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NEWS

No 6 Autumn 2017

news and features from St Margaret's

ADVENT

The season of Advent marks the start of the Christian year.

Although it is a season of preparation, the characteristic note of Advent is expectation, rather than penitence, as the Church looks forward to celebrating the birth of Christ. In

this way it has a different mood from Lent. Commercial pressure may have made it harder to retain an appropriate sense of alert watchfulness in our anticipation of Christmas but, for many Christians, the Church's preparation for the coming of Christ is a potent reminder of the real meaning of the season.

Falling at the darkest time of the year, the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas. The progressive lighting of candles on the Advent wreath, acts as a

liturgical Advent calendar.

As Christmas draws nearer, the focus falls on John the Baptist and then, finally, on Mary, as she prepares to give birth to the Saviour.

Details of services at St Margaret's are on p 2.

JOHN MILTON

Commemorating 350 years of Paradise Lost at St Margaret's

Designed as a national monument to the poet John Milton, the window in the west end of St Margaret's north aisle has many stories to tell: of Milton's life; of his great works *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*; of the Rector, the Reverend Fredric Farrar, who championed the project; of the American sensibilities that made it possible; and of the artistry of the glass makers Clayton and

Bell. Many of these were recounted by Milton specialist Duncan Baxter at a lecture in the church in September.

Farrar had made it his mission in the 1880s to transform the church and put it on the national map. He raised funds for this and other memorials (see also p 3), for the pulpit and lectern and much reordering. He knew poets such as Tennyson and Browning who provided verses for the windows and had influential contacts in Parliament and America.

His travels in the US in 1885 helped to raise funds and build recognition of the church. On that trip he encountered numerous paintings of Milton, guided by Philadelphia newspaper magnate LC Childs, who was to become the major donor for the Milton window.



Duncan Baxter believes that Farrar, with Childs's influence, turned to earlier art as inspiration for the Milton window. Some of the *Paradise Lost* panels on either side, for instance, are similar to William Blake's illustrations, while *Paradise Regained* panels at the top have some precedence in Renaissance painting. The scenes from Milton's life (such as the panel above, showing the blind Milton dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughter) strongly resemble paintings by American Eastman Johnson and Hungarian Munckacsy that were well known at the time. Curiously, the style of portraits then in circulation reflected a penchant for studying art in Düsseldorf, so a German influence via America can be seen in the Milton window here.

Milton often worshipped in St Margaret's when he was a civil servant working for Oliver Cromwell, and his wife Katherine and his infant daughter (also Katherine) were buried in the churchyard. Completely blind by the time of the Restoration, when he completed most of his poetry, his older daughters acted as amanuenses.

After his death in 1674, Milton's poetry was seen as a beacon for many Enlightenment poets and authors, such as Blake and Wordsworth, through the 18th and 19th centuries. Milton's fiercely Puritan and republican outlook, however, came to be valued more highly in the US than in England. This is reflected in the lines in praise of Milton, commissioned by Farrar from the American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, placed at the bottom of the window: 'The new world honours him whose lofty plea for England's freedom make her own more sure, whose song, immortal as its theme, shall be their common freehold while both worlds endure.'

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MARRIAGE

Tara and Ryan Herr were married with great celebration at St Margaret's on 15th July, with family and guests flying in from the US and Finland. Tara was a student at Westminster School and the couple, and Tara's mother too, regularly attend Sunday eucharist.



CAROLS ABOUNDING

St Margaret's will be hosting 19 carol services for charities, schools, firms and departments in the Westminster area – two more than last year. Our sidesmen will be busy, but in many cases will be joined by Honorary Stewards from the Abbey and volunteers from the organisations.



MEMORIAL

On 12th September, the memorial for Lord Jenkin of Roding took place at St Margaret's, where he often attended services with Lady Jenkin, and where his daughter Nicola was a longstanding choir member. A full church remembered his long life and career in the Cabinet, the Commons and House of Lords.



RECTOR'S REFLECTIONS: STEPPING UP

'Refusing to ignore people in crisis' is the strapline of the British Red Cross. If you see a man clutching his chest in pain, looking pale, maybe gasping for breath, he could be having a heart attack. Refuse to ignore him – dial 999 for an ambulance, and help him to sit down, back against a wall. Stay with him to reassure him until the ambulance arrives. Refuse to ignore people in crisis.

