

TIDINGS



Banstead United Reformed Church
Winter 2024



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Our minister's message

As our first icy days arrive, I have been reflecting on these first few months as your new minister in the North Downs Surrey Pastorate. It has been a joy to settle into a new place, share your stories and worship, and begin journeying together in faith.

Winter is often seen as a season of endings, but nature shows us that it is much more a time of adaptation and preparation. Birds fly away to warmer climates, animals grow warmer coats or shelter in cosy places, and trees shed their leaves to conserve energy. The beginning of winter is a time when nature seems to settle into stillness. I wonder how we, too, respond to the changes of the season. Is there such a thing as a wintering time in our faith, a time to rest into a slower pattern of life and renewed prayer?

This is the spirit of Advent, a season that perfectly mirrors winter. During Advent, we wait, watch and look forward to the light of Christ promising to break into our world. This waiting is not a lost time, but full of promise. The trees may seem bare and still, but their roots are busy reaching deeper into the soil, gathering strength for the spring. Animals rest or hibernate, conserving energy for the new life to come. Similarly, in our lives, winter can be a time when God works within us, deepening our faith and preparing and nurturing us.

There is a spirituality to wintering and to waiting. The scriptures are full of moments of waiting with anticipation. The psalmist says, *'I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.'* Jesus is the one we await, the one who serves others and inspires us to serve. And our waiting during this wintertime is active and creative, even when it is still. A discipline of prayer is so often the anchor of mission and service to others.

So, as we journey through these weeks of Advent, as we winter, I hope we can embrace waiting—on, for, and with the gift of Christ.

As part of our Advent reflections this year, we are reflecting together on the book *Do Not Be Afraid* by Rachel Mann – all about

waiting, patiently, creatively, with stillness and anticipation, for the coming of Jesus.

So, as we get busy in December—shopping, decorating, and preparing for Christmas—I hope we remember the invitation to winter. To find stillness in waiting, to allow our roots to grow deeper in prayer. As we light the candles of the Advent wreath week by week, I hope they remind us of the gifts Christ brings: hope, peace, joy, and love. These are the steady, unchanging truths of our faith, worthy of taking time to settle into.

This will be my first Christmas within the pastorate as your minister, and I look forward to celebrating together. May the promise of Emmanuel—God with us—bring warmth to all, and may Christ's light shine brightly in our community and beyond.

Wishing you a peaceful and blessed Advent and Christmas,

Siobhán

Favourite parts of Christmas—David Skitt

Late evening—Christmas Eve

I enter home, most tasks done. I am assaulted by excited fun, family stories. My being washed over by a calm and a deeply-breathed sigh, yet stirred by anticipation of joys to come and of the glow of the nativity story in word and carol. A feeling of having done all I can – now just enjoy! All brought together by a luxurious soaking bath and a change of clothes ahead of the late-night service. And just in case you are wonderingI do have baths on other days as well!



FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the winter 2024 edition of *Tidings*. As we said in the previous edition, we were sure that there were some more 'best days' out there and we were happy to be proved right with contributions from Madeline, Fiona and Ian.

For this edition we asked you to tell us about your favourite parts of Christmas and we are delighted to include your responses on the pages that follow. One of the highlights of Christmas at Banstead URC is our annual service of carols by candlelight on Christmas Eve. Although it has long been a tradition to hold a candlelit carol service in our Church, it may interest readers to know that it wasn't always held on Christmas Eve. In the early years it was held on the Sunday after Christmas and this was then changed to the Sunday before Christmas. In common with many churches, we used to hold a midnight communion service on Christmas Eve. With attendances at both services in decline, the elders decided to move the carol service to Christmas Eve and to discontinue the midnight communion service. The change in 1994 was an instant success with the happy problem of accommodating the large numbers that came to attend the service with many standing at the back of the Church. This year will be the 30th anniversary of the change.

Our friend and Church member Anne Bestente died on 2 October and we include an account of her life in our Church family news.

Eric Riley is the latest member to feature in our 'know your Church member' series. Eric's article is illustrated with two of his paintings. One shows his late wife Joan walking in a country lane and the other is a view of a walking trail in the French Alps.

We also include articles on a range of subjects including Hanukkah, Christina Rossetti, a visit to Salzburg and Christmas robins.

Fiona, Diana and Cliff

Church Family News

In memoriam—Anne Bestente



Anne Bestente died on 2 October and her thanksgiving service was held at our Church 17 November. The following account of her life is based on the eulogy given by her daughter Hannah at the service.

Hannah shared memories and stories of Anne that were particularly special to her and to her sister Alison, beginning with the early introduction of baking into their lives. Homemade cakes and biscuits were regularly cooling on the kitchen counter and were always on hand to go with a cup of tea. Hannah received her own copy of Delia Smith's Complete Cookery Course at just 16 years old.

