



St HELEN'S WINDOW

Bible's Buried Secrets

The Revd Professor John Barton

Many people will have watched the three-part BBC2 programme *Bible's Buried Secrets*, screened in March. It set out to puncture the viewer's belief that the Old Testament gives an accurate picture of ancient Israel. The first programme argued that there is not much reason to think that King David ever existed, or, if he did, that he did any of the things recorded in the books of Samuel. According to the second programme, Israelites in ancient times worshipped many gods, including the goddess Asherah, whom many believed to be the wife of Yahweh, the God of Israel. And the third suggested that the story of the Garden of Eden was based on a ritual practised in the Temple in Jerusalem.

I have to declare an interest: Francesca Stavrakopoulou, the presenter, is a friend of mine. She was a postgraduate and then a postdoctoral student in my department in Oxford. I was one of the examiners of her doctoral thesis, and I have collaborated with her in editing a book (F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, London: T & T Clark International, 2010) that touches on some of the same issues as the series. She is an atheist who studies the Bible, and she enjoys shocking believers, though her style is gentle: the *Radio Times* described her as a 'smiling assassin'.

Naturally many biblical scholars do not think as she does, but believe in the historical reality of David and of widespread monotheistic worship in ancient Israel—though probably not of the historical truth of the garden of Eden. But I think she is almost certainly right that we can know very little about David, and that many Israelites were polytheistic – in other words, they believed in more than one god. Indeed, the Bible itself says they were, though it regards this as a bad thing, whereas in historical reality it was probably normal. These findings are not widely known, but among professional biblical scholars they are not really all that controversial. The question is, what follows?

If what you believe about God and the world is tightly linked to holding that what the Bible tells us is always historically true, then *Bible's Buried Secrets* is worrying. Francesca argued that for some Israelis the justification for the state of Israel is bound up with believing that David really did rule it, and that Jerusalem was his capital city. If that is undermined, the result is potentially explosive. But for most Christians the historical reliability of the Old Testament narrative is not all that central for faith. The idea that monotheism emerged slowly, rather than having already been there from the time of Moses, is challenging to some but is widely accepted. This does not 'undermine monotheism', as Francesca argued, because our belief that there is only one God does not depend on any particular theory about when the idea first emerged.

But the programmes did raise the important question: how far is our faith tied up with a particular view of the Bible? Most non-fundamentalist Christians have come to terms with the idea that the creation stories in Genesis are not literally true. How much more of the Bible could we say that about? Most of us will draw a clear line when it comes to Jesus, and the truth of his life, death, and resurrection. But how much else matters that much? Worth pondering.

John Barton is an Honorary Assistant Priest in the Abingdon Team, and teaches in the University of Oxford

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St Helen's People

Patricia Mary Russell

(1919 -12 March 2011)

I can't actually remember when I first met Pat. It would be in the 1970s when I moved to Abingdon. I was commuting to London and she was travelling the country producing wonderful embroideries to decorate churches and their servers.

Later when I became a full-time resident and Pat had reduced her activities somewhat we found we had many interests in common. We 'did' exhibitions, went to the theatre, travelled out into the country for lunch or just to see the bluebells or the wonderful autumn colours (a great favourite of Pat).

Inevitably these activities reduced to perhaps a cup of tea and a piece of ginger cake once a week with an opportunity to catch up on the activities of Pat's fascinating family with numerous 'phone calls in between when either of us needed support (or a 'phone number) to deal with life's little problems. Pat was very much part of my life and I miss her.

Marion Scott

An obituary for Pat was published in *The Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday 19th April 2011. It is available online at the following address:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/apr/18/pat-russell-obituary>

Mike Harmon



Mike will be spending a month on placement at St Helen's as part of his ministerial training at Wycliffe Hall, where he is an ordinand in his first year.

Before moving to Oxford in the summer of

2010, Mike lived in Solihull in the West Midlands and was a member of Knowle parish church, in the Diocese of Birmingham.

Prior to taking up full time studies, he worked for HM Revenue and Customs as a tax adviser dealing with technical and policy issues.