Other people in need of help are less easy to spot. What of the man whose appearance gradually worsens over a number of months, who was a regular churchgoer but is now rather erratic, who shuns those who enquire after him? What of the woman next door who often seems to be bruised on her hands and face? You ask after her, and she says she's fine, but the bruises don't go away, and you can hear raised voices night after night.

The gospel is summed up by Jesus in the golden rule: love God, and love your neighbour.

We are to put the needs of the vulnerable among us at the forefront of our care. The very young and the very old are obvious candidates. Less obvious are adults of any age who, for emotional, medical, financial or other reasons, may be at risk of serious harm. How are we to put 'love your neighbour' into practice for these people?

Here is what to do:

1. Refuse to ignore signs that someone may be in serious need.
2. Don't be shy to ask, 'Are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?'
3. If you have concerns about someone at St Margaret's, report your concerns to the Rector or to another member of church staff.
4. If someone at St Margaret's or Westminster Abbey discloses abuse to you (neglect, emotional, financial, domestic, or sexual abuse):
 - ◆ record the details exactly as you have been told them; date and sign the record;
 - ◆ report your concerns to Angie McDonald (St

Margaret's Safeguarding Co-ordinator), or to the Rector, or to a member of the Westminster Abbey Safeguarding team*;

◆ DO NOT talk to others, investigate, or alert any possible perpetrator.

◆ If there is immediate danger, report it to the police without delay.

5. If someone who is not at St Margaret's or the Abbey discloses abuse to you, or if you have cause to be concerned for their safety, follow the steps under 4 (above) but report your concerns to your local Council, or to the police in case of emergency.

The heart of the Gospel is about actively caring for the most vulnerable among us, whatever our age. It's about loving God and loving our neighbour, right here and right now.

**For full details see: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/legal/westminster-abbey-and-st-margarets-church-safeguarding>*

SEASONAL SERVICES AND CONGREGATIONAL MILESTONES

Advent and Christmas services at St Margaret's

Sunday 17th December
6.00pm: Service of Lessons and Carols

Sunday 24th December, Christmas Eve
11.00am: Said Eucharist with hymns
6.00pm: First Eucharist of Christmas

Monday 25th December, Christmas Day
11.00am: Choral Matins

Baptisms

Sunday 5th November: Baptism of Alexander George, son of Marina Pronina and Ramon Varela.

Sunday 19th November: Baptism of Florence Caroline Fairfax and Charlotte Jane Cicely, twin daughters of Lauren and Thomas Weatherill, and great-granddaughters of Lord Weatherill, speaker of the House of Commons 1983–1992, himself a twin.

Anniversary, birthday, Sunday School

Friday 1st September: John and Shan Durham celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary.

Sunday 10th December: Henry Livingstone, 5th birthday.

Sundays from mid-October: All the DBS checks for safeguarding are complete, and the Sunday School is restarting. It will operate whenever there are children wishing to attend,

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Explorations in Faith

Sundays 15th October, 19th November,

12.30-1.45pm: Sessions held regularly after the service are currently examining chapters from *Hanging by a Thread: the Questions of the Cross*, by Samuel Wells. You're invited to bring and share some lunch.

Edwardtide at the Abbey

12th to 18th October: Services, a pilgrimage and lecture will celebrate the life of St Edward the Confessor, King of England 1042–1066, re-founder of Westminster Abbey. No tickets are required.**

Coptic Nayrouz (New Year) service

Tuesday 17th October, 7pm: at St Margaret's

St Margaret's Poetry and Arts Group

Last Saturday evening of each month:

details of meetings these sociable meetings, can be found in weekly service sheets, or from Alan Stourton. All are welcome.

Service and Symposium to mark 500th anniversary of the Reformation

Tuesday 31st October, 12 noon (service) and 2.30pm (symposium): the Archbishop of Canterbury will preach at the service in the Abbey; a symposium analysing the impact of the Reformation, follows at St Margaret's. All are welcome, but tickets are required for both.**

A Service of Prayer for Her Majesty's Armed Forces

Thursday 9th November, 1pm:
at St Margaret's

Annual Remembrance Service

Sunday 12th November, 10.55am:
at St Margaret's

St Margaret's Congregational Forum meetings

Mondays 20th November, 15th January, 6pm

Annual meeting of St Margaret's sidesmen and readers

Wednesday 29th November, 6pm:
in St Margaret's vestry

** For these events, see the Abbey website for further information and booking details, www.westminster-abbey.org/events

TOWER LANDMARKS

St Margaret's bell ringers achieve 250 full peals and name a new method

Over the summer, St Margaret's team of bell ringers (The St Margaret's Society of Change Ringers) marked two events of note for the church and for Westminster, and chalked up significant ringing achievements in the process. Tower captain, James White, explains...



