



KNIGHTON



Benefice Magazine

Minster Communities

Evensong at St Andrew's, Aylestone

On 2nd March, a posse of us from St Mary's, together with a sizeable group from St Guthlac's, met at St Andrew's for an evensong service. The meeting was in response to an invitation from one of the wardens, Glen Jones, with the aim of 'bringing our congregations together in worship and fellowship'. The



service was very capably led by their vicar, Revd Rowena Bass. St Andrew's has a fairly large choir, together with a resident music director and organist, but the ranks of the choir were also supplemented by many of our party (principally from the choir of St Guthlac's). There is a lovely acoustic in this medieval church, and all agreed that it sounded heavenly and that the service was first-rate.

Afterwards, tea and cakes were supplied, and it provided the perfect opportunity for us to introduce ourselves and find out a little about our potential Minster Community partners in the 'Teal' group. The folk from St Andrew's were really welcoming and clearly have a talent for making very tasty and unusual cakes. Disappointingly, many churches in the prospective community didn't seem to be represented. Besides the three churches already mentioned, there was also a contingent from All Saints Blaby, including one of their wardens, Mick Larrad.

Of course, we were all keen to know what each other thought about the Minster Community process and the way forward.

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Vicar's letter

Friends,

As Monday morning dawns, I'm looking ahead. Sunday, and its sermon, has passed and a new one beckons a few days down the line. Hopefully, I'm waking with a sense that I preached faithfully from the Bible passage, applied eternal truths to our contemporary lives, and encouraged everyone with Good News – and now it's time to begin sermon preparation again.

For once though, rather than being pulled ahead, I find myself coming back to the message of the first Sunday in Lent. Rather than adding the sermon to my files and clearing my mind, I find that I'm remembering all over again, and particularly when I watch the television news.

To be precise, it's not the *sermon* that has caught hold of me – it's just a human construction after all. Rather, it's the *message*, the Godly truth, of Luke 4.1-13 that keeps returning – because it seems so critically important for us to grasp, in the face of the complexity, cruelty and sheer absurdity of the world in 2025.

You may remember as well, that the passage from Luke 4 is about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Three times the Devil tries to persuade or trick Jesus, so that he'll be derailed even before his ministry and teaching begin.

The first temptation ('tell this stone to become bread') is subtle, because God certainly wants us to take care of ourselves, physically and in every way. The temptation, however, is to be distracted from God's central purpose by personal desire. Jesus decides to make *God's* priorities the most important; he decides to see the world (including himself) from *God's* perspective, placing his momentary troubles in the light of the bigger, eternal picture of what God is doing to save the world.

In our own times, we see the cruelty and violence in the world all too plainly, but we mustn't lose hope – we are called to live day by day within God's priorities and purpose, knowing one day all the wrongs of the world will be put right and justice and peace will reign.

The second temptation ('if you worship me, it will all be yours') plays to our human tendency to allow other things to become more important to us than God – in essence, to create idols that we worship through the time, money and attention we give them.



The temptation is to compromise on our worship of God alone. Perhaps that is through ambition and working all hours to achieve the lifestyle we want. Perhaps it is letting ourselves slip into a frame of mind that puts Christian faith and practice on the same level of importance as gardening, say, or weekends away, or car boot sales ... a hobby or pastime when we feel in the mood.

Jesus knows that nothing else is as important as worshipping God alone. God *deserves* worship, and we *need* worship if we are to be fully human in the way that God has made us to be, and to find our place within the community of faithful worshippers.

The third temptation ('throw yourself down') is the Devil's corrosive, whispered question in our hearts – can we really trust in God's loving care for us? How can we be certain? It is the temptation to let anxiety and doubt rule us, rather than grow in a life of trust and faith in a loving God.

Jesus knows that the answer to this, and the other temptations too, lies in returning again and again to what God has already said and done, and what he promises for the future. Jesus answers the Devil from scripture; he turns to the Bible, and so should we, if we want to keep on track and find the strength to resist these temptations. Spending time reading, discussing, considering and practising the truth of the Bible will change us and help us mature in our faith.

