



Benefice Magazine

Christmas Tree Festival breaks previous records



Christmas Tree Festival

Over 2,000 visitors attended the Festival in St Mary's on 29 and 30 November, including 500 children, slightly more than 2024's total. The final total raised after meeting expenses was £8,052, greatly exceeding the 2024 total, which was itself a record. This will now be distributed equally between The Bridge - Homelessness to Hope, and the Parish's own Place of Peace community project for the churchyard.

As Sue Siesage said on behalf of the Festival Team, "it was a wonderful happy weekend, made possible by the hard work and enthusiasm from many in the St

Mary's community." Sue thanked everyone who had contributed to the success and acknowledged the encouragement and guidance of the Festival's founder, Susan Holligan.



The Festival also had an unexpected and very welcome visit from the Bishop.

Reiterating Sue's comments, Revd Adrian referred to the amazing range and creativity of the trees on display. "It was a fantastic

community event, and our sincere thanks have to go to the whole organising team led by Sue Siesage, the volunteers over the weekend, the musicians and singers and all those who contributed trees. There are always so many appreciative comments from our visitors and the whole event connects both church and parish, and strengthens our local community and well-being."



Vicar's letter

Friends,

Our noisy world is damaging our health. A recent BBC report drew together evidence from international scientists and doctors to demonstrate why noise increases our risk of health problems like heart attack, sleep disruption, anxiety and even how long we live.*

These worries focus on *auditory* noise – the sounds we pick up with our ears – but there is also the ‘flood’ of information that ‘drowns us in waves of data’ ** and fills our minds with noisy chatter - the messages that bombard us through TV, radio, social media, email and the internet.



How do we decide which voices to listen to? And how do we protect ourselves from everything that is just noise?

One key thing we can do is to go back to the texts in the Bible that have proved foundational to Christianity, and use them as both a *filter* and a *test* of the noisy messages that clamour for our attention in the modern world.

I would suggest that the Beatitudes (and in fact the whole of the Sermon on the Mount) from Matthew 5, provide us with just such a test of modern ‘noise.’

These eight statements from Jesus describe clearly both *his* character and teaching, and the sort of people that he calls *his followers* to become. Therefore they give us a reliable test for the claims, assertions and character of the people today who demand that we listen as they declare themselves with such certainty.

The recent ‘Put Christ back into Christmas’ campaign serves as a good example of how the Beatitudes can help us to test the noisy messages of those who want to influence us. Whilst the catch-phrase at first sounds good from a Christian point of view, once we start to look at the character and actions of those who use it on a public and political platform, things look much more concerning.

Aggressive and threatening protests, de-humanising comments about refugees, discrimination against people of colour, denigration of anyone who disagrees, twisting of the truth to create social tension – none of these things lines up with the qualities described in the Beatitudes. Those who act in this way cannot claim to be Christians or to represent Jesus.

Every Christmas we remember the Saviour born in poverty and humility, subject to public disgrace, whose family were homeless refugees fleeing to another country because of threats to their safety, who was hounded by those in power and a vicious crowd, and finally killed for his proclamation of loving service to those in need. Modern flag-waving extremists would chase and attack him rather than support him.

So, when the noisy voices desperately seek our attention and agreement in this new year, let's test them out to see if they line up with the character, life and teaching of Jesus... and if not, let's turn our back on them and follow a different path – the Way of Jesus.

Yours in friendship and Christ's service,

Adrian

* www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct7mw7

** Furedi, Frank, *'Information overload or a search for meaning?'* in 'The American Interest' 17.12.2015



Here lieth ...

Continuing our series exploring some of the more noteworthy burials in St Mary's churchyard

Part 4: Commonwealth War Graves

St Mary's Churchyard contains five Commonwealth War Graves, one from the First World War and four from the Second World War. These graves are a lasting reminder of the sacrifices made in both wars.



