Welcome to Wilma

Elspeth Fearn

There was a joyous atmosphere at St Mary Magdalene on the evening of Monday 25 July as the Revd Wilma Roest was welcomed to Richmond Team Ministry and to St Mary’s. Presented by a representative from our patron, King’s College Cambridge, Wilma was formally instituted as Team Rector by Bishop Richard and then inducted and installed as Vicar of St Mary’s by the Archdeacon of Wandsworth, the Venerable John Kiddle. The church was full of people including Wilma’s family, friends, former clergy colleagues, other faith representatives, many from our three congregations and not least a large number of people from Wilma’s former parish St Mary and St John the Divine, Balham.

Following her institution, induction and installation formalities Wilma was welcomed by our six churchwardens, by local authority representatives and by the Chair of the Governors at Christ’s School.

Bishop Richard also took the opportunity to bless the refurbished clerestory windows which now have clear glass in them. He recalled that when last year he had blessed the north and south aisle windows, which had similarly been refurbished, he had been given a small metal cross made from some of the old Victorian window ironwork. He had brought this with him to the service and held it up.
Jackie Harrison, one of the churchwardens at St Mary’s said:

‘ It was a great privilege to take part in Wilma's induction and installation, to carry the church warden's wand, and to lead her to the door with the archdeacon. The church looked stunning. Heather and her team of flower ladies had surpassed their usual exceptionally high standards – the flowers were simply breathtaking. The most memorable aspect of the evening for me was the music. I don’t think I have ever heard the church filled with such wonderful singing. The large and joyful group of visitors from Balham certainly helped to raise the rafters. If only we could sing like that every Sunday!’

Following the service refreshments were served and everyone had the chance to mingle and talk including with our visitors from Balham. So successful was this part of the evening that people were still chatting in the church until after 11pm!

The last word on the evening however goes to Wilma. Speaking to TEAMtalk she said:

‘ The service of Institution and Induction on 25 July was a wonderful welcome to Richmond and to the Richmond Team Ministry. St Mary Magdalene Church looked splendid – I was really touched by the personal touches, from orange flowers to the Dutch flag. The music and hymns raised our spirits. Family and friends, some of whom had travelled a long way to be there, felt very much at home and loved meeting so many of you.

It was a good start to what I hope and pray will be a fruitful and long ministry among you!’

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TEAMtalk ● Autumn 2016
Goodbye to David Gardiner

Elspeth Fearn

Shortly before David and Sarah left Richmond for his new role as chaplain to the Bishop of Gloucester, I interviewed him for TEAMtalk, at the vicarage in Cambrian Road.

When David and Sarah arrived in Richmond in 2012 they were warmly welcomed and made to feel very much at home right away. St Matthias was a good church in which to develop one’s faith and spirituality and he had also valued very much working with the clergy and the other churches in the team. St Matthias’ spire was visible everywhere, a constant reminder, and when he was driving back from training elsewhere or from conducting a funeral, seeing the spire meant that he was nearly home.

Having come from the Diocese of Gloucester to Richmond, he sometimes found the large urban setting of London a little unsettling, but having Richmond Park just up the top of Cambrian Road was a real blessing and he walked there often, seeing the seasons' changes and the amazing colours of nature.

David considered that work with families, children and young people was a particularly important part of ministry. The potential appointment of a Children’s Ministry Worker was a significant step but work still needed to be done across the Team. He was pleased to have been involved in Young Alpha preparing young people for their confirmation in May.

I asked about the Richmond Passion Play which David had been instrumental in bringing to the town for two successive and successful years in 2015 and 2016. His previous parish in Cheltenham had staged a Passion Play every four years since 2000 and in view of this experience David went to a Christians in Richmond meeting and suggested that it might be possible to hold a Passion Play in the town. He had to talk to lots of people including many whom he did not previously know, but it all worked, with people of varying backgrounds from the churches in Richmond coming...
together to create something very special and which reached out both to believers and to non-believers.

