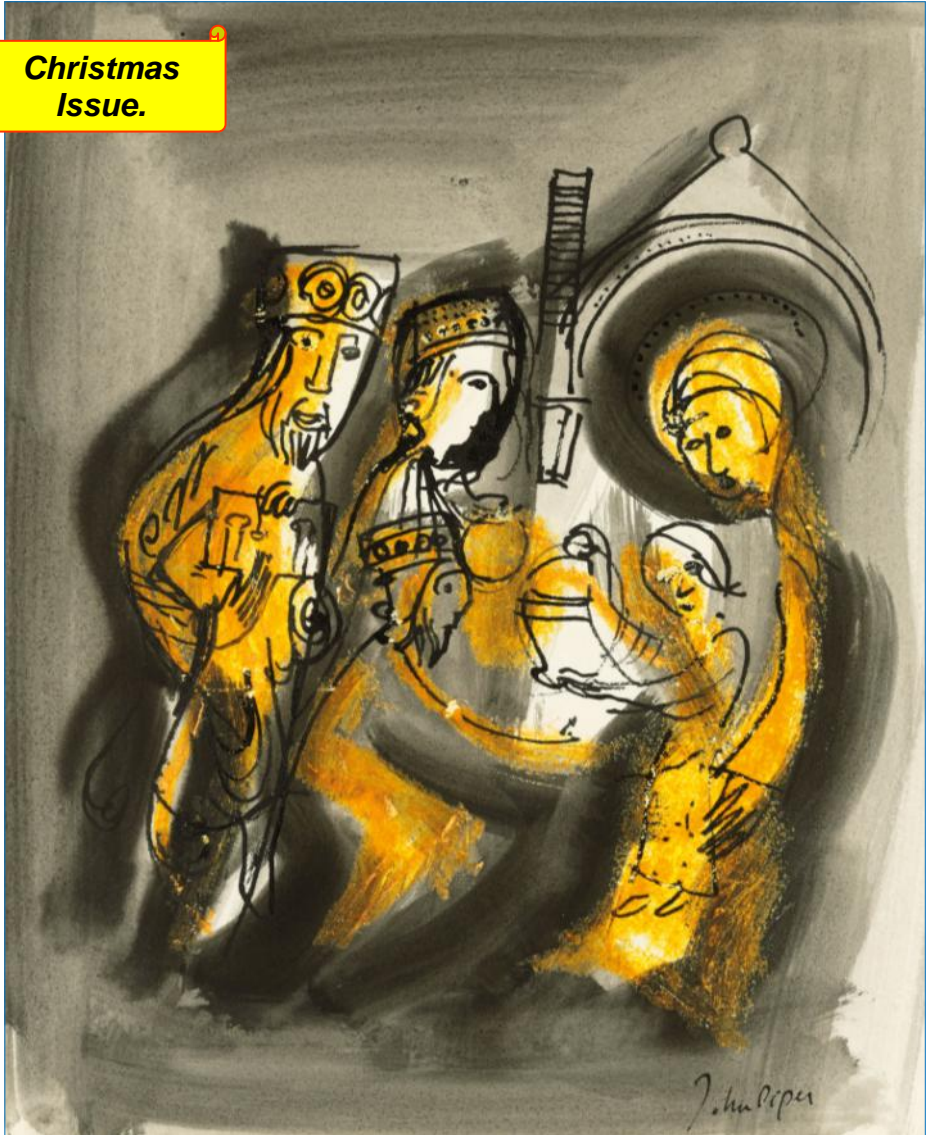


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**Christmas
Issue.**



December 2020/January 2021

£1



**Cover by John Piper; see more about him inside back cover
Top see School Report page 4, Bottom see page 8**



From the Vicarage

2020 is drawing to a close and there's not many of us will regret its passing. Instead we look forward to 2021 with hopes of vaccines and less restrictions on our personal liberties. What Christmas will be like is still not clear, although it is certain that it will be like no Christmas we have experienced before. Nothing is as we would have anticipated yet we still hope for a good, enjoyable Festival.



2000 years ago Joseph and a pregnant Mary had no choice but to set off on a journey for a census, imposed by the government. I cannot imagine they wanted to do it. On arriving in Bethlehem they had no choice in where to stay as there was only a stable available, not exactly ideal conditions for a confinement.

