

# INSPIRE

**JULY 2026**



**The monthly magazine  
for the Parish of  
St John The Baptist, Frome**

The parish of Frome Selwood  
in the Frome Local Ministry Group

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July 2026

St John's Church, Frome Floral Art Society and local schools present:

## Wonders of



## The Vicar's view

I've recently taken to re-reading an Italian book series called Don Camillo, a comic-cum-theological-cum-dramatic series that follows the life of a parish priest in post-war Italy. The series primarily revolves around the antagonism between Don Camillo, the priest, and Peppone, the Communist mayor.

In some ways one would imagine the relationship between the two to be that of polar opposites. Italy is coming out of a fascist dictatorship where the Church, though at times unjustly, was seen as the scaffolding of the right wing. Radical advances in education is seeming to pose a challenge to the religious monopoly the church has held over Italy, Stalin has now purged his country of priests, and Italy, like the rest of Europe, is beginning to awaken to a common humanist ambition that once freed from the sovereignty of religion, along with all other medieval ideologies, humanity can, by fiat and through such omnipotent bodies as NATO and the UN, achieve peace on earth.

Peppone should, and at times does, see Don Camillo as every force that is opposed to humanity's progress. And yet, for all this progress, common people being given a real say in politics, international pacts making peace a political achievement rather than religious aspiration, single minded political focus on economy and trade, social mobility decimating the churches and advancing the secularism of Europe, Christian faith continues to haunt and even move Peppone. When the weighty decisions of office play on his conscience, he cannot help but be drawn to confession. When watching his comrades destroy church-given charity to the destitute, he can't help but ask how their actions match his sense of Christian duty; he often goes to church, under the cover of darkness, to light candles.

I wonder how many of us in the last few decades have felt like Peppone? Uneasy with how some of our cultural ethics, societal progress and even business practices sit with our Christian conscience, but too scared to say anything in case we are mocked as the backwards witchdoctor looking to drag our neighbour back to the Dark ages. We who live half a century after Peppone know just how

much evil his idolised communists perpetrated in the name of progress, the genocides, the famines, the political disenfranchisement of nations, all in the name of a new, enlightened humanity. Progress without Christianity, without conscience, is not always the foolproof path to Eden that it can be set out to be. And yet, for all these revelations of secularism gone wrong, the Christian voice seems as equally silent in our own society's discussions of future and progress; haunted, but not vocal, as we see the face of the crucified Christ amongst those whom the cold voice of proceduralism labels as the sad collateral damage required for advancement.

In one of the stories of Don Camillo, Peppone identifies a perfect location for 'The People's Palace': there will be a library, café, arcade, cheap rooms to rent, a much needed utility. The only problem is that right in the middle of the location is an centuries old shrine to the Virgin Mary. It is a rustic thing, with a third-rate fresco of the Madonna, and eventually Peppone convinces even Don Camillo that it should be scrapped in the name of the good its destruction will do. But when the day of demolition comes, each of the workers throws down the mallets and pickaxes, each refusing to be the first that strikes a blow on the Virgin Mary. Peppone, incensed by this medieval sentimentalism, rushes forward, seizing the pickaxe and thrusting it above his head, only to be met by the eyes of Our Lady, through the fresco, staring directly into his. Something cuts through Peppone that asks how the future can be called progress if it ignores, derides or even destroys the most fundamental elements of our humanity, our link to the past. As Don Camillo observes, 'The eyes of this Madonna have seen all our beloved dead, they have reflected the hope and the despair, the joys and the sorrows of centuries past. Do you remember, Peppone, when we came back from the war? I gave the Madonna flowers and you put them in your tin cup?' Resurrection is not always the same as revolution.

It is not easy being a Christian voice today, often feeling like that third-rate Madonna, ruining ambitious plans and seeming to stand in the way of much needed progress, yet invoking the only power capable of holding the diverse strands of our earthly pilgrimage and directing

them to the one end and goal to which we can truly put our faith. Like the Madonna, Christian faith has remained whilst political ideologies have crumbled. We have seen printing, industrial, agricultural revolutions, we have seen wars and peace, and Christians have not always been on the right side of these, yet humanity keeps coming back, back at Christmas, back in trouble and trial, back to that God-man two thousand years ago who transformed our world through resurrection, not revolution, and who offers us the hope that our future lies not in the razing of the past but in the Good Shepherd who gathers all the wayward strands of our history, meaningful participants in the outworking of his Kingdom. Perhaps this is why Peppone kept returning to the church, despite his Communist tendencies, because life devoid of spiritual truth is humanity robbed of true progress which ultimately is the Resurrection of the age to come.

**Rev Seamus Hargrave**



"Well, ya have been wantin' a new Baptismal font."

## Whatever your task, work heartily (Col 3: 23)

### Part 3 – Anyone for coffee?

You may have noticed that I have been writing a series of articles on 'Ways to get Involved at St John's', and this month my attention is on the social aspects of our service – the meeting and greeting and the coffee! Our team of church welcomers is steadily growing, but there is still room on the rota for more people who don't mind getting to church early on a Sunday morning to welcome people with a smile and friendly word.

Where we really need some extra help is at the end of the service – the coffee and chat time. There is a willing team of people who regularly step into the breach to dispense hot drinks and wash-up, but it would be great if there were a few more who could sign up on the list, so we know that there will be milk available, and that the water will be hot.

It is not a particularly arduous task, and it is a great way to meet new people and chat – and in the winter months it is a good excuse to position yourself near the hospitality area and benefit from the heat of the urn. As with all these jobs, the more people that volunteer, the less of a burden it becomes: at the moment the coffee is 'DIY' on the first Sunday of the month (although even that has to be got out and cleared away again), and the choir are responsible on the 2nd Sunday, so if we had 4-5 people on the rota, your turn would come round only about 6 times a year.