If, like me, you're tempted to feel that events in 2025 are out of control, please do remember this message from the beginning of Lent:

- see everything in the light of God's good purposes and priorities – everything else will pass;
- make the effort to put the worship of God at the centre of life;
- spend the time with the Bible that allows your faith and trust in God's loving care to grow.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8.38-39)

Yours in friendship and Christ's service,

Adrian

Evensong at Aylestone

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I certainly had a few such conversations with worshippers from St Andrew's and Blaby; but, since this was an informal gathering, it wouldn't be fair or representative to write anything about what was said here. I think it would be fair to say that their remains some scepticism about the viability of the Teal group as it currently stands; but, at the same time, there was enthusiasm about the opportunity this provides to work more closely with other churches. I think we are all looking forward to further opportunities for shared worship, together with the chance to meet more formally within the framework of the working groups that are being set up.

Sian Howard

Here lieth ...

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

Harry Simpson Gee



The second significant grave in St Mary's churchyard is that of Harry Simpson Gee, who died on 10th July 1924.

Harry Gee was in the boot and shoe business. He owned, and greatly expanded, Stead and Simpson, and was reputed to be the wealthiest man in Leicester!

He had eight children, four by his first marriage and two by the second.

The family home was

Knighton Frith house, on London Road between Avenue Road and Southernhay Road. The house is gone but the stone gate posts can still be seen. It was a large house with formal gardens, extensive grounds, stables and a farm with horses, pigs and sheep.





In addition to Stead and Simpson, Harry Gee had many other business interests and voluntary roles in Leicester. He was a JP, a Liberal Borough Councillor and a Freemason. He owned and built the Leicestershire Banking Co. at 31 Granby Street, which

merged to become the Midland and then HSBC. At various times he was President of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of Leicester Trade Protection Society, Trustee of Leicester Infirmary, Chairman of Leicester Tram Co, Chairman of the newly formed Leicestershire Club's House Committee, High Sheriff of Rutland and President of Leicester Charity Organisation Society.

On his death he left generous bequests to the University of Leicester (then University College, Leicester). He gave £20,000 to the University as the 'Simpson Gee Endowment Fund.' In 2017 this fund was worth £581,154.00.

Brian Burch's authoritative history of the University states,

The most generous of all its donors was the Gee family, and their company, Stead & Simpson. The patriarch, Harry Simpson Gee, subscribed £100 a year in 1922 and 1923, and, as he promised to do when the College was founded, bequeathed £20,000 on his death in 1924. His third son, and his successor as Chairman and Managing Director of Stead & Simpson, Harry Percy Gee, during his long association with the College which began in 1919 and only ended with death in 1962, contributed over £20,000 of his own money, while his wife was also a generous benefactor in her own right.

This long and successful connection to the University was further cemented by his eldest daughter, Poppy, marrying Dr Astley Clarke, principal advocate of the establishment of the University.

Harry's links with St Mary's are unclear but one account, possibly apocryphal, suggests he was overheard saying,

"I don't go to church because you can't argue with the Vicar!"

Where is the Gee Grave? The family grave is near the lychgate. It is a large monument which had a stone cross on top, but sadly with the passage of time the cross has broken and fallen down, though in recent years, members of the family have made efforts to clear the worst of the overgrowth.



Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Caroline Wessell, a member of the Gee family, who has provided the information and pictures used in this article; and Margaret Bonney who has previously transcribed documents for the family.

Sue Siesage

My previous article about Tanky Smith did not give the location of his grave. It is still in good condition and stands to the south side of the churchyard by the fence.

- *If you have any information on the background to other graves which would make an interesting article, please let the Editor know.*

Memories of ...

... Top Hat Terrace

The story of Tanky Smith's grave prompted these welcome memories from Jill Atkinson, a long-standing member of the congregation whom many readers will remember, and who now lives in the southwest.

In the mid-fifties I started to work as an office junior at Airborne Shoes , formerly Tanky Smith's house on London Road. This was the house that was built for him originally.