In both Passion Plays David played the difficult role of King Herod. What was it like to play such a reviled figure? He remarked that there is very little in the New Testament about Herod compared to Jesus and that gave him some scope in playing the part. Herod was a client king of the Romans, served at their pleasure and was clutching on to power with a strategy largely formed out of fear. He was interested above all in himself and wanted to avoid looking a fool or of losing his power. John the Baptist had criticised Herod for marrying his brother’s wife and had been imprisoned for this. Herod was essentially afraid of killing John the Baptist but was tricked into doing so by his daughter, despite his misgivings.

David was looking forward to working with Bishop Rachel Treweek who was a very interesting person. She became Bishop in September 2015 and was the first woman to be appointed a diocesan bishop rather than as a suffragan bishop. The service side of ministry – such as washing the feet of the disciples – was often overlooked, but in David’s new role this would be important. A bishop’s chaplain had to be a support to the bishop and a help to her household. The experience would be very different to walking alongside one particular parish in its day to day life as he had done at RTM and St Matthias. In future life would be rather different as he would be accompanying the Bishop to a variety of services – ordinations, confirmations, installations and other highpoints of the Diocesan calendar both in the Cathedral and at various churches in the Diocese.

David’s last service was on Sunday 10 April when the Team came together at St Matthias for a Team Service followed by lunch, and to say our goodbyes to him and to Sarah. They were presented with gifts for their new home in Gloucester and went with all our best wishes for the future. A few days later, friends from RTM travelled to Gloucester to attend David’s licensing service at the Cathedral.

In July it was announced that the Bishop of Southwark had appointed the Revd Anne Crawford to be Team Vicar at St Matthias. Anne is presently Rector of Toddington and Chalgrave in the Diocese of St Albans. Her licensing service will take place on Monday 14 November at 7.30pm at St Matthias.
Our Friends in Nablus
Revd. Alan Sykes

On Friday 26 February this year I took a 111 bus from Kingston to Heathrow Airport – hardly the quickest way of getting there, as you will know if you have ever experienced this bus’s peculiarly circuitous route. Still, I had plenty of time. I was on my way to meet Fr. Ibrahim Nairouz, who is the vicar of the parish of St Philip in Nablus in the West Bank.

He was flying in from Amman. Palestinians are rarely allowed to use Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, so they have to fly from Jordan. It involves a much more tortuous journey and is considerably more expensive. It’s just one of the inconveniences that Palestinians have to put up with in their daily lives.

I hadn’t seen a photograph of Ibrahim, so hadn’t any idea what he looked like. However, as it turned out, only one passenger in a dog collar emerged into the arrivals area at Terminal 3, so he was easy to spot.

We came back to Kingston on the 285, which is quicker than the 111 (though only slightly). We sat in the front seats on the upper deck, which Ibrahim considered a real treat. It would appear that there aren’t many double-deckers in Nablus.

Ibrahim had come over in order to foster a proposed link between his parish in Nablus and our parish in Richmond. Most of our time was spent just getting to know each other. We did a little sightseeing and a little shopping. Primark in Oxford Street was a big hit.

There were a couple of events. Ibrahim gave a moving talk about the Palestinian situation after the 9.30 service at St Mary’s. We also drove down to Totton near Southampton. The parish there has had a link with Nablus for some time and they were overjoyed to see him.

Ibrahim gave us a flavour of what life is like for the Palestinians – from unnecessary killings to a string of more minor inconveniences. Such behaviour by the Israeli authorities has led many people, especially Christians, to leave Palestine, so that now the Christian community in the West Bank can only be described as beleaguered. In Nablus, for instance, when the state of Israel came into being in 1948, Christians comprised about 20% of the population. Now, out of a population of about 126,000 there are only about 500 Christians. Most have emigrated. There is a large diaspora around the world.

Ibrahim said that his parishioners often feel forgotten, as if no-one really cared about their plight. What they wanted above all was for us to pray for them.

So how do we envisage this link progressing? First of all, as Ibrahim suggested, we can pray. We can raise awareness among ourselves about the issues and about the plight of our fellow Christians in the land where Jesus lived. We can perhaps find ways to donate money. Perhaps it may be possible for some of us to visit Nablus and experience for ourselves what is happening. I will shortly be convening a group to discuss these things and see what we might do.

