

THE HADLEIGH MESSENGER

November 2020



The Magazine of the
United Reformed Church, Hadleigh, Essex

SUNDAY SERVICES - SUSPENDED

10.30am every Sunday
with Holy Communion on 3rd Sunday of the month

6.30pm on 1st Sunday only
with Holy Communion

Remembrance Day: 'Lights Out'

A reflection by Rev. Michael Meachin

Rev. Michael Meachin, United Reformed Church Chaplain to the Royal Navy's HMS Collingwood, offers this reflection for Remembrance Day 2020.



At 11.00am on the 11th November each year, we will join with many countries around the world in two minutes silence to remember all who have been killed, wounded or affected by war.

In 1914, Edward Grey, Britain's then Foreign Secretary, uttered these words on the eve of Britain officially entering the First World War: "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." Since then however, the United Kingdom has been involved in 44 recognized wars and conflicts.

At Remembrance services all around the globe the words of the Kohima Epitaph – the epitaph carved on the Memorial of the 2nd British Division in the cemetery of Kohima in north-east India – are read:

*When you go home
Tell them of us and say
For your tomorrow
We gave our today*

However, it is based on something much older. It was Simonides who wrote the famous lines about the Spartan action under King Leonidas who held the pass of Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BC. One translation of Simonides' epitaph reads as follows:

*Tell it in Sparta, thou that passes by
Here, faithful to her charge, her soldiers lie*

These moments in human history and the experiences and memories that we each personally have show us that the lamps do not go out, that the hope of peace and justice in the actions of our service men and women keep the lamps lit. This is the promise of God that although we may try, we cannot extinguish what is good in humanity and God's creation. In the Gospel of St John, we read "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it".

So, as we remember the lights going out over Europe at the start of the First World War and the sacrifice of all those affected in the conflicts since, let us be inspired in the knowledge and faith that they will always be relit by those prepared to give themselves for others. Amen

Prayer of Peace

As we remember the courage of our forebears; in action we thank you for their examples of quick thought, courage and self-sacrifice.

Embolden us to pray for the strength to work for justice with mercy in all things. Strengthened by the remembrance of those commemorated here, we ask for confidence and hope in future times;

that we may stand tall and be fruitful people in the challenges that lie before us, and the communities we represent, now and in the years to come.

We ask these things in the name of him whose courage never failed,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

Honour Them

Honour them who may have woken
to know the battle's grim tomorrow;
yet equally whose youth was broken
by living death of pain and sorrow:
they shared the pulling down of blinds
on their own shattered limbs and minds.

Written in 2014 by Ken Tout, a British tank commander in WW2

Letter from Adrian

Dear friends,

As I sit down to write this letter, we have just been told that we are likely to go into lockdown yet again on Thursday (5th November). How do you feel about it?

As we watched the news on Saturday night, to be honest, I got more and more depressed. Our life, once more, was to be dictated by politicians and scientists and, yet, in our part of the country there seemed to be no real reason for it. The graphs that they showed indicated that there wasn't a real problem in our part of the country and so I got annoyed.

This state of mind continued for the rest of the day and on Sunday morning. We are to be allowed out only to walk the dog and visit the supermarket for essentials. The restrictions mean no contact with my daughter and her family, including our new granddaughter, or with my son and his family, and no more meals out. It seemed that the likelihood was that if this second lockdown didn't work as they planned then we could forget about Christmas. To cap it all, the churches were to be closed again so no fellowship and no worship in which to show our love to God.

At Westcliff Free Church, we have restarted our morning services. I'm afraid that my attitude hadn't changed overnight and, as I had booked my seat for that morning's service, I duly went. When the service started, my spirit began to lift as we quietly sang *This is my desire to honour You*. Then we had a reading from Joshua 1:5-8:

'No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land, I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law

always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.'

This led to a testimony from the leader of the service. She told us of a serious illness that she had recently been through and how the Lord had not only comforted her and strengthened her as she went through the treatment involved but also how the Lord used her to speak to those who were treating her about how he was strengthening her. In her testimony my heart responded to all that the Lord had done for her.

Then the minister started to preach on the theme *Never Give Up*. His message was about the opportunity Covid-19 gave us to draw close to the Lord. More time to pray. More time to study His word. More time to grow closer to Him. An opportunity to enjoy a new kind of fellowship that did not depend upon meeting but upon making time to pick up the phone and bless one another. This was a real blessing to me and changed my spirit, so I came out of church on a high.

There is a sense in which, through Covid-19, God has given us time to draw closer to Him. During the previous lockdown I had started to seriously study Ephesians. In normal life, without a lockdown, I probably wouldn't have started. But God seemed to speak in each passage. One of these days, I am sure it will become a preaching series or a bible study series!

How can you use this God-given time to grow closer to Him? How can you use it to pray, to study or to reach out to one another with His Love? Remember in bad situations – like when the Jews were in exile – God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah: "Comfort ye, Comfort ye my people" (Isaiah 40:1). So whatever difficult situations we face, including Covid-19, God will be reaching out to bring comfort. Remember only that the bringer of that comfort could be you.

Blessings,

Adrian



From the Bible

"... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)

From the Editor

Welcome to the November edition of the *Hadleigh Messenger*.

With a second lockdown having been introduced in England, the church remains closed. However, the Elders have recently held a meeting to sign off the risk assessment, which is a pre-requisite for re-opening, so it may be possible to re-open for Christmas depending on how things develop. For the meeting, three of the Elders met at the church and Royston, our Church Secretary joined in via Skype.

I've been quite busy sorting through more photos (and cuttings) rescued from the Echo Archive, which Hadleigh Gardening Association kindly

allowed me to store in their old store more than three years ago! I've come across a few interesting items, some of which I hope to include in next month's magazine. The exercise is a bit like gold prospecting with a lot of time expended in return for the discovery of a few nuggets.