If you think you can do this, please let Rosemary know, either by speaking to me after church, or by emailing me at [rosemarymccormick@hotmail.com](mailto:rosemarymccormick@hotmail.com), and I shall draw up a rota!

If hospitality is outside your comfort zone, watch this space for future articles. Next time I will be putting out a plea for sound-desk operators!

**Rosemary McCormick**



## Some new traditions?

At St John's we love our traditions, and we have enjoyed several of them in recent weeks: the Whit branches and buns for Pentecost; the strawberries and cream for the Patronal Festival; and the beginning of June saw two more events that might well become traditions in the future.

On Trinity Sunday (the 5th Sunday in May) the 5pm service took the form of an 'Evening Prayer Walk'. This had been advertised around the other churches in Frome, and we had a very positive response. Starting at Holy Trinity church we walked to Christ Church, then across to St Catherine's on Park Road, before heading off to Wesley Methodist and then returning to St John's. At each stop on we said part of the service – the readings, the psalm, the intercessions – and we also sang a verse of a short hymn. When we left HT church there were about eight of us, but more people joined us as we went, and by the time we arrived back at St John's there were about 15 of us walking, and we were met by another 4 or 5 who were waiting to greet us (with the kettle on!) as we concluded our service with a final hymn and the Blessing. Not only were we joined by members of the other congregations in Frome but we were also welcomed into their churches – a representative from Wesley even came to meet us at the RC church to guide us in through the back (upstairs) entrance of their church. It added an extra dimension to be able to worship alongside our friends from other churches inside their church buildings. The



The Bishop's table

evening ended with some convivial conversation over a cup of tea and a slice of cake, and a strong feeling that it was something to be repeated.

Another tradition was born a week later on 8th June, the feast day of Bishop Thomas Ken, which we decided to celebrate with a 'Bishop's Table' this year. We set up tables just inside the west door, laid out the 'bring and share' meal and waited for people to arrive – and we weren't disappointed. Our number, alongside some familiar faces from the congregation, included a member of the visiting circus troop, who had set up on the old showground, and a budding film music composer! – plenty of conversation and a relaxed way to make new friends. I think Bishop Ken would have approved!

**Rosemary McCormick**

## A tidy rood screen!

On 15 June the Rood Screen received a much needed clear out! Rev. Seamus and lay vice-chair Peter C are shown below flexing their muscles, while Judith D, Katie B-S (and Angela P a bit!) ferried the recycling and rubbish to Frome Recycling Centre. The rood screen is finally clear of all 'stuff'!



## Festival events at St John's

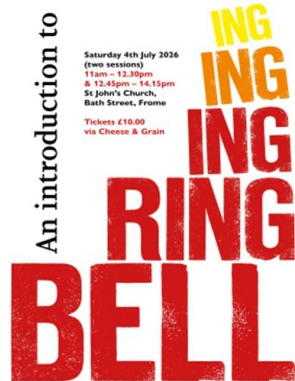


Friday 3 July to Friday 10 July  
11am to 4pm daily

### Wonders of Creation

*Floral displays by Frome Floral Art Society and St John's Flower Team focusing on the Genesis account of Creation and Earth and its wonders.*

**Frome Art for Wellbeing Exhibition**  
*Recent artworks.*



Saturday 4 July  
11-12.30pm; 12.45-2.15pm  
**'Introduction to Bellingring'**

*Learn how the bells work, explore their history, hear stories from other belfries and try hand chime ringing.*



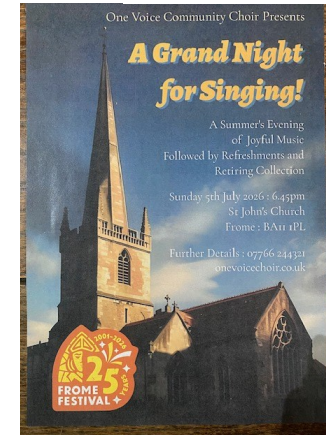
Saturday 4 July:  
7.30pm-9pm

### 'Strings of Light

#### Secrets of the Harp Guitar

*Immersive blend of classical, folk and original music from Jon Pickard and his harp guitar*

## Festival events at St John's



Sunday 5 July  
6.45pm - 8.30pm

### One Voice Community Choir - a grand night for singing!

*A summer evening of joyful music. Pop hits, show tunes and movie melodies*

Monday 6 July, 6pm-8pm

### Kanekt in concert

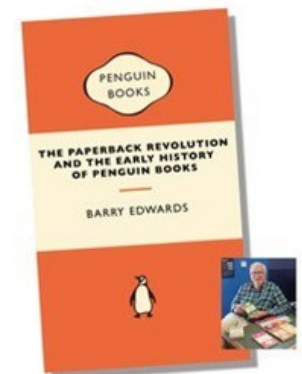
*A unique mix of instruments including guitar and sitar, exploring the links between Indian and western classical, modern jazz, folk and western popular music*



Tuesday 7 July, 4pm-5pm

### 'The Paperback Revolution'

*Barry Edwards explores the social impact of the launch of Penguins in 1935 up to 1960 and the publication of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'*



## Festival events at St John's



Wednesday 8 July, 7pm–8.30pm

### 'Haydn Jeugd Strijk Orkest

*This ensemble of talented string players from the Netherland plays works by Purcell, Elgar, Mendelssohn and Vaughan Williams*

**FESTIVAL  
CHORAL  
EVENSONG  
SONG  
SONG**

Thursday 9th July 2026  
6.00pm – 7.00pm  
Free entry | Donations

St John's Church,  
Bath Street, Frome

Thursday 9 July, 6pm–7pm

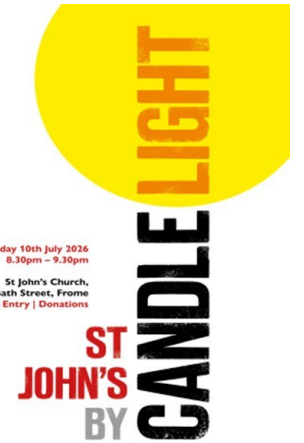
### Festival Choral Evensong

*Traditional evensong to complement the floral displays on 'Creation' and will include works by composers celebrating significant anniversaries this year.*