Walter Edgar Swann

Private, Royal Army Medical Corp.
Service no: 2711

Died on 5th January 1916.



Winifred Margot Munns

Leading Aircraftwoman,
Women's Auxiliary Air Force.
Service no: 473669

Died on 10th May 1946 aged 25.

The daughter of Percy and Olive Munns of Stoneygate.



Michael Hubbard

Pilot Officer

106 Sqdn, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

Service no: 83259

Died 21st December 1940 aged 20.

The son of Ernest and Emma Hubbard of Leicester



John Sidney Coveney

Lieutenant 414 Bty., 144 Lt. A.A.

Regt, Royal Artillery.

Service no: 293312

Died on 25th October 1944 aged 26.

The son of Sidney and Catherine Coveney of Stoneygate.



Ronald Douglas Burt

Leading Aircraftman

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

Service no: 1380000

Died 20th April 1941 aged 20.

For more information, please visit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website at cwgc.org

Sue Siesage

An Introduction to Scottish Hill Walking

The 282 hills in Scotland over 3000 feet high are known as "Munros". Charles Metcalfe has climbed all of them – the first in September 1994 and the final one in September 2022. He has kept a journal of the 71 trips he made to Scotland over those years and the following is an extract from that journal.

Glencoe

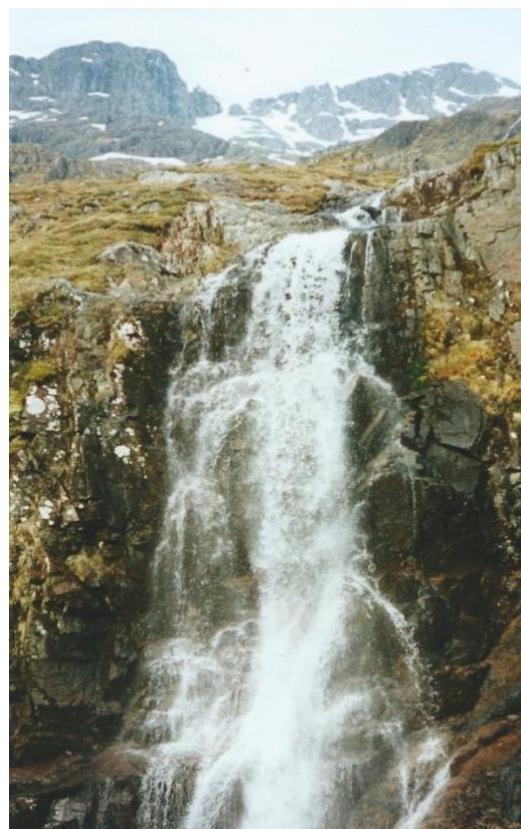
Early Saturday morning I parked in Glencoe ready to tackle 2 hills - Bidean Nam Bian and Stob Coire Sgreamhach. At 3773 feet Bidean is the highest hill in Argyll. In February 1692 the Campbells surprised the McDonalds who lived in Glencoe and set about massacring them. It is a landmark in Scots history. Those McDonalds who managed to escape went to hide in what is known as the Lost or Hidden Valley. Although the scenery is my main reason for walking in Scotland, the local history often provides added interest. And it was through the Hidden Valley that I intended to go to get to the north side of Bidean and climb it.

It's easy to see why it is called the Hidden Valley - - there appears to be no way round the rock faces that guard the entrance. But there is

indeed a route through and you come out into what to me felt a bit like Shangri-La. A beautiful high-level lush green valley with a spectacular waterfall and hills soaring on all sides. I made my way to the head of the valley and started up the slope leading to the summit ridge. Even in early May this slope was one huge snow-field.

Fortunately I had my ice-axe with me – facing north and sheltered as it was, I suspected the snow would stay till late in the year. But I didn't have crampons for my boots.

