose horse had fallen under its heavy load. He had helped the man to reload, given him money, and told him to be kind to his horse. When a member of the gathering suggested that Herbert had demeaned himself thereby, he replied that the memory of what he had done would ‘prove music to him at midnight’. He continued:

I am bound ... to practice what I pray for. ... I would not willingly pass one day of my life without comforting a sad soul. ... And now let us tune our instruments.

Herbert's poems are often direct and simple; you will probably be familiar with some of them from the hymn book: 'Teach me my God and King', and 'Let all the world in every corner sing'. All his poems are on Christian themes, and some are very personal, describing the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus, my Master.

Herbert is often listed among the 'Metaphysical Poets', a group that included Donne and Marvell. They were fond of elaborate 'conceits', or extended metaphors. One such poem, 'Redemption', exploits parallels between Jesus's act of redemption on the cross and redeeming an onerous lease. But there is nothing obscure or strained in the poem.

I end with my favourite, a poem about the love of God.

Love (III)
by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":
 Love said, "You shall be he."

"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 "Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
 "My dear, then I will serve."

"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
 So I did sit and eat.



CORINTH — CRUCIFIXION



Crucifixion (study after the altarpiece at Tölz), 1921-2, drypoint on paper, 30x20.6cm, Scottish National Galleries.

I had never heard of Lovis Corinth until last month, when I visited the Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie in Regensburg. This unusual gallery was founded to explore and display the art of Germans living and working in Eastern Europe, although it has since expanded to encompass the art of the region more generally. Some of the artists displayed were known to me, like Käthe Kollwitz, but many were not, and certainly not Corinth, who gives his name to the gallery's annual art prize and has a few works, including this one, in our National Gallery of Scotland.

Born outside the city he would have called Königsberg in 1858, Corinth studied there before living and working across Europe. In 1898 he painted a Crucifixion scene for a Lutheran church in Bad Tölz, Bavaria. It's a monumental work, with life-size figures crowded into the picture plane, the bodies of the two thieves looming nightmarishly; the figure style is nonetheless fairly conventional.

Fifteen years later, Corinth was working from a new perspective. After a stroke in 1911, he became paralysed on his dominant left side, and with his wife's help had to re-learn how to draw and paint with his right hand. Not only this, the financial precarity of interwar Germany made securing commissions difficult. It was against this background that Corinth decided to reinterpret some of his existing works, including the Tölz altarpiece, as prints for publication: it is this rendition of the Crucifixion which is held by SNG.

After he became disabled, Corinth's work became much more expressionistic, and here it is an outpouring of grief. The faces of his figures are darkened by his dramatic pen strokes, moving almost exclusively from left to right. The composition is the same as in the original painting, but what was there explicitly described — facial expressions, the contorted position of limbs — is here instead implied and suggested. Corinth passed away in 1925, but not before demonstrating startling artistic development in the face of difficulty.

Christian Clarkson

OBITUARIES

Angela Horsfall



Angela's roots were in Yorkshire. She came from Ilkley and attended Queen Margaret's School — also the alma mater of Clephane Hume, Celia Dawson and Celia Curnow. Angela had the candour and straightforward good sense often found among natives of that county, but combined with overflowing good-will, kindness and a love of hospitality. She showed early talent for sport and played representative Lacrosse. She and her husband Linton had been faithful members of St John's for over 50 years. They were Prayer Book people and regular worshippers at the 9.30 Matins on Sunday.

Angela fitted a tremendous amount into her life, and the packed church for her funeral was a testament to the breadth of her interests and the scope of her friendships. In Trinity, she was a pillar of the community, and, living as she did opposite the Lomond Park Tennis and Bowls Club, she threw herself into its activities. Having played plenty of Tennis at school, she became a great asset on the courts at Lomond Park, where she later served as the first lady President. At a well-judged moment, she moved across to the more sedate milieu of the Bowls Club, and ended up as President of the Ladies there. Her firm ideas meant she was a natural leader.

Her other consuming interest was Bridge, and she could recall past hands in detail. An enthusiastic member of the St John's Wednesday Book Group, she often hosted meetings.

To make up for her earlier concentration on games, she decided late on to enrol with the Open University, reaching a successful conclusion after 8 years.