Anne was fiercely proud of her Scottish heritage. She was born in 1937, and grew up on the Isle of Islay although she was schooled on the mainland. She passed this love of her heritage on to Alison and Hannah. Anne and both girls had the ribbon of the 100 year old Clark tartan in their wedding bouquets and it was also used in Anne's funeral flowers. The family spent happy holidays on Islay. Anne was not impressed that Hannah chose to go to university on the East Coast of Scotland and not the West!

Keen to share her Scottish roots, Anne hosted a traditional Burns Night supper at our church's Evening Club, with haggis firmly on the menu. Hannah feels she was tricked into eating haggis when her mother substituted it for the filling in her favourite homemade beef mince pie – but she has loved it ever since.

Glasgow was where Anne began her career, both as a district nurse and a midwife - and she had a reputation for telling anxious fathers to 'get out of the way' in a firm manner. Her nursing career brought her to London but she had no plans to stay down south – until she met Arthur, when she was a bridesmaid at a wedding where he was best man. She was to remain in England, although Arthur was never allowed to forget the importance of Scotland. His work took them to Putney, Worcester, Sutton Coldfield and Redhill before settling in Banstead.

Anne always had others in mind and was very supportive of family and friends who were ill or needed support, visiting them in hospital, popping round for a chat or sending Arthur out to give practical help. However, the nurse in her sometimes made her less sympathetic to days off school for her own girls.

Her faith was a huge part of Anne's life and Banstead URC holds many positive memories for Alison and Hannah. Anne inscribed the same poem (which was read at her Thanksgiving service) in the front of all her bibles, a poem telling of God's strength and support through difficult times and showing Anne's deep faith in all areas of her life. This faith must have been especially important to Anne on the death of her infant son, John. For small or large life events Anne would say 'we'll just say a wee prayer' as she was sure that asking God's help was the best starting point.

Anne played a full part in the life of our church over many years, helping with teas and coffees, organising the flower rota and decorating the church for Easter and Christmas, cleaning the communion silver, making her famous biscuits and much more. She will be remembered for her deep Christian faith and her care and support for those around her.

The poem inscribed in Anne's Bibles and read at her thanksgiving service:

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labour, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

Annie Johnson Flint

Margaret Phillips

Margaret Phillips, a member of our Church since 1996, sadly died on 18 November. We send our condolences to Kate, Stephen and all her family. We will include more details of Margaret's life in the next edition of *Tidings*.

New arrival



We are delighted to announce the arrival of Thea Florence Heritage, born 21 November to Jenny and Fran, a first grandchild for Cliff.

Many congratulations to the whole family.

Membership



We were delighted to welcome Marion Woodward into membership of our Church on Sunday 6th October. Marion transferred her membership from St Andrew's Church, Cheam where she had been a member for over 40 years. Marion was involved with numerous activities at St Andrew's over the years and for the past 23 years has been the editor of its monthly magazine. She would like to thank everyone in our Church for the warm welcome that she has received.

Favourite parts of Christmas—Beverley Kent

My favourite parts of Christmas include:

- putting up the decorations. It's great to see the house looking different and I particularly like putting up fairy lights as they help to shut out the winter evenings - in recent years I have left them up until the end of February!
- watching the faces of the people opening the presents I have bought, especially the children;
- eating food that you only eat at Christmas- I love turkey, sausage-meat stuffing and all the vegetables, and
- spending time with family and playing games.

Ruth Williams' 90th birthday



We congratulate Ruth Williams on reaching the age of 90 on 24 September. We celebrated her birthday after Church on 6 October, when she provided us with drinks and cake.

Alan Kirby led the Church family in congratulating Ruth on reaching this milestone. He said that he couldn't believe that it was 10 years ago that we all gathered to celebrate her 80th

birthday. However, since as we all know 90 is the new 80 then nothing has changed! Alan remarked on the fact that there is one exception to this and that is the huge leaps in technology that we have witnessed over the past 10 years. He also emphasised the important role that Ruth continues to play in the life of our Church, greeting everyone with the lovely smile that she has and always having a cheery word to say. And, he asked, without Ruth would we have anyone to read the Bible on a Sunday morning? Alan concluded by offering the sincerest best wishes on behalf of us all and proposing a toast to a dear friend.

Alan then asked Ruth to say a few words, and she did so as follows:

'I came to this church in the early 1970's and very soon became absorbed into its rather special blend of warmth and friendliness – which I think still marks it out today. Fairly soon, I'm not quite sure why, I was on the Finance Committee chaired by Joe Houghton. At one meeting, I do remember having the temerity to suggest the collection plate, then taken up each Sunday by four men, could perhaps have women added into the rota. It happened! – maybe because it was difficult to find an argument against!

In due course I became an elder – so rewarding as you really get to know people and how the church works. My career was in

personnel management with Unilever which I enjoyed but was glad to take early retirement. When I knew this was a possibility, I can remember praying that if this came about, I must do something worthwhile with my life – and of course becoming Church Secretary was just right. The trick with this is to have the right minister and really who could be better than Jennifer Millington? I remember so well Alastair Dykes, who was our Interim Moderator, and me interviewing her and knowing we were on to a winner. Not only did we have outstanding services, but she was good pastorally and well organised. She was also very musical and as things developed this was really helpful. Jennifer and I enjoyed our monthly meetings and became good friends – and indeed still are today.