November is a time of remembrance and the content of the magazine is heavily influenced by this. I've not had time to write fresh material and, unfortunately, I've not received any contributions from readers. The item immediately below has appeared before but I thought it was worth another airing.

Malcolm Brown



What we can learn from our kids...

- It's more fun to colour outside the lines.
- If your dog doesn't like someone you probably shouldn't either.
- Even Popeye didn't eat his spinach until he had absolutely to.
- Ask for sprinkles.
- Sometimes you have to take the test before you've finished studying.
- Make up the rules as you go along.
- There is no good reason why clothes have to match.
- If you're going to draw on the wall, do it behind the couch.
- Just keep banging until someone opens the door.
- Making your bed is a waste of time.
- If a horse you're drawing looks more like a dog, make it a dog.
- It doesn't matter who started it.
- Ask "why" until you understand.
- If you want a kitten, start out asking for a horse.

HADLEIGH URC OFFICERS

Interim Moderators:

Rev. Jim Tarrant/Rev. Celia Whitman

Hon. Secretary:

Mr Royston Brackin (01702 558862)

Acting Hon. Treasurer:

Mr Royston Brackin

Serving Elders:

Mr Royston Brackin

Mrs Heather Brown (01702 557678)

Mr Malcolm Brown (01702 557678)

Miss Jean Reeve (01702 554907)

Useful information

Address: 1 Church Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, SS7 2DQ

Website: www.hadleighsexurc.org.uk

An invitation

When the church re-opens, we invite you to join us for worship and fellowship at any of our services. In the meantime, if you are in need of help that the ministry of the church can supply then be assured of our interest and concern. If you are suffering from ill health, loneliness or bereavement and feel that we could help, or if you would like to ask for a prayer or personal visit then please let one of our church officers know. All such requests are treated in the strictest confidence.

Family News

David Blackwood



Some readers will remember David, father of the late Gwen Smallbone, one of our Elders who died of kidney cancer in August 2010. Sadly, David passed away in Southend Hospital on 26th October at the age of 92. David's grandson, Douglas, told me (the Editor) about his death and mentioned that David's health had deteriorated since lockdown, resulting in several hospital stays.

David worked in the printing industry and was a well-known bee-keeper. He lived in Hawkwell and worshipped at St Mary's Church but attended events at our church such as the Harvest Supper and New Year's Eve Social. Occasionally, he would provide musical entertainment by playing his keyboard, sometimes accompanying Gwen.

David's funeral will take place at St Mary's Church on Tuesday 17th November.

We fondly remember times of fellowship with David and send our condolences to his daughter, Linda, and to Gwen's family.

Gladys Price

Gladys, a former member of our Wives'



Fellowship, passed away in Godden Lodge care home early on the morning of 30th October. Gladys had reached the age of 97 despite suffering a severe stroke in March 2011, which left her paralysed down her left side. From then on, she needed full-time care. She moved from a care home in Southend to Godden Lodge in Thundersley in December 2015. Until the coronavirus lockdown in March, I delivered the church magazine to Gladys and passed on news about friends in the fellowship.

Gladys's funeral will take place at Pitsea Crematorium on Friday 13th November.

We send our condolences to Gladys's sons, Malcolm and Colin, and to the rest of her family.

Please remember friends in need of prayer...

- **All our friends who are suffering mentally or physically as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the second lockdown. We particularly think of those who live alone and those in care homes.**

URC News

URC honours the late Michael Davies



Rev. Michael Davies, who served the Presbyterian Church of England at Rustington and Wallasey, the URC as its first Youth

Secretary and Moderator of Thames North Province (now known as a Synod), and the World Council of Churches as Assistant General Secretary and as its representative to Britain and Ireland for 20 years, has died aged 87.

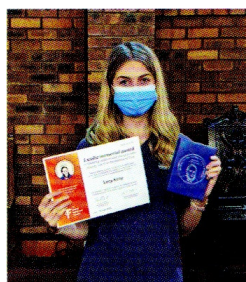
After training at Westminster College Cambridge, Michael was called to St Andrew's, Rustington, on the Sussex coast, in 1959. Whilst there, Michael saw an opportunity for a new church in the Pagham area, 14 miles away. In 1966, St Ninian's Presbyterian Church hall opened thanks to his church planting efforts. (The church building of St Ninian's opened in 1971.) In 1965, Michael was called to the Presbyterian Church at Egremont, Wallasey. He spent two years working for Help the Aged before becoming the URC's first ever Youth Secretary in 1972.

Rev. Michael Hopkins, Clerk of the URC General Assembly, said: "I first encountered Michael in the late 1990s, when he was again covering the role of National Youth Secretary. He was very helpful to me in helping me explore and develop my vocation. I later came to realise the depth and breadth of Michael's experience – church planting in Sussex, his work at Church House, as Moderator of Thames North, and the World Council of Churches. After the former Moderators of the General Assembly Revs. Martin Cressey and Arthur Macarthur died, Michael ended up as the only person to have attended every URC General Assembly, indeed he had attended every Presbyterian Church of England Assembly since 1959. In later years, he was an invaluable member of the volunteer team organising the Assembly."

Rev. Dr Andrew Prasad, Moderator of the URC Thames North Synod, said: "Michael served as Moderator of Thames North Province from 1978 to 1990. He was an outstanding leader: wise, kind and knowledgeable, whether in youth work or accountancy, and he engaged well with people of all ages. We pay tribute to him for his amazing ministry – he will always be remembered, and we

hold his wife, Rosemary, and children Heather, Jackie and Peter, in our thoughts and prayers at this sad time."