## Festival events at St John's

Friday 10 July, 8.30pm-9.30pm  
**St John's by Candlelight**  
*An atmospheric tour by candlelight involving meditation, light, music and stories*

Friday 10th July 2026  
8.30pm – 9.30pm  
St John's Church,  
Bath Street, Frome  
Free Entry | Donations



Sunday 12 July,  
11.30am – 2.30pm

**Fashionable Faith Displays**  
*Glamour and glory! An expert guide through the history and meaning of Christian dress*

**Please note that the catwalk and talk at 3pm has been cancelled**

**FASHIONABLE FAITH**



## Music Matters

As we approach the summer break it seems a good opportunity to reflect on the many achievements of our hard-working choir over the past few months. As I write this, we are busy preparing for the Festival Evensong, but we have also been kept busy with weddings and funerals over the past few weeks. There is always a lot of music to learn, and I am always impressed by the way all the singers rise to whatever challenge I throw at them! I am, of course, always indebted to Paul, who plays for the bigger services and steps in for me occasionally when I am away for the weekend.

The monthly Choral Evensongs go from strength to strength, and we now have a regular core of singers, some of whom come from Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury and whose sight-reading ability never fails to astonish me. Once again tea and home-made cake are an important part of Sunday afternoons – if you haven't been to a Choral Evensong yet, please come and find out what it is all about. The next one will be on 19th July.

Earlier in June I had the opportunity to attend the inaugural Major Church Network (MCN) Conference for Music Directors – it sounds very grand, and I found myself in some illustrious company. It had been organised by the organists of St Mary's Warwick and Great St Mary's Cambridge, who felt that it would be useful to bring together musicians from across the country who share similar challenges on a weekly basis. Two days earlier Neil had another Major Churches conference in Oxford, but that one was mostly about buildings.



Major Churches are those which are large and have particular historic or cultural significance but are not cathedrals, and therefore do not share the benefits of the cathedral network. Musically this boils down to



insufficient resources, and over the weekend I heard many familiar stories of musicians trying to maintain organs and recruit new members into choirs.

These themes were also addressed at the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) annual conference which I attended in April, and at a time when Seamus is keen to develop the music at St John's I found both events informative and inspirational. There were some common themes across both days – vocal health and development, choral repertoire and the liturgy, growing new choirs – but at the RSCM event there was also a focus on community enterprises and how children's choirs could be a way of introducing young people to faith while at the MCN they discussed the state of singing in schools and how to successfully apply for grants.

These events are always a great opportunity to meet other people doing the same work, with similar goals but very different contexts. I was particularly pleased to be able to talk to David Fawcett, Director of Music at Swanage parish church and one of the driving forces behind the RSCM Young Voices Toolkit. The perennial question of 'So which hymn book does your church use?' led to a heated discussion in the pub at the end of the day, while as I was walking to the venue in the morning I enjoyed 'Spot the Organist'.

More seriously though, these conferences have given me the chance to reflect on what we are trying to do at St John's. We do not have the resources of some of the other Major Churches (full-time paid music directors, many of whom also have a paid organist, and some even a paid music administrator), but we do have enthusiasm and loyalty. A couple of messages that came through clearly from both conferences was that music should be seen as central to the worship of the church, not an 'add-on', and that if we are to bring children into our choirs, and thence into our worship, it should be a whole-church initiative! We have already started some of this with our Launchpad group – now is the time to develop that and start looking at more ways of bringing young families into our community.

**Rosemary McCormick**



## Support St John's while you shop online

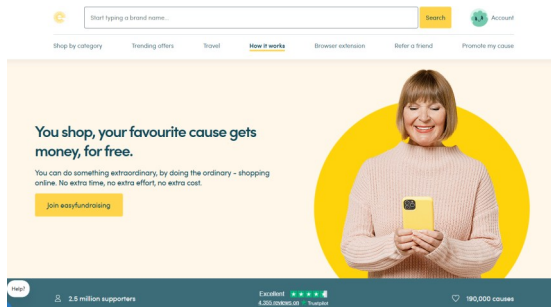
**Did you know that you can raise money for St John's Church every time you shop online – at no extra cost to you?**

St John's is now registered with **easyfundraising**, a fundraising platform that partners with more than 8,000 retailers, including supermarkets, travel companies, insurers, clothing stores and many other online shops.

Every time you make a purchase through easyfundraising, the retailer will donate a small percentage to St John's Church, Frome – completely free to you.

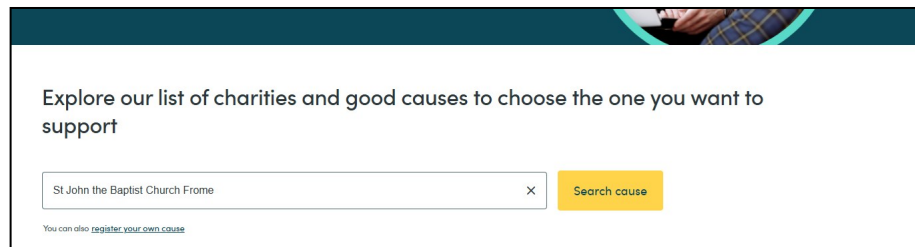
### How it works

- Create a free account at [easyfundraising.org.uk](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)



- Choose **St John the Baptist Church Frome** as your cause
- Shop online as normal with any participating retailer.