After retiring as Church Secretary, I organised pulpit supply, took my turn on the sound desk and now I just arrange the weekly readers for services.

I could finish here but it omits one facet of church life which gave me much joy – and that was the choir. It was my club – I liked it because it was mixed in ages and gender and in Brenda Houghton we had the supreme leader. She taught us so much and we had fun. Our first anthem was Wesley's 'Lead me Lord' and we progressed through all sorts

of musical varieties to the Rhythm of Life. Fortunately, by then, Ian was on the scene, so we do have some splendid recordings.

It just remains for me to thank you for being here and for the different contributions everyone makes to the well-being of this church.'

The moderator's Christmas letter



As we enter the beautiful season of Advent, we are reminded of Mary's song in the Gospel of Luke, often called the Magnificat. Mary's song of praise reminds us of the joy and hope that comes from faith in God's promises.

In her moment of awe, Mary proclaims, 'My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' These words echo through the ages, inviting us to reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation. Mary's song is both deeply personal and universally hopeful. It reflects her humility and gratitude to God, who chose her to bear His Son, Jesus.

This Christmas, let us join Mary in glorifying the Lord for the gift of Jesus, who brings light into our darkness and hope into our despair. Mary's hymn also calls us to recognise the transformative power of God's love. She sings of the mighty being scattered, the proud being brought low, and the humble being filled with good things. In a world often marked by division and strife, we are reminded that God's kingdom upends worldly values and lifts up the marginalised.

As we celebrate Christ's birth, let us embody this spirit of humility and service in our Church and community. Additionally, the Magnificat encourages us to remember God's faithfulness throughout all generations. Just as God fulfilled His promise to Mary, we can trust that God is at work in our lives today.

In this season, let us share the good news of God's love and grace

with those around us, being containers of hope and joy. As we gather for worship and fellowship in the coming Advent weeks, may our hearts be filled with gratitude and our spirits renewed. Let us celebrate the miracle of Christmas together, proclaiming with Mary the greatness of our God.

Thank you to all who participate in the life and witness of God's church. We are the visible face of Christ.

Wishing you all a blessed and joyous Christmas.

Bridget

Moderator for Southern Synod

United Reformed Church

Favourite parts of Christmas—Fiona Lynch

As a child I was always excited when it was time to put up the decorations. The most nervous moment was when my Dad took the string of Woolworths' lights out of their box, where they'd been carefully stowed away the previous year, tightened up the bulbs and then did the big switch on test. Will they light up or not? I loved it when we'd turn off the lights and sit there by the warmth of a real fire, with the twinkling tree lights, watching the Christmas specials, such as Morecombe and Wise or the Two Ronnies.

I also loved opening my advent calendar. Not one with chocolates in like they have today. I always chose one with glitter on it and was always excited to open the 24th window that always had the nativity scene behind it.

As an adult, I love the day I write my Christmas cards and wrap the presents. I choose a day when my husband is off to Manchester to watch his team play football. I settle down with all the sellotape, scissors and paper around me and binge watch Christmas films all day. It really gets me into the Christmas spirit.

Know your Church member

Eric Riley



Eric Riley is one of our longest serving members having been admitted to membership by Revd Eric Allen in 1966.

Eric was born in Shirley in 1932. His father was an electrician working in a factory in Thornton Heath making hypodermic syringes and needles, so soon after Eric's birth the family moved to Thornton Heath to be near his father's work.

Three years later, Eric's sister Rita was born. Eric started school in Thornton Heath, but in 1939 the family moved to Woodmansterne, so he started attending Woodmansterne School, moving to Chipstead Valley School aged 11.

In common with many people who lived through the war, Eric's family life was greatly disrupted by the war. They were bombed out of their home in Woodmansterne and Chipstead Valley School also suffered damage from a flying bomb, so Eric and his sister were evacuated with a neighbour and her two boys to Abertridwr, a mining village near Caerphilly in South Wales. Eric's mother and father remained behind because the factory in which his father worked was essential for the war effort, so he had a reserved occupation. Eric attended Cwm Aber school till just before the end of the war when he had to return home for an emergency tonsillectomy. Following his recovery, he was able to resume his schooling at Chipstead Valley school. After

the war, Eric's father left his mother, leaving her on her own to look after the children, so the family moved in with his mother's parents in Sutton. Eric passed his exams to go to Wimbledon Junior Technical College (WJTC), travelling there from Sutton on a daily basis.

On completion of his studies at WJTC, Eric obtained an apprenticeship at the GPO in the engineering department, based in Wimbledon. Eric's call-up for national service was delayed by 6 months to allow him to complete his apprenticeship. After undergoing his basic training at Catterick, he was allocated to the signals regiment, which made sense given his background in telecommunications. He requested a home posting, due to his mother's poor health, but this was completely ignored, and he was posted to Singapore, which was then part of Malaya. At that time, Britain was fighting a guerrilla war against communist insurgents, which came to be known as the Malayan emergency. There was no long-haul air transport in those days, so Eric travelled to Singapore aboard a troop ship called the Empire Pride. It was not the most comfortable trip as there were no beds and they had to sleep in hammocks.