Young brigade helper honoured



Seventeen-year-old Lucy Keep, from 7th Coventry Girls' Brigade, received a Lundie Award in September for her dedication to the organisation in these challenging times. The brigade group meets at

Hollyhead Road URC, Warwickshire. Karen Adams, the Girls' Brigade team leader, who also serves as an elder at the church, nominated Lucy for the award.

She said: 'Lucy has worked closely with our other leaders to plan and prepare badge work for younger girls, from craft work to new ways of telling Bible stories. My other main leader moved away from Coventry, and, despite her young age, Lucy has stepped up to help me. She has started an apprenticeship, and comes straight from work on a Monday evening and gets stuck right into whatever we are doing. She has supported sleepovers and an activity centre day – really going out of her comfort zone to join in some activities – as well as week-to-week activities. Lucy also ensures that the practicalities and rules of running a Girls Brigade company are recognised and followed, including safeguarding and security. She shows a care and consideration for the girls and the leaders with a maturity beyond her age. In addition to this, Lucy has stepped in to deliver IT support for church services.'

The Lundie awards scheme was established in memory of Rev. Robert Lundie, a Scottish Presbyterian minister who died in 1895. The scheme rewards children or young people each month, with a chocolate medal and a £100 grant to be spent for the benefit children and/or young people in the recipients synod.

New URC website

The United Reformed Church website is being transformed to make it easier to use and look better. As part of this process, a digital research and feedback group has been established to inform the look, feel, content and navigation of the new website. To donate some of your time to help, visit www.bit.ly/urcwebfocus.

New Moderator of URC's Thames North Synod nominated



Rev. George Watt, Minister of Reigate Park URC, has been nominated as the next Moderator of Thames North Synod. George was born and brought up in the Highlands of Scotland, living most of

his childhood in the village of Lairg in Sutherland. He came to faith through the work of Scripture Union and was also nurtured through his local Church of Scotland and its youth fellowship.

George's family moved to the Shetland Islands when he started studying at Stirling University where he gained a degree in history, but also studied economics, statistics and religious studies. On graduating, the minister moved to the Medway Towns in Kent where he started work as a statistician with Lloyds of London. He went on to become a computer implementation analyst.

George joined the URC in Gillingham and became an Elder at the age of 23. He met and married his wife Linda and then started training for the ministry at Mansfield College. His first pastorate was at Freemantle and Isaac Watts Memorial Churches in Southampton. In 1998, he moved to St

Andrew's, Cheam, where he was minister for 12 years. George has been the Minister at Reigate Park Church in Surrey for the past ten years. George and Linda have three sons one of whom, Reuben, is the URC Youth Moderator.

George will succeed Rev. Dr Andrew Prasad who is due to retire in early 2021, having served as Synod Moderator since 2008. The nomination will now be presented to Mission Council.

Former Westminster College principal serves Bristol churches



Rev. Neil Thorogood was inducted to the pastorate of Thornbury and Trinity-Henleaze United Reformed churches, Bristol, on 19 September. Mr Thorogood previously served the URC as

Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge. 'I am thrilled to be given this opportunity to discover what God intends in these settings,' said Mr Thorogood. 'My family and I are feeling very at home already.' Mr Thorogood's induction service was led by Rev. Nigel Uden, Immediate-Past Moderator of the URC General Assembly. A video recording can be watched on YouTube at www.bit.ly/NTinduct.

A Reflection by Bob Kikuyu

A young man once heard of the wisdom of an old man and decided to test him. He thought through all the things he could do to stretch the old man, perhaps trap him and prove him not as wise. He then came up with what he considered a bright idea.

So, he rose early one morning and as he walked through the fields, caught a butterfly and trapped it in the palm of his hands. He proceeded to the old man's house and told him what he had in his hands. He then posed the question – "Is it dead or alive?" He knew full well that if the old man said it was dead he would release the butterfly alive. If the old man said it was alive, he would then kill it by crushing it between the palms of his hands. He waited for the response, convinced that he had finally trapped the wise old man. After a few minutes of contemplation, the wise old man looked into the young man's eyes and spoke gently saying, "Son, it depends on you".

The earth, this beautiful work of God's creation which we have been given seems to be hurtling to

ruin. Our news headlines speak of massive forest fires on one side of continent's coast and thundering hurricanes on the other. Creation seems to be lashing back. It does not appear to be good in the manner it is introduced to us in Gen 1: 31. "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good..."

Perhaps we have misunderstood our role. In the same creation narrative from Genesis 1, much has been emphasised about our role of dominion. The misunderstanding of this term has led humankind to set itself above and outside of creation. We do not see ourselves as part of creation but rather creation as something we can exploit for our own ends. Our attention to creation, if proper, must be on the premise of seeing it and ourselves through the eyes of God – a loving creator God who saw what He made and it was good. Dominion means that we keep all creation as good, use it for good and nurture it for its good.

From BBC Radio 4's Sunday Worship on 4 Oct 2020.

Remembering Together

In *Saving Private Ryan*, a 1998 Hollywood film loosely based on a true story, Captain John H. Miller, played by Tom Hanks, is killed in the process of rescuing Private James Ryan. The captain's final words to the man he has been charged with rescuing are: "Earn this; earn it." The captain and his comrades have gone to great trouble to rescue Ryan, and now a life is to be lost on the battlefield for him. The captain wants assurance that it's all been worth it.

The old saying "war is hell" dates back to at least the 19th century and seems undisputable. War forces people to endure indescribably hostile environments, treacherous journeys and violence, trauma and the death of countless people who did not ask for conflict to rage in their land.

