

TIDINGS



Banstead United Reformed Church
Winter 2025



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Our minister's message

Dear Friends,

As we arrive at the season of Advent and Christmas, I've been thinking about what it means to keep Christ at the centre of our lives. Not in a complicated way, but simply as the one who steadies us and helps us to see what really matters.

This month has taken me to the extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly, to focus on the work of the Church Life Review within the URC. The conversations were big, but the heart of it was very down-to-earth: how local churches can live out their calling with hope and imagination, often in small and steadfast ways.

As I've reflected on that, I've also been thinking about this idea of 'wintering' — the season when the surface looks still, but new life is quietly preparing itself underneath. It's a good reminder that God is always present with us in our busy and our quiet seasons. Banstead URC has been wonderfully busy this past year, full of activity, welcome, creativity and fun. Even so, I find it helpful to pause now and then, to be still for a moment. A short time of silence, even in a busy day, can make space for God in a way nothing else quite does.

You might find it helpful this Advent to try one simple prayerful practice:

- Take a short pause each day, even one minute, to sit quietly;
- Notice one good thing: a warm home, a kind word, a moment of rest;
- Say a short prayer such as, 'Christ, be at the centre of my day', or
- take a short walk or spend time looking out of the window and simply pay attention to what you see and hear.

Thank you for everything you have given and shared this year. I am grateful for the kindness, care, and friendship in our church community. May you know peace this Christmas and may the light of Christ be with you in the weeks ahead.

With every blessing, Siobhán

FROM THE EDITORS

When we have our editorial meeting to discuss the forthcoming edition of *Tidings*, we often wonder whether we will have enough material to fill the magazine. That certainly has not been an issue this time. We have so much material that we have stretched to forty pages for this edition.

Our friend and long-time Church member, Olive Worsley, sadly died on 11 October, only a few months short of her 100th birthday. We include a tribute to her on page 6.

A recent highlight for our Church was the concert to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day and VJ Day. When Diana first conceived the idea for the concert, she mentioned it to Cliff whose response was that it was a great idea but where was she going to get the performers from? In the event, an eclectic mix of acts was assembled who treated the 130 plus people attending to a wonderful afternoon's entertainment. We include reports on the concert starting on page 14.

Continuing our series on features of our Church, we come to our Spencer Hall. This is named after Mrs Mary Ellen Spencer, who can rightly be regarded as the founder of our Church. You can read all about the early history of our Church and Mrs Spencer's prominent role in the story on page 28.

In the Autumn issue, we told the history of Reigate Park Church. In this issue, we move on to Redhill URC, another member of the North Downs Surrey Pastorate. The current Church at Shaw's Corner is the result of a merger of the previous Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in Redhill, which by 1988 had both become URC Churches and decided at that time to combine at the building at Shaw's Corner. This Church building celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2026. You can read the history of Redhill URC starting on page 31.

The Hazel Usher fund is getting towards the end of its life, and the Hazel Usher committee decided that its last major grant would be

awarded to Chailey Heritage Foundation. This is a charity that we have a connection to because of the significant care that they have provided to George Cushnie over the years. The grant has been used to create Hazel's Kitchen. Read the story on page 12.

After the service on 2 November, Bernice Graham gave a moving talk about her father's wartime experience surviving the horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. You can read an account of her talk on page 22.

In the autumn issue we included details of books that readers have enjoyed. We said that we would be delighted to receive further contributions for this issue and happily a number of you have provided further reviews of favourite books. Through this edition you will find contributions from Marion Woodward, David Skitt, Ruth Williams, Ruth Hunter-Currie and Margaret Palmer.

2025 marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Jane Austen and this has encouraged Roy Jordan to contribute an article about the life of this celebrated author—see page 34.

Beverley Kent has agreed to be the subject of 'Know your Church member' and you can read all about her busy life on page 18.

Fiona Gayner has recently visited St Helier, in Jersey. In view of the connection with a local hospital, she thought it would be interesting to tell us about St Helier and how he became the patron saint of both Jersey and St Helier. You can read about St Helier's life on page 24.

All that remains is for us to wish you all a joyous Christmas and a happy new year.

Happy reading!

Fiona, Diana and Cliff

Church Family News

In memoriam—Olive Worsley



It is with sadness that we record the death of Olive Worsley on 11 October 2025. Her funeral took place at the Church on 5 December. Olive was the subject of our 'Know your Church member' feature in the Spring 2025 edition of *Tidings* and this included much information about her life. One aspect that is worth mentioning again is her singing. Back in 2010, when our Church celebrated its 70th anniversary, we held a 'Banstead's Got Talent' variety concert. There was no doubt that one of the stars of the show had

talent and that was Olive. As a seasoned musical theatre performer, she commanded the stage – she didn't just sing her songs she acted them out. For many years she performed with New Malden Co-Operative Amateur Operatic Society, or NEMCOM as it was known. Her crowning achievement was taking the lead in 'Annie Get Your Gun' at the Scala Theatre in London in 1963. Two years ago, the local Lavender Theatre was putting on a production of 'Annie Get Your Gun' and the cast were thrilled to be visited by Olive, 60 years after her own performance in the role of Annie Oakley.

Another very important part of Olive's life was her Christian faith. Olive and her husband Ken attended Emmanuel Church in Streatham before they were married. On moving to this area, they started worshipping in Nork but didn't feel that they had found their spiritual home there, so tried attending other Churches in the area. At that time, Revd Eric Allen was our minister, and Olive and Ken very much enjoyed a service that they attended at our Church led by him. On returning the following week they were pleased to be recognised and warmly welcomed and so they decided to stay.