On arrival in Singapore the troops were not allowed to disembark immediately because there was an outbreak of illness on the ship which was initially feared to be smallpox but was eventually confirmed as chicken pox. On finally disembarking, Eric was posted to the signals regiment transmitter station in Singapore, a station that had been taken over from the Japanese at the end of the war, and he was responsible for the operation and maintenance of two large short-wave transmitters with 70ft high aerials! One of the major problems with short-wave radio is that transmission is best done at night-time, so that meant a lot of night shifts. With the Korean War going on at the time, there was a lot of radio traffic with Korea and Australia as well as regular communications with London. Although National Service was originally meant to be for 18 months, the advent of the Korean War meant that for Eric this was extended to two years. At the

conclusion of his two years, Eric's return sea journey was more comfortable in that he actually had a bed to sleep in!

On his return to the UK, Eric resumed his career with the Post Office. Initially he worked in telephone exchange construction and maintenance and during this period he spent some time at the Burgh Heath exchange, which was then located in Diceland Road. He later moved to the Post Office telegraph development office in Aldersgate, where he was engaged in trying out new equipment.

After a few years at the Post Office, Eric decided it was time to move on in his career and he joined a contact at Sutton Congregational Church who was setting up an electrical development laboratory in Chertsey which was engaged in developing electrical circuits for aircraft and missiles. Although he enjoyed the work, he found the daily commute quite demanding, and when he was offered a job at a laboratory at Mullards at Mitcham, part of Philips, the Dutch multinational group, he jumped at the chance. His work there involved designing electrical components for controlling domestic appliances. He remained with Mullards for the remainder of his career.

When Eric returned from National Service, he moved back into the family home in Sutton. His mother had applied for council housing and eventually the family was allocated a house at Tattenham Corner. On a shopping trip to Sutton, Eric bumped into a girl called Joan that he had known from his days attending the Youth Fellowship at Sutton Congregational Church in his teens. He and Joan went for a coffee and, from that, romance blossomed and they were married in 1965. They set up home in Coulsdon, initially in Westleigh Avenue and then Richmond Road. Their son Stephen was born in 1968 followed by their daughter Georgina in 1970. Eric moved to his present house in Rickman Hill Road in 1983. Eric is a widower as, sadly, Joan died in 2017.

Eric has remained loyal to the United Reformed (previously Congregational) Church all his life. In his youth, he attended Sutton Congregational Church which had a thriving youth fellowship and Eric was an active and enthusiastic member. On moving to

Tattenham Corner, he worshipped at Epsom Congregational Church as it was easier to travel to. Then, after his marriage, both he and Joan joined our Church. Eric enjoyed the link with Ludwigshafen and took part in a couple of Church visits there. On one of those he went by car, driving Tony Groom's car (Tony was our minister at the time) as Tony didn't fancy the driving. More recently, Eric joined us on a visit to our friends in Dessau. Eric is a non-serving elder, having served two terms in the 1970s. He was also a regular member of our Men's Group which ran up to the 1980s.

In 1957, Eric became very ill, losing two and a half stones in weight. Eventually, he was diagnosed as having type-1 diabetes, and this is a condition that has subsequently required careful management, including insulin injections and keeping detailed records of diet and blood sugar levels.



Eric has always enjoyed painting. When he lived in Sutton, he attended oil painting classes at Sutton Art School. On moving to Coulsdon, he started attending watercolour classes, something he did for many years, and that became his preferred medium. He also belonged to a local Art Group. During his time at Mullards, the company ran a

very active social club which Eric found very beneficial. In particular, the club ran a country walking group and Eric very much enjoyed walking with them. This love of walking also extended to holidays, and Eric and Joan enjoyed many walking holidays including walking in the French Alps. Eric is also a keen gardener.



And finally, one thing you probably don't know about Eric. If you purchased a British made washing machine in the 1970s or 1980s, it almost certainly contained an electrical controller designed by Eric!

Christmas Robins



Everyone loves a robin, but why are they on the front of so many Christmas cards? It probably arises from the fact that postmen in Victorian Britain wore red jackets and were nicknamed 'Robins', so the robin featured on the Christmas card is an emblem of the postman delivering the card. In 1861, the postmen's uniform was changed to blue, but red has remained as the traditional colour of the Royal Mail, reflected in its vans and post boxes.

However, there are several legends that actually link the robin to the Christmas story. One of these is that Mother Mary was worried baby Jesus would get cold as the embers were dying in the fire. The other animals didn't help but a plain, brown coloured robin assisted by flapping his wings so the embers glowed again. He then picked up some dry sticks and tossed them into the fire, however, as he did so a flame suddenly burst forth and burned the little bird's breast a bright red. Mary praised the robin for all he had done, saying 'From now on, let your red breast be a blessed reminder of your noble deed. You will be known throughout the universe as the messenger of the Christ child, the true herald of Christmas...and you will be part of the message of Christmas until the end of time and will always be known as the Christmas Robin'.