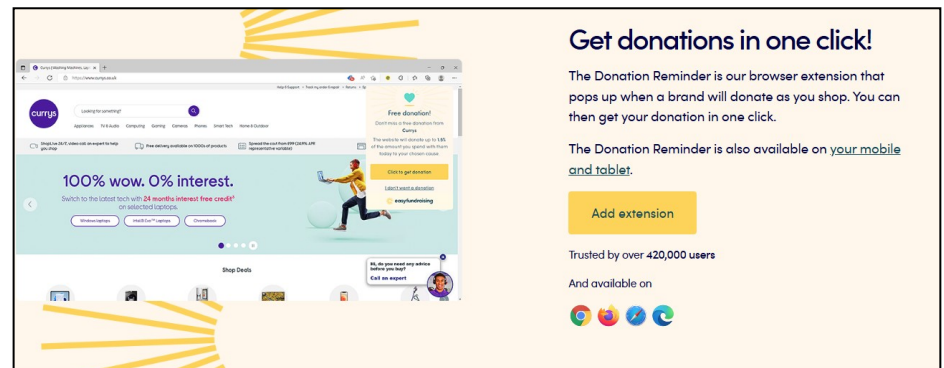
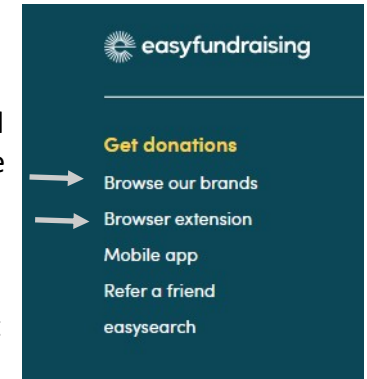
The retailer will then make a donation to the church at no extra cost to you.



You can see which brands support this fundraising by clicking on 'Browse our brands' at the bottom of the window.

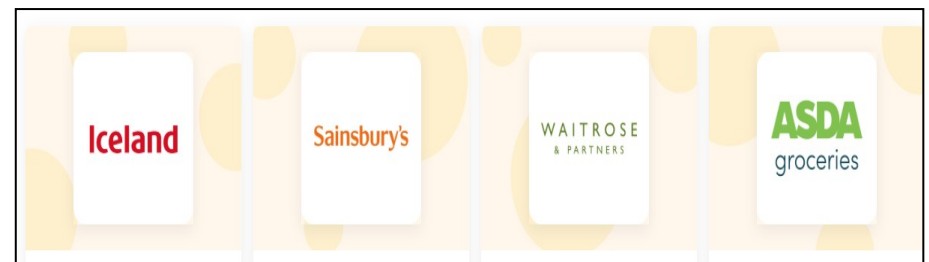
For even greater convenience, you can install the easyfundraising extension. It will automatically remind you whenever you're shopping with a participating retailer, so you never miss an opportunity to raise funds.

The individual donations may be small, but together they can make a significant difference, helping to support the life, ministry and mission of our church.



Thank you for considering this simple way of supporting St John's. If you would like any help setting up your account or have any questions, please do speak to either of us.

**Christine Holland and Mandy Crook**



## News from other churches

### St Katharine's, East Woodlands

We were delighted to be joined in our Morning Service on 7th June by worshippers from Rook Lane Chapel. They meet in the Frome Cricket Town Pavilion, but during the cricket season, they attend various churches around Frome and district.

### Songs of Praise - Sunday 30th August at 5pm

Advance notice of our special annual service. If you have a favourite hymn, please let our choir mistress/organist Diana Carrington (01749 831332) or any member of the choir know as soon as possible and we will try to include it in our Songs of Praise service.

### Village Hall, East Woodlands

Pop-up Pub on first Friday at 7pm in July, August and September.

Word on the street is that The Jockey (our much beloved and sorely missed pub The Horse and Groom) is being auctioned on 9th July. Another one bites the dust?

### Cream Teas every Sunday throughout August

3pm -5pm.

Make a note in your diaries - such a popular feature of our summer!

**Pam Chapman**



### From the archives

Neil McCormick writes:

In our Baptism Register for the 19th February 1833 there is an entry recording the baptism of Frances Bush, daughter to Francis Bush, a surgeon, and his wife Laura.

On the same page there is a sworn statement made on the 25th February 1852 by Sarah Long. She says that she is well acquainted with the baptised baby. She was the baby's nurse and was present at the baptism. She asserts that the entry in the Register is incorrect. The baptised baby was, in fact, a son, *Francis*, and not a daughter Frances!



## CHRIS WHITTINGTON: WHAT IS A CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE?

CHRIS WHITTINGTON EXPLORES THE ROLE OF  
MEDITATION AS A PATHWAY TO PEACE, COMMUNITY  
AND ONENESS

**11 JULY 12-4**



Suggested donation £10 - includes a soup lunch

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## Our church by Rosa-Mae, aged 5

Eds: Very many thanks to Rosa-Mae for this lovely picture of St John's



## SERVICES at ST JOHN'S – JULY 2026

### Regular weekly services

#### Sundays

8.45am Online service via Zoom – contact admin for link & code

10.00am Choral Eucharist\*

5.00pm Evening worship in the Lady Chapel:  
 (4.00pm on the 4th Sunday)  
 Week 1: Evening Prayer  
 Week 2: Benediction and Evening Prayer  
 Week 3: Come and Sing Evensong  
 Week 4: 4th @ 4.00  
 Week 5: Flexible Fifth

