

## The Parish of St George-in-the-East with St Paul

# Newsletter for August 2014



*One of many images of the church blitzed in 1941, to remind us of places of worship which are currently being destroyed in many parts of the ancient Christian heartlands of the middle East and elsewhere*

### Summer events

Many thanks to all who made the **Anniversary Barbecue** such a success – especially Paul and Hannah, chief caterers, the team who fetched and carried, and all who supplemented the food and drink! The sun shone, and a good mix of folk came, including old friends (among them Michael Saward, and Richard and Marta Powell) and visitors, including a French couple whom John and Rowena took under their wing, linguistically and in other ways, taking them on to Sandys Row Synagogue to explore her Jewish heritage. Serendipitous encounters of this kind feature large in this parish. *[Pictures to follow on the website]*

The **Orthodox London Mission** had an equally successful event the previous weekend, marking the 20th anniversary of their formal links with the Coptic Patriarchate.

Distinguished visitors jetted in and out from around the globe and a large number attended the impressive liturgy – complete with liturgical umbrellas. There was lovely food, and wonderful Eritrean drumming and singing – vibrant and graceful.



Bishop Angaelos (their 'General Bishop') has kept up pressure on the government about the plight of Oriental Orthodox Christians in the **Mosul region of Iraq**, who in the words of ISIS, its ruthless oppressors, must choose forced conversion to Islam, the payment of (impossibly) punitive taxes or the sword. Many ancient churches and monasteries have been destroyed. Those who have hung on (thousands had already gone) are now leaving: yet one more region of the ancient Christian heartlands where Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together for centuries in mutual respect for

each others' histories, sharing life and faith, but do so no longer. The cover picture of this newsletter is a reminder of the destruction of sacred places. We trust that all peaceable Muslims in Tower Hamlets (to whom we wish *Eid Mubarak* at the end of Ramadan) share in our sense of shock and horror at the activities of 'Islamists'.

The current headline atrocities are the shooting down of Malaysian **flight MH17** (in tragic error, or deliberately?) carrying many Dutch and other passengers, some of them aid workers bound for a major conference, made worse by the way the dead have been treated; and the plight of **Palestinians in Gaza**, where over a thousand civilians (20% of them children) have been killed, including in schools, hospitals and refugee centres, Israel alleging that they were being used as human shields, and massive damage to ordinary people's homes. This has become part of the increasingly volatile and violent climate of the whole middle East region, for which we must pray daily. Praying the **psalms** is a challenging way of doing this: although there is much rather crude stuff about territory, cursing of enemies, and the assumption that 'God is on our side', we need to be honest to God about our own human instincts on these matters. The underlying themes are of peace, justice and righteousness; and when Christians pray the psalms, in the light of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, the kingdom of God, rather than any earthly kingdoms, become the true focus.



### First World War

Continuing the theme of violence and destruction: despite the Rector declaring that he was dreading four years solid of media hype marking the centenary of the First World War (he'd have preferred a decent reticence until 2018), the coverage so far has actually been enthralling and of high quality, with some well-told and moving stories (not least that of our 'own' war poet Isaac Rosenberg, who was a pupil for a time at St Paul's School).



Many imaginative liturgies have been created, including at St Paul's Cathedral, where on 3 August at 6pm a frontal made by convalescing soldiers [pictured] will be recommissioned [no tickets needed for this service], and at Westminster Abbey, where ['Lights Out'](#) at 10pm on 4 August – marking Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's remark *The lamps are going out all over Europe, and we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime* – will mark the start of the War [no tickets left – the service will be broadcast].

### 'Red letter days' in August



**The Transfiguration of our Lord**, on 6 August, marks a determining moment in Jesus' ministry: a mountain-top revelation of his true destiny as fulfiller of the law and the prophets (of which Moses and Elijah were representatives) and an anticipation of his coming passion. By terrible irony, the day of divine transfiguration is also the day of human disfiguration, as it marks the anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It's good that more has been made of this festival in recent years, and the sharpness of this contrast.

Roman Catholics keep 15 August as the feast of **The Blessed Virgin Mary**, as any of you who have been on holiday in parts of Europe will know, since everything shuts down for *fiesta*. They link this to doctrines about Mary – her (bodily) assumption into heaven, or dormition (falling asleep) – which stem from papal teaching rather than scripture, and which Anglicans are not required to accept, but the Church of England has added this date to our calendar (alongside other dates honouring Mary, based on the biblical narratives) as an ecumenical gesture, with the general theme of Mary as a pattern of Christian discipleship.



24 August is **St Bartholomew's Day** – a doubly 'black' day in church history, since in 1572 it saw a massacre of Protestant Huguenots in France (we wrote last month about those who settled in and around Spitalfields a century later, and the splendid annual festival marking their contribution to life hereabouts); and in 1662 the enforcement of the Book of Common Prayer which led to the 'Great Ejection' of those ministers who could not accept it (again, this had many local resonances).

However, for the Rectory family the day has happier associations, since their younger son is a Bartholomew – a link to his part-Polish ancestry:

*Bartoshu, Bartoshu, you will save Poland* crooned his grandfather when he held him as a baby. He recently met for the first time, to his delight and amazement, a baby who shares this forename. They'll be away at a family wedding that weekend, and the Revd Jenny Petersen will be leading worship on his feast day.

There are many legends and traditions about Bartholomew – not least in Armenia and India – but little in scripture. Was he one and the same as Nathanael [in John's gospel], or not? [Jan Struther](#) (Mrs Joyce Anstruther, aka Maxtone Graham [her first husband was a wealthy banker], later Placzek – right in 1931), though an agnostic, wrote a number of hymns for *Songs of Praise* - including *When a knight won his spurs*, *Lord of all hopefulness*, and (do some of you remember this from primary school?) *Daisies are our silver*. She also had a go at Bartholomew – eschewing the legends and linking him instead to the summer holidays. Unfortunately there is only one tune that fits it, and it's not very singable! But here it is:



*O saint of summer, what can we sing for you? How can we praise you, what can we bring for you?  
Lost are your words, your deeds are nameless, saint without history, mute and fameless.*

*Said you wise sayings? No one has hoarded them. Worked you great wonders? None has recorded them.  
Only your name, time's hand defying, shines with the light of your faith undying.*

*So fade the words, so vanish the deeds from us of each lost summer, swift as it speeds from us;  
We jest, we toil, we weep, but after slip from our memories grief and laughter.*

*Only the sun that cheered us and shone for us, all else forgotten, ever lives on for us,  
kindling our hearts when summer's ended - soul of the summer, serene and splendid.*

*Time, take our words and do what thou wilt with them; death, take our hands and all that we built with them;  
Only our faith, our soul's endeavour: take it, Lord, make it, Lord, thine for ever.*

### **Leaving Tower Hamlets deanery**

Michael and Jan Ainsworth's last Sunday will be 28 September, and we're delighted that this will also include a Ramanoop family baptism! More details next month. Having filled several vacancies in the deanery, two more have now emerged: Prebendary **Alan Wynne**, Team Rector of Poplar for the last 20 years, is moving into well-earned retirement; and the Revd **Rod Green**, currently of St Paul Shadwell (resident in the former Cable Street Schools – he gave an excellent talk at this year's Huguenot festival) goes to a parish in [West Harrow](#).