Interesting robin facts:

- National Robin Day in the UK is on Saturday 21st December.
- Males and females are similar in colouration.

- Nearly 75% of robins will die before they are a year old.
- Male robins exhibit highly aggressive territorial behaviour, many ending in fatalities.
- In the 15th century, the bird became known as robin redbreast, (rather than just redbreast), when it was popular to give human names to familiar species.
- Some sports organisations are nicknamed ‘The Robins’, typically teams whose home colours predominantly use red.
- Due to artificial lighting, robins will often sing at night.
- The robin has twice been declared Britain’s national bird, the first time in 1960 and the second in 2015, but it’s not yet been made official.
- There is an increase in robin numbers during the winter months with migrants from Scandinavia, Russia and Europe joining resident birds when the winters become too cold and food scarce in those places.

Favourite parts of Christmas—Tweeny

I used to be responsible for arranging the Christmas meal when my family was young. Now I leave it to the younger members of the family.

We always have a ‘Secret Santa’ present where we each buy a present (a pre-arranged cost) and we take it in turns to take a present. We play a game using a dice and if you get a 6 you can snatch someone else’s present instead of the one you have. Quite exciting!

Favourite parts of Christmas—John and Olive Fannin

The best part of Christmas for us is all the family getting together for Christmas dinner and opening presents and playing games after. John has added that Olive has loved making Christmas pudding and stuffing for the turkey for over 50 years—but Olive is unavailable for comment!

Best days—Ian Catt

In the early 90's, I was in a band managed by an agent called Mo, who specialised in providing musicians for music videos. One day she called me and said, 'Robert Palmer is making a film to promote his new album and I'm putting you up for it'.



Palmer had been hugely successful in the 80's with hits like 'Addicted to Love', (promoted by videos featuring a 'backing band' of glamorous fashion models who clearly couldn't play the instruments they were holding); he was so successful, in fact, that by this time he could record pretty much anything he wanted to, knowing his record label, EMI, would release it.

'Great', I said. 'What kind of music is it?'

'It's an album of American songbook jazz standards – 'Honeysuckle Rose', 'Witchcraft', that kind of thing' - full orchestra, big budget, ten day shoot – you'll be playing guitar'.

'But Mo, you know I play BASS guitar – and I don't do jazz..... I don't really understand it and I certainly can't play it'.

'But you do play *some* guitar, right? And it's not actually playing - just miming for a film - they'll only want you for the way you look anyway.....'

Unconvinced, but needing the work having just taken on a hefty mortgage, I went to the audition and bluffed my way through 'People Will Say We're In Love', surrounded by members of the LSO and RPO, feeling totally out of my depth, waiting all the while for the tap on my shoulder that meant 'game's up sonny, get your

coat...' – but the tap never came and to my great surprise, Mo was proven right and I got the job. I was given the sheet music for the album and went home feeling very relieved, looking forward to a new experience and two weeks of well-paid work. But that wasn't the special day...

Once home, I looked over the music – which was all rhythm guitar parts, full of unfamiliar and complicated jazz chords; but chords are easy to bluff, I told myself - only another guitarist is going to know if I'm playing the wrong ones as long as I just strum in time.... Which was fine, until I came to a song called 'Not A Word', which had a 24-bar guitar solo, the only notation for which was the phrase 'ad lib' written in each bar.... 24 BARS! And of course, it wasn't *really* 'ad lib' - I had to copy what had already been recorded. I am *not* a soloist, and it's impossible to bluff a guitar solo to a camera only six inches away - if you're playing the wrong notes, it's very obvious. So, I propped the music up on a pile of unopened mover's boxes in our new flat and set about transcribing it from the record, note for note, bar for bar - and then learning to play it, which was the only way to mime it convincingly. So that was definitely *not* the special day either.... (for 'day' read 'weekend' - and most of Monday as well).

... And so to my first day on a film set, which was a disused Marks & Spencer warehouse in west London, converted to look like a nightclub. After the initial nerves wore off, I started to enjoy the experience; watching the film crew at work was fascinating, the catering was excellent, and Mr. Palmer was very urbane and unpretentious. But as the day went on, I became increasingly anxious that the following day I would be playing 'the solo' sitting only two feet behind him. My anxiety wasn't helped by overhearing the director grumbling to the producer about wanting to sack the pianist for not knowing his parts well enough – any time he was in a close-up his movements hadn't matched the music, thus ruining the shot.

Anyway, the following day I donned my rented tuxedo, took my position behind the star and 'Not A Word' was played over the

sound system. The orchestra played, the cameras rolled and I played 'the solo' and nailed it - absolutely perfect, note for note, including a really tricky bit in the middle, prompting Mr. Palmer, no mean guitarist himself, to yell 'Yeah!' and turn round to me with a big grin – a nice moment. So, THAT was the special day. At the 'wrap party' on the last day, he thanked me for conscientiously learning the whole 24 bars, as they would probably only use a few bars of it in the final cut of the film; I wasn't about to tell him that it was down to naivety and fear, not conscientiousness!

