

# Christward

The magazine of



March 1st–April 26th  
2020

## ~ Bits and Pieces ~

It's been a dry beginning to the year as far as the magazine is concerned so I'm driven to scavenging bits and pieces from my own thoughts and activities.

### One

Went to see the play 'Death of England' at the National Theatre written by two black British playwrights, Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. This is a 'state of the nation' play with a dazzling performance from Rafe Spall as he delivers a towering and frenzied one hour and forty minute monologue about Britain today as seen through the eyes of Michael, an Essex born, white working class male. The trigger is the death of Michael's father, a nationalist, racist, market stall holder, which brings to the surface all Michael's confusion about who he is and what he believes. He is grief stricken by his father's death yet his best friend, Delroy, is black. Football is his passion, and a metaphor for England 'we invented the game, we are the masters etc', but everything is going downhill. It's not our fault, it's due to foreign players, home grown talent isn't recognised, all the old excuses reflecting our shame and guilt as the bananas rain down upon the stage.

Writing when the play was first performed at the Royal Court one of the playwrights wrote, 'We live in a country where politicians speak proudly about the capacity of the British people to "tolerate" other races, creeds, and religions. They think these speeches will bring us all together and show how liberal they are. The audacity makes me laugh. I am to be "tolerated"? This country was built on the blood, sweat and tears of the people of its commonwealth and former colonies. Are they now to be "tolerated"? Michael's honesty is the beginning of us having a conversation that shows that we are more than tolerant - that we are beginning to understand and to acknowledge our mixed messages. That we know there's much work to do on ourselves.'

There is a moment in the play where Michael, tells how he used to go as a child with his father to watch Leyton Orient. When his father's friends started to shout at the players using the 'n' word and the 'c' word his father would cover Michael's ears. Why asks Michael, in anguish, did his father not say something to them rather than covering his son's ears.

Perhaps there is something of Michael's father in all of us.

## Two

I am into recycling stuff from past issues of Christward. I find it useful to be reminded of the things which concerned us in the past. I'm surprised how relevant and perceptive the writers are about our current concerns. I find it encouraging that, although Union Chapel has changed markedly over the decades, the same important issues keep occurring implying that we do not want to stand still and vegetate.

Below are some extracts from an article written thirty two years ago by Steve Roberts entitled

### ***'Wanted - A Low Maintenance Church'.***

'...few of us have any enthusiasm for the maintenance of our organisation and buildings. These things are a burden to us, and a distraction from what are our main concerns. The burden may be a necessary one, but it is a burden none the less, and it seems to be a burden which is falling more and more on fewer shoulders...'

'Can we forget about rot (*it was the time of the dry rot crisis. Ed*) and buildings and practicalities for a while and consider these questions. ..What is it that we want from our Church? Perhaps we can all agree that what we really want is each other, a feeling of belonging to a group with a past - a history. We want to worship together, to take time out... to reflect with others on the world and the Word. *We want to do this with.....* people with whom we can be open and honest, whom we have grown to trust, where we can safely express our fears and doubts, where we need not be afraid if our explorations and reflections take us beyond what others call orthodoxy. We want others to inspire us with their visions, to be inspired by our visions, to assist us in working out these visions and to stand with us when it doesn't work out as we had hoped. And we want an excellence in our worship as we bring all this before God in an open and honest way.'

'Our problem is that.....The only way we can see to organise ourselves is the one which we are now following: Church plus minister plus buildings; Deacons and stewardship appeals and workdays, people coming to church and church finding them things to do; Meetings, and meetings and meetings..... We know no different, this pattern is so ingrained and such a habit, and we have all committed so much time and effort into making it work we can see no alternative.'

*(There follows a discussion about the House Church movement and the article ends as follows:)*

‘It is all about the church being people and not the place, about being involved in the world and not some Christian ghetto....about enabling each other for service.

What I want from Union Chapel is an honesty in reflection, support in our service and an excellence in our worship. Let us find the right structures which will allow all our visions to flourish.’

**Note:** *See the Minutes of the last Church Meeting (below) concerning the Agenda for the March Meeting ‘People seem to be indicating that they want to talk about the future, but not about buildings as such.’*

### **Three**

The exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery ‘Drawing from Life’ which is devoted to the drawings of David Hockney is definitely Five Star.

Most of the drawings are self portraits or portraits of Hockney’s mother and three close friends made over the last sixty or so years. The most recent ones dating from January this year.

So many techniques and skills are displayed but I think for most of the lay people, who visit, it will be witnessing the changes both physical and emotional in the sitters which occur as the years rolled by which will most impress - not only impress but confront. You are forced to realise that you are seeing yourself in these drawings. Your enthusiasms and your boredom, your delight and your impatience, your strength and your weariness, all reflected in the faces of five people you’ve never met in your whole life.

‘O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us  
To see ourselves as others see us!  
It wad frae many a blunder free us’  
An’ foolish notion:’

Hockney gives us the gift and the portraits are enough to make you weep for yourself.

## **~ Snippets of Hebrew ~**

### **Overweight**

Biblical Hebrew has what might well turn out to be a unique literary device. Literature specialists may know otherwise!