#### Mondays

8.45am Morning Prayer in the Ken Chapel

#### Fridays

12.30pm Lunchtime Eucharist in the Lady Chapel

#### Saturdays

5.00pm Evening Eucharist in the Lady Chapel

### Additional services in July

Fri 3rd 8.45am Morning Prayer – St Thomas  
 12.30pm Eucharist – St Thomas

Thu 9th 6.00pm Festival Choral Evensong

Fri 10th 9.30pm Compline

Sat 11th 9.00am Morning Prayer – St Benedict

Wed 22nd 12.30pm Eucharist - Mary Magdalene

Sat 25th 9.00am Morning Prayer – James the Apostle

Wed 29th 12.30pm Eucharist - Mary, Martha and Lazarus

## DIARY DATES – JULY 2026

### July

Fri	3		Frome Festival starts—See p 8-11
Sat	4	9am	United Prayer at St John's
Sun	5	11.15am-2pm	Café & Mini Market - Book Sale Special
Thu	9	2pm	Craft and Conversation
Sat	11	12pm-5pm	Retreat Day (SM) 'What is a Contemplative Life?'
		1pm	Wedding
Sat	18	10am	Fundraising Meeting
Thurs	23	2pm	Craft and Conversation
Sat	25	10am	Worship Committee Meeting
Tues	28	11am	Julian Meeting
Fri	31	2pm	Hospital Service

### August

Sat	1	9am	United Prayer at St John's
Sun	2	11.15am-2pm	Café & Mini Market
Wed	5	6.30pm	Book Club

### Café & Mini-Market – the first Sunday of the month

The next dates are:

**Sunday 5 July - Book Stall Special**

**Sunday 2 August - Sunday 6 September**

11.15am to 2pm

Refreshments and light lunches. Cakes, bakes and preserves.

Books and bric-a-brac. Produce & plants in season.



## Barcelona's Sagrada Familia towers – finished after 144 Years

Most cathedrals and large churches take a long time to complete, and Barcelona's Sagrada Familia - 'Holy Family' – church in Spain is no exception. This year saw an important milestone in its completion with the final of its 18 towers being constructed in February 2026. It started in 1882, to be a simple church, financed by private donations. But this changed when the young Antonio Gaudi took over as architect, with a completely new ambition to build a great basilica, composed of natural forms, rather than of the traditional Gothic structures which had dominated cathedral building for hundreds of years. Despite Gaudi's death in 1926, shortage of money, the Spanish Civil War during which nearly all of Gaudi's documents and models were destroyed, as well as the pressures of modern traffic, the external structure is now complete. Final completion of the interior is expected by the mid-2030s.



Eighteen 'sandcastle spires' rise up from the church and pierce Barcelona's skyline: 12 to symbolise Christ's apostles, four for each of the Evangelists who recorded Christ's life in the Gospels, one topped with a star over the apse honouring the Virgin Mary and, tallest among them, the Tower of Jesus Christ. Since February 2026 it has been the tallest church in the world, at 172.5 metres. Describing Sagrada Família, art critic Rainer Zerbst said '*it is probably impossible to find a church building anything like it in the entire history of art*'. It is the most-visited church in Spain, with five million tourists a year:

money from the entrance tickets funds the continued construction of the church.

The immense weight of the towers was always going to be too great to be supported by the traditional Gothic pillars and external buttresses found in mediaeval cathedrals. Gaudi looked to nature for the answer, and the pillars internal to his structure are based upon the way that trees rise in a massive trunk and then branch out as they get higher. This can be seen in the picture of the interior above. More modern architects have also had to cope with the traffic in modern Barcelona streets, as well as the vibrations from the high speed trains that now pass directly underneath the building.



When Gaudí died, the basilica was less than a quarter complete, but work continued under the direction of his disciple Domenec Sugranes i Gras until interrupted by the Civil War in 1936. Parts of the unfinished basilica and Gaudí's models and workshop were destroyed during the war. The present design is based on reconstructed versions of the plans that were burned in a fire, as well as on modern adaptations. Since 1940, various other architects have continued the work: computers were introduced into the design and construction process in the 1980s.

In this century, work has concentrated on the crossing and supporting structure for the main tower of Jesus Christ, as well as the southern enclosure of the central nave. Computer-aided design technology has allowed stone to be shaped off-site by a computer numerical control milling machine, whereas in the 20th century the stone was carved by hand. The final towers were constructed between 2010 and 2026. The basilica was consecrated by Pope Benedict in 2010, since when services have been held regularly. The final tower, of Jesus Christ, was topped by a massive cross and blessed by Pope Leo in June 2026. This was followed by fireworks, the highlight of the display being a massive head of Gaudi appearing for several minutes in the Barcelona sky.

The church is designed to have three grand façades: the Nativity façade to the east, the Passion façade to the west, and the Glory façade to the South.

The Nativity façade bears the most direct Gaudí influence. It has bell towers with biblical narratives in ornately carved stone, topped with pinnacles made from mosaics of Venetian glass.

The Passion façade was built according to the design that Gaudí created in 1917. The construction began in 1954, and the towers were finished in 1976. It is striking for its spare, gaunt, tormented characters, including emaciated figures of Christ being scourged at the pillar, and on the Cross.

The Glory façade, the main entrance of the church, on which construction began in 2002, will be the largest and most monumental of the three and will represent one's ascension to God. It will also depict various scenes such as Hell and Purgatory, and will include elements such as the seven heavenly virtues and the seven deadly sins.

The steeples on the Nativity façade are crowned with geometrically shaped tops that are reminiscent of Cubism, and the decoration is in the style of Art Nouveau, but Gaudí's unique style draws from nature and defies categorisation. There are a few places on the Nativity façade where a hyperboloid appears. For example, all around the scene with the pelican there are numerous examples. Also, the hyperboloid adds structural stability to the cypress tree. Finally, the 'bishop's mitre' spires are capped with hyperboloid structures.



### Organ

In 2010 an organ was installed in the chancel by local organ builders. It has 26 stops (1,492 pipes) on two manuals and a pedalboard. To overcome the unique acoustical challenges posed by the church's architecture and vast size, several additional organs will be installed at various points within the building. These instruments will be playable separately (from their own individual

consoles) and simultaneously (from a single mobile console), yielding an organ of some 8,000 pipes when completed.

### 'My client is in no hurry'

Gaudí himself knew he was unlikely to see his church finished.