In some ways our experience this year and particularly as we approach Christmas reflects how Mary and Joseph may have felt. They must have been anticipating the birth of a child that had been prophesied in ancient times, that Angels had foretold. They would, like any first-time parent, have been full of hope and no doubt some fear, and yet were surrounded by problems that must have felt like a tidal wave of difficulties and stress. Yet they got through!

For us today the journey toward Christmas, normally a highlight of the year, has been as difficult as it can be and full of frustrations. There are so many situations that seem to demand our attention. What tier are we in and how many friends and family can we meet for the big festive meal? What are the risks to have friends and family over? For some it must feel like drowning in fear and anxiety.

So, what can we do? Well, it seems to me we have two choices. The first and worst is to sit in fear and wish the difficulties would all go away. The alternative is to journey toward Christmas in hope. But what should we hope for? That we can meet with our family? That the new approved vaccines will be rolled out at speed? Personally, I think that Advent requires us to stay awake to the problems we face, accept the challenges, and ask God how to meet them. We can then journey in faith toward Christmas, and in due course the ending of the pandemic.

May God be with you as you journey toward Christmas through Advent and may it encourage your faith.

Paul

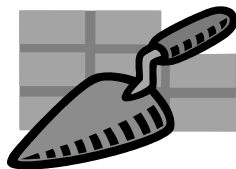
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Christmas Services

This is a provisional list of the Services planned. Please check our website though for any changes—we live in uncertain times!

13th Dec. 8.00m & 11.00am Holy Communion. 4pm Carols by candlelight

20th Dec 8.00am Holy Communion. 11.00am. Nine Lessons.

24th Dec 4pm Crib Service. 11pm Holy Communion

25th Dec 11am Family Service followed by optional Holy Communion

27th Dec No Services

Foodbank Collections return. Cash collected over Christmas will be donated to **local Charities**.

Christmas cards & notelets

Lucy Earl writes "Thank you to all those who have bought Christmas cards. The remaining ones are on sale at Nisa on Handside Lane who are kindly selling for us. I do have a few packets of notelets left at home so if anyone wants those, they will need to email me Lucy.earl2@btinternet.com."

Gardens

Mary Douglas writes: "The Volunteer gardeners have carried

on during lockdown. This has been possible at a safe distance since the area we are now tackling is large!! -the mound, or border between the church and Lemsford House.

It is smothered in ivy which trails out across the grass making mowing a challenge. We have started around the middle and now need primroses, bluebells, snowdrops and other happy spreaders of which your garden may have an excess!! If you would like to donate, please leave the plants where they can be seen and text me on 07850527050. I can collect too.

In the process of clearing we have found small holly and yew saplings so have transplanted them to the church/school hedge where they will be able to flourish. This gives them a new chance.

Similarly, Advent gives us another chance to start a New Christian Year remembering the Church of England's focus on Comfort and Joy."

Jenny Roden recommends in the run up to Christmas that we watch The Living Advent Calendar - "**Kathryn's Advent Adventure**" - on Youtube from 1st December.

Parish Magazine copy date for the next issue: **25th January**

Well, here we are and it is nearly Christmas and what a strange term it has been. We have all adjusted to the various levels of restrictions and the children have just been amazingly adaptable. They have knuckled down to their learning, kept focused on constant hand cleansing, and having lots of fresh air in the classroom. No words of complaint about what they have missed in terms of extra-curricular activities have been heard in school, which is a tribute to how well the staff have kept them engaged and happy.



Working in bubbles has its challenges and, it has to be said, a few unexpected joys too. Although we are desperate to be together again as a whole school, we have noticed how well the children have bonded and played together in their class bubbles and some lovely imaginative play has developed at playtimes as classes use their own space at break. Having said that, we long to return to normal and celebrate St John's school to the full!

We were delighted to be able to ask our Year 6 children to lay crosses and wreaths at the War Memorial in honour of those who died for us in two world wars and other conflicts. This resonated particularly as Class 4 have been doing some really thoughtful work on the two world wars for their history topic this term. *See picture inside front cover.*

We are still worshipping together as a school, using technology to be together whilst in our separate classroom and the children are still contributing with thoughts and prayers, and our Pupil Worship Groups are leading some of the Collective Worship too.

Our new value of Joy is perfect for Advent. It is helping us to be thankful for the care and love we feel around us and to look to praise God ...and each other.... to help shine His love in these difficult times. Class 4 have been writing to our Quantum Care link care homes and are building pen pals. Today we received our first reply to one these letters.