Mike is married to Lynne, who is a counsellor in the NHS. They have two sons, Alex, currently in Australia, and Russell, who lives in Reykjavik. His leisure interests include theatre, cinema and music. Depending on the season, Mike also enjoys hill-walking, skiing and golf.

Please make Mike welcome as he continues the training and formation process in preparation for ordained ministry.

An Abingdon Prayer Walk

by Jane Duce, photographs by David Duce

Abingdon is a beautiful riverside town with a rich and varied history. Why not take half an hour or so to explore it, reflectively and prayerfully?

1 This walk starts in the Market Place – the town centre – a meeting place, a centre of commerce and activity. Here we are surrounded by cafés, banks and shops. Consider the people who come here, their needs, their aspirations, hopes and fears. Remember the local residents and traders – the unemployed, businesses which have been forced to close – and visitors to Abingdon.



2 From here pass under the archway by St Nicolas' Church and pause for a while to think of those who have worshipped there over

the centuries, and the present congregation meeting there week by week, and for their ministry of welcome and hospitality as the church in the market place.



3 Move on past Old Abbey House to the Abbey grounds. Trace the outline of Abingdon Abbey. Consider the influence of the monastery on the town and the continuing influence of monastic communities in our own society.



4 Next we come to the river – the reason for the existence of the town in the first instance. Think of the impact water has always had on all forms of life. In this country we take it for granted. Remember the many people across the world who live where water is so scarce. Water also plays such a significant part in our lives of faith. Give thanks for the sacrament of baptism.

5 As you retrace your steps towards the town centre – notice the Cosener's House, on your left. The name is derived from the Kitchener who was responsible for food at the Abbey. Reflect for a moment on the importance of food in our lives. Be thankful for those who welcome and offer hospitality to strangers.

6 Back at the archway consider the significance of doorways. Christ said, 'Knock and the door will be opened to you'. What is our response to his call?



7 Turn left and pass the Crown and Thistle – an old coaching inn – a traditional place of rest and refreshment for weary travellers. Remember those who provide for our needs and well-being and be thankful.



8 Next pause on the bridge where we see the Old Gaol. Think of prisoners and hostages in our own time, and of the many areas of conflict around the world. Pray for peace in the hearts of all mankind, for an end to wars and violence.



9 Now look at the spire of St Helen's Church by the river – a place of worship for over 1,000 years. Remember our parish, the clergy, the laity, all who strive to witness to the Christian faith in their lives and pray that they and each one of us may help to make this world a better place.

Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism and Confirmation.

Alexandra Green

The Prayer Book catechism tells us that a sacrament is ‘an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace’. Baptism is the way in which new Christians enter into the life of the Church; confirmation, the affirmation of the promises which they made, or their parents and godparents made for them.

Read about the marvelous font in St Helen’s and its history, and an account of the joyful and glorious celebration of the confirmation of Abielle Hallas, Nick King, Emma Shearer, Alfie Smith, Paul Smith and Jo Smith on Easter Eve.

ALMIGHTY God, giver of all good things, who by thy Holy Spirit hast appointed divers Orders of Ministers in thy Church: Mercifully behold these thy servants now called to the office of Priesthood; and replenish them so with the truth of thy doctrine, and adorn them with innocency of life, that, both by word and good example, they may faithfully serve thee in this office, to the glory of thy Name, and the edification of thy Church; through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen.

(from the *Book of Common Prayer*)

June is also the month when we celebrate the lives of two central figures in the beginning of the Christian Church, St Peter, the leader of the apostles, and St Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. The succession of their work and witness is marked especially at this time by the ordination of women and men who have a particular vocation to serve God as deacons and priests.

And so this month we rejoice especially with Jane Baun and SokHan Yong, who are both to be ordained as priests by the Bishop of Reading in Reading Minister on 26 June 2011.

St Helen’s Font

Silvia Joinson

Since much of St Helen’s church is medieval in origin, it’s a fair assumption that our baptismal font would date from the same period—but it is in fact a Victorian copy in marble of the twelfth-century stone Norman font in Sutton Courtenay church.