There are of course many instances of injustice and oppression throughout the world and I don’t propose that we should emphasise one at the expense of all the others. But the Holy Land has a special resonance for Christians and we can perhaps play our (no doubt small) part in helping to forge a solution in which the rights of Jew and Arab are respected equally.
May Fair

14 May 2016 saw the 47th consecutive Richmond May Fair. The Fair was first organised in 1970 by Sylvia Oates, wife of the then Vicar of St Mary Magdalene, Canon John Oates. The aim of the Fair, which was held around the outside of the church, was to raise money for charities in the London Borough of Richmond and so further their work. Since then the Fair has grown considerably, covering Richmond Green as well. As usual the day saw a lot of visitors come into the town to enjoy the event. Also as usual the weather regrettably was its customary ambivalent self. So often there are warm days in the run up to the Fair but they sadly disappear by the Saturday!

Things were a little quieter around St Mary’s this year with fewer stalls and not so many people passing by, although the coconut shy stall did as well as previous years. All the stallholders worked very hard selling plants, various delicious things to eat and books, amongst other things, and you could also visit the church tower.

Inside the church there was a buzz with a large number of young people enthusiastically engaged in singing and other musical activities. At 12.20pm the Blessing of the May Queen and her attendants by the Revd Alan Sykes took place in front of the Mayor of Richmond.

On the Green there were about 100 stalls, including as always the Friends of St Matthias with their renowned BBQ and Cake Stall.

**Our grateful thanks must go to everyone who contributed to such a successful May Fair.**
Race to the top

Earlier this year Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) Charity organised a fund raising event – the BT Tower Climb challenge event. Those taking part had to run up all 34 floors and 843 steps of the famous tower which is 177 metres (581 feet) high. There were only 350 places to do the climb and Huw Morgan of St John the Divine had one of them. A family member had benefited very much from treatment for deafness at GOSH and the Tower Climb was a way for Huw to benefit the hospital and at the same time go up the BT Tower, which he had wanted to visit for years.

For training Huw did some extra work at his local gym with sessions using the step machines although he would not see the actual Tower steps until the day of the race. He did not however make any changes to his diet.

On the day there was an initial mass warm up at the base of the Tower for those taking part. They then set off at roughly thirty second intervals up the steps and were effectively climbing up the emergency fire exit in the middle of the building. Tags attached to their shoes had a microchip inside which automatically timed the beginning and end of the climb. On the way up each step was numbered and at various points there were marshals ticking off the race numbers to ensure no one went missing. As Huw says ‘They were very encouraging which helped a lot. We knew we were also going to be given a glass of ‘bubbles’ at the top while we enjoyed the view, which was a pretty good motivator!’

Huw reached the top in the very commendable time of 10 minutes and 24 seconds. The total he raised for GOSH was £720 which ‘I was very pleased with. It’s never an easy thing to ask for money but people have been extremely generous and I would like to thank everyone who donated to this worthy cause.’

Huw’s plan for next year is to go back to taking part in the annual 10,000 metre run through central London. As in the previous two years he’ll be raising much-needed funds for a small local charity which helps the families of children with cochlear implants (www.cicsgroup.org.uk) which is obviously something very important to him.

The flags are back

Four years ago, during the London Olympic and Paralympic Games, all the flags of the competing nations were displayed in St Mary Magdalene, providing a real talking point for both the congregation and the many visitors the church receives each week. In 2015 the flags of all the nations taking part in the Rugby World Cup were displayed in a similar way and again got a good reception.

The flags have now made a welcome return for the Rio Olympics and Paralympic Games with 207 separate flags around the church, some hanging up above the nave, some above the west door and others draped over the side pews. The new clear glass in St Mary’s windows, recently extended to the clerestory windows as well, has enhanced the colours of the flags to make a really vibrant display. Watching the delighted reaction of visitors as they enter the church and see the display for the first time is very encouraging. A list with pictures of all the flags is available to help them as they work their way round the church. Thanks go to Charles Stiller who arranged the display on each occasion.