For God, the answer is clear. All life is sacred. In Genesis 1:31, as God looks over all creation, following the introduction of human beings into the mix of land, sea, light, darkness, animals and plants, God saw that "indeed, it was very good". However, throughout the rest of Genesis, this initial image of paradise and perfection doesn't last long. Humanity is created in the image of God with the ability to choose a life of love, peace, justice and fulfilment for all creation, but also to choose power, selfishness, greed and corruption. The remainder of scripture follows a story of humanity struggling with these choices, often getting it wrong, with individuals, nations and peoples often putting themselves and their own interests above those of others. This struggle continues to this day, perhaps most visible in the persistent prevalence of conflict.

On Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday, we take time to remember those who have sacrificed, or otherwise lost, their lives in conflict. It is clearer than ever, as we take time to remember all who have been lost, that the way of life which God hopes for us, of love and peace for all creation, is not an easy one. There are many for whom injustice is a daily reality, through no fault of their own, with little sense of hope or escape. There are many who have no choice but to fight enemies who are trying to eradicate them. For those who offer their lives to the service of their country, there is no choice in the orders they receive. If they are called to fight, they must fight. There are many who want justice but find it difficult to show mercy.

Given these challenges, it is easy to feel that what we have to offer God is not enough. In terms of our relationship with God, we do not need to "earn it". The love, grace and salvation of God are offered freely to us, not as a result of anything we've done or the status we hold, but so that all people who are created and shaped by God, may, as John 10:10 says, "have life and have it to the full".

What does God expect of us mere human beings in the face of life's challenges? As the famous words of Micah 6:8 remind us:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

We are not asked to give what we do not have, solve every problem, or get everything right. We are only human, after all. We are called to walk humbly with our God, accepting our limitations, but, at the same time, doing everything we can in pursuit of justice and mercy. In keeping this as a priority, God promises us, that no matter how difficult things get, the Holy Spirit will always be with us to strengthen and guide us "until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

It can be hard to act justly and love mercy, but everyone has the chance to make the world a better place. As we walk around our communities, go to work, shop for groceries, enjoy our hobbies, there are chances to build relationships with those around us, to show kindness, to grow our awareness of issues around us and to help find solutions to problems as they emerge in the different communities we're part of. In making the most of these everyday opportunities, we can play our part in reducing the divisions, inequalities and injustices which fuel negativity.

As well as the personal ways we can work for peace, we can also be part of the wider global struggle, participating in the many movements and campaigns which work towards an end to war, encourage reconciliation and strives for a world in which all can live in peace. More information on how you can be a part of this can be found at the end of this booklet.

These actions may appear small and insignificant at times but, following the example of Christ, living the life of Jesus today cannot be underestimated if we want to build the world which God calls us to create. That is why we are

asked to “walk humbly”, not powerfully or arrogantly, with our God. It is the small steps which ultimately lead to significant changes which will bring about the world of peace and justice which God calls us to build.

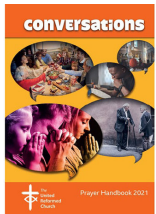
As we take time to remember the horrors of war and conflict, offering prayers for those who have died, we can also take refuge and hope in a God who is working to help those who are caught up in needless violence (Isaiah 2:3-5). We can also trust that God is actively at work through us.

So, whatever might be holding us back, making us sad or angry, making us fearful or hesitant, making us tired and weary, may the old words of Charles Wesley be true for us this day: “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee”.

From a booklet entitled ‘Remembrance for whole-of-life disciples’ prepared by Martin Hayward, Mission and Development Officer for URC Southern Synod, and Simon Peters, Walking the Way Project Manager for the URC.

2021 URC Prayer Handbook: Conversations

The 2021 Prayer Handbook, *Conversations*, is now available from the URC Bookshop. This year, the prayer handbook includes new sets of prayers in addition to the usual prayers that follow the weekly lectionary readings.



Editors Karen Campbell, the URC’s Secretary for Global & Intercultural Ministries, and Ian Fosten, a retired URC Minister and book reviews editor for Reform magazine, explained more.

“Someone was once described as, ‘only ever on broadcast, never on receive’. That expression might describe how we often experience prayer. Prayers - particularly in church services - are spoken, offered, ‘broadcast’, often without a response being sought (or expected!).

“We are certain, however, that prayer is meant to be rather more interactive than this – ‘conversational’, you might say; us speaking with God, God speaking with us. In making this assertion, we in no way wish to reduce Almighty God to the status of being merely a cosy chum, rather we are seeking to express the deep truth that God, who is made known in Jesus, invites us into an active relationship.

That relationship, like any other, is discovered and deepened when it is enriched through honest giving and receiving, speaking and listening.

“In seeking prayers for this book, we were keen to find pieces that reflected the writers’ conversational encounters with God – sometimes using familiar style and language, at other times speaking less conventionally and more adventurously - always speaking from the heart.

“This year’s Prayer Handbook comes in two sections. The first follows the pattern of linking a prayer to one or more of the set lectionary readings for particular days throughout the year.

“For the second section, we invited contributions which arose out of the writers’ personal experiences of conversing with God – the everyday and extraordinary situations in which they are moved to say ‘Sorry!’, ‘Help!’, ‘Thank You!’; the issues which give rise to deep reflection, or move them to consider their response to God’s voice as heard through the scriptures and the world.”

The Prayer handbook can be purchased online from www.urcshop.co.uk. The A5 standard edition is £4.99 + p&p and the A4 Lectern/Large print edition is £9.99 + p&p.

Praying For Rain

The minister's six-year-old daughter had been so naughty during the week that her mother decided to punish her by not allowing her to go to the Sunday School Picnic on Saturday. When the day came, her mother felt that she had been too harsh and changed her mind. She told her daughter that she could go to the picnic after all but the little girl's reaction was one of gloom and sadness.