Angela was more than just a Trinity resident. Consciously or unconsciously, her generous instincts extended into a pastoral concern for Trinity neighbours, those who were St John's members and others as well.

Angela's marriage to Linton was a long and close one, and they reached their 60th Wedding Anniversary just at the time when sadly their plans were overtaken by Angela's last illness.

She will be greatly missed.

Robert Philp

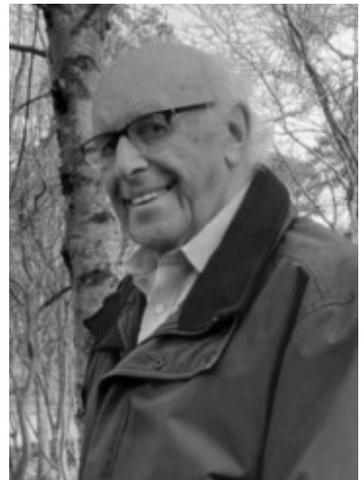
Ian Stevenson

Ian came to St John's in his teens, having first worshipped at St Mary's Cathedral and St Ninian's. In his schooldays he played the organ for assemblies and sang with the choir but remained as a pew-based singer thereafter, though music was always important to him.

He remained with us for the rest of his life, maintaining his interest in all things church for as long as he was able.

It will come as no surprise to hear that he was totally involved in all things of a social nature: indeed, he headed up our social group for many years, organising outings, our notable summer tea party and, of course, holidays. Quite how he came to go to all the choir parties when he wasn't a member is a question with an obvious answer!

Regular games of squash with our former Rector, outings with the walking group — he didn't gather dust and nor, of course, did his flat.



Holidays naturally drew on his love of travel — where did he not go? — and he led several legendary holidays, including to Egypt, the Holy Land and Turkey. When we had a pastor (Jaan Tammsalu) on sabbatical from Estonia, it was only natural that when he returned to his country, we should visit.

It was always going to be the last holiday, but when we returned the holy tabot to the people of Ethiopia, well, that had to be checked up on. A memorable journey! The finale was to Oberammergau in 2010.

Involved with the international committee and the one which set up our festival activities, including the now thriving craft fairs, Ian shared his expertise unstintingly.

Always ready to welcome people to the church on Sundays or during the week, Ian was a regular presence, whose faith was absolute.

His friendship and support were appreciated by many of us during times of loss or illness.

His father had died when Ian was a toddler and he remained with his mother until her death, so a lifetime of care for others.

And he had a career with Standard Life which extended into the Pensioners' Association, all beginning with a temporary job!

When glaucoma damaged his eyesight, he battled on, but age caught up with him physically and cognitively so that his last years were at Murrayside. 'The staff are kind and the food's not bad,' he assured me. And he had many faithful visitors. It was sad to see him a shadow of his former self, but the essence of Ian remained – 'lovely to see you' would be his greeting.

A loyal and faithful servant of St John's. Words such as courteous, genial, kind, a fine man have been circulating – well remembered by everyone.

Clephane Hume & Fiona McLuckie

FROM THE ARCHIVE

The BEGINNINGS of ST JOHN'S



The church pre-opening. Note planned tower.

The Scottish Episcopal Church had prospered in the 17th century, and by 1689 there was a Bishop in every Diocese in the country, with 600 clergy ministering to two-thirds of the population. Yet a century later it was all very different. There were a mere four Bishops, 40 priests and 5% of the population attending worship. During the Jacobite risings of 1689, 1715 and 1745 the Episcopal Church found itself identified with the Jacobite cause, and so became seen as disloyal to the current monarchy and proscribed, with just a few congregations tolerated if they had explicitly sworn allegiance to the Hanoverians. This lasted for much of the 18th century, but eventually in 1788 Bonnie Prince Charlie died, and much of the tension eased. In 1792 the penal laws against Episcopalians were finally repealed.