Lemsford School Association (LSA) have devised a programme of daily 'events', *The 12 Days of Christmas*, for the 12 days before the end of term. We are all excited about this initiative helping to make this time as magical as possible, despite some traditional events not being able to take place.

We are preparing simple Nativity 'plays' to film for our parents this year to ensure our younger pupils in Class 1 and 2 have that experience of performing this special story. We are also preparing to record the children singing the carols from our usual carol service (in their bubbles of course) and telling the story of Jesus' birth from bible readings, again for parents.

We would like extend our very best wishes to all the St John's Church family and hope you find joy and keep healthy over Christmas.

Many congratulations to Jean who celebrated her 90th Birthday on November 25th.

Despite the restriction on visits from her family she said she had an amazing day. Those that could turned up to her doorstep keeping a safe distance. She also had numerous cards and calls from her many friends in the Church and elsewhere.

Jean has been heavily involved with St Johns for decades, latterly as a Deputy Church Warden. She has been key in keeping the Church looking beautiful with flowers week in week out.



She had a special poem written in her honour by St Johns Poet Laureate, Edward (Ted) Webb. Ted it transpires has been writing poems for many years, and you can read another one of his on page 11. He is pictured there with his book of collected works.

Ninety! (A poem for Jean)

By the time you reach ninety you've seen quite a lot.
And the sum of these years is the knowledge you've got
about politics, places and people and such.
There are times when you'll wonder if it all comes to much.
But the parts that you don't see are the impact you've made
on the people around you, by the time that you gave,
to sharing your knowledge, your skills and your learning;
it's on actions like these that the world keeps on turning.
So "Thank you" Jean for sharing your skills;
turning out in all weathers and ignoring your ills.
For if you weren't around we'd be left in the lurch,
missing the things that you do for the church.



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Reviewed by Mary Rathbone, Lay Reader Hatfield Team

After eight months of lockdown we are still doing our best to avoid the COVID-19 virus—and it doesn't look like it going to get easier anytime soon.

So how are we supposed to understand what is happening around us with the pandemic at a spiritual level—and how should we respond?

There are a lot of different views around: 'This is a sign of the End of Times' some say. 'It is all predicted in the book of Revelation' others say.

Some have another view: 'This is a call for all to repent. God is judging the world and through this disease he's telling us it's time to change.'

Some take a secular view and ask who is to blame: 'It's the fault of the Chinese, the government, the World Health Organization.....'

Bishop Tom Wright examines all these reactions to the virus and is not convinced by any of them.

Instead, he invites us to consider a different way of seeing and responding – a way that draws on the teachings and examples of scripture, and above all on the way of living, thinking and praying that Jesus taught during his ministry on earth.

Bishop Tom examines what the Greek philosophers' view might have been, as well as the Old Testament prophets and New Testament disciples. In conclusion he proposes that we should not be asking why God is allowing this pandemic?' Rather—what can we do to help others during the pandemic?

The book, although short, is full of biblical wisdom and truths about how people have responded in times of difficulty down the centuries and advises that these responses are just as valid today.

Iwould recommend the book, a light and easy read, for anyone wondering how they might respond to the pandemic in a Christ-like manner, during these strangest of times.



God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath. Paperback : 88 pages Publisher : SPCK Publishing

Beating the Bounds

For several years I have been sponsored to run in the “Race for Life” for Cancer Research. When we were searching for ways to compensate for the loss of income from the Fete after its cancellation, I wondered if we could initiate a local event with similar objectives. After a chance conversation with Rev Paul the concept of “Beating the Bounds” came up. *“Beating the bounds is a centuries-old tradition, aimed at reminding everyone of boundaries that were important in their lives. During Rogationtide—the fifth week after Easter—villagers, with the rector and other local dignitaries, would walk the parish bounds. The children would carry willow wands to beat the boundary markers with, and in some ceremonies children had their heads bumped on boundary stones to imprint them firmly in the memory”*. Now we weren’t going to do it anywhere near Easter nor would we be walking with local dignitaries and we definitely didn’t intend to bash any children around the head, but it was an idea that might work.



Rev Paul sent me a map of the Parish which the brilliant Richard Cuthbert used to devise a walk which was safe and legal. To walk around the whole parish, amazingly for such a small parish church is **9.4 miles**. Now that is enough of a challenge to ask for sponsorship for and so it began.....