“What's the matter? I thought you'd be glad to go to the picnic,” her mother said.

“It's too late,” the little girl said. “I've already prayed for rain!”

Vera Brittain

Though not a soldier, Vera Brittain had a first-hand glimpse of the carnage of World War I through three years as a British Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse in France and Malta. During that time she suffered several personal tragedies. Brittain captured her anguish in *Verses of a V.A.D.*, a collection of poems, published in 1919, that describes the war from a female perspective.



Born in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Brittain was the daughter of a well-to-do paper manufacturer. When she was 18 months old, her family moved to Macclesfield, Cheshire, and when she was 11 years old, they moved again; to the spa town of Buxton in Derbyshire. Growing up, her only brother Edward was her closest companion.

From the age of 13, she attended boarding school at St Monica's, Kingswood, Surrey where her aunt was the principal. She read English Literature at Somerville College, Oxford, delaying her degree after one year in the summer of 1915 to work as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse for much of the First World War, initially at the Devonshire Hospital in Buxton and later in London, Malta and France. Her fiancé Roland Leighton, close friends Victor Richardson and Geoffrey Thurlow, and her brother Edward were all killed in the war.

A quotation from Brittain's poem *To My Brother* was featured on a commemorative stamp produced in 2016 by Royal Mail as one of their Special Stamps commemorating the 100th anniversary of the First World War. Brittain wrote about receiving the news of her brother Edward's death in *Testament of Youth*:



“By the following Saturday we had still heard nothing of Edward. The interval usually allowed for news of casualties after a battle was seldom as long as this, and I began, with an artificial sense of lightness unaccompanied by real conviction, to think that there was perhaps, after all, no news to come. I had just announced to my father, as we sat over tea in the dining room, that

I must really do up Edward's papers and take them to the post office before it closed for the weekend, when there came the sudden loud clattering at the front-door knocker that always meant a telegram.

For a moment I felt that my legs would not carry me, but they behaved quite normally as I got up and went to the door. I knew what was in the telegram – I had known for a week – but because the persistent hopefulness of the human heart refuses to allow intuitive certainty to persuade the reason of that which it knows, I opened and read it in a tearing anguish of suspense.

‘Regret to inform you Captain E. H. Brittain M.C. killed in action Italy June 15’

‘No answer’, I told the boy mechanically, and handed the telegram to my father, who had followed me into the hall. As we went back into the dining room I saw, as though I had never seen them before, the bowl of blue delphiniums on the table; their intense colour, vivid, ethereal, seemed too radiant for earthly flowers...

Long after the family had gone to bed and the world had grown silent, I crept into the dining-room to be alone with Edward's portrait. Carefully closing the door, I turned on the light and looked at the pale, pictured face, so dignified, so steadfast, so tragically mature. He had been



through so much – far, far more than those beloved friends who had died at an earlier stage of the interminable War, leaving him alone to mourn their loss. Fate might have allowed him the sorry compensation of survival, the chance to make his lovely music in honour of their memory. It seemed indeed the last irony that he should have been killed by the countrymen of Fritz Keisler, the violinist whom of all others he had most greatly admired.

And suddenly, as I remembered all the dear afternoons and evenings when I had followed him on the piano as he played his violin, the sad searching eyes of the portrait were more than I could bear, and falling on my knees before it I began to cry ‘Edward! Oh, Edward!’ in dazed repetition, as though my persistent crying and calling would somehow bring him back.”

Returning to Oxford after the war to read history, Brittain found it difficult to adjust to life in post-war England. She met Winifred Holtby, and a close friendship developed, both aspiring to become established on the London literary scene. The bond lasted until Holtby's death from kidney failure in 1935. Other literary contemporaries at Somerville included: Dorothy L. Sayers, Hilda Reid, Margaret Kennedy, and Sylvia Thompson.

In 1925, Brittain married George Catlin, a political scientist. Their son, John Brittain-Catlin, with whom Vera had a bad relationship, was an artist, painter, businessman, and the author of the autobiography *Family Quartet*, which appeared in 1987. Their daughter, born 1930, is the former Labour Cabinet Minister, now Liberal Democrat peer, Shirley Williams, one of the 'Gang of Four' rebels on the right-wing of the Labour Party who defected to found the SDP in 1981.

Brittain's first published novel, *The Dark Tide* (1923), created scandal as it caricatured dons at Oxford, especially at Somerville. In 1933, she published the work for which she became famous, *Testament of Youth*, which chronicled her wartime experiences, followed by *Testament of*

Friendship (1940) – her tribute to and biography of Winifred Holtby – and *Testament of Experience* (1957), the continuation of her own story, covering the years 1925–1950. Vera Brittain wrote from the heart, basing many of her novels on actual experiences and actual people.

In the 1920s, she became a regular speaker on behalf of the League of Nations Union, but in June 1936 she spoke at a peace rally in Dorchester, sharing a platform with Dick Sheppard, George Lansbury, Laurence Housman, and Donald Soper. In January 1937, she joined the Peace Pledge Union and, later that year, the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. Her newly found pacifism came to the fore during World War II, when she began the series of *Letters to Peacelovers*. From the 1930s onwards, Brittain was a regular contributor to the pacifist magazine *Peace News*, eventually becoming a member of the editorial board.

Brittain never fully got over the death in June 1918 of her beloved brother, Edward. She died in Wimbledon on 29th March 1970, aged 76. Her ashes were scattered on Edward's grave on the Asiago Plateau in Italy.

The Last Post

The stars are shining bright above the camps,
The bugle calls float skyward, faintly clear;
Over the hill the mist-veiled motor lamps
Dwindle and disappear.