Olive became a member of our Church in 1968 and over the subsequent years she has been a much loved and valued part of our Church family. She entered fully into Church life eventually being ordained as an elder. She was a regular reader on Sunday mornings and she took her turn in providing flowers for decorating the Church. She was a long-standing member of our Monday Club. Together with Joe and Peggy Houghton, Olive and Ken recognised a gap in the social life of our Church and started a group that they called the Fellowship Group. The members of the Group met monthly, mostly at Joe and Peggy's house, for an evening of discussion on a pre-arranged topic accompanied by refreshments. One highlight, which Olive often talked about, was the evening when the group had an outing to HMS Belfast for a visit and a meal.

Olive and Ken made another significant contribution to Church life with the annual swimming picnics that they hosted at their home in Ruden Way. As well as swimming, there were opportunities for games and chatting to our friends. These were lovely family occasions which were much appreciated by all. Olive always insisted that there should be a time at these picnics when we paused to thank God. Our minister used to hold a short open-air service, and we shared a loaf baked in the shape of a fish.

Going back to the Church's 70th anniversary, the slogan that we adopted for that year was '70 years and still singing'. So perhaps we can adapt that when looking back at Olive's life – '99 years and still singing'.

Baptisms



On Sunday 19 October, Lucinda and Oliver Bailey brought their daughter Anastasia Emily Elizabeth for baptism at our Church. It was a wonderful and very happy service conducted by Revd David Skitt who had previously baptised big sister Arabella.



Thea Florence Heritage was baptised at St Barnabus Church, Dulwich by the vicar, Revd Liz Barnett, on 16 November. Afterwards, family and friends joined Thea at the Dulwich Clock Café in Dulwich Park for her first birthday party.

Meeting up



In November, Annabel Franklin (née Parsk) went to visit Caitlin Wipiiti Pollock who many of you will remember from Junior Church days and who now lives in New Zealand. This is a photograph of Caitlin with daughters Maia and Awhia and Annabel with daughter Imogen.

Ruby wedding



Congratulations to Chris and Mike Harris who celebrated their ruby wedding anniversary on 2 November 2025.

Thank you

Dear all,

Thank you so much for your kind messages, gifts, visits and the meals delivered to our door following my hip replacement. What a thoughtful, supportive congregation of friends we are. I'm delighted to say that my new hip is amazing. Hopefully, the rest of me will catch up soon!

I look forward to being able to take a more 'active' part in church life at some point; I miss you all.

Love

Ruth Hunter Currie

Recent reading – Marion Woodward

I have never been one to read murder mysteries (historical novels with a happy ending are much more my thing) but, when a friend recommended a series with a strong horticultural and garden history content, I could not resist. So, I discovered John Sherwood and his intrepid amateur sleuth Celia Grant.

The one I have read most recently – *Menacing Groves* – finds Celia on a luxury coach trip visiting gardens around Florence with a disparate group of fellow garden enthusiasts, all of whom could be hiding secrets. Celia herself is an imposter having on an impulse taken the identity of the cousin who gave her the ticket when, at the last minute, circumstances prevented her from going.

We are treated to descriptions of Italian gardens with their structural evergreens where Celia, who is a plant breeder, rather abhors the lack of colour.

It is best to read the book quickly unless you have a very good memory as there are lots of intertwined threads to follow before the final denouement. But it is hard to put down anyway. I am looking forward to reading the rest of the series. This book was written in 1988 before the advent of instant communication made life so frenetic.

Recipe—Chocolate truffles

For the truffles:

200 ml (7fl oz) single cream

25 g (1 oz) butter

500 g (1 lb) good quality plain chocolate

A dash of rum, brandy or liqueur of choice, if desired



Using a heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat the cream and the butter until they reach a rolling boil. Remove the mixture from the heat and stir in the chocolate. When it has melted add the liqueur if used. Pour the chocolate mixture into a shallow tin lined with baking parchment and spread out with a palette knife. Leave it in a cool place, uncovered, for 24 hours.

Pull off small pieces and roll them into balls in the palms of your hands.

To coat the truffles:

4 tbsl cocoa powder

1 tbsl icing sugar

Chocolate vermicelli

Sift the cocoa and icing sugar together on to a square of baking parchment and roll the truffles either in this or in the vermicelli. Keep the truffles refrigerated in a covered container layered with baking parchment. Put in paper sweet cases.

These truffles are a lovely gift for older children to make at Christmas. Most supermarkets sell small pots of tiny holly leaves and berries which can be added as decorations.

Fiona Gayner

Hazel's Kitchen



When the Hazel Usher Fund committee was exploring potential recipients of the Fund's last major grant, the Chailey Heritage Foundation (CHF) was selected both because of the incredible work it does supporting children, young people and families living with complex disabilities and because of its ongoing support for our own George Cushnie. When we approached CHF as to how we might help they suggested the construction of a new cookery space. Previously, cookery sessions had been held in a shared kitchen space alongside the staff of CHF's main café. While this arrangement had served them well, they knew they could do better, especially for those who needed a quieter, more tailored environment to enjoy the full experience of cooking. Now a previously underused area in the activity centre has been transformed into Hazel's Kitchen, so named at our suggestion in loving memory of Hazel Usher, who as we know was a passionate advocate for people with disabilities. The space vacated has been completely repurposed, removing old equipment, adapting utilities, and installing a fully accessible kitchen designed specifically for wheelchair users.



Hazel's Kitchen was officially opened on 3 October. Members of the Hazel Usher committee were in attendance together with staff and students from CHF. Chris Brittain had the honour of cutting the ribbon at the entrance to the kitchen after which tea and cakes were enjoyed by all.

Will Folkes, Director of Specialist Services and Income at CHF, commented:

'We are incredibly excited to have launched Hazel's Kitchen. One of our primary ambitions at the charity is to provide more opportunities for young adults living in the community to access a range of accessible and meaningful activities — cooking is definitely one of the most popular.'

Hazel's Kitchen is already proving to be a hit. It's a vibrant, welcoming space where flavours and techniques from around the world can be explored— Polish and Cajun recipes are currently favourites! CHF is looking forward to welcoming even more people into Hazel's Kitchen in the months and years ahead.