Famously, he said that his client, God, was 'in no hurry'. We should all remember his words, especially when we realise how small our own efforts have been, over the years. We should each end our days with the thought that *'I have lived my life and that which I have done may He within himself make pure.'*

Chris Lewis

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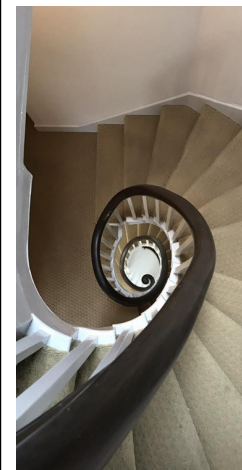
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## Links in a Golden Chain 22

### Evelyn Underhill



On June 15th the Anglican church remembered a remarkable woman whose life and writings made a significant contribution to the Church of England in the years between the two world wars.

She was born in 1875 and died in 1941. She lived a conventional upper middle-class life, and it was only in her late twenties that she began to explore spiritual questions seriously. She wrote poetry and three novels which explored these themes, but it was her encounter with mystical writers in the Christian tradition that led her to produce her first major book, *Mysticism*, in 1911. This book, which has remained in print ever since, remains highly regarded both in the Church of England and within a wider span of readers extending beyond the institutional churches.

She thought of joining the Roman Catholic Church and made contact with Baron von Hugel, a leading Catholic layman in earlier 20th century England. He remained her spiritual director until his death in 1925 and advised her to stay in the Church of England and to develop a personal ministry to spiritual seekers. She went on to become one of the leading retreat conductors in the country, and to produce many books aimed at the average churchgoer which opened the realities of the inner life to a very large number of people.

In 1936 she published her second major book, *Worship*, which endeavours to explain how the life of faith is embodied and expressed in public liturgy and private prayer. She became the first woman to be invited to lecture to theological students and to advise senior members of the church hierarchy, at a time when women were expected to limit the expression of their Christian faith solely within the domestic context. In her ministry, in person and through her writings, she strove to expand the vision of the ordinary Christian towards God, both outwardly to a world in need of service and within the depth of the individual soul. Her prayer for wholeness is as relevant today as was when she wrote it a century ago:

O Lord, penetrate those murky corners where we hide memories and tendencies on which we do not care to look, but which we will not disinter and yield freely up to you, that you may purify and transmute them: the persistent buried grudge, the half-acknowledged enmity which is still smouldering; the bitterness of that loss we have not turned into sacrifice; the private comfort we cling to; the secret fear of failure which saps our initiative and is really inverted pride; the pessimism which is an insult to your joy, Lord; we bring all these to you, and we review them with shame and penitence in your steadfast light.

A prayer with which we can all join, I think, in sorrow and in hope,

**Kevin Tingay**

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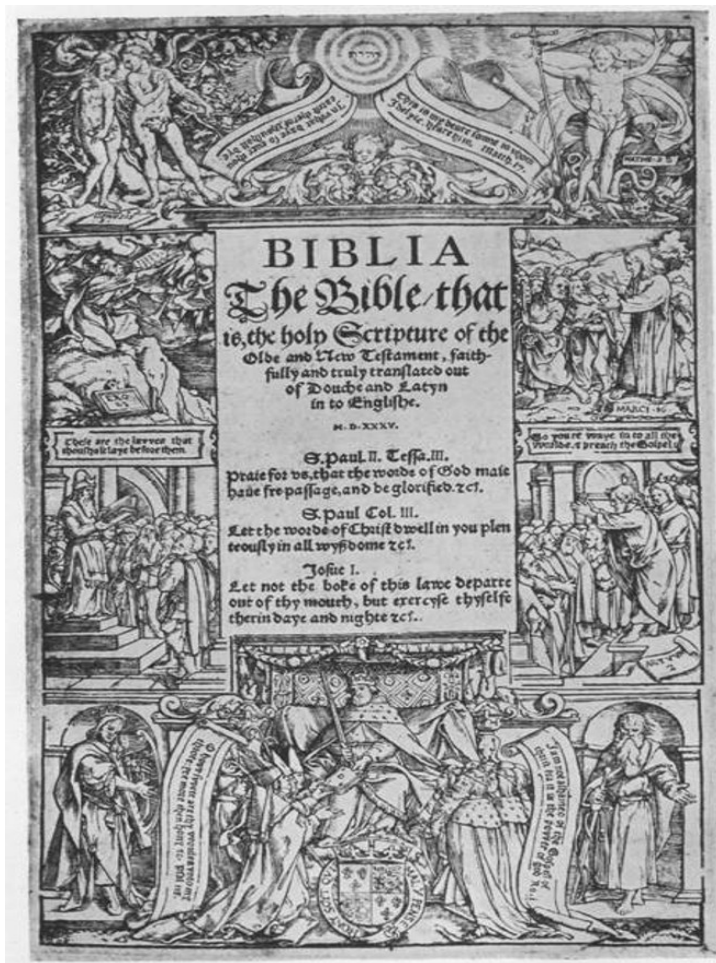
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## Title Page of the Coverdale Bible (1535)



*[The image is 500 years old and thus in the public domain]*

Miles Coverdale was a biblical scholar who was living in Antwerp during the reign of Henry VIII. For the 'Reform' minded Christians (who would later be labelled 'Protestants') it was deemed a safer place to live than England, where Henry distrusted 'Lutherans'. Henry VIII had major issues with the Pope, but was still very Catholic in his personal religious practice.

That said, in the year 1535, the officials of the Holy Roman Emperor,

Charles V, arrested another English Protestant, William Tyndale. He was found guilty of heresy, in part for translating the Bible into English without permission from the Church authorities. In 1536 he was strangled and then burned at the stake in Belgium.