It was against this background that in the same year a young English parson, Daniel Sandford, arrived in Edinburgh to teach Greek. Two years later he opened a chapel for worship in a room in West Register Street, close to where the Café Royal now stands. As more and more people came, he raised funds to build the new Charlotte Chapel in Rose Street, which opened in May 1797. He now worked to bring together the congregations which had professed loyalty to the Crown and those who hadn't, and as the Episcopal Church revived and came together, he was consecrated Bishop of Edinburgh in 1806. By 1814 the Charlotte Chapel could no longer accommodate Sandford's congregation, and it was recognised that the centre of the city needed a new, full-sized Episcopal Church building. The initial plan was to

erect a large ‘mega-church’ in the city centre, at the foot of The Mound. Second thoughts suggested that this would just be too big, and Plan B was adopted: to build two churches at each end of the New Town — St Paul’s (St Paul’s and St. George’s) in York Place, and St John’s on the site of a market garden at the West End of Princes Street.

Gillespie Graham was appointed Architect, but felt the site was too narrow for two side-aisles. He was told they were ‘indispensable’, and the decision was taken to appoint William Burn (champion of the Neo-Gothic and at the start of his distinguished career) in his place. He set to work in 1816. The sight of building starting on the south side of Princes Street set alarm bells ringing among Princes Street residents. Their open vista to the south was already very precious to them, and they worried that this would kick off a spate of building ruining their unparalleled view over to the Old Town. In the same year they took up arms and obtained a private Act of Parliament to stop any further building along the south side. Today we are in their debt — the open space in the city centre of the city and the unparalleled vista southwards to the Old Town are unique elements in the cityscape.

Burn accepted that St John’s must have side aisles but was then told that the Church must be able to take 700, and should not be “square in the Presbyterian manner”, so he suddenly had to add an extra bay. He wanted the tower to stand out from its surroundings, so he designed a high, lantern-like, open-work crown to go on top of it. He had not, however, reckoned with the West End gales, and on 15th January 1818 the church was hit by a severe storm. The *Edinburgh Evening Courant* reported: “At half past four, the turrets and other ornaments upon the Tower of Bishop Sandford’s new chapel were blown down with dreadful force”. Sir Walter Scott wrote to Willie Laidlaw: “The Devil never so well deserved the title of Prince of the Power of the Air, since he has blown down this handsome church and left the ugly mass of new buildings standing on the North Bridge.” Sir Walter is catastrophizing a bit here, as it was only the crown that came down. It was never re-built, and this chance occurrence saved St John’s from a fanciful addition that would always have seemed gratuitous among its surroundings. A couple of months later, all was ready, and on Good Friday 1818 Bishop Sandford finally stepped up to welcome his congregation into their handsome new worshipping space, planned for so long. It would take 74 years to re-pay the initial loan, but a new community and a new landmark was born.

*Robert Philp
with acknowledgments to Leslie Hodgson & Eleanor Harris*

A LAYPERSON'S GUIDE TO ANGLICAN WORSHIP

PT.7: THE CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION

Why do we need to confess at every service, and be absolved? Why is Sin so important? Well, it is true that much of the Bible is dominated by it. Scarcely has the Bible begun when in the book of Genesis the idyllic scene in Eden is corrupted by the arrival of Sin on the scene via the sinister serpent. Mankind is tied to the capacity for Sin, inescapable and somehow inherent in humanity. In time this developed into an actual doctrine, the concept of Original Sin, - though not everybody was happy with the idea, and a monk called Pelagius had no time for it, as the old Drinking Song records:



Oh, he didn't believe in Adam and Eve,
He put no faith therein.
His doubts began with the Fall of Man
And he laughed at Original Sin.

Pelagius ended up being condemned as a heretic, and over many centuries Sin went on being seen as plainly against the will of God, but yet as inevitable. There was some confused thinking here, but the problem of Evil would not go away. As time went on, particularly after the Reformation, preachers often weighed in on the terrible things that could happen to you if you sinned. Their rhetoric didn't just refer to this life, but often looked forward into the afterlife, where they seemed to have an oddly detailed idea of what to expect. Potentially, hell fire awaits. Robert Burns had attended sermons like

this, as he tells us in his poem *The Holy Fair*. He had heard the Minister of Kilmarnock preach, whose ‘voice was like thunder’:

His piercing words, like Highland swords, divide the joints
and marrow.

His talk of Hell, where devils dwell, our very souls does
harrow, -

A vast, unbottomed, boundless pit, filled full of flaming
brimstone,

Whose raging flame and scorching heat would melt the
hardest whinstone.