When I think of it now, I'm amused at the irony - that enforced 'crash course' of intensive learning and practising – just to be able to *mime* convincingly – actually made me a much better player and the records I made immediately afterwards contain some of my best playing.

The film wasn't a big success and the video has been unavailable for a long time, but there are clips on Youtube – so you can see my big moment half-way through the clip [HERE](#) (or if you're reading this in the paper edition, try searching for 'Not a Word Robert Palmer' and find the version on 80s 90s videos remastered).

I did another video with him the following year, which was the last time I met him. Sadly he died in 2003, suddenly and much too early, at the age of 54.



Favourite parts of Christmas—Fiona Gayner



One of the parts of Christmas I like most is decorating the tree. I always have a real one and from bitter experience I have learnt to take the tree stand with me when I buy it, remembering one year when we had to try to shave bits off the bottom of the tree with a carving knife to make it fit. A lengthy and dangerous procedure I wouldn't recommend.

I put on a Christmas CD and love rediscovering the treasured decorations which come out every year, bringing memories of people and places. A little red pottery angel from Riga; cross stitch and bead decorations made by the ladies of the Presbyterian Women's Association at St Andrew's church in Bermuda and a little Bermuda Moongate decoration they gave me when we came back to England; a striking bauble from a Christmas Market in Krakow. On a teacher visit to a school in Denmark my Mum's hostess made decorations on the bus to school, delicate window scenes, miraculously cut with precision on the bus (and after a breakfast which always seemed to include a nip of schnapps to keep out the cold!) This year I have a new addition for the tree from a friend just back from Australia – a small festively decorated wooden Christmas wombat. Must have been a late arrival at the Nativity ...

Hanukkah



Every year, in November and/or December, Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah, which is often called the Festival of Light.

This Hebrew word means ‘dedication’ and the festival actually commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem and second dedication of the holy temple in Jerusalem, some two hundred years or so before the crucifixion of Jesus.

Hanukkah lasts for eight days and this year it will start on the 25th December and so both Christians and Jews will be celebrating an important but different religious event at the same time.

The event which occurred and forms the basis for the celebration is reasonably clear. The occupying power under the Assyrian-Greek King, Antiochus 1, had banned all Jewish religious practices, including observance of the Sabbath. The King had exacerbated the situation by installing a statue of the Greek God Zeus in the temple for the Jews to worship. A family of Jews, the Maccabees, went into the countryside, and for three years fought a guerrilla war against the oppressive Seleucid occupying power. Just as Judah Maccabee had advanced to a position where he could finally retake the temple, he found that there was only sufficient oil to burn a candle

for one night. Then what was considered a miracle occurred - the oil lasted for eight days, which gave Judah the opportunity to win the battle and reclaim the temple.

In the early years after this miracle, different groups of Jews celebrated the event in different ways, but the most popular version which is usually celebrated today is from the religious post-biblical book the Talmud.

Families gather and each day there are readings from the Psalms and other Scriptures, the singing of a special hymn and giving money to the poor and needy. Chocolate coins and sweets and other presents are usually given to the children. However, the focus is on lighting one candle successively each day for eight days on a candle holder called a Menorah, using the ninth candle, the Shammash - the Helper, to light all the others.



The miracle of the oil is remembered by frying food, usually in olive oil, with the latke, a potato pancake, being particularly popular. Another favourite is a deep-fried doughnut filled with fruit jelly. A game is often played

with a four-sided spinning top, called a dreidel, which has a different acronym on each side which together stand for 'a great miracle happened here'.

The holy temple in Jerusalem has held a special place in the hearts of Jews, following the construction and furnishing described in some detail in the first book of Kings.

Hanukkah commemorates the recovery and second dedication of the temple.

Diana Parsk

The hills are alive—a visit to Salzburg

I've just returned from 4 nights in Salzburg with my daughter, Alice. The city, in northwest Austria, grew around the salt trade in the 8th century and the beautiful historic centre is now a UNESCO



world heritage site. We enjoyed a trip on the funicular to see the Hohensalzburg fortress which dominates the skyline and were rewarded with stunning views across the snowy alps. The city is also the home of Mozart, whose birthplace we toured, and I was treated to a brilliant concert of his work, performed by a string quintet and

horn soloist in the grand Marble Hall at the Mirabell Palace, as an early Christmas present.



Salzburg is also famous for being the location for much of *The Sound of Music*, a personal favourite of mine, and we took a bus tour to visit many of the locations from the film. It was lovely to see so many familiar scenes - the castle used as the Von Trapps home, the lake where the children capsize their rowing boat, and the convent the real Maria lived in for many years, and it raised a smile remembering a Banstead URC choir trip to 'Singalonga Sound of Music' with all of us packed into a minibus dressed as nuns.



