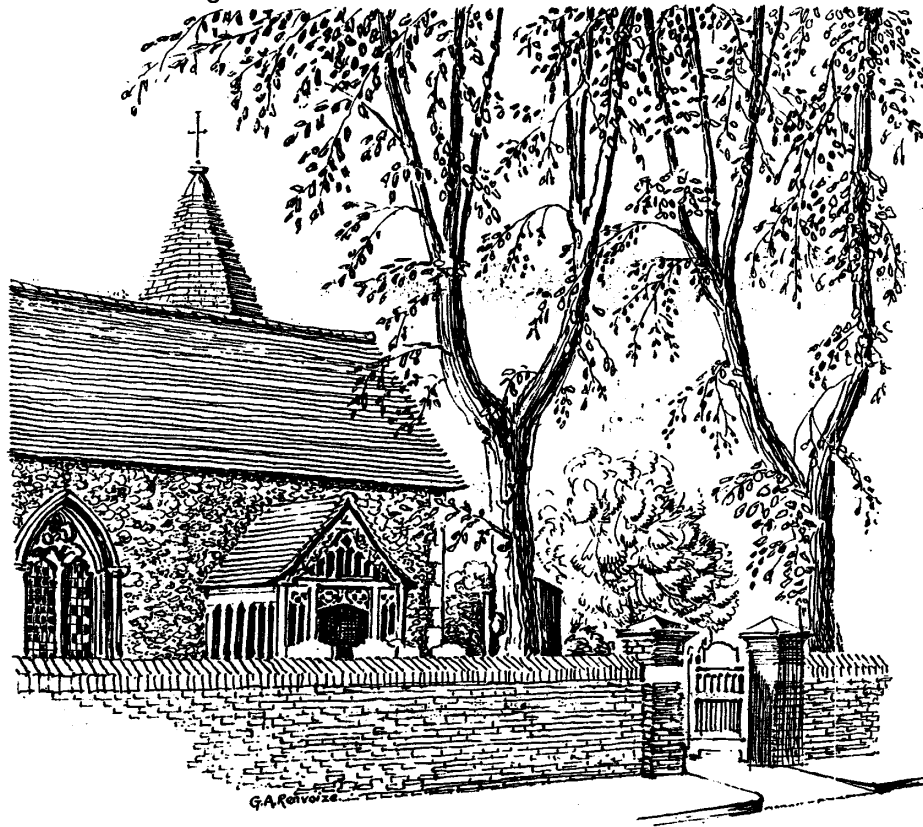


The Parish Magazine



St Mary the Virgin Merton

February 2010



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St Mary's

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Magazine published monthly by
St Mary the Virgin
Church Path, SW19 3HJ

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Mon to Fri 8:00 to 12:00
Outside these hours by appt

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Church

Vicar's letter

Since I last wrote about the parish having a Curate back in December, some more details have emerged which I can now share with you. Kat Campion –Spall, our Curate designate, is expecting a child, due to be born on 20th April and the Bishop of Kingston has agreed with us and her that she will be ordained on Sunday 26th September and start work in the parish from the end of October (ie 6 months after the birth of the child). The exact start date cannot be determined until the child is actually born, but we shall have 6 months advance notice!

Accordingly, Kat, her husband Peter and their baby will move into the parish in good time for the ordination, possibly a little earlier so Kat is settled before starting work in the parish. It is the Bishop's will, with which I concur, that when Kat starts work in the parish, it should be part time (almost certainly half time) until Easter, then becoming full time. In this way, Kat and Peter can adjust to having their first child before Kat throws herself into full time training in the parish.

I was pleased to hear of pledges from members of the congregation

who have promised to increase their planned giving to help finance the Curate's post, some of whom have actually effected the increase and others have yet to come through. Saturday February 6th will see a Curry evening and live entertainment kick off a series of fund raising events for the Curate Fund. The next two known events are a Sponsored Walk on 17th April and the Occasional Singers Concert on 22nd April. Please do support these events as they become advertised through the year and further offers to organise more events are always welcome. One off donations are also very acceptable and some people have already given –thank you - and should be made payable to 'St Mary's Merton P.C.C.' with a note earmarked for the Curate Fund. To repeat the clarification I gave before Christmas, the diocese of Southwark is sharing with us the costs of training, paying and housing the Curate and have most recently agreed to cover the accommodation costs from 26th Aug until Kat starts work in the autumn.