Remembering VE Day and VJ Day 80

At 2 pm on Saturday, 8 November, about 130 people were welcomed into the Church to enjoy a programme of entertainment as part of a Church Social event. They included members of the Tuesday Club, which uses the church facilities and whose members like to respond to music.



The three objectives announced by the MC, Diana Parsk, at the beginning were to raise money for the Maggie's charity at the local Royal Marsden Hospital, to pay tribute ahead of Remembrance Sunday to those who died or suffered in two World Wars and finally just to take the opportunity to socialise with some refreshments and enjoy a wide variety of entertainments loosely associated with the war years.

There were thirteen different acts performed by church members or by artists with an indirect association with a church member. The age range involved was wide - from three to ninety-three. It would take too much space to describe each act but in summary they were:

Two external acts, one in each half:

First, Janet Fairlie, a trained international opera singer and London stage singer of musicals. Janet sang a variety of popular operatic arias and songs from musicals, accompanied by pianist Judith Flint. Janet encouraged a willing audience to join in the choruses. In the second half, there was a swinging performance by the Moonlight Sirens. They are a five-member female band led by singer Patsy Dee. They played some of the music popular on the dance floors and night clubs in the 1940's, often under an American influence. Two of the songs were accompanied by three lady dancers from the church. The dance was called The Stroll.

The other performances were by people from within the church:



Two Pete Seeger songs, 'Where have all the flowers gone?' and 'If I had a hammer' sung and played harmoniously by Cliff Houghton and Ian Catt.

Monologues 'George, don't do that' made famous by Joyce Grenfell and recited by Diana Parsk; 'The Home

Guard' and 'The Day Hostilities Ended', associated with Robb Wilton and recited by Revd David Skitt; 'Albert and the Lion' popularised by Stanley Holloway and recited by Paul Chadburn; and a party piece popular with the war generation recited by Roy Jordan.

A dynamic and almost gymnastic dance routine by young Issy Sloper (on her birthday).

The even younger children of Sunday Club singing (with hand actions) 'He's got the whole world in his hands' accompanied joyfully by the rest of the audience.



A Nuns' Chorus. A convent of novice nuns, processed through the church onto the stage and sang, some with male voices 'How do you solve a problem like Maria' from the musical 'The Sound of Music'.

An assorted number of artists, who enthusiastically sang a music hall skit entitled 'If I were not in the forces'. This required much exertion and a sense of timing to avoid any physical injury to the singers!

The final act was a rousing audience participation sing-along of several popular war-time songs, under the guidance of Janet Fairlie, sung with much enthusiasm and waving of the miniature flags provided. As a tribute to our war-time king, and our present monarch, we all then joined in the national anthem.

Diana presented bouquets of flowers in thanks to Janet Fairlie and Judith Flint, who had each contributed so much to the music

during the afternoon.

Everyone was then invited into the Spencer Hall and Fellowship Room for tea, coffee and cakes baked by Fiona Lynch. There were some colour murals of peace celebrations on the walls and patriotic bunting was all round the church and halls.

On a slightly more serious note, at the beginning of each half, excerpts from conversations held by Fiona Lynch with Kathleen Bentley and Roy Jordan about their memories of WWII were shown. These were accompanied on the screens by film clips and photographs assembled and all edited by Jimmy Lynch. During the interval, people were able to see the excellent and informative exhibition arranged by Marion Woodward, showing how the UK war-time population lived and coped.

Diane Forzani ended the first half with a description of the work of the Maggie's charity in providing support and space at the Royal Marsden hospital for cancer patients and their relatives. At the end, Madeline Cranfield announced the winners of the excellent raffle prizes she had assembled. The proceeds of the afternoon totalled £1,445. Banstead URC is matching this sum from its charitable fund and rounding it up so that Maggie's is receiving a total of £3,000.

There are very many thanks to offer to many people: to Diana Parsk for her initiative in organising this joyful social and sending out so many invitations; to Madeline Cranfield and Fiona Lynch for their strong support and efforts; to Ian Catt for his expertise with the sound equipment and for all the hard work he put in behind the scenes; to all the participating entertainers; and to the multitude of helpers including stage erectors, car park attendants, raffle ticket sellers, tea and coffee makers, bunting arrangers and anyone else omitted accidentally from this list. Thank you, Banstead United Reformed Church, for a very vibrant and entertaining afternoon.

Roy Jordan

That's entertainment!

When I first met Cliff, little did I realise that three years later I would be standing on a stage, dressed as a nun, singing 'How do you solve a problem like Maria' with members of his Church! As we were walking up the aisle, there was almost a Mexican wave of laughter rippling up the Church as members of the audience saw the first four nuns- Cliff, Alan, Paul and Ian – followed by the slightly more believable female nuns. And when I agreed to take part in the concert, I certainly didn't realise that I was going to be a very small cog in an enormous wheel of talent, with Banstead URC putting on a concert to celebrate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. What a joyous occasion it was. Diana Parsk was a vision in her



amazing outfit and her interpretation of Joyce Grenfell's 'George, don't do that' was a true highlight.

Although all the cast deserve a mention, the best bit for me was the skit 'If I were not in the forces'. It was true slapstick comedy at its best. Apparently, I laughed so much that those

around me found themselves laughing at me laughing at the act.

Roy Jordan and Kathleen Bentley contributed first hand memories of the war accompanied by black and white footage and this brought us down to earth on the futility of war.

Finally, I feel duty bound to mention Cliff and Ian's contribution! Their choice of two Pete Seeger songs, 'Where have all the flowers gone?' and 'If I had a hammer' were beautifully played and sung by two very talented Church members.

Kathy Randolph

Know your Church member

Beverley Kent



Beverley was born in St Helier hospital – her parents were Joan and Trevor Higgins, who were living in Wallington at the time. Beverley was the eldest of their three children and was followed by her sister, Nichola and her brother, Richard. Joan attended St Michael's C of E church in Wallington which had no Sunday School. Later, when they moved to another part of Wallington,

Joan started going to Holy Trinity and all three children were able to go to Sunday School there.