As I climbed higher the slope got steeper and I had to cut steps in the ice to stop slipping down. I started to feel a bit uncomfortable – the slope was steep and high and a slip could be nasty. However someone had obviously been up previously, because there were footprints and steps already cut. I couldn't use these as they had rounded and iced over, but I went up parallel to them. I started to wish I'd got crampons on – getting a grip was



*Waterfall in the Hidden Valley
near Glencoe*

not easy. As I went higher, I wished I wasn't on my own and felt ropes would be an advantage. But the thought of going back down had now become as scary as going on up. I noticed the other steps had ceased – presumably the previous party had turned back. The sun didn't get there, and it felt cold and bleak. The slope seemed to go on for ever and seemed almost vertical towards the top - - - but finally I was able to break through the small cornice and haul myself, exhausted, onto the ridge which led

up to the summit. Immediately it was The sun was warm and there was no snow on the ground. My fears had gone - I felt a sense of satisfaction – even triumph. All was right with the world. As I sat eating a Mars bar a chap came up from



The climb up the north side of Bidean nam Bian

the south and sat down with me. We got talking. He suddenly gave me a strange look and asked which way I had come up. On my telling him he told me Mountain Rescue had been called out the day before - someone had slipped and been killed on the route I had come up.

We walked to where I had come up and through his binoculars you could see where the steps ended and yesterday the guy had lost his footing - and the marks as he slid down and over the edge - - - -

The walk round the top ridge to take in the 2 Munros was fairly uneventful. However, as I came down the steep arete from Bidean with sheer drops of hundreds of feet on both sides, I slipped on the snow-covered rocks and my ice-axe was torn out of my hand. Fortunately I was able to jamb my arm in a crevice and prevented myself from falling. The strap on my axe meant I didn't lose it.

When walking on my own I generally try to go for easy hills well within my ability and comfort zone. This day had stretched things a bit. Summer conditions should have posed few problems, but today the snow on those rocks had tested my ability to an uncomfortable degree.

Sunday I climbed the 2 Munros of Beinn a Bheithier. Glorious weather, hardly any lying snow! Drove home Monday!

Leicester Medical School's 50th Anniversary

This is a talk I gave at an event in De Montfort Hall in November, celebrating the fiftieth birthday of the Leicester Medical School. I would not normally have thought to include it our magazine, but my friend and colleague, Paul Jenkins, who edits the magazine of St James the Greater, asked if he could use it in their latest edition, so it would seem odd to deprive our own readers.

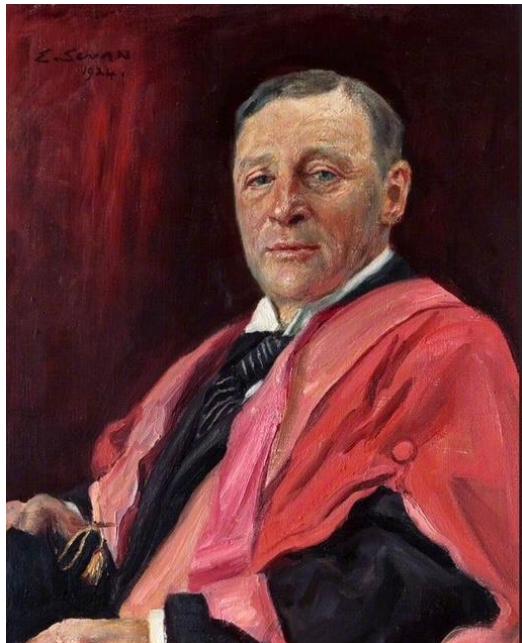
Other speakers at the event included our neighbour at Knighton Hall, the Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Nishan Canagarajah, and Professor Alistair Buchan, former Dean of Medicine at Oxford, whose parents were Alan Buchan, Medical Officer of Health and Area Medical Officer when the Medical School was founded; and Dorothy Buchan, Headmistress of Portland House School (now Leicester High School).