Salzburg is home to a great number of churches and cathedrals, with domes and spires peppering the views across the city, and we visited many of these, particularly enjoying the central Dom zu Salzburg and its surrounding state residences and museums, filled with rich history of the region's Princebishops, with incredible statues and jewelled treasures in the cathedral museum.



A real highlight was visiting the Christmas markets, set in the grounds of the Cathedral, where we enjoyed making a few festive purchases and drinking the occasional glühwein (just to stay warm, of course), listening to the daily choirs and traditional trumpet music playing out across the square. Altogether a most enjoyable few days, and a destination much to be recommended.

Fiona Gayner

Favourite parts of Christmas—Marion Woodward

Amongst many others, one of my greatest joys at Christmas is keeping in touch with the many friends I have made over the years, from schooldays, St Andrew's Cheam, university, various jobs and travelling to and from Australia by sea twice in the 1960s because that was where my mother came from and where I have quite a few cousins.

I have written an annual newsletter since 1971 which provides me with a history of my life. I know this is a 'marmite' thing, but I love receiving news in this form from others and they tell me they enjoy reading mine. Sadly, each year the list gets a little shorter and, although one makes new friends, that is not the same as remembering those with whom one has shared experiences in the past, even if sometimes we have hardly met since – it doesn't seem to matter.

Another great Christmas joy is Banstead URC's Carols by Candlelight which I had attended long before I ever thought I would become a member – for me the perfect start to Christmas proper.

Best days—Madeline Cranfield



As you may know, I have a lifelong passion for horses ! So, when my Dad came home one day in 1972 and said a client's daughter had a pony she had outgrown, and would I like to ride it, I was overjoyed. The owning family continued to look after the lovely Gentleman Joe (the one-eyed rocket), and I rode him often. We went to pony club camp, entered Gymkhanas, and explored Epsom Downs together (although he chose to dump me on the floor on a couple of occasions). I learnt so much with him and made lifelong friends as well as becoming the horsewoman I am today! The picture is of me riding Mojo, a horse owned by my friend Lesley. I have been riding Mojo for the past 13 years.

Best Days—Fiona Lynch

What an interesting question? How do you define the best day of your life? I know what my husband's was – the day his team won the treble. He tries to say it's not, but anyone passionate about football will know how significant that day was to a footie fan.

I know that Sunday 11 August 2024 will be one of the best days of my life and will be a memory I'll hold forever. This year a much talked about and anticipated family holiday finally happened. Twelve of us, four generations, including four teenage boys aged 13 – 16, rented a farmhouse in Suffolk for the week. The weather was glorious, with every meal eaten alfresco. On this particular day, it was decided that we'd spend the day at Sutton Hoo, the most significant site of archaeological importance in the UK. Cue moans and groans from the teenagers in our party.

Bonus number one was that between us we had enough National Trust members' cards to all get in free. On arrival, we booked ourselves onto the lunchtime tour of the burial sites by a volunteer



historian. We spent time in the museum, with one of the boys dressed up in Saxon costume so convincingly that most of us didn't recognise him and other visitors thought he was part of the attraction – very funny.

After a walk around the house and grounds and the all-important picnic had been eaten, we headed to the rendezvous point. The poor guide's face when he realised he had four teenage boys in the group to entertain was a picture. For the next hour he regaled us with the history of Sutton

Hoo. There were a few points he stumbled on, including some significant dates. Suddenly a voice piped up from our group correcting his mistakes and filling in some of the gaps he'd left. As fifteen-year-old Jake said, 'Clearly this year's history GCSE exam has come in useful'. The boys opted to stay on for an additional tour, which was a surprise to all the adults. Bonus number two, an unexpectedly good day out.

When we arrived home the boys decided they'd like to cook dinner – a first! Under the expert tutelage of their Auntie Fiona, they produced a huge and very tasty pot of Chilli Con Carne and rice. Bonus number three – a lovely meal cooked by the boys.

At dusk we watched the bats as they came out to hunt, then as the skies darkened they came alive with the stars. That part of Suffolk is designated a clear sky area so there was little light pollution, and we could see clusters of stars we'd never seen before. We wondered at the opaqueness of the Milky Way and their grandfather pointed out the constellations. We stayed out for hours and saw shooting stars, satellites and listened to the owls hooting. Bonus number four – star gazing.

Bonus number five - A perfect family day, full of lovely memories, that hopefully all the family will remember.

RECIPE—Kiss me under the mistletoe orange cake



Ingredients:

- 1 large orange
- 180g raisins
- 240g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 240ml milk
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 225g castor sugar
- 115gm margarine
- 2 eggs

Method:

- Grind together the whole orange (rind and all) with the raisins; reserve the juice for topping.
- Sift together flour, baking soda and salt.
- Cream the margarine with the sugar. Beat in the two eggs.
- Add the dry ingredients alternately with the milk and beat until the batter is smooth. Fold in the orange mixture.
- Pour the mixture into two round 9" pans that have been well greased and lightly floured.
- Bake at 180C (Gas mark 4) for 40 minutes or until done.
- Drip 1/3 cup orange juice over the warm cake and sprinkle with a little castor sugar and chopped nuts.

