



**DOWNING PLACE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE**

PLACE MATTERS



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Front photo: New life springing up in the Hub
Flowers from Ian de Massini, photograph by Ann Auger

THE CHURCH'S SABBATICAL?

Well here we are, dear friends, over half way through the Sabbatical ... As one of several retired ministers in our congregation (oh, you've noticed!), I well remember being on sabbatical – a glorious three months away from the normal responsibilities and tasks of ministry. A bit frightening to contemplate in all honesty: 'will they cope without me?' being balanced by, 'will they notice I've gone?' A tiny bit like contemplating one's own death. During my final sabbatical, just over twenty years ago, I remember being aware of the time becoming a space in which I could re-learn how to be a human being – chat to the neighbours, pop to the shops, not go out every evening, take the dog for long walks, etc. I also realised that it was time to learn again how to be a church member, a worshipper more than a leader of worship; someone able to join in practical activities – the local church was trialling a café and I could join in as a waitress – ah, what goes around comes around! Of course, there was also a project to accomplish: by no means was this allowed to be wasted time ... yet, compared with normal life, it was relaxed. Ministers on sabbatical need to rest - just think what the word means. And until you stop you don't always realise how tired you are. Fortunate, aren't we, to have such a generous employer? Friends, *we* are that generous employer, members of the wider Church which organises and funds the ongoing education and support of our ministers. Technically, ministers are not employees, they are Office Holders; a grey area between employed and self-employed which gives the tax office endless fun. However, our loving Church treats us with a care better than many employers, and this continues into our retirement. It was not always so, and therefore we are doubly grateful.

Reflecting on our beloved minister being on sabbatical led me to wonder if this is also a sabbatical for the church? Hollow laughter from the Elders and officers. We do know that they need a periodic rest too, so a stand-down period is built in for the serving eldership. But what about the rest of us, the church as a body ... do we need a periodic rest, a kind of stock-taking? Do we need, just once in a while, to stop? But ... 'will they manage without us?' and 'will they notice we've stopped?' And who are 'they' in this context? Now you may have guessed that this conversation could lead us to a discussion of Lent. Yes indeed, the six weeks or so between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week; Lent, the season of lengthening days as spring takes hold, the sap rises and we walk thoughtfully towards the Cross – and beyond.

Lent could be seen as the church's sabbatical – a period for doing things differently; for rest and reflection; less business, and less busy-ness. In local ministry many years ago I suggested that we could mark Lent by *not* doing things:

cancel our weekly house groups, not hold the church meeting, spend some extra time at home with the family ... they thought I was joking, and when they realised that I wasn't they voted it down. Ah well. We are such busy churches; who are we when we are not being busy? The Jesus we follow in Lent is the Jesus of the wilderness and of early morning prayer, alone with God. The Jesus who wrestled hard and long over what his ministry would mean and how it should be accomplished. The Jesus who looked candidly at the 'dark side' and reconnected with his faith-roots in scripture and prayer. He fasted – now there's a challenging idea. It can mean literally going without food, and if done sensibly and purposefully that can be a powerful spiritual discipline. If done as a means of coming closer to God it's fine; done for less mature reasons it can be dodgy. It certainly shouldn't mean making yourself ill, or competing with others in the holiness stakes. Personally, I only undertake particular spiritual disciplines if it seems that God is suggesting it.

Lent, then, as a season of rest and reflection ... less beaver-ing away (unless you are a beaver), more space for wasting time with God. Do you remember the strange, beneficial side of the pandemic? With so many things forbidden we were told to go out for exercise. And it was spring! An unusually bright and sunny month and more, a warm Easter ... the joy of walking around the local area drinking in the detail of unfolding buds, new lambs, nesting birds, fresh green hedgerows. Silent walking, time to think and pray, especially to pray for those who were sick and the medical and other teams risking all to care for them. Time for gratitude. Time for wonder. Time to develop new ways of meeting, new forms of worship – and discovering that other people were out there wanting and needing what was being offered, even if the traditional stuff on offer had not engaged them in the past. Out of that silence came new ideas, fresh experiences, new ways of serving each other and of caring for the vulnerable.

And now, in this current time of anguish; of earthquakes, war, fomented hatred of others perverting the benefits of social media, as well as the personal issues that may afflict us, can we now step back – use this Lent as a time of rest, reflection and blessing, drink in again the beauty of nature, the joy of focused prayer and the stimulus of engagement with scripture? And do this not as another dreaded 'ought' but as a gift of space and time – and it's our choice as to how we make the time and carve out the space.