Nigel Siesage

I should begin by stating my credentials. I joined the University's central administration (as it was known then) in 1981 and worked in the Fielding Johnson Building in a variety of roles for 20 years. I was then asked by the Registrar if I would transfer to the position of Secretary of the Medical School - answerable both to the Dean and the Registrar.

So, something of a gamekeeper turned poacher. But I hope it gives me a reasonable perspective on how the Medical School was perceived by the rest of the University - and *vice versa*.

Let's start with a little history. Leicester's Infirmary was established in 1771 with 40 beds. And the Leicester Medical Society was founded in 1800, the fourth oldest such society in the country. Many provincial cities - Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield - had seen the establishment of medical schools of some sort as early as the 1820s and 1830s. But not Leicester.



Leicester was also some way behind in establishing a university. The idea was advocated first at the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society in the 1880s. But it was not until 1912 that it really gained momentum, thanks to an address at the same society by its President, Astley Clarke, who has rightly been described as the father of the University, and should also be honoured as a founder of the Medical School.

Clarke was a local doctor and Honorary Physician to the Infirmary. His enthusiastic and generous

commitment to the University deserves much of the credit for its survival on limited means in the 1920s and 30s. In 1923 (only two years after the University College admitted its first tiny cohort of students), he became Honorary Director of Medical Studies, giving lectures to local graduate students and doctors.

Clarke dreamed that Leicester would one day have its own medical school, and he was chairman of the University College's Council when in 1943 it made a bid to the government. This was rejected - understandably when you consider that by 1946 the College had only 218 students.

The aspiration for a Medical School remained alive, and in the 60s Leicester, now with some 3,000 students, responded positively when a Royal Commission recommended expansion in medical education. When in 1970 the government finally approved the creation of a school at Leicester, the VC, Fraser Noble, wrote

This [change] is the one which will make the most significant contribution to the life and future welfare of the local community and have the most considerable impact on the University itself.

And as one historian of the University has written:

[it] confirmed the University's place among the major research universities, and in this sense had a significant effect beyond anything that could have been foreseen at the time.

This, surely, is a fair summary of the way the Medical School was seen by the University. In the 21st century, Medical Schools have popped up all over the country, several of them nurtured selflessly by our School. But we shouldn't underestimate that 1970 achievement in the context of the time - its importance to the University, to the local NHS - and indeed to the city and county's sense of their own standing.

Some did have doubts about the impact of the development, fearing perhaps that it would disturb the collegial nature of the University, still physically confined to the site on the east of University Road. As the original historian of the University wrote in 1958, there was:

a belief, strongly held, in the value of maintaining a small and closely-integrated society.

The arrival of this new and very different discipline was bound to have a considerable and potentially unsettling effect. Everything was different - a permanent Dean, additional sites, partnerships with the NHS, non-standard term dates, course length and timetable requirements, clinical contracts and salary scales, a separate administration ... not to mention a substantial additional number of well qualified students.

The groundwork was laid by the first Dean, Professor Cramond, but he left in 1974, and the credit for the effective integration of the Medical School goes to his successor, Robert Kilpatrick - and to his close working relationship with Vice-Chancellor Maurice Shock.



Sir Maurice Shock and Robert, later Lord, Kilpatrick

Kilpatrick was essential to the extent to which the School was accepted across the University. His involvement in top-level planning and strategy - in a way not previously known at Leicester - was soon accepted as a given. Despite his purely medical school responsibilities, he was very much a University man, as likely to be on the appointment panel for an English professor as for a biochemist. As Shock said when he retired as VC in 1987: '[Robert Kilpatrick and I] ... have cooperated on the

medical school like two on a tandem; I have never been quite sure who has been driving whom, but at least I cannot recall that we have ever fallen off.'

Inevitably the relationship between later Vice-Chancellors and Deans varied with the personalities involved. Kilpatrick's successor, Frank Harris, could be described as a force of nature, from whom an unexpected telephone call would be received with trepidation - whether one worked in the Maurice Shock or the Fielding Johnson.