The shoes we sold were manufactured in Anstey, by a family firm named P.W. Shoes (Pollard & Wain).

The sons of the family were all involved in the business and the firm had a good reputation as an employer.



They produced very high-end, quality shoes. There was a warehouse at the back where the shoes were stored, and reception and office at the front. On the first floor was the showroom with the shoes beautifully set out.

I did mainly accounts on a Remington accounting machine, along with other jobs including ... (as I was the youngest employee) going to the bosses' and visitors' coat pockets at dusk to retrieve their car keys and to switch on the sidelights in all their cars parked on London Road, Saxby Street and University Road Can you imagine that now!!

The location of Tanky's house on London Road was excellent for business, as buyers would regularly arrive using the train nearby. London Road at this time also had an incredible range of high-end shops including grocery stores, butcher's , clothing stores, newsagents and even a piano seller .

Jill Atkinson

- *Editor's note:* The advertisement dates from 1947, so a few years before Jill joined the business.

... Fun and Fundraising

Shirley Wills recalls some of the more imaginative fundraising activities and other social activities of the parish

In the past, many members of the congregation have been involved in fundraising. I particularly remember two auctions, organised, as I recall, by Michael Kirk, with a lot of support and generosity of others. The first was held in 2004 and the second in 2021, in aid of the spire appeal.



In 2004 my husband, Rex, and I had bid to host an evening meal at our home, Brookside, Cooks Lane. The picture shows the happy gathering.

I also bid for a piece of pottery I liked, but when I went to collect my item, I found that I'd actually bid for a chair! Which just goes to show you need to

check the numbers in the catalogue before you put your hand up. The chair went to a nursing home on London Road where I used to work. They were happy to have it.



The other pictures have a date stamp of June 1989, but they are of the St Mary's May Fair. Another very happy occasion for all, as is clear.

Shirley Wills

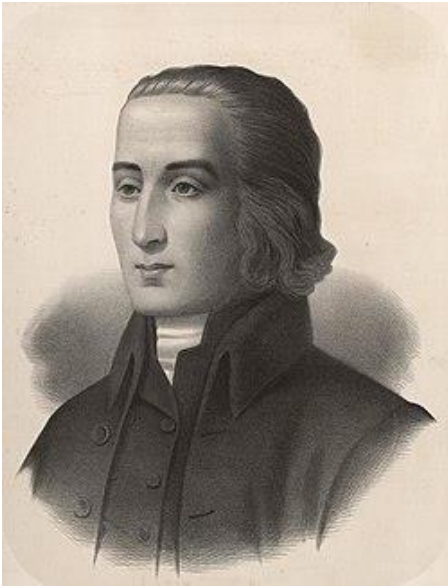
- *Editor's note:* I am sorry for any shortcomings in the photographs, which reflects the limits of my technology. More recollections are very welcome.

Favourite Hymns

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer

Since the last magazine, we have celebrated the feasts of two of the United Kingdom's patron saints - David (1 March) and Patrick (17 March). Since I have some Welsh, but as far as I know, no Irish connections, I hope I may be forgiven for selecting St David. I am strengthened in this decision by the fact that one of the hymns most closely associated with David and Wales is a magnificent one - *Guide me, O thou great Redeemer*, sung to the tune *Cwm Rhondda*.

Here things become a little complicated, because there are both English and Welsh versions, with different translations, and, as is common with all popular hymns, different tunes are used in different times and places.



The origins of *Guide me ...* lie in the Welsh hymn, *Arglwydd, arwain trwy'r anialwch* (Lord, guide me through the wilderness), written in 1745 by William Williams (1717-1791), a Methodist minister and leader of the 18th century religious revival in Wales. Williams is generally regarded as Wales's premier hymnist and is known as 'the sweet songster'. Three of the original verses were translated into English in 1771 by Peter Williams (no relation), another Welsh Methodist itinerant preacher.