The device is as follows. In order to link sections of a story and possibly even to provide a little amusement, sometimes a key word is carried over to a following section of the narrative, and used in place of a more obvious word. But the use of the different word is so obvious, that it would make the readers stop and wonder. It would also alert them that there is something ahead!

There is a graphic account in Judges chapter 3. Ehud is one of the judges of Israel in the book of Judges, and Eglon is the king of Moab. Moab are giving Israel a hard time. Ehud pays Eglon a visit. Ehud is left handed, but Eglon probably doesn't know this. Ehud takes the tribute that Israel pays to Moab, and he also took a sword about a cubit in length, strapped to his right leg. The sword is about 457 mm long. If I ever write anything about dimensions after Brexit, I may revert to the exclusive use of imperial units of weights and measures, but for the sake of clarity this would be 18 inches.

So Ehud announces that he has a secret message for Eglon, and Eglon clears the courtiers from the room. He is clearly being cautious about which of his courtiers should hear this secret message, so better to be safe than sorry. They all have to leave so he can hear the secret message alone. Ehud tells Eglon that he has a message from God for him. You can almost hear the wheels of his ego whirring, as he thinks how important he is, that God has a message for him. This is so good he has to stand up for this. At which point Eglon thrusts the short sword into his belly. Now Eglon was very fat. Don't worry about political correctness, this term is a quotation from the Bible (King James Version; Judges 3 verse 17). The hilt of the sword went into his belly and the fat closed over it, and Ehud left it sticking in him. Very quaintly the King James Version says, "and the dirt came out". At which point Ehud makes his escape, closes the doors of the room behind him, and locks them. The courtiers eventually come looking for Eglon, and see the doors are locked and think he is relieving himself, and so Ehud has time to get away. He went back home to Ephraim and blew a trumpet, and all the people came to see what was up. Then they all went to Moab and slaughtered the Moabites while they had the opportunity. Presumably there was a power vacuum after Eglon had been

dispatched which gave them an opportunity to strike while the Moabites were in disarray.

So, which word links the two elements of the story? “Thrust,” as in Ehud thrust his sword into Eglon. The same word thrust, is used to describe the blast on the shophar, or rams horn, but trumpet will do. Breath was thrust into the trumpet. And the result is that Israel went and thrust their swords into the Moabites.

I think that future generations of readers would roar with laughter. The wrong use of such a word would stand out very prominently in one’s native language, like a pun that doesn’t work. It must surely be a way of adding more relish to the action. Perhaps they joked about blowing their sword and thrusting their trumpets thereafter.

It would be even funnier after a lot of wine!

## **~ Genesis 1 - 2nd Edition ~**

### **RNA world**

Inside every cell there are little factories which make the proteins we need. These proteins might be enzymes for enabling a certain chemical reaction, or to make a bit of hair or muscle, or to make an antibody or some haemoglobin in your blood. The factories are ribosomes, and plants, bacteria, animals and fungi (everything (except viruses, which hijack other cells)) uses them.

The information to make each protein is stored on a piece of DNA which is part of a chromosome in the nucleus of each cell. This information gets copied as a piece of RNA, which goes into the ribosome, and then the ribosome has the amino acids brought to it by a different kind of RNA. Joining up the amino acids makes the protein. Thus the DNA code gets translated into a protein sequence (everything uses the same code; this means that the human insulin gene will work in a bacteria for example, if we want to make a useful amount of human insulin).

In terms of function, DNA is an excellent stable storage medium for information. Proteins, chains of amino acids, are very versatile. There are 20 options for each amino acid, and a protein can have hundreds of amino acids in it, so there are a huge number of permutations, giving proteins with many different shapes and functions, like hair or antibodies.

This is a problem for molecular evolution. At one end, we are reasonably happy with the primordial soup containing all the building blocks you need for life molecules. At the other end, we can see how once you have a cell that can divide, evolution can take place, with complexity gradually increasing. It's the bit in the middle that is the challenge; forming some molecules which can replicate (like DNA can) *and* control or catalyse chemical reactions (like enzymes can).

RNA can do both of these things. A strand of RNA will act as a template on which to form another strand of RNA, and that copy can act as a template to create one exactly like the original. RNA will fold itself up into a shape, determined by the order of its own building blocks. With that shape there is now the possibility of the RNA acting as a catalyst, to speed up its own formation.

Evidence for this is of course not something you might dig up in a layer of ancient rock as it would have had to happen between 4.4 and 3.9 billion years ago. Just think how many dinosaur bones there must have been but which have all gone and that was only 60 million years ago.

But if you look at the protein factory, the ribosome used by all organisms, then RNA forms all the crucial parts that make it work. RNA is also used as part of some ancient enzymes (that is, everything uses them). These molecular memories and ghosts are clues to what might have happened to start things off. Other theories are available (like "proteins first").

*David Garner*

## ~ News of the Family ~

We were sad to hear that Margaret Garner's father had died. Our thoughts and prayers are with Margaret and David and all the family.