This additional financial help is most welcome but still leaves us with considerable ground to cover and I am keen that we raise as much of the first year's cost to us ie £13,000, **before** Kat actually starts work in the autumn. This can be done by one off or annual donations, increases in planned giving as well as by social fund raising events. Raising most if not all of this first £13k, by the September ordination will positively signal our support and willingness to embrace Kat and her family from the day they arrive and set the kind of welcoming tone I know you would wish her to receive. So, in whatever way you can, please do not delay if you can avoid it, in making your contribution earlier rather than later—thank you very much. At the time you read this, we will have just celebrated Candlemas or The Presentation of Christ in the Temple. Let us, then, like



MOTHERS' UNION

Tuesday 2nd February
1.45pm for 2pm

Annual General Meeting
Chaired by the Vicar

All welcome—ideas for future
meetings needed please

the grandparents of Jesus, Simeon and Anna, take our part in setting the scene for welcoming this new child and family into our midst so that, like them, our wait might give rise to great gladness and joy.

From John

Thank you to the Vicar

The congregation would like to convey their warmest thanks to John for his generous hospitality over Christmas. The parties in the Vicarage drew our community together for conversation and laughter. As the Song of Solomon says, we “ate your bread with joy and drank your wine with a merry heart”.

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A Problem of Modern Life

Dear Parishioners,

I would like to write to you about something which, I think, is taking over our lives.

It is difficult to give it a name, but I will begin by calling it "Administration". It affects all areas of life, even those aspects which are not, or should not be administrative.

Most of us are parents. Think, for instance, how much parents have to deal with regarding their children's schools. I see from one school's newsletter in just one week, that parents had to consider: a sponsored walk; e-mail addresses; School Fund payments; Lend an Hour (effectively, helping to run the school); and After-School Clubs - amongst other matters.

All these things are worth while, but I would note two things. Firstly, the sheer number of items. You children (or parents!) of forty years ago, do you remember being told about (not assisting with) more than one matter at a time, in the odd letter brought home? Secondly,

a modern school cannot run without this sort of help - the staff alone could not do it. Others (parents) are doing the extra tasks, which are laid on schools by government and society. With schools at least, it is a good thing that parents have an input to school activities; but, finding more work to do and then giving it to private citizens, or those with other jobs, is something that seems to flow in unchecked - often from government. Monitoring, feedback, guidelines, are unloaded on people who already have their own jobs to do; and there seems to be no person in a position to limit or control this. We all hear about scarce resources. In this case the resource is Us - our time, our availability.

One aspect of this is form-filling. Forms, of course, have always been with us, but they have proliferated as information-gathering has increased. The amount of paperwork the Police have to do is well-known. I read a policeman's de-

scription of the processing of a simple crime – some youths had vandalised a man’s garden fence. At least six versions of the report had to be written: starting at 10 pm he finished at 3 in the morning! It took many times as long as the actual policing, and no more policing could be done during all that time.

You may say that this is just part of life nowadays. But you are, largely, very able people who succeed in dealing with these issues – indeed it is often precisely your job to do that – as engineers, surveyors, financial advisors, or managers of any sort. However there are thousands of people whose skills are not of this sort – skills which are frustrated and wasted by this; as well as millions who are less able to cope with these procedures at all. A few years ago came the news that the government had brought in a new benefit – but the application form ran to twenty pages! The benefit was for precisely those people who were least articulate, least able to deal

with this sort of administration. A really close look has to be taken at administration to reduce it to what is do-able – something which our management culture does badly: those in charge do not deal with the nuts and bolts, but since those in charge have to change things, it needs to be done from the top. Another feature is that those who devise the work are not those who have to carry it out – which would be a healthy limiting factor – allied to a syndrome in this country of giving more and more tasks to the same number of staff to administrate. If they are already fully employed how can they do more, except by doing each task less often, or less well?