The notes of day's good-bye arise and blend
With the low murmurous hum from tree and sod,
And swell into that question at the end
They ask each night of God—

Whether the dead within the burial ground
Will ever overthrow their crosses grey,
And rise triumphant from each lowly mound
To greet the dawning day.

Whether the eyes which battle sealed in sleep
Will open to reveillé once again,
And forms, once mangled, into rapture leap,
Forgetful of their pain.

But still the stars above the camp shine on,
Giving no answer for our sorrow's ease,
And one more day with the Last Post has gone
Dying upon the breeze.

Vera Brittain - Étapes, 1918

Planning the burial of the Unknown Warrior

- a blog post from the National Archives

On Friday 15th October 1920, a mere 27 days before Armistice Day, the British Cabinet considered a proposal sent by the Dean of Westminster, Herbert Ryle. He had suggested that 'the remains of one of the numerous unknown men who fell and were buried in France should be exhumed, conveyed to England, cremated if necessary, and given an imposing military funeral in Westminster Abbey on November 11th'.

After a lengthy discussion, in which the Chief of the Imperial General Staff declared that the Army would be unanimously in favour of the proposal, the Cabinet agreed, and plans were swiftly put into motion to make sure that this plan would come to fruition.

After overcoming objections that this type of event would be deemed as 'sensational', the view was taken that such a gesture would be acceptable to the people, honour fighting men, and do so 'without singling out for such distinction any one known man'. Arrangements were made for the selection of the individual and plans put together for their transportation to London.

The ship chosen to take the coffin of the Unknown Warrior from Boulogne to Dover was HMS Verdun. The vessel was specially selected to perform this duty as a compliment to France, given the significance of the Battle of Verdun to the French people.

As late as 6th November, the Admiralty notified the Commanding Officer of the vessel that 'Their Lordships have selected HM Ship under your command to convey a coffin containing the remains of an Unknown Warrior...on November 10th'. The letter went on to provide instructions as to how the coffin was to be treated:

'The coffin is to be received on board HMS Verdun by a seaman guard of about 20 men under an officer, and placed on a bier [pedestal] in a suitable position. A large Union Jack is to be taken to cover the coffin from Boulogne to London. Colours to be half-masted as the coffin arrives on board. The ship's company is to be fallen in. After arrival on board, sentries with arms reversed are to be posted round the bier'.

Upon its arrival in Dover, the military garrison there was also given further instructions as to the procedure to be adopted. Once HMS Verdun had

passed through the entrance of the Harbour, a 19-gun salute would be fired by No.11 Fire Command, Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA).

The vessel was to come alongside No.3 berth, and was to be met by the band of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, which would be playing 'Land of Hope and Glory'. The coffin would then be conveyed to the railway carriage, bound for London Victoria Station, by six bearers, one man from each of: the Royal Navy; No.11 Fire Command, RGA; 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers; 2nd Battalion, Connaught Rangers; Royal Marines; and Royal Air Force. Guards of honour, consisting of 3 officers and 100 other ranks, from the two Irish regiments stationed at the Dover Garrison, as well as students from the Duke of York's Royal Military School, would then line the route through the town. The band was to play a slow march while the coffin was carried to the railway platform.

The coffin was to be placed in a luggage van, the same van which had carried the bodies of Edith Cavell, a nurse executed in 1915 for helping Allied service personnel escape in occupied Belgium, and Captain Charles Fryatt, a Merchant Navy Captain who was executed in 1916, having attempted to ram a U-boat off the Netherlands coast in March 1915. It would arrive at Victoria Station by the afternoon of the 10th.



Photograph of the Cenotaph, Nov 1920

The event at Westminster Abbey was also to coincide with the unveiling of the permanent Cenotaph at Whitehall.

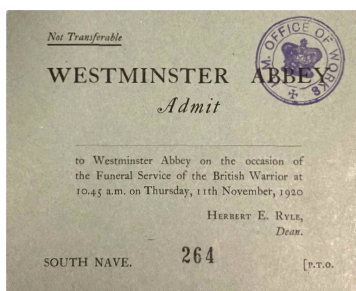
A temporary memorial had initially been built, but the Cabinet had authorised Sir Edwin Lutyens

to create an exact replica on the same site as the original at an estimated cost of £10,000, 'in order that on the day of the Peace Procession the Nation should visibly express the great debt which it owes to those who, from all parts of the Empire irrespective of their religious creeds, had made the supreme sacrifice'.

Though initially saying that he would not unveil the memorial (because of fear this would appear too ostentatious), following a groundswell of public feeling, the King agreed to perform the unveiling ceremony.

By 2nd November, the Memorial Services Committee had decided that 'the remains to be interred in the Abbey shall be those of an unknown British fighting man, and every precaution must be taken to ensure that his identity shall never become known'. This broadened the initial proposals, when discussion had focused on the selection of, specifically, the bones of a soldier (they were not to be cremated – though this suggestion was in the Dean of Westminster's initial proposal) who had fallen in 1914, and not just at any time in the war. This was even the preliminary recommendation made by the Cabinet, before the definition was subsequently broadened.

Tickets for the event at the Abbey were allocated by ballot. A team was responsible, in a period of only a few days, for dealing with callers and correspondence from 'in all cases bereaved parents or widows who were labouring under deep emotion', before allocating the tickets.



Applications exceeded 15,000, despite the short amount of time between the ballot opening and the event itself. Tickets were open to three

categories of people: women who had lost a husband and one or more sons; mothers who had lost an only son or all sons; and widows. Nearly 100 applications were received from those who fell into the first category, and over 7,500 were received by mothers who had lost an only son or all or their sons.