Soon the sabbatical will be over, new ideas and new work will flourish, 'normal service will be resumed'. Let our minister find us rested and ready for the next thing, as we walk in step together, following the Master.

Elizabeth Caswell

REBEKAH GREENBANK – A PROFILE

Like many living in this City, though I call Cambridge home, I grew up elsewhere and moved here to study. My family live near Dartford in a small town called Swanley. If I'm trying to flex, I'll say I'm from London because you can use an Oyster card at the station, but Swanley is by pretty much all metrics in Kent.

Swanley is best known for a huge Asda and its proximity to the Dartford Crossing. My parents took me to their local Church whilst I was growing up. It was a free Church with very a very small congregation, but I always appreciated that. Even at a young age it felt important to me that everyone knew each other, that faces were recognised and familiar. The style of worship was something we would probably describe as charismatic. Think of guitars, drums, hands in air etc. I credit this style of worship for forming a deep love of spirituality within me. Despite these and other aspects of this Church I am grateful for, I always felt a slight disconnect and couldn't quite put my finger on it at the time. Looking back now, I realise it's because the views of the Church were far from being queer-affirming. I remember the pastor asking the whole congregation to pray out loud mid service that same sex marriage legislation wouldn't be passed. Yikes. I don't think I had quite realised my own queerness at that point, but even so the whole experience felt pretty uncomfortable.

Aside from being a very religious child, I was also deeply committed to my studies and education. I loved geography and religion and philosophy. Music was also a keen interest of mine. I took it to AS level but my musical career was somewhat stalled by a very experimental composition that I had intended to replicate a river's journey from source to spring. The obvious genius was sadly lost on the examiner. Despite the disastrous music composition, I performed well in my exams and was placed in a group of students who my school were encouraging to apply for top Universities.

The group went on a visit to Queens' College in Cambridge. I really didn't know much about Cambridge at all other than that my aunt and uncle lived vaguely nearby. Our visit consisted of a tour of Queens, the city and attending a couple of lectures. Most of my peers were quite dismissive of the city. They said it felt too old or too small, or that there would be way too much studying and not enough time partying. I, however, was quietly enamoured with the city. My Director of Studies seemed like somebody I could work well with and Christ's College felt like a place I could call home. So, I worked probably the hardest I've ever worked in my life to get through A levels and the rigorous application process, and in October 2016 I moved to Cambridge.

I had gone to Christ's to study Theology, and I was so excited to have three years to explore my faith and try and figure out what it was that I believed in. I was lucky to find a great group of friends early on in my time at Christ's. I decided to go to Holy Trinity when I came to Cambridge. Though Anglican, it felt closest to the Church I had grown up with. I met some great friends there who I'm still in touch with today. One morning I stayed for student lunch. An older theology student I'd already met from Clare introduced me to another fresher from Clare, Tanya Kundu. We were both from London(ish); she was doing English, and we got on well. She'll feature again later so it's right that we introduce her here.



*Bekah (far left) and Tanya (far right)
with friends at the beach in Norfolk*

My first year at Cambridge felt incredibly relaxed and carefree. I had such a brilliant time and was lucky to meet some amazing people. I enjoyed my studies and having the freedom and time to ask probing questions about my faith that Christians I'd known in my childhood had been scared to ask.

Second year was a lot tougher for a couple of reasons which I now think were probably related. I've been living with anaemia for a long time. Taking regular iron tablets keeps it under control so much so that I don't even notice it. But mid-way through my second year it spiralled out of control. Studying at Cambridge is tough when you're well. It's seriously difficult when

you're ill. My focus with the little energy I had was being spent getting all the essays done! Fortunately, my friends were living in the same building as me so they would always be stopping by and we'd eat dinner together, so the anaemia never felt isolating. At the same time, though, I was starting to feel increasingly anxious as I was realising that I was attracted to women and non-binary people when all my life I had been expected to fall for men. I really was not sure how on earth to tell anyone this as I didn't know any Christians who were queer-affirming. The Churches I had attended until this point certainly weren't.

I'll spare the details but it came to a point where I knew the right thing for me to do was to start to come out and to face whatever consequences that would bring.