This move meant a change of school for Beverley which had a big impact on her. She moved schools in June, going into Year 3 for about a month. She hated it as friendship groups were established, she wasn't allowed to do joined-up writing which is what she had learnt and had to do French for the first time, with a teacher who was French and only spoke French. However, when they went back in September, Beverley had a male form teacher, who paired her with another child, and everything was much better. The seal was set on her happiness when they studied the Tudors – they were divided into two groups, and each had to make a Tudor costume. Beverley was chosen by the teacher to model her group's costume. From then on she loved school, worked hard, passed the eleven plus and went to Wallington High school. She enjoyed Geography, French, Home

Economics and athletics. Having passed her 'A' levels Beverley knew she wanted to go into nursing, but the school was only interested in students going to university. So, with no help from the school, Beverley applied on her own to nine London teaching hospitals, gaining places at eight of them.

Beverley chose the Royal Free Hospital because there was no wait to start her training and she liked that the training there included practical ward work as well as the theory and studying – all this done on a pittance of pay. She worked for a few months at the Royal Free after finishing her training. Beverley had met Tom at a police disco in Holborn, less than a year into her 3-year course. They married in 1983 and bought a house in Wallington, moving to Woodmansterne in 1986. Tragically, in 1987, Beverley's brother Richard died in the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' ferry disaster. Beverley was working at St Helier hospital when she became pregnant with Natalie and asked for a transfer to Carshalton War Memorial hospital, a geriatric hospital, which she hoped would be calmer. She went back there until pregnant with Daniel. After having Daniel, she worked one night a week in a nursing home.

The family moved to their current home in Wilmot Way in Banstead in 1991 and Beverley's parents followed them to Banstead (having asked for their permission to do so!). When she moved to Banstead, Joan continued to worship at Holy Trinity where Natalie and Daniel were christened, before trying Banstead Baptist church and All Saints. Beverley took the two children to Sunday school at All Saints which they enjoyed and they were not best pleased when Joan suggested in 1992 that they should all try the URC! This was when Beverley was pregnant with Sabrina, whose birth completed the family. All Saints loss was our gain! After Sabrina was born, Beverley worked for twelve years as a practice nurse in Wallington. She then moved to work as a part time teaching assistant at Overton Grange School and at the same time working part time as a school nurse at Epsom College. The children all started school locally, then Natalie went on to Wallington Girls, Daniel to Wilsons and Sabrina to St Andrew's.

When Natalie was five and Sabrina only two weeks old, Beverley took over the running of the Banstead Rainbows, which otherwise would have closed. She moved on to run the Banstead Guides which she loves and has now been a leader for an amazing 33 years. She enjoys the meetings and taking the Guides camping, preferring indoor camping as it's less hard work! Beverley is always seen shepherding her Guides at the Remembrance Day service at the War Memorial.

Beverley first started helping with the Banstead 5 Panto when Natalie was old enough to take part. The second year, Carol Pollock signed up to help paint the scenery and persuaded Beverley to sign up to help with the props. From there she moved on to be stage manager and production coordinator. She is continuing with both roles in the current production, Peter Pan. For twelve years, Beverley was the Banstead 5 Youth Coordinator. This was very successful, including teenagers from each church, supported by reps from the churches, and involved many activities, including sleepovers at The Old Pheasantry in Mogador, and generally encouraging the young people in their church life.

Beverley has always had a dog and enjoys walking. She has been an avid reader since she was five, with a wide taste in books, and loves outdoor (not wild) swimming, at pools such as Hampton and Guildford. In recent years, Beverley has enjoyed going to the theatre, recently seeing 'Wendy and Peter Pan' at the Barbican and 'Ballet Shoes' at the National Theatre. She has been a committed member of the Time Out group since it started and is known for her treasure hunts and walks around Banstead in the summer.

As a child, Beverley went on family camping holidays in Europe, usually France, for three weeks. It was a major operation to fit everything into the car and trailer, plus three children, and it sounds like it was very hard work. The tent, the children sitting on the sleeping bags and pillows on the back seat, food (the children didn't like French butter, French cheese and so on!) sterilising tablets, nappy buckets when Richard was a baby, and an inflatable canoe which seated all five of them! The girls sat sideways reading

all the way and had to be encouraged to look up at the views occasionally, while Richard, wedged in the middle and leaning forwards, peered between his parents as he was obsessed with car spotting. Those were the days of no seat belts!

In later years Beverley's parents owned a house in the Pyrenees. The first time Beverley went there with Tom and their children, there was no water in the swimming pool. They decided to fill it up using the hose and after some time the water was still very shallow. However, the task had to be abandoned after a visit from the fire brigade and the Mayor as they were draining all the water from the nearby village!

As a family, Beverley, Tom and the children had many holidays at Center Parcs, which suited Sabrina who cannot be out in the sun because of an unusual health condition. In later years, Beverley and Tom have had three trips to friends in Australia, a week in New York when Tom retired and many holidays in Europe, especially to Berlin, as Natalie, her husband and children live there.

Beverley's busy working life concluded last February when she completed 20 years at Overton Grange School in Sutton. She had adapted to another demanding job and was undoubtedly an asset. She particularly enjoying helping with English and Drama in Years 10 and 11 – before her well-deserved retirement! Phew!

If this wasn't enough, you won't be surprised to hear that in and among her other activities, Beverley, with a friend, ran a Bouncy Castle business from Beverley's home. Of course she did!

Beverley continues to be an important part of her family, our church and the local community.

