



St HELEN'S WINDOW

Reflections of an 'OCM'

The Revd Tim Hewes

I can't begin to understand what it must feel like, as a soldier of nineteen, to write a last letter home to be given to your loved ones if you have been killed in action. Having to think in this way gives soldiers a keen sense of their own mortality, a sense that is no doubt heightened by being trained to apply tourniquets to themselves, by 'contact' experiences—a euphemism for being shot at—and by attendance at repatriation services that take place in Camp Bastion, Afghanistan before the bodies of their fellow soldiers are flown home.

For the past few months I have been working for a short time each week at Dalton Barracks in Abingdon with the 12 Logistics Support Regiment of the Army's Royal Logistics Corps, giving pastoral support as a newly-appointed Officiating Chaplain to the Military (OCM). The Regiment has recently returned from a six-month deployment to Afghanistan. I've watched as the soldiers came off the buses from RAF Brize Norton, where they have been flown in to from Afghanistan, handing over the weapons, body armour, identity tags and medical records that they've carried on active service. I've seen them taken by bus to the Community Centre just 'outside the wire' of Dalton Barracks in Abingdon, where they met their loved ones.

I've been at the post-operational briefing meetings, which are designed to help the soldiers re-orientate themselves to being in a non-combatant environment. They've been warned about flashbacks being normal, and told not to worry about them as long as they don't go on for longer than six weeks; about how to cope with tensions in relationships; about not letting children overhear conversations about horrific experiences of war. How salutary this has been to me, as someone unfamiliar with military life, and only acquainted with combat through hearing the war experiences of relatives, many years before.

As a civilian I had not expected the warmth of reception that I have received from soldiers about Abingdon Station, or indeed as I 'cold-called' on others working behind closed office doors. Neither was I prepared for the now customary cheery welcome—'D'you want a brew, Padre?' *But it has been the trust and openness shown to me by these men and women that has impressed me most deeply.* Their confidences have usually come unprompted, often within minutes of meeting their 'Officiating Chaplain' for the first time, and they've often led to deep, meaningful conversations about personal difficulties at home or the profound experiences they have had while on active service.

Being with these energetic and dynamic people—who often have a *rich* sense of humour—is a great privilege. As an OCM, it is my role to support them in their spiritual needs, and offer a constant reminder that *no one* is excluded from God's desire to bring us all home to Him. Am I learning more from them than they are from me? It feels that way. It is certainly a humbling experience, but then seeing God's love at work for people when life really hurts, and being a quiet witness to that work, usually is.

The Editors

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A Letter from Padre Stephan van Os

The October St Helen's Window carried a short notice that The Revd Stephan van Os, who served recently as chaplain at Dalton Barracks, and frequently worshipped with his wife at St Helen's, was to return to Afghanistan. Below are excerpts from a letter which he sent in September just before his redeployment.

... 'Be careful what you wish for, Padre. You might just get it!' Well, I wasn't very careful and now I have got it, a deployment to Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan for six months with the premier Battalion in 16 Air Assault Brigade, the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment. Really and truly it doesn't get to be much better than that. Of course it will be an exceptionally demanding tour of duty and probably the biggest challenge I will ever have faced in my entire life, but I am up for this and the fact that I am doing it with the Royal Irish is simply the icing on the cake.

... Our main task will not be war fighting in the traditional sense, but rather bringing reassurance to the local population around Nad-e Ali, acting as a bulwark between the local population and the Taliban insurgents to enable them to rebuild their community life and ultimately take care of themselves. In other words we will be conducting a traditional counter insurgency operation, something we have considerable experience in doing, all the while operating against a determined and ruthless enemy.... Our Battle Group HQ will be at Shawqat and my main accommodation will be there but as Battle Group chaplain I will be moving around the different Company locations, Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and Patrol Bases (PBs)

Life will be tough and demanding, but there are things we can do to ensure a measure of normality and sanity in an insane environment. I already have my projects set out. My musical project for the tour is to become totally familiar with the complete works of

Frederick Chopin and they have now been uploaded on to my iPod to go with me wherever I happen to be.

My reading project is divided into two parts. Firstly spiritual formation. I have packed the 5-volume series of Eugene Peterson's magnum opus that begins with *Christ Plays In Ten Thousand Places* and hopefully I will get them all read by the time we return to the UK. Secondly, entertainment. A number of friends have recommended the Stieg Larsson trilogy which everyone seems to be reading at the moment. But Margaret warned me that I would need another project as Larsson was such a compelling writer and like her would almost certainly finish those books in double-quick time. So I'm taking Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Chronicles* to keep me going thereafter.... That's not all the reading I'll be doing. There will be sermons to write and services to conduct, a life of ministry and prayer and above all people to take care of, so I shall have my hands full. I guess if I am busy it will make the time go faster.