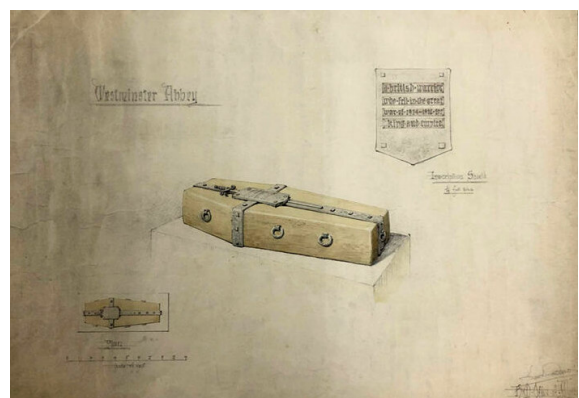
The event itself was carefully choreographed, as the funeral procession was to form at Victoria Station, taking a route through Grosvenor Gardens, Grosvenor Place, the Wellington Arch, Constitution Hill, The Mall, the Admiralty Arch,

Charing Cross, and to the Cenotaph. Here they would be met by the King who would unveil the Cenotaph while Big Ben was striking the hour of 11.00. This would be followed by a two-minute silence, and a procession to Westminster Abbey, with the Coffin followed on foot by the King and his entourage. The former was keen to express that this would take place (and without the use of umbrellas) even if the weather was unfavourable.

The troops detailed to process with the Coffin were the 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards. Members of the other Guards regiments of the British Army formed the band, and the mourners lining the route were to consist of 828 all ranks from the Royal Navy, Army, and Royal Air Force, in addition to 400 representatives of various ex-Service Men's organisations, as well as 100 recipients of the Victoria Cross. Once at the Abbey the ceremony and burial was to commence.

On the day, everything went to plan broadly as had been outlined. Ex-service personnel, wives and widows were accommodated for, and the Coffin of the Unknown Warrior reached its destination. On its departure from Boulogne, Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the French former Supreme Allied Commander during the First World War, 'entirely on his own initiative' paid farewell to the coffin as it was embarked on HMS Verdun.

In the following year, in the lead up to Armistice Day, the United States presented the Unknown Warrior with the Medal of Honor, its highest award for valour, while the American Unknown Soldier (and by this time other nations had adopted a similar approach, most notably France and Belgium) was reciprocally awarded the Victoria Cross.



Drawing of the tomb of the Unknown Warrior

Eventually the tomb of British Unknown Warrior was to be capped with black Belgian marble stone, and remains the only tombstone in Westminster Abbey on which it is forbidden to walk.



Working together in God's mission

Peter Pay interrogates what “prophetic voice” means, and why it matters today.

The United Reformed Church's Wessex Synod close ecumenical links with *L'Eglise Protestante Unie de France* (the United Protestant Church of France). Honouring this connection, the synod has, for many years, sponsored an annual meeting to consider topics from the two Churches' differing cultural and historical perspectives. When I first became involved in this meeting, it was called “the Colloque”, and featured each participant speaking in our own language. It is now called “Le Weekend” and we provide translation to make it more inclusive.

One of the early Colloques I attended was themed *La Voix Prophetique* (the Prophetic Voice). I remember, with shame, wondering what all that was about, and whether I really wanted to spend a whole weekend talking about it. Was ‘prophetic voice’ really relevant today?

It was an important moment though – a moment when I came to realise how important prophetic voices were throughout the Bible, and how God speaks through the prophets: major prophets, minor prophets, reluctant prophets; prophets who did not think they were capable; insiders and outsiders; saints and sinners; young and old. Prophets were led by God to speak out, to bring good news, to express hope, to warn, to guide. Prophets spoke truth to power, no matter the consequences. Prophets are prepared to give their lives, if necessary. The Bible shows us that prophets brought about change, and that prophets were vindicated over time. We are even warned about false prophets.

I am particularly amused (and challenged) by the story of Jonah. Asked by God to prophesy to Nineveh about their wicked ways, he tries to avoid it. Eventually, after his voyage in a fish, and still reluctantly, he does as he is asked, certain that he will not be heard. When his prophetic message is heard instantly, and accepted in a quite exaggerated manner, Jonah fails to understand or accept God's subsequent forgiveness of Nineveh and goes away to fume and sulk. God then helps him to see that prophesy is about God's message,

not our own. God chooses the time, the subject, the message, the messenger and the outcome. It is a story that highlights, in an insightful and a comedic way, the problems of being a prophet.

There was a feeling at that early Colloque meeting that, in many ways, the Church had lost its prophetic voice. It had lost its ability, or the will, to challenge authority. Church had lost the courage to take a stand on important issues, whether local, national or international.

Some years later, I had a small hand in helping with the formation of the Joint Public Issues Team – the group that now speaks on behalf of the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland and the URC. The team produces excellent reports and resources. They speak truth to power, and they are being heard. They even irritate power on occasion (a good sign!) They irritate us on occasion too, when we are confronted by our own behaviours and choices.

As Moderators of General Assembly, Clare and I also play a part in this truth telling. Our primary purpose is to enable voices to be heard in the councils of the Church, as we, together, seek to discern the will of God. We sign letters to the government, often prophetic in nature, which have been approved by those councils. We also have occasional access to people of influence or power, enabling us to use our prophetic voices. In all of this, we are advised and guided by specialists.

There are many others, in our churches and beyond, speaking as prophets. People who bring our attention to matters of real concern: poverty, slavery, the environment, oppression, injustice... the list is uncomfortably long. There are prophets calling for us to change, and to help bring about change, challenging what is done in our name.