Coming out is a unique experience and process for everyone. I knew that I'd reached a point where I couldn't carry on, and I didn't want to carry my secret alone anymore. I started telling people close to me at the start of my third year, and by the time I graduated everybody that I wanted to know, did. Looking back, I'm so grateful that I studied Theology at the same time as I was exploring my identity because I had the time and the space to deconstruct the exclusive, dogmatic faith I had been raised with and to explore the love of spirituality that had been sown all those years ago. I graduated feeling more authentically myself than I had ever felt, with people around me who accepted all of my identities. My anaemia had also stabilised again which meant I could face adult life with regular, and sometimes abundant, energy, which was also a huge relief to me.

To explain my next step, we need to jump back a little bit to my final term at Cambridge. One day when I was at the nearby Sainsbury's store I bumped into a familiar face. It was Tanya! The combination of incredibly busy schedules meant that we had lost contact with each other so we started with the small talk question every soon-to-be graduate asks ... "What are you doing next year?" We were both hoping to stay in the city but neither of us had firm plans of what we wanted to do yet. Tanya had some tentative plans to live with a couple of other people who I also knew and asked if I wanted to join the gang - to which I said yes. It turned out that those people then found plans elsewhere, so Tanya asked if the two of us wanted to live together. Without really needing to think about, I said yes, and I'm so grateful to 21 year-old Bekah for making that call!

Tanya and I lived together for two years in a very special little two bed terrace on York Street. It wasn't perfect, there was a mould problem in the bathroom that we just couldn't beat despite our best efforts. But this house was the best possible first home I could have ever dreamt of. So much of that is due to Tanya, and all the fun we had together. Most of our time at York Street was during the pandemic but when I look back on that era I don't think of the lockdowns, I just remember all the love and laughter. We have so few photos of our time at York Street, I think because we were having so much fun in the moment we forgot to take pictures! Thankfully there is a picture of our gingerbread Cathedral featuring Santa in a baptismal pool. Tanya and I both arrived at York Street having been on very similar journeys. Both of us had recently come out as queer and we



Christmas Cathedral

were trying to figure out what faith and spirituality meant for us now.

We started going to Downing Place together. I had found information about the Church via the Inclusive Church website so I knew that this would be a safe space for me, but I had never been to a safe Church before and didn't know what they would look like. At this point the two congregations had merged and were meeting at Emmanuel while building work was taking place at St Columba's. I remember nervously walking up to the Emmanuel building grateful to be greeted by lots of rainbows on the door! I must thank you all for the incredibly warm welcome which I received that first Sunday, and have always received since then. Your friendliness, generosity and acceptance have been so incredibly healing to me. A special shout out to Helen who I met on my very first Sunday at Downing Place. You were so kind to me that first Sunday and it was such a blessing. I also joined Open Table, and went on to be a Trustee for the national Open Table Network.

My nine-to-five at this time was taken up with my first ever job which was at CBM, an international development charity supported by Downing Place [our February 2022 Special Cause]. I started as the Fundraising and Communications intern before working my way up over the course of 3 years to lead the Major Donor Programme. I look back fondly on my time at CBM. There were some really lovely, talented people working there and the cause we were championing was always inspiring. Looking back on it now, I do think getting this job was a bit of a miracle, and that's a word I use very rarely and with caution. I heard about CBM through a maintenance worker at Christ's College who happened to be a supporter. He knew that I wanted to work in fundraising and suggested I get in touch. I was looking for a job, and they were looking to hire an intern. The timings coalesced so beautifully with my graduation that I was fortunate to be able to go straight into a job once I left Christ's. The story of how Tanya secured her job at Romsey Mill is similarly fortuitous but I'll leave it for her to share the details. All this is really to say that after a difficult time navigating my faith and identity and feeling rather lost, I somehow ended up exactly where I was meant to be. Happy, loved, authentic, appreciated and known. And that I do think was something quite miraculous.

I'm running out of space, but there are two more pieces of the story that I'd like to share. The first is to say that I then made a rather drastic and dramatic move to March in the Fenlands. I bought a house there as the property market is much better than in Cambridge. It is a very lovely little cottage by the river and I very much enjoyed doing some DIY there and making it a uniquely Bekah style! I found with time though that it wasn't really home for me. The commute to and from Cambridge didn't look too bad on paper but the reality of being an hour to

an hour and a half from Cambridge soon took its toll. I was tired from the back and forth and one morning the inevitable happened - I actually wrote my car off and had to say goodbye to the dearly loved Noah the Corsa. I knew it was time to move back and I'm grateful to now be in a lovely little studio on Milton Road which is kitted out with lots of smart lights and rainbow paraphernalia.

My job has also changed recently too. I was ready for something new and applied for a job as Fundraising Manager with St Catharine's College. I still have a lot of love for Christ's but I must say I absolutely adore Catz College. It's lives up to its reputation for being the friendliest College and I love the College community I get to work with.