In conclusion could I commend for your prayers the following issues:

1. That in the days before we deploy all the organizational issues will run successfully and that we will all get to Afghanistan in an orderly fashion.
2. For the safety of my soldiers as we put our training into practice for real and start moving out on patrols. These guys are consummate professionals and I love them to bits. I desperately want to bring them all back home at the end of our tour of duty.
3. That I may be found faithful in my ministry and have the physical and spiritual robustness to carry out all the tasks and journeys that come my way.
4. For the staff in our Battle Group HQ as they take over their responsibilities from the previous Battalion.

They will be working long hours and their leadership skills will be key to much of what we do.

I'll be flying next week and as I think of my journey I have the music of that exquisite trio in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* 'Soave sia il

vento' playing in the background: 'Gentle be the breeze, calm be the waves and every element smile in favour on their wish.'

Love & best wishes, *Stephan*

Prayers for the Armed Forces, and for Peace

The best gift that we can give the British men and women serving in our armed forces is to pray for them. Can we make November, the month of Remembrance, a month in which we pray daily for our soldiers, sailors, RAF personnel, and their families?

Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces, at home and abroad. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Prayer (US)

Merciful and loving God: we know that your desire is for all your children to live in peace. We pray for those who are now in danger as they defend the cause of justice. Watch over them and keep them in your mercy and your care. Support and comfort those who are filled with anxious thoughts for their loved ones. Bless those parents and children, those husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, all loved ones, who are now divided in time of war. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and uphold us with your blessed spirit of peace. This we pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord.

United Methodist Church (from the Archbishop of York's website)

**Lord, hold our troops in your loving hands
Protect them as they protect us.
Bless them and their families for the selfless acts
they perform for us in our time of need. Amen.**

A popular prayer circulating on the Internet

The Soldier's Prayer, a Prayer of Commitment

Almighty God, whose command is overall, and whose love never fails, let me be aware of Your presence and obedient to Your will. Help me to accept my share of responsibility with a strong heart and cheerful mind. Make me considerate of those with whom I live and work, and faithful to the duties my country has entrusted to me. Let my uniform remind me daily of the traditions of the army in which I serve. When I am tempted to sin, help me to resist. When I fail, give me courage to try again. Guide me with the light of Your truth, and keep before me the example of Jesus in whose name I pray. Amen.

Royal Army Chaplains' Department

Almighty God, stretch forth your mighty arm to strengthen and protect the armed forces: grant that meeting danger with courage and all occasions with discipline and loyalty, they may truly serve the cause of justice and peace; to the honour of your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Field Service Book of the British Army

People in the News

St Helen's is immensely proud of our chorister **Jacob Thorn**, who is a finalist in the BBC Radio 2 Young Choristers of the Year 2010 competition.

Jacob will sing with the seven other finalists before a live audience at a packed St Paul's Cathedral (at the time of going to press, already fully booked) on 29 October. The composer and conductor John Rutter chairs the judging panel, which will choose one girl and one boy to be the Choristers of the Year. Those of us who were not able to go to St Paul's to support Jacob in person will have a chance to hear the competition on Sunday, 7 November on Radio 2, at 8 pm. Highlights from the final will also be featured on Songs of Praise (BBC 1) on 6 February 2011.



From left: Jacob Thorn, Rosie and Debbie King, Charles Pope and Emma Shearer

The choir is always on the look out for girls and boys who would like to sing with them. The young choristers have their own club, Quest, and meet for their own rehearsal time on Friday evenings at 18.15 before being joined by the adults. Quest are expected to take part in the Sunday morning services and to work towards the various RSCM awards. (There are light blue, dark blue and red ribbons before reaching the dizzy heights of Dean's and Bishop's awards.) Throughout the year Quest have various outings, to the snowdome at Milton Keynes, for example,

Of the eight finalists, only Jacob, and a chorister from St Olave's Church in York, come to the competition from a parish church choir: the rest sing in cathedrals or in their school chapel choirs. The winners typically experience a whirlwind year of radio and television appearances, and receive professional-standard voice coaching.

By the time you are reading this, the results will be known—and however the judges decide, well done, Jacob, for all your hard work and musical intelligence! We are blessed in all our choristers, and so grateful for their gifts, the dedication shown by them and their families, and the joy and beauty they bring to our worship.