In fact, it is a management problem. Can the management be changed, or can the management approach be changed, to something different to the “management culture” we have had for several years? And who is there in government, politics or elsewhere, who can bring this about nationally?

In the “New Scientist” of 5th April 2008, there was an article

about the collapse of civilisations. Studies have found that all civilisations – this can include our own – fail not because they are weak, or cannot produce enough food, but because they become too complex and their organisation collapses. Will our national life collapse under its own complexity?

Where is faith, in all this? Can it provide a different approach? Of course, on a different level it can. When we pray, “Your kingdom come”, that means “Your rule, Your jurisdiction”, not the forms and processes of civil author-

ity. Can it provide an inspiration not so centred on bureaucracy? If you have any thoughts or feelings similar to mine about this situation, I would be interested to hear of them.

Some of the greatest changers of the system have come from right inside the establishment. The supreme example was St Paul. For all his advice to abide by civil authority, his following of Jesus caused a seismic shift in Jewish society and eventually through the whole civilised world.

Neville Squires.

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Answers to last month's crossword: Across: 1. Rabbit 4. Bethel 7. Ablutions
9. Easy 10. Tact 11. Choir 13. Stelae 14. Sadden 15. Bestow 17. Abacus
19. Nimbi 20. Sion 22. Bell 23. Nicodemus 24. Pixels 25. Senate **Down:** 1. Rivers
2. Baby 3. Touche 4. Blinis 5. Tent 6. Listen 7. Ascension 8. Sadducees 11. Canon
12. Rabbi 15. Bishop 16. Widows 17. Abbess 18. Salome 21. Nile 22. Burn
Due to lack of space, there is no crossword this month.

Your Choir Needs You!

Stepping out of the vestry into the Church for the Christmas services is always a great joy. Seeing the Church brimming with excited worshippers expecting a musical feast is one of the many factors that make being Director of Music at Merton special.

The choir and I take great pleasure in presenting our work to the locality and offer you our sincerest thanks for all the wonderful comments of gratitude and appreciation.

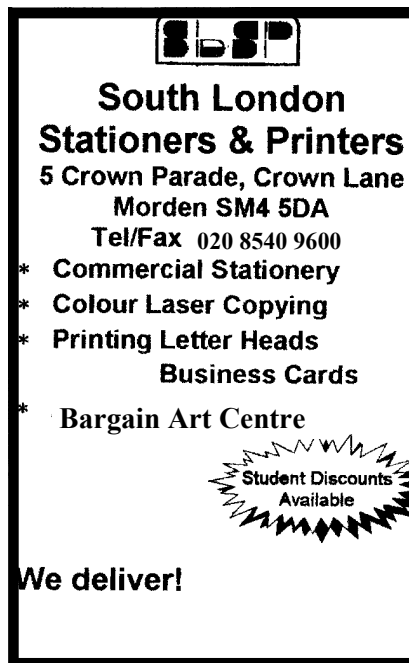
What makes such occasions special is not the low lighting and festive spirit, although that does provide atmosphere, it is the fact that our choir rehearses and sings together for one full rehearsal and two Choral Services per week nearly every week of the year!

For a Choral Director this is the time when one can blend, mould and finely tune the sound that was so beautiful during Nine Lessons and Carols. The Choir is also successful because of the dedication of its members and the fantastic spirit of cooperation and friendship that abounds amongst both trebles and men. I am glad that you enjoyed, meta-

phorically speaking, the choir putting the star on the Christmas tree at Nine Lessons and Carols. Please do continue to support the musical tradition at St. Mary's with your presence throughout the new year. We will be there for Eucharist and Evensong 90.5% of Sundays. Watch us with a new year and new challenges start putting the first ball-balls on the first branches for 2010.