Flags inside St Mary’s

Elspeth Fearn
The Somme, ‘bloodiest of all battles’

John Owen-Davies

At 7:30am on July 1, 1916, after a week of almost continuous shelling, and the detonation of mines in and around German front lines, British troops went ‘over the top’ and started across no-man’s land, their aim to over-run German soldiers and their trenches as fast as possible. It was not to be. Instead it was the beginning of one of the most bloody and controversial battles ever fought, lasting for just over four-and-a-half months, gaining just 6 miles in geographical advantage along a front of 16 miles of the Somme, and costing 420,000 British and Commonwealth, 205,000 French and between 450,000 and 600,000 German casualties. On that first day alone Britain and its Allies suffered 57,470 casualties, 19,240 of them dead; the French lost 2,000, the Germans 12,000. Not just one of the blackest days in British military history, but one of the bloodiest of all time.

‘The whole earth heaved and flared;’ British RFC pilot C. A. Lewis said later of the explosion at Lochnagar Crater, ‘a tremendous and magnificent column rose up in the sky. An ear-splitting roar drowned out all of the (German) guns. The earth column rose to 4,000 feet.’

One of the first out of the trenches was Captain Wilfred “Billie” Nevill, of the East Surreys, whose home was in Twickenham. His commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Irwin, agreed with Nevill, aged 21, that each platoon should have a football to kick near enemy lines. But the Germans had quickly rallied: Stefan Westmann, a German medical officer who settled in England in the 1930s, wrote: ‘The very moment we felt that their (the British) artillery fire was directed against our reserve position, our machine-gunners crawled out of their bunkers, red-eyed and dirty, covered in the blood of their fallen comrades and opened up a terrific fire.’ Twenty minutes after leaving his trench, Nevill and some others of his group were killed approaching the German wire. Two footballs were found in the area the next day and are today in the Regimental Museum in England. Nevill’s name and 120 others are on the memorial cross in St Mary’s churchyard, Twickenham.

‘I started crawling towards our lines and I had never seen so many dead men clumped together. That was all I could see and I thought to myself, “All the world’s dead – they’re all dead – they’re all dead.” That was all I could
think of as I crawled along,’ so wrote Charles Taylor, a private with the Yorks and Lancs. And an unnamed French artillery observer, on hearing the initial fighting, compared it to the 1854 Charge of the Light Brigade: ‘I thought of the Crimea and of what another French officer said then of the English – “It is magnificent but it is not war.”’

The British Army of the Somme was a mixture of the remnants of its pre-war regular army, the Territorial Force and the so-called ‘Kitchener Army’ composed of ‘Pals’ Battalions’ – so-called, being recruited from the same places and similar occupations. Empire contingents fought alongside, from Australia, New Zealand, Bermuda, Canada, India, Newfoundland, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, suffering equally and carving out their own fame.

The Somme campaign lasted until mid-November of 1916. Many front-line villages were reduced to rubble, while in and around areas such as Pozieres for example, 23,000 Australian soldiers were killed in six weeks. This was almost as many men as Australia had lost in the earlier Gallipoli campaign. Delville Wood was a defensive feature that saw heavy fighting led by South Africans; constantly changing hands between allies and the enemy, the South Africans alone lost 2500 men, and it was here that Basil Umney fell (see page 10).

Other major battle areas included Thiepval, which was chosen post-war as the location for the Sir Edward Lutyens’ memorial to the nearly 74,000 British and Allied soldiers who have no known graves.

One of the most distinguished servicemen during World War I and World War II was Bernard Freyberg. Born in Richmond, he moved with his parents to New Zealand at the age of two. He took part in the Dardanelles campaign in 1915 and later joined the British Army as a captain. During the final stages of the Somme battles, Freyberg was involved in the capture of Beaucourt and won the Victoria Cross. He was one of the most highly decorated soldiers, a veteran of both World Wars. In 1946-52 he was New Zealand’s governor-general. He died in 1963 and was buried at St Martha on the Hill near Guildford.

Captain Wilfred “Billie” Nevill, who made his name on that first day of the Somme battles, was followed by other soldiers from Richmond, Twickenham and elsewhere in the area. Serjeant Hubert Henry West left his Richmond
family home just before the outbreak of war and joined the 8th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. On 19 July 1916, he was shot dead by a German sniper. Serjeant Henry Bowgen, of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, killed on 9 September 1916, was a member of an old Kew family: on the day he was killed a letter, in which he suggested improving the paving of Richmond Bridge to help alleviate the suffering of horses, was published in Richmond. Private Frederick George Bailey, Middlesex Regiment, aged 23, was killed in action in the Somme area on 15 September 1916; known as ‘Sonnie’, he was vice-captain of Richmond Town Football Club, and fought in Gallipoli in 1915 before going to the Somme.