Five of our Choristers have achieved awards in the Royal School of Church Music Voices for Life award. **Jacob, Rosie, Charles** and **Emma** gained the Bishop's award and **Debbie** gained the Dean's award. As well as testing their vocal skills these awards also test their knowledge of church services and festivals. Well done to you all.

newcomers, and generally have fun.

The choir is planning to have more details including a clip of them singing available through the St Helen's website in the near future. If you know of anyone who would be interested please encourage their parents to contact Christopher Fletcher-Campbell on 07889 131372 or cfc47@btinternet.com

or the planned trip at half-term to Millets' Halloween Howl, as well as excursions to Pizza Express. Although there is a lot to learn initially, this is one group of young people who look out for each other, help

Marking Advent - Celebrating Christmas

Susan Scott (Co-ordinator, Ministry of Welcome and Hospitality)

The liturgical season of Advent begins on Sunday, 28 November this year, and runs for the four Sundays before Christmas. In the church calendar, Advent is traditionally a penitential period, when we meditate on how to prepare ourselves for the feast of Christmas. To suit the sombre mood, St Helen's does not have flower arrangements in the church, and with the liturgical colour of purple used for altar hangings and vestments, the church can appear bleak and bare. The church is not open to visitors except for services but it is used by several local schools for end-of-term and carol services.

In contrast, outside the church at this time of year, the folk of Abingdon are buzzing, commercially, culturally, socially and domestically, with pre-Christmas preparations—and even (very early) Christmas celebrations. At St Helen's, we begin the season with a special Advent Carol service on the first Sunday of Advent, and with an Advent Wreath, which has a candle for each of the four Sundays of Advent. A natural Christmas tree has usually been erected and decorated in about the second or third week of Advent, and the church gradually begins to be adorned with greenery on the window sills, until the main decorations are put up immediately before Christmas Eve. The church is then only open for services until the New Year.

A new approach: opening our doors

While it is accepted that it would be a losing battle to try to halt the pre-Christmas frenzy of 'the world', this year at St Helen's, as part of our mission and outreach, we are going to try to honour the season of Advent by offering our sacred space as a place of stillness, welcome, prayer and reflection to the people of Abingdon. In contrast to previous custom, a fifteen-foot Christmas tree has been purchased, which will be erected in time for the first Sunday in Advent. Acting as a Jesse Tree at first, it will gradually grow in decoration until it is a fully-decorated Christmas tree. The church will be open to visitors every Sunday afternoon in Advent (and, we hope, on Saturdays as well). Children especially will be encouraged to come in and experience the church's Advent atmosphere, with a subtly-lit interior (not difficult given our current lighting!), background music, story telling, and seasonal refreshments.

The festivities will continue after Christmas. The church will be open on the afternoon of Sunday, 2 January, so we can offer a Christmas welcome and celebration. Our (now) customary Epiphany processional service and Tea will take place on the next Sunday afternoon, 9 January. Finally, our Christmas celebrations will be brought to a close on Saturday evening, 15 January, with a performance at St Helen's of Gian Carlo Menotti's one-act children's opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a much-loved Epiphany classic.

How you can help

Would you like to get involved in this new and exciting initiative at St Helen's? Could you give one Advent afternoon to welcome visitors, make drinks, serve biscuits, and perhaps even engage in conversation on the meaning of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany? Could you serve as a steward for a few hours on a Saturday and enable us to have the church open? Would you like to see the church open in the days after Christmas for visitors—who might be your own guests—and could you volunteer as a steward to help make it happen? Could you bake some mince pies or seasonal biscuits? Could you help put up and take down the tree? Musicians and

story tellers have been approached and materials are being selected, but if this is something you could also offer, please let me know. We intend to publicise this programme to the schools, in the press, the town and environs—could you help with that in some way?

Christmas is still an important season, culturally and socially, even in an increasingly secular society. At Christmas, people want to reconnect with their roots, as the generations gather together to do the familiar things and rekindle memories. While it is acknowledged that secular society has a hold over Christmas, especially commercially, the season of Advent, and the Christmas and Epiphany seasons following, offer St Helen's an opportunity to do something different. By creating an atmosphere of wonder on our Advent and Epiphany afternoons—through creative use of our holy space, through our marvellous tree, stories, movement, lighting and music, and shared food and fellowship—we hope to engage the imaginations of all who come, children and their families, parishioners and newcomers, towards a deeper sense of the beauty, mystery, and meaning of Christmas.