Fiona Gayner

An Auschwitz survivor



Following on from the morning service led by the Revd David Skitt on 2 November, Bernice Graham gave a moving and well-presented talk about the experiences of her father in WW2 and his imprisonment in the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. She assembled a mixture of memories she had obtained from talking to her father over the years and from a report he had written at the request of the British Library. She supplemented these memories with photographs and

video clips from presentations her father had given to schools in his later years. Bernice emphasised that his experience was just one of countless thousands, most of whom did not survive.

Her father's name was Mordechai Izbitski. He was a member of a largish Jewish family living in a two-room house in a predominantly Jewish village, Izbitzka, in central Poland. They were poor but were close to one another in a happy atmosphere and they spoke Yiddish. Mordechai was 14 when the Nazis invaded Poland and he left the village one day on a crowded lorry to embark on some work which the Nazis had promised. His mother did not want him to leave but threw him some bread as he left. That was his last memory of her, because he never saw her again.

He arrived as a frightened teenager at a labour camp and immediately realised that life was about to change for the worse. He was fortunate to find that his older brother Tovia, who was a cabinetmaker, was there. In the shouting and confusion, Tovia took him to the right side when the Nazis told those who were craftsmen to move away from the recently arrived crowd. Those who were not skilled were put to death. It was Tovia who

encouraged and supported him through the following terrible years. Death and fear of death were a daily part of their life.



Living conditions were very hard in the camps, especially in the cold winters and with little to eat. They were subsequently moved over several days in a rail car designed for cattle to Auschwitz. Those who were weak fell to the floor and died.

In Auschwitz, the detainees slept in a dormitory with three layers of bunks. He and his brother were fortunate to share a bunk on the top tier. They were not allowed to move during the night and therefore did not have access to a toilet. Those on the bottom bunks had rats running underneath them. The Nazi guards would poke the prisoners with sticks to disturb their sleep. Mordechai's daily task was to ensure the concrete was at the correct temperature for the construction work they were forced to do on new buildings and roads etc. They would try to keep a little warmer by hiding the empty concrete bags under their flimsy prison uniforms but were beaten if a guard found out. Russian troops freed them in 1945.

The horrors of the concentration camps have been well-documented and covered in subsequent years, but less attention has been focused on what happened to individuals after the war had ended. When Mordechai and Tovia eventually returned to their boyhood village, they found that the houses and businesses had been taken over and they were not welcome. They received hate mail through the door of their lodging, had to bear a multitude of anti-Semitic insults and actions and were effectively driven away. Bernice's father came to England to live with a cousin he had never met while his brother went to Israel, where he established a business, married and raised a family. Mordechai had difficulty at first in settling down because he did not speak English and did not know anyone in the UK. However, he persevered, became a skilled tailor, married, had two children, some grandchildren and greatgrandchildren. He changed his name

to Martin Bennett. He suffered nightmares following his experiences and it was not until 1993 when he returned to Auschwitz for the first time, that he found some form of closure.

He did not feel hatred against his Nazi oppressors but felt in later years that it was right that he should try to ensure that his memories and the horrific extermination of six million Jews should not be forgotten and that it would not happen again. He was a kind man who told of looking forward with hope.

Thank you, Bernice for bringing this to us.

Roy Jordan

St Helier



Those of us who live locally are very familiar with the name of the above saint, as most of us have spent time at his desirable residence in Carshalton. What of the real St Helier, though? The parish Church in St Helier, Jersey, is dedicated to him and was founded in the 11th century. At the time of building it was the closest accessible location on dry land to the site of St Helier's martyrdom. St Helier became the patron saint of both Jersey and St Helier. The stained glass window pictured is in St Helier parish Church.

St Helier was the son of Sigobard and his wife Lutsgard, who were pagans. They lived in Tongres, Belgium and were so desperate for children they asked Cunebert, the Christian hermit, to pray for them. Cunebert agreed to do this if, when the child was born, its life would be given over to God. When the child was born they decided not to give the child's life to God as promised and the

child became ill. The distraught parents were forced to take their child to Cunebert, who cured him, named him Helierus and brought him up as his own son and a Christian.

As he grew up, Helierus became famous for his miracles – this so angered his father Sigobard that he sent two men to kill Cunebert. When Helierus discovered Cunebert's body, he fled to northern France where he spent his time praying in the most uncomfortable circumstances he could create. It was at this time that Helierus raised a child from the dead and was declared a saint by the locals. To escape their admiration, Helierus, now St Helier, fled again, this time to Nanteuil where he met St Marculf. St Marculf baptised him, trained him and sent St Helier to Jersey with a companion, Romard, as Marculf had been receiving pleas for help and guidance from the small community of fisherman there. The community had dwindled in numbers because of repeated Viking attacks. One of the first things St Helier did upon arriving in Jersey was cure a cripple called Anquetil.

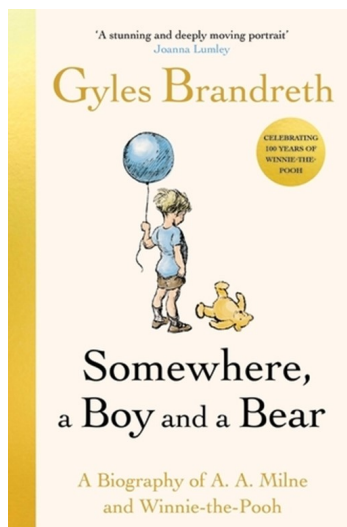
He settled on a tidal islet now known as Hermitage Rock and from this vantage point he could see the sails of approaching ships and would signal to shore so the inhabitants could scatter to the marshes. Helier remained there for about 15 years, fasting and praying. There is still an ecumenical pilgrimage to Hermitage Rock every summer.

On 16 July 555 AD, the island was again invaded by Saxon pirates and St Helier, able to speak their language, urged them to abandon their way of life. The pirate chief, fearing his followers would listen, raised his axe and struck St Helier with a blow that severed his head. There is a gruesome legend that, despite his weakness from fasting, Helier had the strength after his beheading to pick up his head and walk to shore! He was found on the beach still clutching his head and taken by Romard in a boat to Breville-sur-Mer in France, where a healing spring appeared where his body had been resting overnight. This spring still attracts those seeking a cure.