On 20th July, St Margaret's Day, ten members of the Society rang a peal of 5003 Grandsire Caters in 3 hours and 16 minutes. Two or three peals are rung at St Margaret's each year to mark church events or festivals, but this one was of particular significance: it was the 250th true peal on the bells. The first, when the tower had only eight bells, was in 1743, and the first on ten bells was in 1761.

On 4th September, members of the Society met for our monthly practice. With our usual timekeeper, Big Ben, out of action for four years,

we decided to mark the loss by ringing and naming a new method (that is, a bell ringing pattern): Big Ben Bob Caters. 'Caters' means nine bells are involved in the pattern, and patterns on odd numbers of bells are traditionally rung with the tenth bell, the tenor, at the end of each row, as a form of punctuation and providing a steady rhythm. Although the method had been rung some 30 years ago, changes to the system of naming new methods meant that the quarter peal (just over fifty minutes of continuous ringing) gave us the right to name it. ~ For further information on the bells or bell ringing contact: mail.james.white@gmail.com.

REMEMBRANCE

Annual service and 89th annual Field of Remembrance

St Margaret's annual Service of Remembrance will be held this year on Sunday 12th November at 10.55am, following the opening of the Field of Remembrance the preceding Thursday.

The unbroken tradition of a Field of Remembrance dates from 1928, when The Poppy Factory took a group of disabled veterans, a tray of poppies and a collecting tin to St Margaret's churchyard.



The men gathered around a wooden cross, taken from the battlefield grave of an unknown British soldier, and some pushed poppies into the ground. Passers-by then began to buy and plant poppies of their own, creating the first field. The small crosses rather than poppies have been planted since 1931.

Security will naturally be high, and the opening ceremony is ticket only this year. The churchyard will be open, via bag search facilities, from 1pm.

DID YOU KNOW...?

O Little Town of Bethlehem

The American cleric Phillips Brooks was an imposing man (6' 4" tall and over 20 stones) and an equally impressive priest and preacher, held in great esteem on both sides of the Atlantic. Today, he is best known as the author of the Christmas carol *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (1868), still a



favourite in the US and Britain, albeit sung here to a different tune from his organist's original version.

A fervent abolitionist at a time when the Episcopal Church in America saw slavery as a political rather than a moral issue, Brooks preached the eulogy for Abraham Lincoln in Philadelphia as the President's funeral cortege rested there. Later as Rector of Trinity Church Boston, and finally Bishop of Massachusetts, he built a reputation for broad and tender sermons, compelling and full of humanity.

In 1880, Brooks became the first American to be invited to preach in the Abbey, and to Queen Victoria at Windsor. After his death in 1893, Boston Stock Exchange and shops closed in his honour and the city held a memorial service for him. And in London, St Margaret's Rector, Frederic Farrar, raised funds from Britain and the USA to install the mosaic in the south aisle. It depicts the Good Shepherd, in honour of his memory, and legacy.

STEWARDSHIP

The latest available figures for congregational giving, in the three months to May 2017 are:

June £1,948 July £1,258
August £1,654

ORGANIST PROFILE

Thomas Trotter

With its evidence of honours, awards, prizes and an international reputation, Thomas Trotter's illustrious CV could easily fill this page, so we thought we'd provide a web link to his career details (see patrickgarvey.com/artists/thomas-trotter.html) and explore beyond it.

Although not coming from a musical family, Thomas is a musician to his toes and pretty much always has been: he started playing piano at the age of five. His horizons expanded at Mostyn Hall prep school in the Wirral, when his piano master one day suggested he play the organ for a school service. From that moment on he knew that this was his instrument – although at 11 years of age he couldn't yet reach the pedals. He relates how those pedals would soon offer him new scope for interpretation: 'The limited reach of my hands for piano playing became irrelevant, as the pedals became an extra left hand on the organ.'

After prep school, his exposure to greater repertoire, musicians and instruments grew steadily, first at Malvern College, then at the Royal College of Music, where he was also organ scholar at St George's Chapel Windsor, and finally as organ scholar at Kings College Cambridge. After leaving there, a scholarship took him to study in Paris with Marie-Claire Alain the world's most recorded classical organist.