Angel decoration for the Jesse Tree

St Helen's Church and Church in Abingdon News

St Helen's Church

Mondays 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 November

First Steps

13.30-14.30, Church Centre
Bible-based group for 3-4 year-olds

Tuesdays 2, 16, 30 November

Desiring Life Reading Group

14.15-16.00, Church Centre Lounge
Details from Susan Scott, 522960

Saturday 6 November

Jesse Tree Decoration Workshop

10-12.00, Church Centre

Tuesday 9 November

Mothers' Union talk

'Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance'
20.00, Church Centre

Wednesday 17 November

St Helen's @ Lunch

The Boundary House
12.00 onwards, just turn up
Details from Susan Scott, 522960

Wednesday 17 November

Wednesday Club

20.00, Church Centre
'My Aussie Antecedents' by Rod Hunt

Friday 19 November

FOSH Meeting

19.30 refreshments in Church Centre
20.00 Talk by Geoffrey Morris on almshouses
£2 members, £3 non-members

Sunday 21 November

16.30 Choral Evensong

15.15 Tea

15.30 Concert: Valerie Findlay, cello
with Olivia Newbold, piano

Thursday 25 November

Trip to Winchester (Cathedral & Christmas Market)

9.30 departure; cost £15 in advance
Sign list in Church or contact Susan Scott

Saturday 27 November

Christmas Market

10.00-12.30, in Church
Look at list in Church and offer help.
Note the date and start making & baking!

Sunday 28 November

16.30 Advent Carol Service

Readings, music, dedication of Jesse Tree

Advance diary date: Sunday 5 December

Christmas Lunch

12.30, Drayton Golf Club
Sign list in Church or contact David Eggleton 831794

St Michael's Church

Saturday 20 November

Christmas Fair

10.00-14.00, in Church
Stalls, games & refreshments

Church in Abingdon

Ecumenical House Groups

Details: Dorothy Field, 526089

Thursdays 4 & 18 November

'Back to 35'

10.30-11.30 Baptist Church Hall
Opportunity for chat and fellowship
4 November: 'Health & Wellbeing Centre'
with Tony Andrews
18 November: 'Haiti after the Earthquake'
with Rosemary Short

Sunday 7 November

+ Annual Bereavement Service +

15.00 at Trinity Church

St Ethelwold's House

30 East St Helen's St

Wednesday 10 November

Quiet Day, 'Celebrating our Senses'

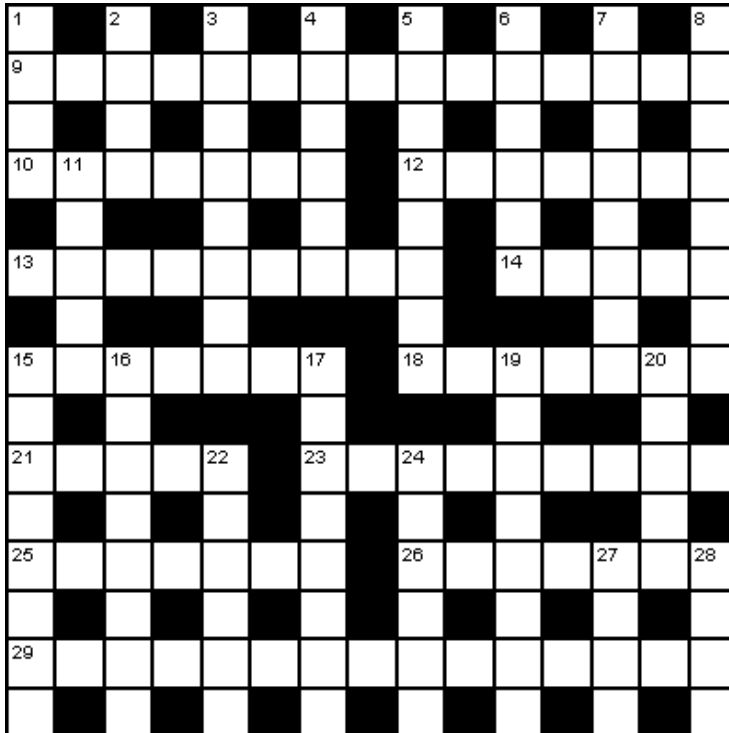
10-16.00, Revd Laura Hodges
Suggested donation £10; book on 555486

Wednesday 24 November

19.30 Fresh Vision

A new monthly group with a simple service
& discussion led by Revd Laura Hodges
More details from Laura, 527654

If you would like an event listed on this page let us know by the 10th of the previous month and we will try to include it. Contact Silvia at alanj@phonecoop.coop or tel: 01235 521247