It was a topsy-turvy time. All the more odd that Coverdale seems to have been ordered by Henry VIII's pro-Reform minister, Thomas Cromwell, to produce the first complete translation of the Bible into English to appear as a printed book. This had to be done abroad because Bibles in the everyday tongue (the 'vernacular') were still forbidden by law in England.

Another strange 'fact' about this book: the artist who created the frontispiece was Hans Holbein, the famous Swiss artist who transformed the art of England. Nobody knows what his religious affiliation was. He produced famous portraits of Sir Thomas More, who burned Reform 'heretics', and of Henry VIII, who beheaded More for 'treason' when he supported the Pope rather than Henry.

On the left-hand side we have scenes from the Old Testament which are balanced on the right by scenes from the New Testament: Adam and Eve listening to the Serpent in the tree is opposite the Risen Christ crushing the Serpent underfoot; Moses receiving the Ten Commandments is opposite Jesus sending out the Apostles to preach the Gospel (known as the Great Commission); Ezra reading the Jewish Law after the exiles return to Judah from Babylon is opposite Saint Peter preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles; and King David with his harp is opposite Saint Paul holding the sword which beheaded him. David represents the Psalter (Psalms) and Paul the Epistles (Letters).

At the bottom Henry VIII sits enthroned, holding a sword in his right hand as a sign of his royal authority, and handing a closed Bible in his left to a group of mitred bishops. Notice how Henry 'on earth' balances the symbol for God – YHWH – 'in heaven' at the top. The Pope is nowhere to be seen because in 1534 Henry had cut his ties to the Papacy, declaring himself to be the Supreme Head of the Church in England. He is God's representative.

Some commentators note that to the left of the bishops and slightly behind them is a man who does not wear a mitre. This man, beardless and round-faced, is thought to be Thomas Cromwell – Henry’s fixer (until he lost his head) and another man who sat for a Holbein portrait.

Another oddity: the bottom of the page does not carry the King’s Privilege (permission to print), but it does have the royal coat of arms immediately below Henry. This suggests that the king must have tacitly approved the publication. Otherwise to use it would be an act of treason.

Coverdale’s English can sound quaint to modern ears. For example, in Psalm 147.10 the Hebrew Psalmist provided an image to show that God was unimpressed by human and military strength. Coverdale gave a very literal translation. ‘He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth he in any man’s legs.’ The New Revised Standard Version changes the second part to read ‘nor delight in the speed of a runner’.

**Mark Golder**



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## Hymn Writers

### Julia Ward Howe

Some hymn writers are famous for only one hymn and Julia Ward Howe was one of those. Her ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ is actually in the St John’s hymn book, but it is not much sung in the UK. It was written in 1861, just as the American Civil War had started, and quickly became a patriotic song for the Northern side. Since then, with slight changes, it has become one of the favourite hymns for USA celebrations and for funerals of former presidents and other famous people.

The first three verses link the Union cause with God’s vengeance at the Day of Judgement through allusions to biblical passages in Isaiah and Revelation. The final verse links Christ’s life with the challenge to our own lives. Its words have been quoted and requoted: most US school children know them off by heart, from frequent singing at school. It has clearly been written by someone very familiar with the Biblical passages alluded to.

#### Selected verses

It is often remarked with surprise that the author is a woman, as the sentiments are very masculine ones. The first verse starts with a description of the second coming, echoing words from Revelation 14, written to appeal to soldiers of the time and later to all worshippers as ‘Soldiers for Christ’:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;*

*He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;*

*He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:*

*His truth is marching on.*

*Glory, glory, Hallelujah ...*

The final verse is more poetic and reflects the fact that Julia was actually a well-respected poet.

The original words: *'let us **die** to make men free'* were replaced by *'let us **live** to make men free'* once the Civil War was over and that is how it is sung today.

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.  
While God is marching on.  
Glory, glory, Hallelujah ...*

### Music

The music is adapted from the soldiers' song about the anti-slavery campaigner and martyr John Brown: *'John Brown's body is a mouldering in the grave'*. Nowadays, it is often sung to the accompaniment of a military band, with trumpets, drums and massed choirs heightening its impact on its hearers. UK Christians, in general, find it too militaristic.

### Julia Ward Howe's other life

Julia Ward was pleased at the success of her hymn but annoyed that it eclipsed her other work, which she regarded as much more important. She lived a long and successful life as a poet, author, mother of six children, abolitionist and campaigner for women's rights. She was born into a rich family in New York. She was married, as a young woman, to a doctor twenty years older than her, who specialised in services for the blind. He believed women had a very limited scope in life, to bear and look after children and to support their husbands in everything. He insisted that she came with him to all his campaigns for blind people, which involved a lot of travel. He was notoriously unfaithful and despised the social life that she adored.

He did not support her poetry and campaigning for women's rights and tried to suppress all her actions. However, he could not suppress everything she did: during the Civil War, she worked for the US

Sanitary Commission, which promoted actively clean and hygienic conditions for soldiers and hospitals, which he could hardly disagree with, and he was forced to acknowledge that her Battle Hymn had made her more famous than he ever would be.

She outlived him by over 40 years, so, after his death, she was able to dedicate herself to her work completely. She established and led major women's organisations and championed the right for women to vote. Most people gave priority to improving the rights of those who had been slaves, but eventually laws were changed, and in 1869 Wyoming was the first state to grant women the vote. This only happened nationally in 1920 nearly 10 years after Julia died.

She also presided over the Women's International Peace Association. She became a Queen Victoria-type figure, known as the 'Dearest Old Lady in America', and lectured widely. In 1873, she organised the Association for the Advancement of Women to improve women's education and entry into the professions. She continued to publish poems, essays and books throughout the 1880s and was the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1908.