Mention too should be made of the very moving coincidence which has recently come to light at St John the Divine. St John has in its keeping the temporary battlefield wooden cross of Norman Blows, born in Richmond and baptised in St John, who fell, aged 21 on 1 July, the first day of the Somme. When a photograph of his headstone was obtained, it revealed that he was buried in a double grave. Buried with him was an Ealing lad who fell alongside him on that same day, just two days short of his 21st birthday – Edward Laflin, the great uncle of St John’s Director of Music, Mark Laflin.

**Saint and Soldier**

*Peter Moore*

Have you seen this face before? Next time you’re in St Matthias, take a look at the stained glass windows in the south chapel, particularly at the four ‘warrior’ saints. This, the face of St George, is a real face, a photographic likeness.

This is Basil Charles Lovell Umney, born in Bromley on 8 February 1897, only son of Percy and Ethel Jane Umney, who moved to King’s Road, Richmond shortly after Basil’s birth. Percy Umney was a prosperous solicitor, member of a practice in the City and on Richmond Green, and with a family and business connection to the ubiquitous Wright dynasty, of Coal Tar Soap fame.

In 1905, aged eight, Basil was sent to Harrow School, where he boarded, moving up into the senior school in 1911, and following a largely undistinguished schooling. The declaration of war in August 1914 would undoubtedly have set the school houses afire with patriotic fervour; barely a fortnight later Harrow would open its Roll of Honour, its extensive catalogue of fallen pupils.

In March 1915 Basil Umney left Harrow, passing into the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, the immediate destination of most public schoolboys, and on 10 August he received a temporary commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the 21st Battalion (4th Public Schools Battalion), Royal Fusiliers. He spent the next few months, probably at Clipstone Headstone of Norman Blows and Edward Laflin, Hebuterne Military Cemetery. Courtesy britishwargraves.co.uk.

From the Rev Max Binney’s letter in the Parish Magazine, dated 26 September 1916

*On three more of the homes of our Parish the proud distinction has fallen of giving the life of a dear young son to the Country in its defence. Basil Umney, Evelyn Blech and Douglas Cockburn have fallen on the battlefield. The sorrow which comes with such a loss is very hard to bear.*
Camp in Nottingham, completing his own training and training his troop detail. Late in April 1916 Basil was posted with his regiment to France, joining the 3rd Division under Haldane in the St Eloi area south of Ypres, an area noted particularly for the largely underground warfare conducted on both sides by tunnellers who planted mines under enemy outposts, while above ground the conflict appeared at a stalemate. In July the regiment relieved the troops at Albert, and then in mid-July was moved up to become part of Haig’s offensive to capture Bazentin.

Close by, the hamlet of Longueval abutted Delville Wood, long held by the Germans, recently briefly taken by the South Africans, before a German counter-attack had swept them back with massive casualties. On 20 July the Fusiliers moved up as relief, consolidating what little gains they could, constructing trenches close to the German lines, fighting off a further counter-attack, and themselves expecting to be relieved on 24 July.

However, on Sunday 23 July, according to his Captain’s account, Basil Umney ‘was hit in the head early in the morning by a shrapnel bullet and died instantaneously, without the slightest suffering.’ He was just 19 years of age.

His parents commissioned the four ‘warrior’ saints, St Alban, St Martin, St George and St Michael in St Matthias from the stained glass firm of Burlison and Grylls; each window contains a reference to an element of Basil’s life, and Harry Grylls used a photograph of Basil in his study of St George. Beneath the windows a marble plaque records the dedication: as the plaque posits, Basil may well ‘lie at rest in the village of Longueval’, but in no known grave, rather in one of 3,953 unidentified graves among the 5,523 in the Delville Wood Cemetery (right), as a ‘Soldier of the Great War, known unto God’. His name appears on a panel of the Thiepval Memorial (above); at Harrow School; in St Matthias and St Mary Magdalene; and on the Richmond War Memorial.

A fuller account of Basil Umney’s life has been placed with St Matthias.
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Our Churches

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