Happy New Year

Karl Dorman Director of Music



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February Prayer Calendar

Please pray:

1. For the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People organisation
2. THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE (CANDLEMAS)
That we may feel proud in presenting ourselves in prayer and worship
3. For people whose jobs put them in moral dilemmas
4. For children abused and neglected by parents
5. For the work of the NSPCC
6. On the anniversary of her accession for our Queen and Royal Family
7. THE SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE LENT Help us to honour all that God has created
8. For the residents of Melrose Road and their St Mary's roadwarden
9. For physiotherapists and occupational therapists
10. For those who work in children's homes
11. For those engaged in scientific research
12. For the Leprosy Mission (Christian healing and compassion)
13. For those who teach and train
14. THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT May the light of Christ enter the darkness of those in need or distress
15. Giving thanks for the work of SPCK (The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel on the day we remember its founder Thomas Bray
16. For all prisoners that they may see the error of their ways and resolve to integrate into an honest and true life
17. ASH WEDNESDAY As we go forward into Lent may we learn to hate sin, to overcome temptation and to grow in holiness
18. For the residents of Merton Hall Road and their St Mary's roadwarden
19. For all involved in cancer research
20. For Bishop Tom on the day of his farewell prior to retirement
21. THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT Guide us Lord in the honest endeavours of our prayer life
22. For playwrights and producers and all connected with the theatre
23. For those who work for Christian organisations and charities
24. Giving thanks for the coming emergence of the new life spring brings
25. For the London Branch of the Samaritans and all who are struggling in their relationships
26. For the work of the United Nations
27. For the residents of Mostyn Road and their St Mary's roadwardens
28. THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT For our families, especially where there are children and young people

Winchester—Place of Pilgrimage

Plans are now well underway for our marathon walk to Winchester in May. A series of practice walks organised by Penny Clarke kicked off with a very happy day at Box Hill on January 2nd, while Simon Hillson focuses on route planning and ensuring participants have somewhere to sleep at night.

Winchester is an appropriate place for us to make a pilgrimage on a number of levels. The ancient capital of the old kingdom of Wessex, so declared by King Egbert in 827 AD, the city is built on the much older Roman remains of Venta Belgarum. But even by this early date, Winchester had been established as a great centre of Christianity for several centuries. The ancient cathedral, known as the Old Minster, dates from 627 AD. The mortuary chests still preserved in the cathedral contain the remains of many of the Saxon and Danish kings of England.

The Saxon street plan laid out by Alfred the Great is still evident. The city remained an important centre beyond the conquest; it was here that William the Conqueror compiled the Domesday Book, before London was established as the capital of England.

The decline of Winchester as an administrative centre can be dated from the serious fire of 1141, although it remained an important centre of the wool trade.

The new cathedral was begun by Bishop Wakelin in 1079. The nave, begun by master mason William Wynford in 1379, is the longest of any cathedral in the world. The original tower collapsed and the present rather squat structure was built in 1202. It seems the monks of old paid insufficient attention to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 27, as the building has been perennially affected by the instability of the ground on which it stands. This became so critical that by the turn of the 20th century, it seemed inevitable that the entire structure would collapse. To solve this problem the Dean hired a deep sea diver, a heroic character called William Walker. From 1906 until 1912, he worked six hours a day at a depth of 20 feet in complete darkness, packing the foundations with 20,000 bags of concrete, 115,000 concrete blocks and 900,000 bricks. There is a statue of him in the cathedral, and there is no denying that he worked hard for his memorial.

The diocese of Winchester is among the most ancient in Eng-

land. Some of the most prominent names in the history of the English church have held sway here, from St Swithin in the middle of the ninth century to Randall Davidson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, more than a thousand years later. Historically the diocese covered the whole of the south and the Bishop of Winchester remains one of only five prelates who sit in Parliament as of right. Our own St Mary's was part of it until 1877 when London's expansion led to a reorganisation of ecclesiastical government. When we make our pilgrimage there later this year, we will be following – literally – in the footsteps of our forebears in Merton. In medieval times, every Mothering Sunday, pilgrims from the daughter house of St Mary's made their way to make offerings to the Mother Church, following largely the same medieval roads and ridge-ways we will follow in May.

As befits such a distinguished building, it has seen a lot of history. Numerous grand Royal events took place here, among the more notable being the burials of King Canute in 1035 and William Rufus in 1100, and the marriages of Henry IV to Joanna of Navarre and of Mary I to

Philip II of Spain. It figures prominently in literature: Jane Austen worshipped here and was buried in the cathedral in 1817 and many scenes from Trollope's *Barchester Chronicles* are set in its precincts.