Carmen sends her love. She is sad that she can't get to church every Sunday now, because her osteoarthritis is playing her up.

## ~ Church Meeting held at Union Chapel on Sunday 16th February 2020 ~

**Present:** Carole W, Michael W, Steve R, Gwyneth HR, Gwen M, Margaret R, Alan R, Margaret E, Ted L, Geoff W, Margaret G, David G, Brenda M, Dylan, Andy H (chair)

Apologies: Enid W, Nicola H, Lorna R

**Minutes:** The Minutes of the January Meeting which had been circulated by email were approved.

**AOB notified:** Prayer List

**Church Weekend:** David G reminded the Meeting that the Church Weekend this year will take place on 26th – 28th June at Thornleigh, Grange-over-Sands. David G and Leonie E will be doing the housekeeping and a leaflet will be circulated soon. Please forward to family members as appropriate. All those intending to come are urged to complete and return the form promptly; a reference should be included if paying by bank transfer. Anyone with concerns about the cost should contact Leonie and David. The working title for the theme is Enjoying the Bible. Offers of help with content to Steve R please.

**Fabric Update:** We are having PAT testing carried out in the next few weeks. Items without a current PAT sticker should not be used. David proposed that we should replace the fluorescent tubes in the Large Hall with LEDs. This will cost approx. £950 – it is expensive because the ceiling is high. The Meeting voted in favour of this work being carried out.



**Links to other churches in the neighbourhood:** The old Churches Together network appears to have collapsed in recent years. The Meeting was asked if anyone was aware of any organised structure of local church co-operation, but nothing was reported. There are still ad hoc contacts, especially from St Chads in connection with Christian Aid.

We are planning to have a joint Good Friday Service with Withington Methodist Church as usual, at their premises. Offers to read at that service to Margaret R please. We are also invited to their Pancake Party.

We are occasionally invited to Newall Green Baptist Church events. We exchange magazines with Withington Methodist. It was suggested that we might widen the circulation to other local churches and invite news from them.

**Agenda for the March Church Meeting:** Discussions around the future. People seem to be indicating that they want to talk about the future, but not about buildings as such. Steve R asked whether there are items which people want to discuss specifically or whether it is more that people want space for general conversation, and also how meetings should be structured to enable these conversations. A number of comments were made, including

- It would be good to have time every 2 months or so for people to be able to report anything positive they had heard which may relate to our concerns eg about affordable housing;
- Can the Deacons find 3 people, perhaps not those with known strong views, to talk about options/thoughts? There is a wider discussion to be had about affordable housing which looks as if it may be a parallel tack to previous discussions.
- If we decide to keep the existing buildings beyond the short term, we need to discuss eco-adaptations to make them more efficient and sustainable.

Further suggestions are welcome, preferably before the next Deacons' Meeting on 4th March.

It is important that we keep communicating openly, clearly and honestly.

Three of the Deacons are meeting later today with representatives of two housing associations, just to see if they have anything worth considering further.

**Pastoral Group:**

Now that we have no minister it has been suggested that Margaret G should formally co-ordinate a network of pastoral care within the congregation. Margaret is willing to take on a role as the central person for communications but needs to be clear about what is expected. There was a general agreement that it is incumbent on all of us to report matters of pastoral concern to Margaret, and that it is better that several people mention a concern than that no-one does, accepting that she is not a quasi-minister. We trust her to exercise her discretion in dealing with information received.

**Prayer list:** Gwen M has compiled a list of topics for prayer on a day-by-day basis over the Lent period. The aim is to bind us together as a Baptist family. So far this has not been generally circulated. Those who have seen it have only minor comments. Agreed to get the document finalised and circulated in the coming week or so.

Copies of the Iona Community Lent Booklet have been distributed on a one per household basis.

**Church Action on Poverty:** have written a letter encouraging all churches to speak the truth to power about poverty in the UK and have asked for it to be signed by church “leaders”. The Deacons have agreed that Nicola H should sign this as Secretary.

**Date of Next Meeting: Sunday 15th March**

**The Meeting closed with a sung Alleluia at 12 noon.**

## **~ Church Weekend 2020 ~**

The Church Weekend will take place at Thornleigh, Grange -over-Sands from Friday 26th June to Sunday 28th June 2020.

The theme of the weekend is ‘Enjoying the Bible’. It is not about Bible Study and finding the right answers or worrying about the context. It is more about celebrating and enjoying a book which is important and

influential in our lives. About how the book lives for us in the things we like and dislike about it. About the art, literature, music, film, satire that it has influenced. About how people use and have used it for good and ill. To use the 'News of the World' slogan 'All human life is there.'

We have been to Thornleigh before. The last time was in 2017. The accommodation is good, the town is enjoyable and the countryside is beautiful.





Booking forms are available and further information can be obtained from Leonie (mobile: 07919121794 or email: [leonie\\_eshaw@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:leonie_eshaw@yahoo.co.uk))

## **~ Local Flooding ~**

### **Scenes in Fog Lane Park**



## **Talking to Each Other ~**

*If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to [alan.redhouse@virgin.net](mailto:alan.redhouse@virgin.net) or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.*

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