There is in retrospect something disreputable about the practice of trying to frighten people into belief and good behaviour like this. Who was to tell whether their sins were or were not bad enough for the flames of hell? The desire to do something to stop it happening led to the concept of penance, something you could do to show how sorry you were. This idea had been around since Old Testament times, and we find the prophet Micah, for instance, reflecting the desperation of the sinner to atone for his crimes (6,7):

Shall I come before the Lord with burnt-offerings, with calves
a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten
thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my
body for the sin of my soul?

As the offers get increasingly more desperate and drastic, Micah’s answer is of course No. Just do the right thing: ‘Act justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.’

The New Testament has a different emphasis — that Christ died ‘for our sins’, and that though we can never by our own efforts free ourselves from the effects of sin, He has, in a way we cannot explain, achieved this freedom for us. St Paul gives this idea of Justification by Faith a comprehensive airing in the Epistle to the Romans. The idea was supported strongly in the Reformation, and the Protestant tradition since has upheld it, believing that it has to be God who forgives our sins, in the light of the death of Jesus. The Lord’s Prayer confirms this with the caveat that we should make sure

to forgive anyone who sins against us. Meanwhile the custom of formal Confession to a priest has lingered on in the Roman Catholic Church in the whispered unburdening of a guilty conscience in the privacy of the Confessional. Those agonised by guilt appreciate the explicit absolution it brings, with perhaps a penance to follow. Anglican priests have not, by contrast, normally burdened their clergy with the awesome responsibility of lifting the burden of guilt off them. In the Anglican prayer book, the faithful have for centuries repeated “We have erred and strayed like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, and there is no health in us.” and heard the comforting words of the Absolution. Today Sin has a much lower profile in our culture, and this part of the Eucharist, Matins or Evensong is less emotional and less specific, but none the less it is a crucial part of the Anglican service.



***SPONSOR
WELCOME
SPACE SOUP!***

St John's members have been asked to sponsor soup for Monday's Welcome Space. It costs £30 to supply soup from the Red Cockerel to feed the many guests who come to St John's on Mondays. There has been a generous response so far, but contributions are still needed. They may be sent by cheque, bank transfer, online portal or cash in the envelopes in pews, clearly marked SOUP.

PEN PORTRAITS

Kate Laughland

My parents, Jan and David Hill, met at St John's and their marriage was blessed in the church. I was baptised in the church and grew up attending St John's with my family, normally arriving by bicycle. I have fond memories particularly of the Nativity play performed annually by the Sunday School where I was often a narrator.

For my last two years at school I went to a boarding school in Perthshire and the daily chapel services (except Saturday) were comfortingly familiar. I met my now husband, Russell, during my first weekend at the school, and it was very special to get married in the school chapel 12 years later.

After school I moved to Belfast to study medicine at Queen's University. I returned to join Russell in Edinburgh for my Foundation training in 2010, and we made the big move to the North of the city together.

After qualifying as a GP, I spent several years working in palliative care at St Columba's Hospice before more recently returning to General Practice. I used to go to St John's to see my parents but now they have moved to Kinross, they come to St John's to see me, or at least my children, Logan (7), Olivia (5) and Eilidh (3). It is a real joy for us to be part of St John's and wonderful to be part of the children's ministry.



Susanna Kerr

My parents met during World War 2 in Cairo. I was born soon after their return to London, where they set up house in a pretty street in Twickenham. Schools in Richmond and Hampton followed until university in Edinburgh where I read history.



At university, I met Andrew Kerr, who had switched from science to studying for a post graduate degree in law. We married in the beautiful St Mary's Church, Twickenham by the river Thames.

Back in Edinburgh, we moved to a flat, followed by a house, in the centre of the town.

My father was Scottish and had been brought up in North Berwick, so when he retired from the Civil Service my parents moved back to East Lothian.

I was a Senior Curator at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery for eight years. After retirement, I continued lecturing for the National Galleries of Scotland Education Department. I then became a free-lance lecturer with a special interest in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scottish portraiture.

I am now completely retired and very much enjoying all the things retired people do, such as book clubs and singing in choirs!

MY FAVOURITE HYMN

Ann Reid describes her favourite hymn. Not many of us can claim to have known the author of a hymn!