Even in modern times, the cathedral continues to capture the creative imagination. A possibly unique distinction is that a pop song called *Winchester Cathedral* was a top ten hit in the 1960s, which went on to be a no. 1 hit in the USA, and the band *Clinic* released an album of that name in 2004. There is a sculpture by Anthony Gormley in the crypt. And something in common with St Mary's is that the cathedral's Epiphany Chapel is decorated with stained glass by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, manufactured in the William Morris workshops in Merton.

So whether you see this event as a spiritual journey, an enjoyable and challenging long distance walk, or simply a day out to enjoy the fellowship of other church members, please put Sunday May 16th in your diary.

Alan Hay

Spirituality

Faith/Belief

There seem to be three types of belief. That where we do not really believe and yet pretend to believe i.e. make-believe. That where we believe as long as it works – so long as there is no serious opposition or until things don't seem to be working out the way we had planned. And that type of belief we call faith that never breaks whatever happens – even if life seems full of dangers and losses, it grows.

We are now a few weeks into the Year 2010. The past is behind us and cannot be changed and what is to come is unknown. We may feel that materially we are better or worse off than we were twelve months ago, but the all important question we need to ask ourselves, is whether or not, during that period, our faith in Christ's teaching has grown and flourished.

Hubert Bradbury

Keeping Faith

In Psalm 23, the most memorised text in the Bible after the Lord's Prayer, we meet the Lord's sheep and they seem to have it easy. According to this psalm, the Lord's sheep do not need to do anything. They spend their days lying in green pastures. They wander beside quiet placid lakes and walk along straight paths. The Shepherd's rod and staff keep them safe and when they're hungry, there's a pleasant table laid out for them.

It's all very bucolic – until we notice that the paths of righteousness could also mean ways of justice. Or until we notice that the psalm also talks about walking fearlessly through the valleys that are like night, filled with deep shadows. Or until we notice that the table spread with abundant food also happens to be surrounded on all sides by enemies. The Lord's sheep might not have it so easy after all, and they begin to look like a much more complicated sort of creature. They believe in the mercy and the providence of the shepherd, but life can still be full of

terrors and unexpected grief, and walking the paths of justice is sometimes painfully difficult. It begins to look like the Lord's sheep depend more on radical trust than blind obedience...

...Faith in God is not a magic wand which takes away our fears and smoothes the uncertainties out of our lives, whatever they are, however lost we may be, or however much we may feel that our hearts are cracking. In the end, this is faith – not flashy, not dramatic, sometimes barely even acknowledged – that nothing can separate us from God who loves us. This is the promise, that God is with us, closer to us than our own breath, and no matter what happens, he will not let us go.

From a homily given by Revd Lynda Patterson, Theologian in Residence, Christchurch Cathedral, New Zealand.

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FEBRUARY DIARY 2010



- 2** 9:00am Holy Eucharist
 2:00pm Mothers' Union AGM, *The Vicarage*
 6:45-8:30pm Wedding couples for 2010 meet team, *St Mary's*
4 10:30am Holy Eucharist, *The Accession of HM The Queen*
6 7-11pm Curry Evening, *Church Hall*

7 THE SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

- 8:00am Parish Eucharist *Rev Ch 4* *Luke 8: 22-25*
 10:00am Parish Eucharist *Luke 8: 22-25*
 6:30pm Evensong *Ps 147:13- end*
Gen 1: 1-2: 3 *Matt 6: 25-end*

- 8** 8:00pm Faith & Worship meeting, *The Vicarage*

- 9** 9:00am Holy Eucharist

- 11** 10:30am Holy Eucharist, *Scholastica, sister of Benedict*

14 THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT

- 8:00am Parish Eucharist *2 Cor 3: 12- 4:2* *Luke 9: 28-36*
 9:30am Parish Eucharist *2 Cor 3: 12- 4:2* *Luke 9: 28-36*
 11-12:00pm Occasional Singers practice
 6:30pm Evensong *Ps 89: 1-18*
Exod 3: 1-6 *John 12: 27-36a*