Much of the popularity of the hymn today rests on the tune *Cwm Rhondda*, written in 1905 by another Welshman, John Hughes, for the inauguration of a new organ at Capel Rhondda, in Hopkinstown in the Rhondda valley. It became a favourite choice of Welsh male-voice choirs, and was sung by Welsh regiments in the trenches in the First World War. The repeated 'bread of heaven' in the first verse has given both hymn and tune a popular alternative name.

The tune first appeared in an English hymnal in a new Methodist Hymnbook in 1933. It has featured in at least two major films: John Ford's 'How Green Is My Valley' of 1941, and 'The African Queen' of 1951, where it is sung by Katherine Hepburn.

Its popularity at rugby games and as a royal choice for state weddings and funerals have helped secure its place in popular affection.

Nigel Siesage

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven
Feed me till I want no more.
Feed me till I want no more.

Open thou the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:

Strong deliverer, strong deliverer
Be thou still my strength and shield.
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

- Do you have a favourite hymn? Please let the Editor know.

St Mary's Lent Lunch

38 people attended the Lent lunch on 8th March and enjoyed delicious soup, cheese and biscuits, grapes and a roll. The lunch made £256 including generous donations, and this will go to the Goldhill Food Bank who provide a hot meal for children after school. The Social Committee wish to thank all who contributed to make this a special occasion.

And a big thank you to the soup makers.

Beryl Bonfield

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*'Publish the date of the
jumble sale, but not the
US bombing plans. Those
were sent to us by mistake'*

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 church can claim an additional 25%.

The City of Leicester Singers



Charity
Number
518215

St James the Greater Church
London Road, Leicester

Saturday April 5th 2025

7.00 p.m.

Mozart Requiem

Caroline Essex - Soprano

Lindsey Ashwin - Alto

Tom Stanyard - Tenor

Andrew Ashwin - Bass

Conductor - Richard Archer

Organist - John Pye

**Tickets £12 under 16s free,
From choir members, at the door or
www.cityofleistersingers.co.uk**

From the Editor

The May/June issue of this magazine will be issued in *late May*. The closing date for copy will therefore be **Monday 5 May 2025, 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.



Rewilding – how we can heal our land Isabella Tree

- **7 Apr 2025**
- **19:30 - 21:00**
- Hansom Hall in the Leicester Adult Education College, 50-54 Belvoir St, Leicester LE1 6QL

Isabella will talk about the huge potential of rewilding to restore biodiversity and store carbon, based on the latest science coming out of the Knepp rewilding project. She'll show how rewilding can connect isolated nature areas together, creating living landscapes and providing the life support systems for sustainable farming. We can all play our part, from large landholdings to urban parks, from private gardens to window boxes.

- **Guest tickets – £7.00 (Student Guests £3.00)**

Guest tickets allow you to attend in person or by Zoom. For this event, it is also possible to pay at the door without purchasing a ticket in advance.

More information and to book go to <https://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/event-5760237>

And on **Monday 28 April 7.30pm**; same venue.

Writing the Roman Empire: from Leicester to the Sahara and back again
Professor David Mattingley.

Details: <https://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/event-5760241>

Knighton Christmas Tree Festival 2025

Craft Workshops

The Knighton Christmas Tree Festival Team plan to run a series of Craft Workshops during the year. These will take place once a month on Tuesdays from 10.30-12.30 in St. Mary's Church, Knighton.

We hope to provide a warm welcome, a variety of craft activities, tea/coffee and biscuits. Everyone is welcome to attend. No previous skills or knowledge required - just a willingness to have a go!



We plan to sell the items made at the next Festival, but if you would like to take your creations home you are welcome to, for a small donation.

We hope to see you there! The dates are:

- Tuesday 8th April
- Tuesday 13th May
- Tuesday 3rd June
- Tues 15th July
- August – no craft workshop in August
- Sept – to be confirmed
- October – to be confirmed
- November – to be confirmed

Save the date!

This year's Festival will take place on **Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th November.**

Any queries please contact: knightonctf24@gmail.com

Sue Siesage and the CTF Team