And that folks, takes us right up to the present day. It's been an incredibly busy life, especially in recent years, but I'm glad to be in a place now where I have a job, Church and, most importantly, people in my life who know me and love all of me. Thank you so much for reading!

Bekah Greenbank

POETRY AT DOWNING PLACE, NO. 2 – ALISON BINNEY

Editor: This series on Downing Place Poets began almost by accident, after I discovered Ruth Conolly's The Bright Land on an attic shelf last November. Two of Ruth's poems were included in the December 2022 – January 2023 Place Matters issue, and I'm now pleased that Alison agreed to my request to publish two of her poems here. Alison's prefaces, and the poems, now follow.

'Coming out for beginners' is a poem close to my heart - one of a sequence of twenty poems published in my debut poetry pamphlet, 'Other Women's Kitchens', which won the 2020 Mslexia Pamphlet Competition and was published by Seren Books in 2021.



Coming out for beginners

There is an in.
Those who've no
need to come out
don't know they're
in: they just are.
Your in is a lie
you never told.
You're in until
you come out,
however out
you think you're in
looks. Once you're
out you're out.
There are many
ways to come
out, only some
of which involve
a haircut. Out
is not always
better than in:
it's darker inside
but it's safe. In
is not always
safer than out:
it's quiet inside
but it's cramped.
Once you're out
you're still in
every time you
go somewhere
new. Once you're
out you'll wonder
how you ever
stayed in.

I write about a wide range of themes, with a particular interest in ecopoetry. Recently, I've been supporting my Dad through his diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and his subsequent move into a care home, and I've found that writing

poems about this experience has provided a valuable space for reflection. The second poem here, 'The women of 10y3', was inspired by my continual sense of awe at the amazing women who have helped to look after my Dad, both while he was still at home and now that he is living in residential care. Like me, my Dad was an English teacher, so the poem also reflects on that connection between us. The poem was Highly Commended in the 2022 Live Canon International Poetry Prize, and I was thrilled that this resulted in a professional actor giving a reading of it at the awards ceremony. A recording of this reading can be viewed here, at about 56.18:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bRF664qI_g

I am currently working on the final manuscript of my first full collection, which will be published by Seren Books in 2024.

The women of 10y3

Getting you out of hospital is the latest thing
I think I should know how to do, and don't,
but I have Donna's number on a post-it.
I'm not sure who Donna is but when she picks up
and calls me *darling* I nearly cry.
You're not her remit any more, Donna says,
but she hands me over to Hollie
who calls Amber from Respite Care.
Hollie will get you transferred this afternoon
and once you're settled, Keeley and Kayleigh
will be in touch. And now we have a plan,
and I know it will be OK because we both
trust these women with the names of girls
who sat at the backs of our classrooms years ago,
you about to retire, me just starting out,
the ones who'd warn us when a lad farted,
who cared enough to chew without us seeing,
the ones who'd lend a highlighter, and print
coursework in 14 pt with bordered hearts.
Sometimes they'd be off and we'd find out
there was a brother with Down's or a nan
who wanted the company, and it would make sense,
then, that point they'd made about Juliet and the Nurse,
when we'd picked on them one Friday afternoon,
and realised there was more going on.
They're tattooed now, often, which you enjoy,

though you'd never have brooked one on me.
It's something to chat over while they're helping
you on with your socks, the hearts filled
with children's names, the no-good men
morphed into dolphins. They make it all look
as easy as you once made poems seem, or tried to,
these impressive capable Ambers and Dawns
who've learned to read between your lines,
to breathe warmth into the hard words,
to tell I need to hear I'm doing right.
And now Hollie with the mermaid tattoo,
coming down the ward with her clipboard,
who will sign your discharge papers
with a circle over the *i*, then follow me out
to ask if you'd like a man to change your pad.

VISIT ITALY WITH THE WALDENSIAN FELLOWSHIP

The URC Waldensian Fellowship is planning a visit to the Waldensian Church in Italy, to take place in the period from 4th to 18th May, 2023.

The visit will be based in comfortable and well situated Church Centres in two areas of Italy. The programme for the visit is as follows:

A week in the historic Waldensian Valleys in the Cottian Alps, west of Turin, visiting historic sites set in dramatic alpine scenery;

and

Four days at a Waldensian Centre on the Ligurian coast, a few miles from the French border, where we will see something of the Waldensian Church's witness in wider Italian society.