I shall avoid characterising subsequent Deans in view of present company, but I'm fairly sure all VCs would echo a remark of Vice-Chancellor Ken Edwards that the Medical School represented 10% of the University's students, 20% of its resources and 50% of his time.

Of course, there have been plenty of bumps along the road, usually over matters of finance. Funding specifically for the School was challenging from the very start, and that was in the context of a University which has always been relatively underfunded.

Most medical schools feel somewhat removed culturally from the rest of their institutions, not least because of their separate locations, the importance of NHS funding and the clinical demands on their staff. In that we are no different; and Leicester Vice-Chancellors were probably not sorry that clinical professors were generally too busy to attend Senate.

But in compensation the School has fostered a series of clinicians and scientists whose national and international achievements have brought distinction to the University; and it has continued to provide members of staff who have made innovative contributions to the curriculum, have shown outstanding care for the wellbeing of students and played a valuable part in the wider operations of the University.

So the School *may* have contributed to a decline in cosy collegiality, as feared in 1958; but my observation of many medical schools has convinced me that our School is more positively embedded in the University than many. The physical heart of the School has remained firmly part of the main campus, symbolised for so many years by the inelegant bridge across University Road - and that also reflects the close connection between the School and the Biological Sciences departments, which has been an enormous strength of Leicester from the start, both for teaching and research.

What has been clear - and this is reinforced by the study recently carried out in the University's archives - is that the Medical School has always made a dynamic contribution to research, to clinical care and to developments in medical education; and that the University, in its public and internal communications, has always been proud of it. It would be invidious to single out specific instances and there is no time to provide a list. No doubt many will come up during today's discussions, and I recommend an examination of the excellent timeline that has been prepared showing some highlights.

With the benefit of 10 years since I stood down from day-to-day management in the School and College, I can say that things have definitely not stood still, and that the first 50 years are ending with a decade of considerable achievement. To mention only a few instances - expansion into other clinical disciplines such as nursing, midwifery and now optometry; rising to 2nd in the Research Excellence Framework; and ranking 1st in the national student survey.

Though I'm confident the current leaders of the School would echo Isaac Newton and say they stand on shoulders of giants - from Astley Clarke to Robert Kilpatrick and onwards - I am sure the University acknowledges that the long struggle to win a Medical School - and the effort to adapt to having one - were the necessary grit which has now produced the pearl we are celebrating today.

Coffee Morning



On Saturday 24th January 2026

From 10 - 12 noon

In St. Mary Magdalene Church

Stalls to include

Unwanted Christmas Gifts,

Cakes, Books, Jigsaws,

and a Raffle

Just come along

Everyone Welcome

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PLANNED GIVING

Regular giving is an integral part of our church life, supporting our day-to-day costs, ministry and mission.

A good way to achieve this is through a monthly direct debit as part of St Mary's participation in the **Parish Giving Scheme** or by standing order to St Guthlac's.

Details of the two schemes can be obtained from Planned Giving Scheme contacts for each church, listed in the Contacts section. If you are a taxpayer and gift aid your giving, the churches can claim an additional 25%.

Knighton Advent Windows

A magnificent variety of imaginatively decorated windows for Advent in Knighton Church Road and adjoining streets, culminating at St Guthlac's, has become an important event for the Knighton community and for visitors from further afield. Here are just a few of this year's windows (with thanks to Steve Bowyer for the photographs).



From the Editor

Yet again your Editor offers his apologies for the late publication of the magazine.

Because of other commitments in February, this unsatisfactory situation may continue for a time.

My aim is to produce the next issue in mid-March, so the closing date for copy will be **Monday 2 March 2026**, but you can send your contributions at any time to the usual address, stmaryknighton.magazine@gmail.com.

Articles do not represent the opinions of the Parochial Church Council of either church. Typographical and other errors (and the occasional omission) are the Editor's responsibility.