By that stage Thomas had long realised that he wanted a freelance career as a concert organist. Taking first prize in 1979 at St Alban's, generally regarded as the top international organ competition, opened opportunities, not least for his debut at the Royal Festival Hall in 1980, and a host of contacts, including Richard Hickox, then Director of Music and organist at St Margaret's.

When Hickox left the church in 1982, Thomas became permanent organist. While he has never been officially on the staff, he has gladly taken on responsibility for covering services in exchange

for flexibility and use of the organ for rehearsing. Of many highlights as St Margaret's organist, he puts his 30th anniversary concert at the top. 'It was such an impressive audience, and a welcome chance to raise funds for the Royal College of Organists.' He continues to support the RCO, which last year awarded him the RCO Medal for distinguished achievement in organ playing.

In 1983 Thomas became the youngest Birmingham City Organist ever appointed. 'It was a big career break for me as an aspiring concert organist, with so many concerts to present.' And he's always on the lookout for new repertoire for Birmingham and elsewhere, even commissioning work from composers such as from James Macmillan and Jonathan Dove.

As anyone who has heard his introductions at concerts will confirm, he helps guide audiences into new works and classic repertoire alike, with pertinent background and musical extracts to illustrate key points, a light touch and a dry wit. Aware and appreciative of audiences, he says, 'I don't just play for me. I'd like the audience to find something accessible in every piece.'

Some 60 concerts a year offer the chance to play organs across the world, which he clearly relishes. 'Every organ is different, and you have to assess strengths and weaknesses to get the best out of it. That involves hours of rehearsal, but I find it very rewarding.' A favourite is St Sulpice in Paris, and after our interview he was preparing for a concert at the Mariinsky Hall in St Petersburg. It's the organ's power and range of colour and style that continue to captivate.

He sees his recordings, which regularly win prizes, as a necessary part of his professional life. 'They attract more publicity than recitals, and are a useful marker of where you are as a player. The trouble is you can't go back to them if you later change your ideas on the interpretation.'



Having made friends in Windsor as an organ scholar, he's been living there happily since 1981. When not working he 'just does normal things – dinner with friends, family visits, cinema, catching up with box sets, a bit of jogging.' He also enjoys recitals by other organists, playing his piano and other keyboard instruments and exploring composers. Music, it seems, is always in the air.

To find out more about Thomas beyond the organ loft, we posed some quick fire questions...

✦ **What's your favourite setting?** Howells' Gloucester setting for Evensong **Voluntary?** Widor's Toccata...or whatever I'm playing in my next concert! **Musician?** Ton Koopman, whose playing is so full of character and humour. **Conductor?** Mackerras.

✦ **And your favourite book?** Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*. **Art?** Currently a Corot in the Louvre called *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*. **Food?** Anything from Greggs. **Holiday?** Mainland Greece.

✦ **If you had a time machine where would you go?** I'd love to hear JS Bach play the organ in Weimar or drop into the astonishing premiere of *Rite of Spring* in Paris where the audience rioted.

✦ **And your guilty pleasure?** Trying to get a bargain on eBay...

GUIDED TOURS

The tightening of security arrangements around the Abbey and St Margaret's has had the unintended effect of making it much more difficult for visitors to come to St Margaret's during the week. Weekday visitor numbers are currently standing at about a third of what they were prior to the closure of the east and north

gates into North Green. When the churchyard gates are open, numbers continue to be buoyant.

With a challenge come new opportunities. Following consultation with St Margaret's staff and the Rector, the Abbey Visitor Services team is shortly to pilot a scheme of free guided tours around St Margaret's. On weekdays, visitors to the Abbey will be invited to gather in the North Transept at stated times during the day, and will be taken over to St Margaret's by a knowledgeable Abbey Guide for a 20 minute guided tour of the building. Times of guided tours will be flexed around the availability of Abbey Guides, services in St Margaret's and the Abbey, and other weekday gatherings in St Margaret's.

If you know St Margaret's and its history well, and would like to volunteer as a Guide, do contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator, simon.jones@westminster-abbey.org for further details.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN WESTMINSTER

The St Margaret's link person with Churches Together in Westminster has recently changed. Very many thanks go to Willem van der Lee, who has served as our link person for many years. Thanks to Willem, St Margaret's has hosted ecumenical services and events from time to time, and has developed good relationships with a number of churches across the City of Westminster. Many of the congregation have had the opportunity to visit churches ranging from Westminster Quakers Meeting House to Notre Dame de France, the French church near Leicester Square. We look forward to continuing to develop our connection with Churches Together in Westminster via our new link person, Victoria Dearborn.