We set 24th October as Walk Day, however with Covid rules and wanting anyone to be able to do this, we allowed it to happen over several weeks. Plus with half term at the same time it would give people plenty of opportunity to complete the walk at a time to suit them. Clever Richard had written in some short cuts in case there were little legs that couldn’t quite manage 9 miles too.

On the morning of the 24th Paul and I got ourselves appropriately dressed for a walk in England in October, boots/wellies, tee shirt, jumpers, thermals, coats, raincoats. The rain was expected at 3pm so let’s try and be back before that. Off we set away from our house on Great North Road towards Stanboroughbury farm, then to Green Lanes and Great Braitch Lane to pick up Rev Paul and Cate. They had been waving off the early walkers with a drink and snacks. Next we entered an area I’ve never been; across the gravel works. It was very wet at this point and the puddles straddled the whole path so we had to try and tiptoe around the edge or jump over where possible.

One of the highlights of the day happened as three deer bounded across the field in front of us. After Symondshyde Farm we got a bit lost having failed to check Richard's map, as we assumed we knew where we were going, doh! We ended up near a house we recognised from our pilgrimage to St Albans on Easter Monday each year. We followed the footpath which eventually brought us back to the top of Cromer Hyde Lane. We crossed over and continued to walk across the fields until we reached the Wheathampstead Road that we had to daringly cross and into the Brocket Estate.

Over lockdown I've been doing a little bit more walking and running around the Brocket estate so I was now on more familiar ground. We went straight on towards Wheathampstead to Water End Lane. Never having walked the Lane before it was quite an experience with all the inclines and dips. At the top of one of these there was a lovely view at the top across to WGC, but boy, it was windy and cold.

More ups and downs along pretty lanes with lovely houses until we came into Ayot Green. It was now past 2 o'clock and we hadn't really drunk much or eaten since breakfast apart from a satsuma, so decided on swift half of cider and a packet of crisps in The Waggoners.

We could see the end now, just go back down into Lemsford a short walk along the Great North Road and home to a nice cup of coffee. Dilemma time! We didn't fancy walking down Digswell Hill so thought a meander through the Brocket golf course (along the public footpaths of course) would be preferable. That took us to the mill and then left out of the village and up the road back home. We said goodbye to Paul and Cate who had been great company as they had to do the extra part of the journey that we'd done at the beginning. My Fitbit told me I'd done 16.22 km (10 miles) in 3 ¾ hours and 21,677 steps. So our short cut at the end may in fact have been a long cut.....

Thank you to everybody who sponsored us and others who've walked the route. To date we have raised **£850** which is phenomenal.

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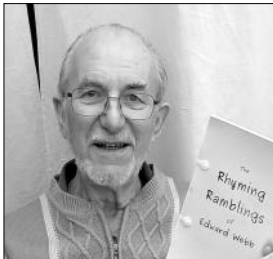
We're gathered in the living room,
 at 4pm it will be "Zoom";
 the thing that we will watch together
 and no-one cares about the weather.
 All eyes are focussed on the screen;
 since March that is how its always
 been.

Funeral, meetings, quizzes too
 I get the chance to talk to you.
 In a digital sense it's face to face
 Is this the future human race?
 When people don't go out all day
 and even log-on-line to pray?
 Or will reality return
 and people go to work to earn?

We find the lockdown very stressing
 the situation is so depressing.

The New Year's not so far away,
 we're looking forward to the day
 when Covid is no more a threat,
 but don't relax – it's not gone yet.
 The vaccine's coming, so they say,
 and I'm looking forward to the day
 when someone doesn't have to ask
 "Why are you here without a
 mask?"

Edward Webb



Joan Baraclough



She sat alone
 at the window and
 watched

Watched as the thin man with a
 baby strapped to his chest, facing
 forward, walked grimly up the road

Watched as the baby stretched out
 his arms to the sun and his father
 smiled.

Watched as the golden leaves
 fluttered to the ground making a
 bright carpet in a grey world

Watched as the guide dog in his
 yellow jacket escorted the teenager
 across the street, safe from traffic

Watched as young parents laughed
 as their toddlers ran and skipped in
 the fresh air and sunshine

Watched as empty streets were
 filled with cars as parents collected
 children from school

Watched as two seniors, yards apart,
 walked across green pastures to the
 lake's still waters and heard,
 whistling on the wind, the soft
 strains of Psalm 23.

She sat alone, but was not alone.
 Her name was Faith. The baby was
 Christopher and the two seniors
 Hope and Charity.