- 16** 9:00am Holy Eucharist

- 17** 8:00pm **Ash Wednesday**, *Eucharist & Ashing*

- 18** 10:30am Holy Eucharist

21 THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

- 8:00am Parish Eucharist *Deut 26: 1-11; Rom: 10: 8b-13*
Luke 4: 1-13
 9:30am Parish Eucharist *Deut 26: 1-11; Rom: 10: 8b-13*
Luke 4: 1-13
 6:30pm Evensong *Ps 119: 73-88* *Jonah ch 3*

Occasional Singers required AM & PM: 9am & 6pm rehearsals



FEBRUARY DIARY 2010

- 23** 9:00am Holy Eucharist, *Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr*
25 10:30am Holy Eucharist, *George Herbert, Priest & Poet*

28 THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

- 8:00am Parish Eucharist *Gen 15: 1-12, 17-18; Phil 3: 17- 4: 1*
Luke 13: 31-end
 9:30am Parish Eucharist *Gen 15: 1-12, 17-18; Phil 3: 17- 4: 1*
Luke 13: 31-end
 6:30pm Evensong *Ps 135*
Jer 22: 1-9, 13-17 Luke 14: 27-33
 7:30pm **Karl** will give an *Organ Recital* following Evensong
(retiring collection in aid of Organ Fund)

MARCH DIARY 2010

- 1** 10-12pm Peripatetic Ringers, *St Mary's Church*
2 9:00am Holy Eucharist, *Chad, Bishop of Lichfield*
3 7:00pm Standing Committee, *The Vicarage*
 8:00pm Finance Committee, *The Vicarage*
4 10:30am Holy Eucharist

7 THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

- 8:00am Parish Eucharist *Isa 55:1-9; I Cor 10: 1-13*
Luke 13; 1-9
 10:00am Parish Eucharist with Baptisms *Luke 13: 1-9*
 6:30pm Evensong *Ps 12*
Gen 28: 10-19a John 1: 35-end

For further information please contact either the wardens or the parish office.

From the Registers

BAPTISMS



DEATHS



WEDDINGS



Stanley Buffham
Bert Hyde





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WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER



LET EVERYTHING THAT HAS
BREATH PRAISE GOD

CAMEROON 2010



Friday 5th March 2010

Prepared by the Christian women of Cameroon

11am, Sacred Heart Church, Edge Hill, Wimbledon

Speaker from the Cameroon

8pm, Holy Trinity Church, The Broadway, Wimbledon

Meditations on the theme

Let everything that has breathe praise God

The Wizard of Oz
Parish Players – 6th – 9th January

As the programme notes, ‘The Wizard of Oz holds a place in the hearts and memories of everyone who has ever seen it.’ And therein lies the challenge. Never mind the lion - any group that takes on *The Wizard of Oz* is going to need courage aplenty.

Most of us approach *The Wizard of Oz* not at all as we approach traditional pantos such as Captain Hook or Mother Goose. Because when we come to this show we can’t help but bring Judy Garland, Toto and Over the Rainbow with us. The weight of expectation that comes with seeing a different interpretation of such an iconic Christmas film is in danger of creating a tornado of feeling – and potentially disappointment - before the first gust of wind is felt. For this reason I think ‘Oz - the panto’ was a bold choice and you needed courage to make it. But, as we know, if the show is to be a success, you also need brains - to find ways of making us see *The Wizard* anew – or at least with green-coloured spectacles on – and of marrying the film we know so well with a traditional panto format. And, most importantly perhaps, you need a heart – because of course no show without a heart can possibly make our dreams come

true.