Our font was shown at the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, from May until October 1851, so it is now 150 years old. The sculptor was Henry Prince Peyman, who had premises at 24 Ock Street (part of the Clock House complex). His grandfather had begun the business in Bath Street in the 1780s and it was Henry who made the move to Ock Street, where the business thrived for fifty years.



He is listed in the 1861 census as having fifteen men and a boy working for him, which would indicate a substantial enterprise. He was a local ‘Mr Fix-It’.

In St Helen’s, the font was moved to its present position in 1868. From the late eighteenth century, the original font had been at the west end of the south aisle (where the modern St Helen window is now). Before that, it may have stood near the west door. The cover for the present font is much older than the font, dating from 1634. Although the font is round, the cover is octagonal.

Sources: Mienke Cox, historical notes on deposit at St Helen’s Church; Ock Street Heritage Group, *Ock Street Remembered* (2008).

Confirmation at St Helen's, 23 June 2011

Abielle Hallas, Nick King, Emma Shearer, Alfie Smith, Paul Smith and Jo Smith were confirmed by the Bishop of Reading, Andrew Proud, at the Easter Vigil. Alexandra Green spoke to Emma Shearer about the occasion.



Back row: Nick King, Paul and Jo Smith
Front row: Abielle Hallas, Bishop Andrew, Emma Shearer, Alfie Smith

Emma, you were confirmed in St Helen's by Bishop Andrew on Easter Eve. When did you first start thinking about being confirmed, and was there anything in particular that prompted you or was it a gradual process?

It was certainly a gradual process, ever since seeing my sister confirmed a few years ago. That made me aware that it was something that I really wanted to do, and when I was approached about joining the classes it felt like the right time to take this step.

Can you say a little about the confirmation preparation?

I was part of a group of three young people being prepared for communion with SokHan Youg every Monday during Lent. We explored different aspects of the faith every week through appropriate Bible passages and were able to take the content covered in the sessions away with us to continue thinking about at home.

What did you find the most rewarding part of the confirmation preparation?

The most rewarding part was being able to learn more about the faith and having the time really to think and learn about it properly with SokHan's

guidance and from the other confirmation candidates.

When it came to the service itself, how did you feel?

I was quite nervous on the actual day, mixed with excitement and anticipation. It was amazing, though, to have so many friends and family there along with so many from the congregation and choir to support me and the other candidates.

What was the most memorable part of the service?

Other than inadvertently setting fire to my hair with a candle, definitely the confirmation itself, and of course Bishop Andrew's commanding voice.

Now you have been confirmed, how do you feel it will make a difference to your Christian life and to your life overall?

I feel now like a full member of the church and that my faith has been strengthened greatly through this experience. I hope that it will allow me to grow further over the course of my life as I still have a great amount to learn, and to live out in my everyday life.

What's on in June

St Helen's Church

Tuesday 14 June
Mothers' Union
Wave of Prayer led by Jenny Kelsey
 20.00 Church Centre

Wednesday 15 June
Wednesday Club
 Visit to Bridewell Organic Garden
 From 18.00 at Wilcot near Witney
 Details from Sue Austin 523436

Friday 17 & Saturday 18 June
Church Centre Working Party
 10.00-16.30
 Painting toilets prior to laying new floor
 Tidying area around shed
 Surveying roof and gutters
 Can you spare time to help?
 Please sign list in church

Sunday 19 June
3rd Sunday Concert with refreshments
 14.00-16.00 teas
 15.00 Music: oboe and piano
 16.30 Choral Evensong

Saint Nicolas Church

Sunday 12 June
Clarinet and Piano Recital
 at 15.00
 Michal Bredik, Clarinet and Lucie Smitkova, piano.
 Music by Brahms, J. Horowitz, S. Taneyev, M. Istvan
 and B. Kovacs.

Tickets at the door, £10.00, £9.00 concessions.