### Julia's poetry

Her other writing began with *Passion-Flowers* (1854), a poetry collection published anonymously because of her husband's concerns. Many of her poems are very religious. Here are some extracts from a poem about Whit Sunday, summarising a sermon she would have given in church, had she been allowed to:

*My friends, the day we celebrate, is that of fear and glory blended,  
Whereon the promised Holy Ghost, to bless God's chosen ones,  
descended.*

*The sad disciples met to pray, and, in intensesness of devotion,*



Continued, till the breath of God convulsed the house with mighty motion.

Then cloven flames upon them came, Till, from their fiery immersion, They rose and spoke in unknown tongues, Arabian, Cretan, Syrian, Persian.

With superhuman eloquence, The wondrous works of God displaying, All powers miraculous were theirs, Such are the gifts that follow praying ...

By you, my friends, be pious thoughts And prayerful habits cultivated,

Continue earnest on your knees, Be with this service never sated.

And God, who gave these holy men, The grace of soul that we inherit,

In this appointed way shall pour, On you, likewise, His Holy Spirit.

Chris Lewis

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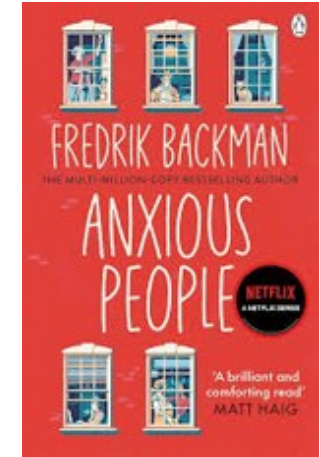
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## Inspired to Read

### *Anxious People*

by Fredrik Backman

When the book group met at the beginning of June, we discussed one of my favourite books: *This is Happiness* by Niall Williams. I love his prose, the pace of his narrative and his character development. But of course, one of the great joys of being in a book group is exchanging opinions with other people who have different reading habits, and it quickly became clear that, while some people were as entranced by Niall Williams's writing as I am, there were others for whom the book was tedious, with over-long descriptive passages and not enough action. The discussion that followed set us up very well for our July meeting when we are going to explore in greater depth what our individual reading styles and preferences are.



I am not including a review of *This is Happiness* in this article. I realise that I wrote about it in an article about Irish writers, which appeared in the Feb 2025 magazine, so I shall, instead review a book that I picked up at a recent mini-market, and thoroughly enjoyed: *Anxious People* by Fredrik Backman.

#### About the Author

Backman is a Swedish writer who achieved international prominence with his first novel, *A Man called Ove*, in 2012; the book was later adapted into a very successful film starring Tom Hanks with the title *A Man called Otto* (2022). To date Backman has written eight books, all of which have been translated into English. He has been successful writing in different genres, but he is perhaps most highly regarded for his ability to write about ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary situations. One reviewer has described his books as 'odysseys of the ordinary man and woman, and stunningly moving tales of everyday courage'.

### From the back cover:

It's New Year's Eve and House Tricks estate agents are showing people around an upmarket apartment when an incompetent bank robber rushes in and politely takes everyone hostage.

### A short extract:

*This story is about a lot of things, but mostly about idiots. So it needs saying from the outset that it's always very easy to declare that other people are idiots, but only if you forget how idiotically difficult being human is. Especially if you have other people you're trying to be a reasonably good human being for.*

This is a story about a diverse group of people who find themselves stuck in an impossible situation. Seven people are being shown round an apartment when suddenly a masked gunman comes in and takes them hostage. But nothing is as it seems, and the drama takes some unexpected and quite touching turns as events unfold. Backman has assembled a remarkable cast of characters, not only the hostages but also the police officers; he reveals their individual character traits and anxieties gradually. The story is not linear – facts are revealed gradually with a few twists and turns along the way. Underlying all the writing is a sympathetic yet also humorous understanding of how all the people involved have come to be in the situation, and we see them deal with their own concerns while also developing empathy for each other. There are several themes running through the book, but at its heart it is about how human beings interact with each other in extreme circumstances.

I would certainly recommend this to anyone looking for something a bit different to read on holiday – I shall be on the lookout for one of his other books next time I am in a bookshop.

With the summer holidays upon us, the book group is going to be doing something a bit different over our next two meetings (1st July and 5th August). We are going to spend some time reflecting on our different reading styles and preferences, starting by taking an online quiz, Read your Color: <https://readyourcolor.com>

It has been devised by an American book lover, Steven Reese, who posts on social media, and while I don't recommend getting sucked into the world of endless internet book influencers, I find he has some interesting ideas about books, and he is certainly passionate about getting people reading. I hope that by thinking about different genres and reading habits, we might be able to devise our own reading lists with more awareness of each other's preferences. Read the next issue to find out how we got on!

### **Rosemary McCormick**

**Ed's note:** *I have also enjoyed several of Fredrik Backman's novels and would whole-heartedly recommend My Friends as an excellent longer summer read! Published in June 2025 and is now available in paperback. Karolyn*

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Sunday 12 July Sixth Sunday after Trinity	Isaiah 55.10-13 Psalm 65 Romans 8.1-11 Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23	H Chapman S Smith	J Caudwell	K Gurr C Holland	J Davies
Sunday 19 July Seventh Sunday after Trinity	Wisdom of Solomon 12.13, 16 - 19 Psalm 86 Romans 8.12-25 Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43	B Essex A Barr-Sim	J Bruges	M Veakins J Davies	A Crook
Sunday 26 July Eighth Sunday after Trinity	1 Kings 3.5-12 Psalm 119 Romans 8.26-end Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52	E Gilbert R McCormick	L Bushell	A Crook J Bruges	C Holland
Sunday 2 August Ninth Sunday after Trinity	Isaiah 55.1-5 Psalm 145 Romans 9.1-5 Matthew 14.13-21	S Caden N McCormick	Rev Seamus	A Barr-Sim B Essex	J Davies
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the day  
that the Lord  
has made,  
we will rejoice  
and be glad in it

Psalm 118:24