The Church hall does not seem the most promising candidate for transformation into Munchkinland, The Emerald City or even the Mid West and yet, magically, before I even walked in the door, Kansas came out to greet me on a cold snowy evening in January. The audience was wrapped in lavish clouds of smoke billowing out of the front doors - and thus the enchantment began. The warmth of the welcome made up for some un-Kansas like temperatures, while the hay bales, the straw on the floor and, of course, the capacious undergarment hanging on the washing line, created a world away from Merton Park. As too did the noisy enveloping wind and the entertaining radio show playing in the background and giving us, appropriately for a snow-obsessed London, a special report on the storm, while also cleverly reminding us to turn off our mobiles. It is a compliment then to say that it was hard to tell when the show itself actually began. The wonderfully boisterous entrance of the whooping band seemed to match the force of the wind, as did the entrance of chorus members hollering through the audience. The energy was marvellous - and

perhaps it did not matter that the noise of the wind prevented the words of the entering chorus from being heard. The intention was no doubt to convey energy and movement – which it did admirably. I found the hand on the volume control of the wind slightly heavy, but this is pretty much my only criticism of the sound and lights for the show, which otherwise were remarkably good and, as always at Parish Players, played a huge part in creating the world of the play. From the magic of the illuminated windows in the toy house to the joyful pyrotechnics at the end of the first half, from the use of flashlight and u.v. in the flying monkey scene to the lavish use of smoke and trapdoors to convey a truly impressive melting, all the lights and special effects were, well, especially effective.

Set, costumes and make up were a similar joy. The psychedelic Oz backdrop and bright costumes were just right – and a marvellous contrast to the drear of storm-filled Kansas/London. Scene changes seemed minimal in this production, whether because they were truly few in number or because they were effected so super-efficiently I simply didn't notice them, I couldn't say. The principles' costumes were flawless and the chorus was brightly and imaginatively dressed. Whoever was responsible for the lion's mane deserves a round of applause alone. And as for

the guards of the emerald city....suffice to say it was an absolute joy to see so many people in sparkly green eye-shadow. One tiny comment on the costume front - SILVER shoes? I had my heart set on ruby red. And from the intake of breath that went round the audience, I wasn't the only one. [*From David Reeves, Chairman of Parish Players: In fact we had no choice but to use silver shoes in our panto this year, as MGM hold the copyright for Dorothy's red shoes. The panto script we used is licensed by NODA, the representative body for amateur theatre.*] I'm being picky, of course, but that's the weight of expectation that comes with such a well-loved classic - and it seemed an odd choice to confound expectations so boldly and deliberately in this crucial area while mirroring, say, Dorothy's dress from the film so faithfully. But so much for the, generally excellent, departments of smoke and mirrors. If *The Wizard of Oz* tells us nothing else it is surely that magic is created not only through special effects - beautiful costumes, fancy backdrops, smoke and bangs, awe-inspiring as they may be – but also through belief and total conviction. In that it is perhaps a good metaphor for theatre in general - a show that relies on tricks instead of the complete involvement and conviction of the cast will never be magical. This is of course particularly true of

panto - where anything less than wholeheartedness on the part of the cast risks making the whole enterprise look silly. The youth of the four leads contrasted with the maturity of their performances. They were truly impressive – each actor was splendidly controlled and yet totally convincing. Olivia Cheetham as Dorothy was very well cast – her performance was utterly charming. She never once let slip her air of innocent bewilderment, beautifully conveyed not only in the delivery of her lines but also in her reactions to other characters and, perhaps most strikingly of all, in the way she moved and carried herself throughout. She held the audience's attention and affection from start to finish. It didn't hurt that she has a lovely singing voice too.

Joe Reeves' scarecrow was also immediately likeable. His goofy laugh endeared him to the audience from the moment we met him, as did his finely-judged ability to break the fourth wall and talk to us in good panto tradition. (I forgive him for calling me an old crow.) Joe too used his movements well to convey character - his initial controlled slapstick was joyous. His concentration never faltered and his sympathetic portrayal made us feel

genuinely affectionate towards the scarecrow.

The tin man's off-stage groans followed nicely on scarecrow's clowning and kept up the pace well. The character change in his first scene, brought about by the lovely alliterative luxurious lubrication, was well done. Indeed, Henry Perryment really relaxed into the role – both as the evening and the week went on - by the second half of the Saturday matinee he was in danger of stealing the show at points – quite a feat, given the competition.

All the main characters need to be sympathetically played, but perhaps Lion especially so. Amanda Roberts' made the most of the opportunities for cowardly silliness - her increasingly dramatic snoring in the poppy scene was hilarious for a start – and she certainly won over the younger audience – my daughter was a big fan.