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A few people in Lemsford may recall my admiration for the poet **John Clare** (1796-1864). Perhaps his life was strange and he had great problems but he wrote some of the best poetry in the English language, especially considering his poor background and little education.



In 1841 after a period in an asylum in Epping he decided to leave and make the journey on foot back to his home in Northborough, which was not far from Helpston where he was born and lived for most of his life.

A new book '**Loves Cold Returning**' by Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh is an attempt to retrace this journey – with the help of Clare's writing 'The Journey out of Essex'. It is a remarkable book with superb pictures and maps with many references to the history of these places and often what they are like today.

When I have given talks about this journey, I was always pleased to say that Clare walked through Lemsford – a place I know well! So I must congratulate **Andy Chapman** for getting a special mention as Chair of the Lemsford History Society. Andy met the authors and pointed out various aspects of the village.

'We visit the neighbouring village of Lemsford at the invitation of its local studies group. Its indefatigable webmaster, Andy Chapman, has kindly offered to show us around and tell us something of the history of the Great North Road here. Standing in the car park of the Long and Short Arm public house, he shows us where the road ran out of Lemsford to Ayot Green before McAdam built the bypass. All that remains is a track that quickly disappears into a thicket of branches....'.

The authors then mention the 'magnificent wall of red brick, which marks the boundary of the Brocket estate' and they say that Clare would have seen the wall.. 'in its full glory aboard the Stamford Regent on his journeys to and from London in the 1820s...'. .

Love's Cold Returning: John Clare's 1841 Odyssey from Essex into Northamptonshire. Paperback : 420 pp Pub'r: Thirteen Eighty One

With the hibernation period starting there have been quite a few stories about hedgehogs in the papers. Only recently I discovered that a near neighbour runs a refuge for distressed hedgehogs, which is perhaps why we see quite a few in our garden.



Following a burglary I installed a security camera looking from the front of the house to observe arrivals. It has explained quite a few things, particularly why the motion-activated light in the porch comes on at random intervals at night. Usually a cat or two comes past at around 2 am, and once a fox sauntered down the path to the house and wandered off again. A regular passer by is a hedgehog, normally around 4 am. It comes up to the front door, sniffs it and carries on its perambulation. Why I have no idea.

I remember two dramatic incidents involving hedgehogs. The first was many years ago when I was working rather late in the garden and it was getting dark. Clearing up I noticed a stray brick which had somehow found itself on a path. Without a thought I bent down and picked it up to move it out of the way. Imagine my reaction when it turned out to be a hedgehog.

The second was more scary. I had been plagued by squirrels attacking my bird feeders and so bought a portable trap. These are baited with fatty food and when the squirrel enters it triggers a spring-loaded door which closes behind it. My father-in-law used them and was not a caring person. When he caught a squirrel he put the whole contraption in a water butt to kill off the beast. I lack his steel and when I caught one I used to drive it to a wood some distance away to release the animal. Invariably another squirrel used to turn up in our garden soon after; whether it was the previous one I never knew.

Anyway, one morning I found the trap occupied by a very dead hedgehog. When I opened the sprung door and upended the trap the corpse fell lifeless to the ground. I went indoors in quite a state to confess my crime. When my wife returned with me to inspect the body we were just in time to see it miraculously recovered making a speedy exit under a hedge! Needless to say I dispensed with the trap and found a squirrel-proof bird feeder.



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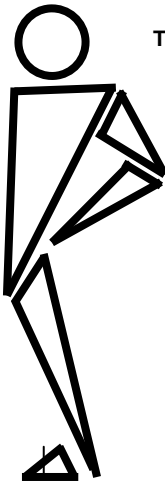
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An extract from 'The Lemsford I knew' by Keith Ladbury

Keith was the son of William Ladbury, Head Teacher of Lemsford School from 1902-1936

All through those early years before the First World War, the School was extremely fortunate for the great interest taken by Lord and Lady Mount-Stephen. Memories which return were the Christmas Treats provided by Lady Mount Stephen. In those years around 1910 – 1914 each girl was given a dress length (red or green) with lining and each boy two woollen jerseys. A number of books were also given as prizes for attendance, work etc. usually by G.A. Henty.

The Christmas Prize Giving was an Occasion. Early in the day a van would arrive from the Hall with vast supplies of 'tin' loaves, Estate butter, buns and cakes. The Teachers would prepare masses of bread and butter always popular in those days. Tea over, the older boys rearranged the desks, set tables stacked with clothing and prizes which, in due course, Lady Mount Stephen presented.