Fiona Gayner

Recent reading – David Skitt

Somewhere a Boy and a Bear by Gyles Brandreth, a biography of AA Milne and Winnie-the-Pooh.



'.....they began to talk in a friendly way about this and that and Piglet said : 'If you see what I mean, Pooh, 'and Pooh said : 'It's just what I think myself, Piglet,' and Piglet said, 'But on the other hand, Pooh, we must remember,' and Pooh said, 'Quite true, Piglet, although I had forgotten it for the moment' (from 'Winnie the Pooh'/'House at Pooh Corner')

'We all have our time machines, don't we? Those that take us back are memories..... and those that carry us forward are dreams' - HG Wells

If that 'Pooh extract and literary quote make you sigh with pleasure, then this is the book for you. It is filled with such.

'Winnie-the-Pooh', of course, is not for everyone (though he has spawned at least two books of philosophy). Indeed, as a child, I resisted all endeavours of my mother to appreciate the stories but , when I was 18 years old, our youth club leader led an epilogue making a devotional message out of a 'Pooh' story and I was hooked.

I date my propensity to discern deeper meanings in well-written children's stories from that epilogue.

This Christmas Eve, Winnie-the-Pooh is 100 years old. He currently resides in the New York Public Library, from where even the joint attempts of an American President and a British Prime Minister to extricate him for a short visit to the UK have failed. Fears that we might not let him back predominate!

There is a deeper, more literary, biography of AA Milne by Ann Thwaite published some years ago, but this book moves along at a rollicking pace with many anecdotes and quotes. I found it hugely enjoyable and replete with interesting morsels of facts.

AA Milne thought of himself primarily as a humourist, essayist and playwright and was rather dispirited to be most famous for two books of 'Pooh' stories and for two books of children's rhymes. There is also space given to how the real 'Christopher Robin' coped with it all as a child and as a man. So there is plenty to think about as well as enjoy.

Reading this book is a lovely way to toast a centenarian.

Recent reading – Ruth Williams

I have just finished rereading 'They were Sisters' one of the later books by Dorothy Whipple. Written in 1943, It was republished in 2005 by Persephone Books – I read it then and enjoyed it just as much 20 years later. Persephone describe it as 'Contrasting three different marriages' and so it does; but as with all Whipple's books, it is not just the theme but her ability to draw the characters - including the children - which makes it outstanding. With six on its list, she is Persephone's top author – and there is in addition 'The Other Day' recording her childhood in the 1890's and perhaps even more interesting 'Random Commentary' – not a full autobiography but a sketch through her adult life. It tells mainly of her time in Nottingham from the 1930's. Fascinating to read how different life was in general and particularly for women. Married to a man 20 years older with no children, she faced the challenge to become recognised and develop her career as an author. Once established, life became absorbingly full; she is well supported by her editor and in London is taken to dinners, plays and concerts meeting interesting and well-known people mostly from literary and political circles.

The Spencer Hall



Our Spencer Hall is named in memory of Mrs Mary Ellen Spencer, who can rightly be regarded as the founder of our Church; so much so that in the earliest years it was referred to as Mrs Spencer's Church. The story of Mrs Spencer's work in establishing a Congregational Church in Banstead starts in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of WWII when several families regularly travelled from Banstead to Sutton to attend worship at Sutton Congregational Church. On these bus journeys, Mrs Spencer used to talk to her fellow travellers of her vision of starting a new Church in Banstead. With the outbreak of war, many of those people were scattered to distant places and few were destined to become members of the new congregation, but the seed had been sown and Mrs Spencer ensured that the idea was taken to fruition.

At Mrs Spencer's request, a meeting of neighbouring Churches and the Surrey Congregational Union was held on 3 February 1940 and gave its blessing to the new enterprise and agreed that Sunday services should be started forthwith. Mrs Spencer then placed posters in many of the shops in Banstead High Street announcing 'services in connection with a new Congregational church'. All

persons who responded were sent a notice by post inviting them to the first service which took place in a school classroom on the snowy evening of 18 February.

The war years that followed were very difficult, with numbers dwindling in the face of blackouts, air raids and an unheated school classroom. The Surrey Congregational Union wished to close the project down until circumstances improved. It was only due to Mrs Spencer's energy and enthusiasm that the nascent Church continued its parlous existence. In those early days, Mrs Spencer did all the secretarial work including pulpit supply and publicity and keeping minutes of meetings. She was also very keen to include children and started with a Junior Church of three on a Sunday morning. By 1946, there were over 70 children in the Junior Church!

Mrs Spencer's efforts to keep the Church going through those difficult early years were eventually vindicated. In November 1943, a Banstead Congregational Church council was constituted, and soon after services were moved to the infant school hall in Avenue Road (now the Waitrose car park). In 1946, we were constituted as a Congregational Church, and our covenant was signed by 52 members at a covenant service held on 5 October 1946. Mrs Spencer declared it to be one of the greatest days of her life. Mrs Spencer died in 1949 leaving a lasting legacy in what is now Banstead URC and the hall that continues to bear her name.



Recent reading – Ruth Hunter-Currie

What is my favourite book? I always find this a tricky question as my answer tends to change depending on the author I'm keen on at the time. Certain books which spring to mind are bound up with other things for me - special times or special people.

One book that keeps on cropping up on my favourite list however (and doesn't remind me of special times or special people) is 'The Buried Giant' by Kazuo Ishiguro. It's a bit different from his other books - it's fantasy, not a genre I would normally go for.

It's set in post Roman Britain and some of the characters are based on Arthurian legend. During an uneasy peace between Saxons and Britons, it follows an old couple searching for their son. It explores memory, suffering, loss, love, history and war. It took me by surprise and I just couldn't put it down. At first, I read it purely as fantasy and then it made me think very hard.