Both good witches were a delight. Caryl Court played the Nice witch of the North in good panto tradition – with a touch of thigh slapping, a dash of prim school ma'am and a generous dollop of good fairy. She was a joy in pink to behold and the twinkle in her eye showed utter commitment. I take my life in my hands perhaps by wondering why the choice was made to make the nice witch speak in clipped rather upper-class tones when there would

have perhaps been an obvious advantage to Caryl's playing up the traces of her accent in her role as a witch from the NORTH.

Lindsay Litster's fun portrayal of Glinda gave the show a new burst of energy at just the right moment to get the audience singing along to the song. She was ably abetted in this by Henry Perryment whose tin man really came into his element egging on the audience. Since Lindsay seemed carried along by energy and the appearance of not taking anything too seriously, her merriment was infectious – she was hilarious even when taking a prompt.

And of course Maggi Chick's wicked witch of the west was also a triumph of great panto evil. From her terrific entrance number to her dramatic melting she never let the pace flag. She was great fun to boo and her conviction meant my daughter found her genuinely scary. The flying monkeys – well lit and imaginatively choreographed as they were – were another moment of real terror.

Caroline Chick's performance was also magnificent. Her opening number was a show stopper – beautifully and powerfully sung and all done absolutely straight with real high drama. She was a powerful presence who commanded the stage every time she appeared. Her pairing with Sam Litster - echoing the

good team work and strong characterisation in the performances of Richard Warner and Thom Bricknell at the beginning of the show - worked well - his seriousness making her hot air all the funnier.

It is never easy making an entrance late in a show and by the time we get to meet the Wizard himself the audience expects a lot. Roy Perryment did not disappoint. His convincing accent, appearing as it did late on in the show, brought us nicely full circle to the radio show at the beginning, the only other place where American was spoken.

Beyond this, Roy established the wizard's character immediately and convincingly. He was also a major reason that the penultimate number – what else but the deeply satisfying 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road' - brought the house down.

The chorus showed their concentration and application no less than the individual roles, whether conveying the joy of the witch's death, the sorrow of their imprisonment or their utter conviction that everything should be painted green.

Danni Matsell's excellent choreography was well executed throughout and the musical numbers were all sung with appropriate gusto, though for my money the big up tempo numbers tended to work better than the slightly more touchy-feely ones.

Special mention at this stage has to go to two actors. The first is whoever was hit by the tin man's axe on the Saturday matinee. It is a long time since I've heard such a spectacularly lengthy and funny off-stage death. Well done. And I'm only being slightly flippant here actually. It was a small detail, but typical of the sense of fun and enthusiasm shown throughout the whole production.

The second special mention goes to the band – not only for some excellent sound effects and music – including some terrific original music –but also for their engagement in the show throughout as actors as well as musicians. By leading the panto calls and responding so closely to the actors on stage, the band gave the show a whole new element blurring the lines nicely between audience and performer. I thought the choice of musical numbers was excellent. I also very much liked the snatches of songs familiar from the film played in the scene changes – a few bars of 'We're off to see the wizard' alluded nicely to our expectations and somehow helped blend that 'timeless classic' with the panto tradition. I'd actually have liked more of these myself – other scene-changing snatches – The

Simpsons theme and Moonlight Sonata for example - seemed more puzzling choices with less to add to the production. I'm being picky again. The music and band were excellent – congratulations. Overall I felt the show was directed with brains and heart. There were some wonderfully imaginative moments – the transformation of the washing umbrella into the tornado, the energetic entrances through the audience, the use of the trapdoor and exit to the back of the stage. And there were of course some traditionally sweet touches - the addition of sweets and livestock to the matinee performance was much appreciated by the kids, particularly the bunny in the curtain call. So did I believe it? Did the dreams that you dared to dream really come true? I think so. It was a fun lively production, glad when the scarecrow did his long division and oddly affected by the rush of cold air and the glimpse of the natural world at the back of the stage when Dorothy made her final exit. So well done to all involved for a Christmas classic well re-imagined. It was great entertainment. My troubles melted like lemon drops.

Claire Hoult

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