Prophets offer hope and encouragement in difficult times. May we all hear and respond when God speaks to us through prophetic voices, or when the Lord calls us to be a prophetic voice – no matter what the outcome or consequences may be.

Peter Pay

Posted 22nd October 2020

Computer Corner

Verses of a V.A.D

Interesting download

The collection of poems mentioned in the article about Vera Brittain can be viewed on the Project Gutenberg site. It can also be downloaded in a variety of formats.

URL: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/51907>

Voices of the First World War

Interesting radio series

A series of programmes by historian Dan Snow using the sound archive collections of the Imperial War Museums and the BBC to tell the story of World War I through the voices of those who were. Several omnibus editions available if time is an issue.

URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03t7p9l/episodes/guide>

Note: Episodes are listed in reverse date order so go to Page 1 to listen from the start.

UK Kalender (diary/reminder program)

Useful free software

The test of any software recommendation is whether the person giving the recommendation actually uses the software. I originally recommended UK Kalender in November 2008 and although I didn't actually use the program at the time, I couldn't live without it now! (The UK in the name refers to Ulrich Krebs, the author.)

UK Kalender is a very customisable, diary/reminder program with views by week, fortnight, month and year and visible and audible reminders. Diary pages cannot be printed directly but can be exported as HTML and printed from an internet browser. Diary information can also be exported in csv format to a spreadsheet. For those who prefer it, there is a portable (no install) version that will run from a memory stick.

Download from: <http://www.ukrebs-software.de/>

Word Search – Types of machinery

Inspired by the recent demolition of The Crown pub...

N	K	T	V	U	H	Z	N	C	J	U	U	P	L	C	T	Q	B	D	Z	BACKHOE
G	T	S	D	N	U	I	X	U	X	Q	W	Y	N	D	O	U	Y	U	J	BULLDOZER
F	B	R	Y	O	E	A	F	Z	G	X	E	U	I	N	L	G	R	M	B	COMPACTOR
R	N	E	W	P	X	V	U	N	C	L	N	G	R	L	A	Z	B	P	Z	CRANE
E	R	X	D	F	C	B	F	O	Y	Y	G	V	D	F	S	G	H	E	M	DIGGER
L	E	I	U	D	A	O	M	W	P	E	B	O	O	R	E	D	A	R	G	DUMPER
D	V	M	D	J	V	P	L	U	R	K	Z	A	B	K	N	Q	G	U	T	EXCAVATOR
N	A	D	E	P	A	P	V	M	P	E	A	N	C	V	H	J	G	Y	K	FORKLIFT
A	P	M	G	C	T	N	T	E	R	D	A	X	P	K	W	F	E	T	U	GRADER
H	W	K	T	N	O	I	I	F	J	Z	D	X	R	E	H	B	Y	R	J	LOADER
E	T	O	I	O	R	Y	P	B	T	T	Q	E	U	H	C	O	Y	A	I	MIXER
L	R	A	S	C	I	D	P	O	E	F	L	Y	R	P	C	I	E	N	Q	PAVER
E	K	E	R	R	S	S	E	D	Q	L	I	Q	K	S	K	X	K	S	D	PILEDRIVER
T	G	A	W	L	H	D	R	K	O	P	G	L	L	S	F	O	R	P	T	ROLLER
T	N	R	E	H	C	N	E	R	T	U	Y	T	K	C	V	N	F	O	B	SCRAPER
E	K	R	E	V	I	R	D	E	L	I	P	C	Z	R	P	J	C	R	A	TELEHANDLER
H	T	E	X	R	F	N	A	Q	U	K	D	A	C	A	O	E	V	T	V	TIPPER
T	R	A	C	T	O	R	M	R	E	D	A	O	L	P	K	F	R	E	D	TRACTOR
Y	U	X	C	U	J	Y	C	V	P	A	T	H	E	E	L	K	G	R	G	TRANSPORTER
L	F	N	E	V	W	K	H	L	R	Y	A	F	T	R	R	S	G	H	H	TRENCHER

Words may appear in any direction including diagonally, back to front and upside down.

For the Fallen

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

**They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.**

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

Laurence Binyon

21st September 1914



Robert Laurence Binyon was born in Lancaster on 10th August 1869, the son of a clergyman, and was educated at St Paul's School and Trinity College, Oxford. After graduating, he started working for the British Museum, writing catalogues for the museum and art monographs for himself.

In 1909, he became Assistant Keeper of the Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings and, in 1913, he was made the Keeper of the new Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings.

Such was Binyon's reputation before the First World War that when Poet Laureate Alfred Austin died in 1913, Binyon was amongst names mentioned in the press as his possible successor (others included Thomas Hardy, John Masefield and Rudyard Kipling) but the post went to Robert Bridges.

Binyon was in his mid-forties when he wrote *For the Fallen*, a few weeks after the outbreak of the First World

War by which time the British Expeditionary Force had suffered casualties in several engagements including the Battle of Mons and the First Battle of the Marne. Binyon was too old to enlist in the military forces but he went to work for the Red Cross as a medical orderly in 1916.

Binyon composed his best known poem while sitting on the cliff-top looking out to sea from the dramatic scenery of the north Cornish coastline, although two places lay claim to the precise spot. The poem was published in *The Times* newspaper. Binyon said in 1939 that the four lines of the fourth stanza came to him first. The words of those four lines have become especially familiar and famous, having been adopted by the Royal British Legion as an Exhortation for ceremonies of Remembrance to commemorate fallen servicemen and women.

After the war, Binyon returned to the British Museum and wrote numerous books on art. He died in a nursing home in Reading on 10th March 1943, aged 73, after an operation. A funeral service was held at Trinity College Chapel, Oxford and his ashes were scattered at St. Mary's Church, Aldworth, where there is a slate memorial.