Crossword by Ian Miles

Across

- 9 Two tablets should be our daily rule (3,12)
 10 Diocesan left-winger erupts (4,3)
 12 Ancient lag often initially flung in here (3,4)
 13 Academic detail of organist's pedalling (9)
 14 Leaderless police force bugged by this? (1,4)
 15 Salty scrolls from down here (4,3)
 18 Payment is back in warehouse (7)
 21 'Environmental blow' for this oldster (5)
 23 Real soggy weather: these'll spout! (9)
 25 Opera violinist swallows this Italian dish (7)
 26 I stop 'em becoming utterly dejected (7)
 29 Merits of high faith: Da Vinci's ruler at fault (8,7)

Down

- 1 Greek characters 'trenchermen' (4)
 2 First word in carol service never repeated (4)
 3 Wacky parsons around Oxford singing top line (8)
 4 Surrounded by flustered maids, on time (6)
 5 Seen doctor do cure, signed in support (8)
 6 Ugly blur of mud and some scrambled eggs (6)
 7 Fashionable and renowned for lurid reasons (8)
 8 David happily splits morning writing OT hymns (8)
 11 Penny's formal conclusion: flee to Gretna! (5)
 15 Pile up sumptuous food for Bonhoeffer (8)
 16 'Hi, Ms Lynn': this ingredient may do you good (4,4)
 17 One at St Helen's lancing a boil (8)
 19 Mérimée's doing nicely! (8)
 20 Notions of article during the 15th (5)
 22 Urban menace in classical Rome today takes over (6)
 24 Take off in connection with house-hunting? (6)
 27 Surly-hued, left-handed royal assassin of old (4)
 28 Examine British flower (4)

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Solution to October's Crossword

The last four clues down were missing from September's Crossword. With apologies to our readers they are printed below.

- 21 Frank? Sadly, he's not (6)
 23 Thumbnail illustration on early Bible a 'bauble' (5)
 24 Parisian banker sounds rational (5)
 26 Mrs Major, but not her mother (5)

November at St Helen's Church

Divine Services

7 November	10.00	Sung Eucharist with Welcome to Newly Baptised
14 November	10.00	Remembrance Service
21 November	10.00	Sung Eucharist - Christ the King
28 November	10.00	Sung Eucharist - Advent 1
Morning Prayer	09.10	Monday to Friday
Evening Prayer	17.10	Monday to Friday
Holy Communion	08.00	Sundays (in St Nicholas Church)
Sung Eucharist	10.00	7, 21, 28 Nov with Junior Church
Remembrance Service	10.00	14 Nov. (Junior Church in Centre)
Silent Prayer	18.10	Mondays 8 & 22 November
Wednesday Church	10.30	every Wednesday, Holy Communion followed by refreshments (in Church Centre 10 & 24 Nov).

Meetings and Gatherings all in Church Centre unless marked

Advanced Bell Practice	19.30	Monday 8 Nov. Tower
Alpha Group	19.30	Thursdays
Baby and Toddler Group	09.30 & 11.00	Mondays
Baptism Preparation	20.00	Tues 2 & 16 November
Brownies	18.15	Tuesdays
Clergy consultation	19.00	Weds by appointment
Cubs	18.20	Wednesdays
DCC meeting	19.30	Monday 8 November
Desiring Life	14.30	Tues 2, 16, 30 November
First Steps	13.30	Monday afternoons
Marriage Preparation	20.00	Weds 10, 17 & 24 November
Mothers' Union	20.00	Tues 9 November
Wednesday Club	20.00	Weds 17 November

Events (more details on page 6)

Jesse Tree Workshop	10-12.00	Sat 6 Nov	in Church Centre
St Helen's @ Lunch	12.00	Wed 17 Nov	Boundary House
Peal Attempt	10.00	Sat 20 Nov	St Helen's Tower
Christmas Market	10-12.30	Sat 27 Nov	St Helen's Church

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

Sunday Evening Services

7 Nov	18.30	Eucharist
14 Nov	18.30	Sung Eucharist
21 Nov	16.30	Choral Evensong
28 Nov	16.30	Advent readings and Carols

Promenade Concert and Choral Even- song

21 November

From 15.00, come and enjoy the music with a cup of tea and cake.

16.30 - 17.30
Choral Evensong

Advent Service 28 November

16.30
readings and carols for
Advent

To arrange baptisms, weddings and funerals contact the Parish 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
Director of Music:	Christopher Fletcher-Campbell
Parish Administrator:	Linda Barker

St Helen's Church Office: St Helen's Court, Abingdon, OX14 5BS
01235 520144

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