King George V, being a keen shot, would come down at least once a Season with Queen Mary, a personal friend of Lady Mount. The journey would be to Hatfield station; met there by the Brocket carriage and pair, and driven back to the Hall. On such occasions, the school children could line up on either side of the iron railings to wave as the carriage passed to the Lodge Gates.



Member **Doreen Wright** produced *Memories of Annie Gardiner* (1912-2000) born in Cromer Hyde who also remembers with affection the Mount Stephens.

“Queen Mary used to visit Brocket and we had to line up in the drive to see her. Lady Mount-Stephen was a great friend of hers and left her all her jewellery when she died. Old Lord Mount Stephen would not have a car on the place and one had to be hired each time she came. King George used to come to the shoots and two of the local poachers always had to be there to meet him, the twins Ebenezer Albert and Albert Ebenezer Fox. They were so alike that each would swear he was the other when caught.”



Doreen donated to the group a photo showing her father William working on the estate with a gamekeeper.



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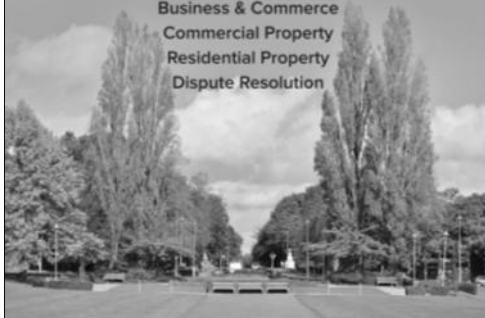
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William was born on 6th August 1889 his mother was a domestic servant in London earning 4/7 per week. On 26th September 1889 he was boarded out by the Waifs and Strays Society to Mrs Susan Tulley who lived in a Clapboard House in Cromer Hyde

William was employed at Brocket Hall. At the time of his marriage his pay rose from 15 shillings to 17 shillings 6pence a week on his wedding day. This was followed by 2 shillings 6 pence on the birth of each child. Anne Louise was born in 1912, William George in 1914, Lily Rose 1916 and Lucy in 1931. He stayed there until 1935 when all the old hands were sacked and green, cheap labour was taken on.

**Lemsford Local history Group would like to wish you a
Happy Christmas and look forward to seeing you in 2021**



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Who Was Thomas Becket? His Portrayal Through Time

Join us in an online Zoom Lecture to mark the 850th anniversary of the death of St Thomas Becket, whose image is emblazoned on the walls of St Albans Cathedral – painted during the medieval period onto a pillar of the nave, and re-illuminated as part of the ‘Alban, Britain’s First Saint’ project.

Murdered in his own cathedral on 29 December 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket became a saint speedily, in 1173, with a growing following. His staunch defence of the church prerogatives in general and, later, the rights and authority of Canterbury in particular sent him into exile and conflict with Henry II and his fellow English bishops, but his shocking and sacrilegious death brought him to prominence across Latin Christendom and secured his reputation. Looking not only at his life and times, but also the way that Becket's legacy was used after his death, this session will investigate who Thomas Becket was to both his contemporaries and those who deployed him as an idea and symbol after his death.

Speaker: Dr Danica Summerlin, University of Sheffield

Wednesday 16 December, 7.30-9pm.

Participants can join from 7pm.

Price: £10 (£6 students)

Participants will need access to a computer/laptop/tablet/phone which has audio in order to be able to hear. You can also join by dialling in using a telephone, but won't be able to see the speaker or any visual aids.

You can book online on the Abbey website, or by calling the Box Office on 01727 890290. Tickets will be on sale until 5pm on the day of the event.

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Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
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and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

From Ian Douglas

And finally— we give thanks for those scientists working on a vaccine



The artist named Christmas

John Piper's *Nativity Window* at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Iffley, celebrates the feast of Christmas with child-like joy. From the branches of the Tree of Life, a cock, a goose, a raven, an owl, and a lamb announce Christ's birth. Latin texts issue from the animal's mouths, proclaiming the glad tidings.

"There is a wonderful old legend that on Christmas night the animals can speak. You can understand why that's a legend because it made such a difference to the world that Christ had come—so naturally everything changed."—Sr. Wendy

John Egerton Christmas Piper, CH (1903–1992), was an English painter, printmaker, and designer of stained glass. A leader of British abstract art in the early 1930s, his eighty foot *Baptistry Window* at Coventry Cathedral, is his best known abstract glass work.





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