Solution to May's Crossword: *Smile please* by Eccles
 The asterisked answers were all cheeses
 Apologies for 'PLUMBOB' which should be
 'PLUMB BOB'

Church in Abingdon

Thursdays 2 & 16 June
Back to 35
 10.30-11.30 Baptist Church Hall
 Opportunity for fellowship, chat and coffee

June 2 *Age UK Services*
 with Paul Cann (CEO)

June 16 *Your Choice of Music*

Pentecost Family Fun Day

Saturday 11th June

11am - 3pm

Abingdon Market Square

Bouncy castle, face painting, craft
 activity,

storytelling and puppets, coffee
 and cakes

and much more.....

All welcome

**Help is needed to put up tables
 and with other preparations,
 contact Debra McKnight on 528958
 if you can offer help.**



Saturday 11 June

Ecumenical Pentecost Eve Event

Waiting for the Holy Spirit.
 19.30-21.00 St Edmund's Church, 1 Radley Rd
 Praise and worship, talk,
 individual prayer ministry.
 For further information, 01235 528528

Wednesday 29 June

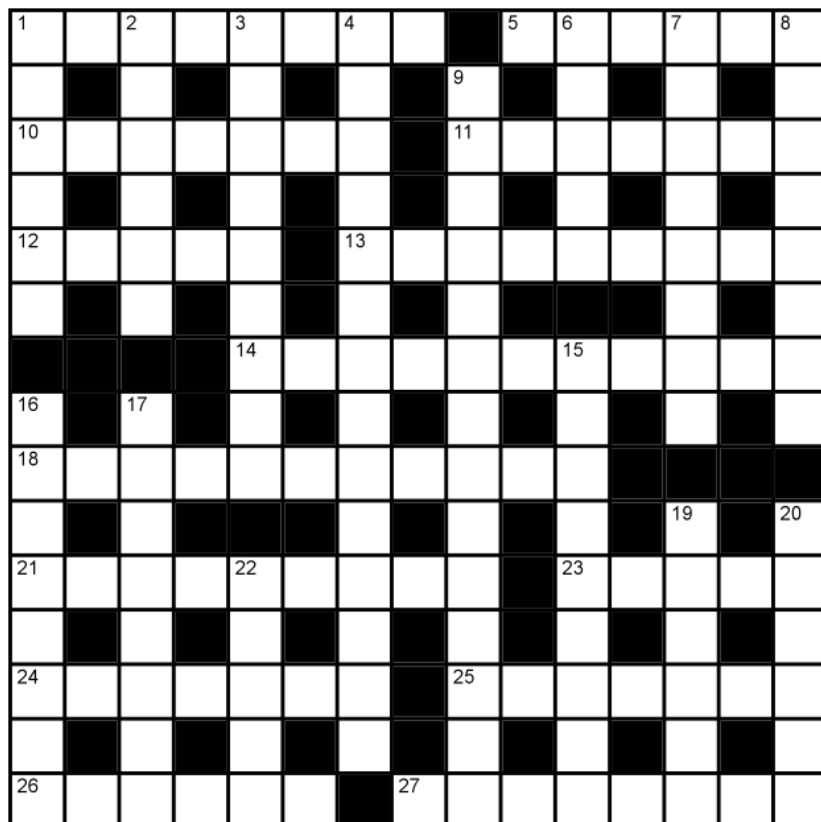
Fresh Vision

19.30 at St Ethelwold's House
 Led by Revd Laura Hodges
 This group meets monthly with a simple service
 and time for discussion and reflection.

If you would like an event listed on this page let us
 know by the 5th of the previous month and we will try
 to include it. Contact Silvia at alanj@phonecoop.coop
 or tel: 01235 521247

Gathered round the Font by Ian Miles

In this month which includes Whitsun, the birthday of the Church, a handful of starred clues lead to titles of fonts (in the typographical sense). Some others have printing-&-publishing connections, and many of the rest are either 'churchy' (as usual) or refer to features of the summer.