One of my favourite hymns is “Tell out, my soul” by the late Timothy Dudley-Smith. It is quite short but very much to the point: “proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight, the hungry fed, the humble lifted high...”

I met him many years ago when I was Secretary to the Bishop of Rochester, Christopher Chavasse. Timothy used my office in Bishops Court as his robing room when he came to take part in services at the Cathedral. He himself became a bishop and wrote numbers of hymns. He died only two years ago.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word –
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same –
his holy name: the Lord, the Mighty One.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure:
tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children’s children and for evermore!

Ann Reid

JEEPS FOR PEACE

It started with a little boy giving Dominique Harris a small plastic Peppa Pig. Dominique had just driven the child, his mother and siblings from the Ukrainian border to safety in Germany in the early days of the war following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To keep the children calm on that long, anxious journey, he sang songs as the miles slipped by. The toy was the only possession the boy had managed to bring. Yet, in an act of astonishing generosity amid fear and upheaval, he pressed it into Dominique's hand.

Dominique was rocked to the core. In the midst of chaos and loss, a child who had nothing still found the spirit to give. That simple gesture became a turning point. If that little boy could give away everything he had, Dominique felt he could do more.

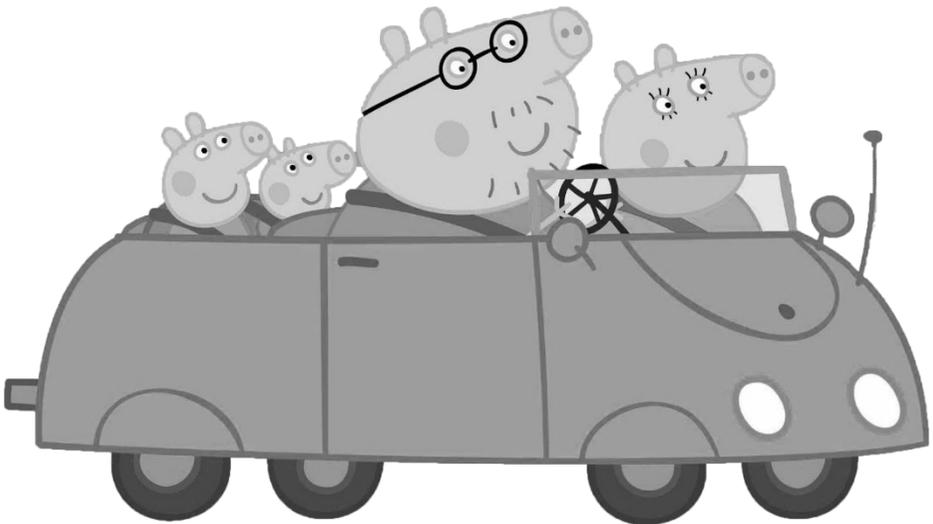
Within months, resolve had turned into action. He cajoled, persuaded and rallied an international group of friends to volunteer for a bold mission: to drive SUVs into Ukraine to fill urgent gaps in humanitarian aid near the front line. Reliable vehicles were desperately needed to evacuate civilians, carry the wounded to medical care and deliver essential supplies where larger convoys could not reach.

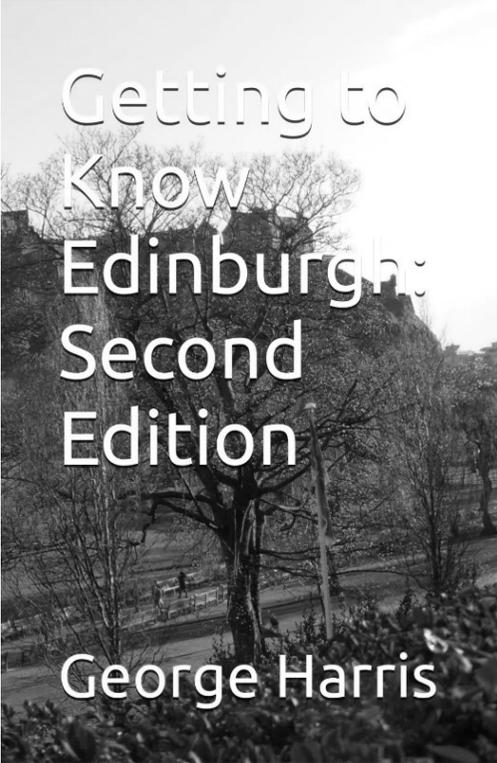
Thanks to the generosity of friends and family — especially the St John's Walking Group — the plan became reality. Donations funded sturdy, ageing four-wheel drives sourced from across Scotland, some rescued from farmers' sheds where they were rusting. Each was repaired, checked and loaded with vital supplies.