Delicious!

Christina Rossetti



There are not many verses which encapsulate so concisely the harshness of the winter in some Northern hemisphere countries as the first verse of the Christmas carol 'In the bleak midwinter' (No. 162 in Rejoice and Sing): 'In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.' This hymn was written by the influential British poet and children's author – Christina Rossetti – and was later set to music by Gustav Holst of 'The Planets' Suite' fame. Her parents had come from Italy to London in 1824, and their house was open to many Italian cultural and political influences throughout Christina's home-tutored childhood. She was born in December 1830 and died in December 1894, a victim of painful breast cancer. She is buried in the family grave in Highgate Cemetery.

Christina had one sister and two brothers, one of whom – Dante Gabriel Rossetti – was a leading painter in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He illustrated several of her published books of religious works, poetry and children's stories. The broadening out of the Anglican Church became important to Christina and she has one other carol in Rejoice and Sing (No. 614) – 'Love came down at Christmas' in the Love in Action section.

Amongst the well-known poets and authors influenced by Christina are Gerard Manley Hopkins, Philip Larkin and Virginia Woolf. She is still influential today – the first verse of Yoko Ono's song 'Who has seen the wind?' is taken from one of Christina's poems. Christina's

facility and talent with words and concepts place her amongst the finest poets and authors of her generation. She is able to express a thought in such simple terms. One of her claims to fame is that she became one of the first female collectors of stamps in 1847, only seven years after the first stamp was issued in the UK, but it is her poems which carry her high reputation and are well worth a read.

Roy Jordan

(see page 34 where we include a Christmas poem by Christina Rossetti)

What's in a number?

You may have watched 'The Big Bang Theory', an American situation comedy about a group of nerdy physicists, engineers and their friends, living in Pasadena, California.

A scene in the episode 'The Alien Parasite Hypothesis', has given rise to a theorem called 'The Sheldon Cooper Theorem'. Sheldon Cooper, one of the show's main characters, explains why 73 is the best number: it's the 21st prime number and its reverse is 37, which is the 12th prime number. The reverse of 12 is 21, which is the product of 7 and 3. Amazing, right? Experts from Dartmouth University in New Hampshire have confirmed that 73 is the only known prime number with these unique traits.

To make it even more remarkable, 73 is a palindrome in binary (1001001), and every 37th number in a Fibonacci sequence is a multiple of 73 (a Fibonacci sequence is one in which each number is the sum of the two preceding ones – 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, ...).

As if that weren't enough, the episode where it was featured was the 73rd of the series, Jim Parsons (who plays Sheldon) was born in 1973, and he was 37 years old when the episode first aired!

Favourite parts of Christmas—Rosalind Parsk

Christmas at home was the best part of Christmas for me.

Christmas started on Christmas Eve when we were all very excited for Father Christmas to come. We would spend the day watching Christmas films and getting excited for Christmas. When we were in bed we could even hear the sleigh bells so we knew that it was time to go to sleep. We would leave our stocking by our bed and hope that when we woke up Father Christmas had been.



As there were a lot of us, whoever was up first, would then run into everyone else's room to see if they were up and see what Father Christmas had brought for them. After opening our stocking it was time to find a present we wanted to take to church and then to pile into the car for church.

When we were back home it was time to 'play with our toy from Father Christmas' whilst Mum would be getting lunch ready. Before we knew it, it was time for lunch and by this time Nannie and Grandpa had arrived to join us all of us. Mum would cook Turkey with all the trimmings and hundreds of vegetables to suit everyone.

At 3pm it was time for the Queen's speech where we would all be in the lounge and watch together. Once the Queen's speech was finished it was finally time to open our presents from the family. This was always done in age order. Stephanie was first... then Nick... until it was Christianne's turn.

After present giving we would take our presents to our rooms, before ending the evening with some family games.

Favourite parts of Christmas—Diana Parsk

The best part of Christmas for me is when it is all over!

Hosting all the family is totally exhausting.

Christmas Eve, 1893



Christmas hath a darkness
Brighter than the blazing noon,
Christmas hath a chillness
Warmer than the heat of June,
Christmas hath a beauty
Lovelier than the world can show:
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

Earth, strike up your music,
Birds that sing and bells that ring;
Heaven has answering music
For all angels soon to sing:
Earth put on your whitest
Bridal robe of spotless snow:
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

Christina Rossetti



Service Details

Our morning worship at 10:30am on Sundays is held in the Church building and on Zoom.

The Zoom link for services is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9922047878?pwd=SmxXY0lKckkvcFhJdFM1UTFHYjR0Zz09>

Meeting ID: 992 204 7878

Passcode: 126600

Recordings of the services are available on our website
www.bansteadurc.org.uk

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We are happy to receive your contributions, ideas and suggestions for *Tidings* at any time but copy for the Spring 2025 edition should be with us by

Sunday, 16 March 2025 at the latest.





TIDINGS - Winter 2024