Across

- 1 A job more cushy, bringing 3 litres (8)
- 5 Local animal can't operate 1st printer (6)
- 10 I dreamt about instruction to confess again (7)
- 11 Pushy purchaser's '2/3 of profit' to the French king (7)
- 12* A liar planted 'signal capture device' in font (5)
- 13* Chalet I've built in classical Switzerland (9)
- 14* Hounding publishers' text font! (11)
- 18 Evangelist, or Darwinist opponent? (5-6)
- 21 A Catholic chemist's formulated beliefs (9)
- 23 Expansive Elgar composition (5)
- 24 Assuage pangs with barbie banger (7)
- 25 Else Georgia takes in a Kiwi's wispy fabric (7)
- 26 Martyr's disgusted expression on street hospital (2,4)
- 27 Versions of work relegated to inside (8)

Down

- 1 Maid of Orleans takes doctor up baptismal river (6)
- 2 1st stage of play preparation Berks town skimped (4-2)
- 3 Repeatedly be less than humble about honeygatherer (6-3)
- 4 It's a shame, innit, suffering allergies without these! (14)
- 6 Corner fish (5)
- 7 Chat, and count child in (4,4)
- 8 Told story Ed ran excitedly about Hamelin vermin (8)
- 9* Racing headline font ... (10,4)
- 15 ... Used to signal strikingly thin face (4,5)
- 16 Old Chinese babies learnt to count on them (8)
- 17 Gets on out of bathing costume; well ... really! (1,3,4)
- 19 Its C16th council was rotten! (6)
- 20 Bloomer features in mixed pastel (6)
- 22* Bell-like sound of classic 1955 font (5)

June at St Helen's Church

Divine Services

5 June	10.00	Sung Eucharist, Civic Service and Junior Church
12 June	10.00	Sung Eucharist with Junior Church
19 June	10.00	Sung Eucharist (Corporate Communion for Central Cluster) <u>at St Michael's</u>
26 June	10.00	Sung Eucharist with Junior Church
Morning Prayer	09.10	Monday to Friday
Evening Prayer	17.10	Monday to Friday
Holy Communion	08.00	Sundays (in St Helen's Church)
Sung Eucharist	10.00	5, 12, (19), 26 June with Junior Church
Silent Prayer	18.10	Mondays 6 & 20 June
Wednesday Church	10.30	Wednesdays, Holy Communion followed by refreshments

Sunday Evening Services

5 June	18.30	Eucharist
12 June	18.30	Pentecost Taizé
19 June	16.30	Choral Evensong
26 June	18.30	Service for Wholeness and Healing

Meetings and Gatherings all in Church Centre Hall unless marked

Baby and Toddler Group	09.30 & 11.00	Mondays
Baptism Preparation	20.00	Tues 7 & 21 June – Lounge
Brownies	18.15	Tuesdays
Clergy consultation	19.00	Weds by appointment
Cubs	18.20	Wednesdays
DCC standing committee meeting	19.30	Mon 6 June – Lounge
Desiring Life reading group	14.30	Tues 14 June – Lounge
Junior Church	10.00	every Sunday – starts in Church (except 19 June when at St Michael's)
Marriage Preparation	20.00	Weds 15, 22, 29 June – Lounge
Mothers' Union	20.00	Tues 14 June, see p. 6 for details
Sidesmen's Social	19.30	Mon 27 June – Ferryman Inn, Bablock Hythe
Wednesday Club	20.00	Wed 15 June, see p. 6 for details

Events (more details on page 6)

Visiting Bell ringers	10.40-11.30	Sat 4 June Tower
ADMS Concert	19.30	Sat 11 June in Church
St Helen's@Lunch	12.00	Thurs 23 June, Broad Face, Bridge Street

*The services and events listed here are correct at the time of going to press
– please consult the weekly Newsheet if in doubt.*

To arrange baptisms, weddings and funerals contact the Church Office.
Clergy are available in the Church Office between 19.00 - 20.00 on a Wednesday.
Call the office to book an appointment.

Rector:	The Revd Dr Charles Miller
Assisting Priest (NSM):	The Revd Tim Hewes
Curates (NSM):	The Revd Dr Simon Thorn, The Revd Dr Jane Baun, The Revd SokHan Yong
Director of Music:	Christopher Fletcher-Campbell
Parish Administrator:	Linda Barker

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