Recent reading – Margaret Palmer

On a recent visit to Dorset, I was reminded that our book group had read *The Mayor of Casterbridge* for our summer meeting. The author, Thomas Hardy, was born in a Dorset village in 1840. By the age of 22 he was working as an architect in London. After five years, unhappy with urban life, he returned to Dorset and began his career as a novelist.

The Mayor of Casterbridge was his seventh novel, published in 1886. At a country fair, Michael Henchard, Hardy's tragic hero, auctions off his wife and daughter when drunk. He spends most of his life repenting of this act and eventually becomes a successful businessman and the Mayor of Casterbridge, a fictional town in Dorset. When his wife and daughter return to Casterbridge he attempts to make amends, but the story ends in tragedy. The book presents the social history of the period in a very readable form and I enjoyed reading it.

The Church at Shaw's Corner— Redhill URC



The history of Redhill URC starts in the 1860's when a group of ministers felt the time was right to build the first non-conformist church in Redhill, so a piece of land was purchased in Chapel Road and the building that became Redhill Congregational Church was built. However, in the 1890s, a group of predominant Presbyterian members of the church acquired a site at Shaw's Corner – the present site of the church - and erected a corrugated hall, which became known as the 'Tin Tab'. Some 42 members transferred from Chapel Road to what became St. Paul's Presbyterian Church. In the long hot summers, the building had to be hosed down to reduce the temperature inside.

The new Church was opened in May 1902. The first Minister of the new church was Revd J M E Ross. Shortly afterwards a campaign was started to replace the 'Tin Tab' which was no longer adequate and this culminated in the opening of the new halls—still used today—in 1905. Church records show that the membership in

1903 was 138 and this had risen to 246 by 1911. On Sunday, a morning Service was held at 11am, children's service at 3pm and an evening service at 6.30pm.

During WWI, a War Help Committee was formed which included providing hospitality to Belgian refugees. Externally, the gardens on the east side were dedicated to the casualties of both world wars, whilst the green space on the opposite side of Blackborough Road was donated to the church by the widow of a church member. In 1940, during WWII, a small bomb was dropped near the War Memorial adjacent to the church and many of the surrounding buildings including the church were damaged.

In 1951 the Revd Brian Pratt was inducted as Minister. He was an inspired leader who oversaw a great increase in the Sunday School. He became clerk to the General Assembly that led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972. Revd Pratt died suddenly on Easter Sunday in 1977 and he was succeeded as minister by Revd Ron Talmey from 1978 to 1983 and then Revd Kenneth Lynch from 1984 to 1996.

During Revd Lynch's ministry, it was resolved to unify the Chapel Road Church with St Paul's. The question was which church? At this time, an outbreak of dry rot had been discovered at Chapel Road. An independent survey revealed that to put Chapel Road into good repair, the cost would be approx. £60,000, whereas the Shaw's Corner property could be improved and repaired for £10,000. So it was decided to sell the Chapel Road property and use the proceeds of the sale to enlarge and improve the Shaw's Corner Church. These improvements comprised an enlarged vestibule, improvements to the upper hall complete with a new kitchen, a caretaker's flat adjacent to the upper hall, installation of a lift to serve upstairs and improvements to the downstairs kitchen. The United church became Redhill URC at an inaugural service held at Pentecost on 22 May 1988.

In 1998, Revd John Joseph was called as minister. Revd Joseph was a popular minister with his dry Welsh sense of humour. Under his leadership the Church saw an increase in membership and an

increase of children attending Junior Church. A Christmas Craft Fayre was instigated, and he arranged for the Pembroke Male Voice Choir to come to the church to give concerts and join with the congregation at Sunday Services on several occasions. John Joseph's last service before retirement was held on Easter Sunday 22 March 2016, after 18 years as our Minister and 44 years' service in the Ministry. Sadly, his retirement was short lived as following an illness John passed away on 28 June 2017. His popularity as a Minister was reflected in a Thanksgiving Service for him held at the church with over 300 people in attendance on 18 July 2017.

In November 2016 a 'Congregational Day' was held to reflect on the church's future. Following this, two options were proposed.

1—To open discussions with another church with a view to a joint united church, and

2—To begin the process of calling a new minister.

At the church meeting in September 2017 option 2 was voted for as the preferred option. In March 2019, Revd Martin Hazell was inducted as Minister of Redhill URC as a shared Minister with Moat URC East Grinstead on a 50/50 basis. He dealt ably with the challenges of lockdown, leading Sunday Services and a Monday morning prayer group on Zoom. Martin retired from the Ministry in August 2022.

In 2023, a proposal was put forward that the four churches of Banstead, Dorking, Reigate Park URC and Redhill explore forming a joint pastorate with a full time Minister. Revd Siobhan Antoniou was formally ordained and inducted at Reigate Park as Minister of the North Downs Surrey Pastorate, her first Ministry, on September 7 2024. So, a new chapter of the 'Church at Shaw's Corner' Redhill begins as it celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2026.

With thanks to Godfrey Nicholls and Keith Ramsay

Jane Austen



The 250th anniversary of the birth of Jane Austen this year is being widely covered and celebrated across most forms of media in the UK. For me, the most interesting items (apart from the subjective analysis and summaries of her books) have been the achievements of the relatively large family in which she spent most of her fairly short life. I wonder if, at the time, each of these family members had chosen which one of them, if any, would receive so much attention in 250 years' time, how many would have voted for Jane? It is always of interest to identify the sources which inspire a successful author. In Jane's case, she wrote of ordinary people in contemporary society and incorporated some of her experiences and that of other family members in her narratives. She also used her innate genius, frustration and humour in her stories to illustrate society's restrictions on, and attitudes to, women. One literary scholar has suggested that 'it is equally possible to see Jane Austen as a feminist critiquing Regency era society and as a conservative upholding its values.'