On a bitterly cold morning in December 2022, Marcus, the Rector of St John’s, gathered us before departure to bless the drivers and the vehicles that would carry us thousands of miles east. It was a simple but deeply moving moment. The ten of us then set off, armed with fierce determination — to get the vehicles there, to help save lives at the front, and to return safely.

Fast forward to 2026. The war continues — and so do we. As I write, 750 “Jeeps for Peace” vehicles have been delivered. Each traces back to that small plastic Peppa Pig, a child’s extraordinary kindness sparking a quiet, determined effort to answer generosity with action.

*Sarah Ryan-Frost
Copyright, February 2026*





Getting to
Know
Edinburgh:
Second
Edition

George Harris

GETTING TO KNOW EDINBURGH — A REVIEW

“Getting to Know Edinburgh: Second Edition” by George Harris. Amazon paperback: £8.50. Amazon Kindle: £3.00 (also available free on Kindle Unlimited). Direct from George Harris: £8.00.

This is a revised edition of George Harris’s guide to the City of Edinburgh. It consists of 10 walking routes, taking the reader through different areas of the city. Each route is covered in great detail with descriptions of all to be seen and providing historical information. Route One, for example, includes the National Gallery and descriptions of many of the paintings. A sketch map is provided for each walk. The book includes an incredible amount of information; in particular, George’s historical knowledge provides a great understanding of the city. The reader would probably want to read about each route before setting out and perhaps underline the directions before starting as they can seem hidden in the text — putting these in bold or a different type would be a useful addition as would an index and page numbers. The book certainly lives up to its title — the reader will definitely get to know about Edinburgh.

Anne Martin

“SERVICE WITH A SMILE”

by DES

“What is the matter with telling the truth with a smile?”

—Desiderius Erasmus to Martin Dorp, 1515

Dear DES,

Did you stay awake during the Ehipany [*sic*] Carol Service? I did. I wonder if the odours of Edom and the Assyrian odours are the same stuff. Would you get searched at customs if a sniffer dog found them?

Lots of love,
Pittie Slop (Colinton)



DORP: As I recall you have greeted each new bishop with some frivolous rubbish. Can it be that you have grown older and wiser?

DES: Since you have reminded me, and my motto is Encomium Moriae, here is a limerick.

We have a new bishop elect.
She’s reputed to have no defect.
The Right Reverend Daggers
Fled north to chase Baggers.
Please treat her with proper respect.

DORP: Your readers may be unaware that Encomium Moriae is rendered in English as “Praise of Folly”.

Dear DES,

I would be interested to hear your views on the Church of England's decision to forbid same-sex blessings, never mind marriages. You have often commented on such matters in the past.

Yours,
Liberal Boomer

DES: All I can say in reply to this is “words fail me”. I see the Archbishop of York used the phrase “intellectual slippage”, a phrase which does some heavy lifting. I note also that blessings are not forbidden (probably theologically impossible) but “ceremonies”, which might be a get-out. I also wonder whether this ruling explains why so many priests ordained in England (naming no names) end up in Scotland.

The Not Very Rev'd Parkin Sliphod (Platitudinarian): I am a bit concerned, perhaps, that you are straying from, er, bland light-hearted stuff to serious commentary.

DES: There is a poem by W. H. Auden called “I have no gun, but I can spit”.

Dear DES

While tidying the choir stalls the other day, I noticed that their Hymn Books are designed for “Refreshing Worship”. I am recommending plans for a mixed sauna in the crypt.

Yours,
Trendsetter (Vestryperson)

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St John's mural was unveiled on 1 March to honour the thousand of lives lost during protests earlier this year. It was created by Greg Mitchell and Iranian artist Farnaz Mohsenpour.