The basic details of Jane's life are widely known. However, because her sister Cassandra destroyed or censored a large number of

letters after Jane's death to protect her reputation, there may well be one part of Jane's personality which will remain obscured. It is speculated that this may have been possibly on account of her sometimes forthright views on her family, friends and acquaintances. Even before her teenage years, Jane had written a variety of stories, poems, essays and letters which were posthumously published many years later as three volumes of 'Juvenilia'. Jane's main legacy is a set of six books, four of which (Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park and Emma) were published starting in 1811, when she was in her mid-thirties, until her death in 1817 aged 41. The remaining two (Northanger Abbey and Persuasion) were published posthumously in 1817. An unfinished novel was published in 1871 under the title 'Lady Susan'. As a female writer, Jane had difficulty in finding a publisher, so her brother Henry became her literary agent and arranged for the publication of her books. Initially, Jane's name did not appear on her books, the first of which was published as written by 'A Lady'. Jane disliked the Prince Regent (later King George IV) because of his womanising but he liked her books and kept copies in his residences. She was reluctantly persuaded to dedicate Emma to him.

Jane never married but she was 20 when she met her first real boyfriend, Thomas Lefroy. Jane did not have a dowry and Thomas's family intervened and sent him away. He later became the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland. Subsequently, at age 26, Jane accepted a marriage proposal from a 21-year old Harry Wither but changed her mind the following morning. It is also suggested that Jane met a man on holiday in Devon from whom she was expecting a proposal, but this never progressed. Her sister, Cassandra, with whom Jane was very close throughout her life, was once engaged to the Revd Tom Fowie, but sadly he died from yellow fever caught on a Caribbean expedition and she never married.

I would imagine that probably there was a pervasive background influence of the Anglican Church in Jane's family. Her father was the Revd George Austen, who was descended from a family of

wealthy wool merchants. However, the family assets had diminished by the time George was born in 1731. He and his sister became orphans and were raised by relatives, but aged 16 he went to Oxford University, where he was known as 'The Handsome Proctor'. Jane's mother was Cassandra Leigh, from an aristocratic family and whose father was rector of All Souls College, Oxford. Cassandra was born in 1739. George and Cassandra married in 1764 in Bath.

After ordination in 1755, George was given the living of the villages of Steventon and Deane, near Winchester, by two relatives. To supplement his income, George tutored 3 or 4 boys at a time, who lived with the family in the rectory, and he also rented a 200-acre farm. In 1801, George retired and moved the family to Bath, where they moved from one temporary accommodation to another. He died in 1805 and never saw Jane's successful emergence as an author, but he had always encouraged her to read books from his large collection and to write and act out dramas. Jane's mother, Cassandra, did however share her success and lived until 1827.

So, Jane entered a fairly crowded Rectory when she was born in Steventon in December 1775. For context, this was the year before the US Declaration of Independence. Jane was the seventh child in a family of eight, with one older sister and six brothers. They were born between 1765 and 1779. Each member, apart from the second child George, contributed in some way to the good of the community or country. George suffered from mental problems, epilepsy and was possibly deaf and mute. He was sent to live with a relative in the nearby village of Monk Sherborne. Of her other brothers the eldest, James, was ordained at age 22 and when his father retired in 1801, he took over the Steventon parish, where he remained until his death in 1819. Henry, a handsome optimist and Jane's favourite brother, served in the Oxford militia, became a banker and when his bank failed, leaving him and some of his brothers significantly poorer, he also became a clergyman for the rest of his life. Edward, the third son, was adopted at age 16 by a

rich but childless distant relative so that he could inherit the estates in Kent and Hampshire, to retain them in the Knight family. He had to change his surname to Knight but was able to settle his mother and sisters Cassandra and Jane in a house on his land at Chawton. The sixth child, Francis (Frank), was sent at age 12 to the Portsmouth Naval Academy. He was commended by Nelson, eventually became Admiral of the Fleet and was knighted in 1837. The youngest child, Charles, was also sent to the Portsmouth Naval Academy at age 12. He was apparently kind and affectionate and eventually rose to the rank of Rear Admiral. His career was adversely affected when he was court-martialled at age 37 for losing his naval vessel when on a voyage to stop piracy in Greek waters. He was acquitted because the vessel was under the control of a Greek pilot at the time but he was not given another command for the next ten years. Elder sister Cassandra was born in 1773, two years before Jane. Together with Jane, she was briefly tutored in Oxford as a youngster. It was there that Jane aged seven nearly died from what is thought to be diphtheria and they were sent home. Both girls later briefly attended together Reading Abbey Girls' School but had to leave because their father could not afford the school fees. Accordingly, both girls were mainly home-educated.

Jane enjoyed being a supportive aunt to her many nephews and nieces, liked to socialise and was a good dancer. She received some royalties from her books but was never financially rich and worried both for herself and for her brothers when Henry's bank failed. She also felt the insecurity at times, along with her mother and Cassandra, of having to live in temporary accommodation in Bath, London, Worthing and Southampton. In the months leading to her death she was in pain from what is believed to be a type of cancer. Jane is buried in Winchester Cathedral but, in their tribute to her on her gravestone, her family did not mention that she was a successful author.

Roy Jordan

Wartime Christmas



Led by a star, a golden star,
The youngest star, an olden star,
Here the kings and the shepherds are,
Akneeling on the ground.
What did they come to the inn to see?
God in the Highest, and this is He,
A baby asleep on His mother's knee
And with her kisses crowned.

Now is the earth a dreary place,
A troubled place, a weary place.
Peace has hidden her lovely face
And turned in tears away.
Yet the sun, through the war-cloud, sees
Babies asleep on their mother's knees.
While there are love and home - and these -
There shall be Christmas Day.

Joyce Kilmer



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 2026 edition should be with us by

Sunday, 15 March 2026 at the latest.





TIDINGS - Winter 2025