We would be delighted if you were interested in joining us! It is possible to join the group for the entire visit, or for one or other of the two parts.

Total cost of the visit (excluding travel to and from Italy) will be around £750.

Part One of the visit on its own would cost £400 and Part Two would cost £350.

For more information please contact Revd. John Bremner on
ecumenical@urcscotland.org.uk

AN INSIGHT INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS WITH THE YOUNGER GROUP

On Sunday January 15th, we saw how John the Baptist told his friends to follow Jesus, and how then Jesus' friends told others to follow Jesus too using Lego figures, whilst our older children read the passage from the Bible. We talked about how we can follow Jesus in our time. We did sing a song about that we are all invited to 'come and see our Maker' using our percussion instruments before we went to make some beautiful crosses which looked like stained glass after our colouring-in efforts.

The following Sunday, the children were learning about how Jesus called his first disciples at Galilee. After miming some fishing and other actions we had a hunt for Simon, Andrew, James and John, who had been hidden round the room. The craft activity resulted in some beautiful depictions of fishing boats on paper plates, complete with fishing nets.



On 29th January our service was led by David Reynolds and the World Church and Public Issues Group. It included the passage from Matthew's Gospel Chapter 5, concerning the treatment of those in need. During Sharing Together time in the service, we had watched a video about maternity services in a Women's Christian Hospital in Pakistan, and we continued the theme in our session. [Editor – see Robert Smith's article about that hospital in this issue of *Place Matters*] We started by singing He's got the Whole World in his Hands, followed

by Jesus' Hands were Kind Hands, then we talked about the needs of newborn babies using baby dolls and accessories. As a craft activity we used black scratch boards, drawing and writing to reveal rainbow colours underneath the black, learning that good can be achieved in seemingly difficult or dark situations if people follow Jesus' teaching of helping one another.

The first Sunday of February, our JC room was dark apart from a few small lights, and we started our session with a tray of salt in which the children could make patterns. We spoke about how Jesus calls us to be the 'light' and the 'salt' of the world. Light and salt make big changes to the taste or to the darkness, and we thought about how we can make a difference to others around us. We even learned a new song: *I can make a difference, you can make a difference, we can make a difference in this world of ours*'. We then made a candle from beeswax whilst eating the popcorn that Alex so kindly had put in our room – yummy!

On the 12th of February, we learnt that Jesus said, "Don't be angry with other people! Make peace with them instead. Don't fight with others. Be friends instead. Say sorry to each other. When you make a promise, stick to yes or no." We showed off our brilliant listening and performing skills as we acted out all of the words in bold type as the sentences were read out.

Sticking to "yes" or "no" questions and answers can be hard work, as we discovered when we played a game of Guess Who, the classic guessing game. It takes effort to choose good questions to whittle down potential identities, and to not give away extra details in our answers. We found that if we managed to stick to sensible "yes"/"no" questions, we did indeed end up with a 100% success rate in guessing the correct identity of the mystery person.

Sometimes we need help to say "yes" or "no" to the right things. But we know that when we get it wrong, we can ask God for forgiveness. And we should be ready to forgive other people when they get it wrong too. We said a simple version of the Lord's Prayer to help us navigate this complicated problem. The children realised that it's often it's easier to say "yes" or "no" to the right things if we have people to help us – school friends, church friends, neighbours, family. Inspired by this, we made paper dolls and decorated them with hearts, stars and beautiful colours – to remind us that being surrounded by a loving community is a wonderful thing indeed.

MARCH SPECIAL CAUSE - THE KITE TRUST

Our Special Cause for March is the Kite Trust.

The Kite Trust aims to create an inclusive society where LGBTQ+ young people are healthy, successful and celebrated. Their work supports the wellbeing and creativity of LGBTQ+ young people in Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and surrounding areas through information, support and groups.

They build inclusive communities to tackle inequalities through consultancy, training and education. They also provide one-to-one support, group activities, and residentials for young people up to the age of 30. I have been chatting with the Kite Trust recently about how we might provide further support to young people at the Kite Trust who are interested in/have questions about faith and spirituality.

Alex Clare-Young

Donations can be made in several ways:

- Online: <https://localgiving.org/donation/thekitetrust>
- Via the Special Cause envelopes on any Sunday
- At the Retiring Collection after worship on Sunday 12 March



Commitment for Life

In appreciation of

Downing Place URC, Cambridge

for the generous donation of £ 10,800.15
towards

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Commitment for Life is the global justice programme of the United Reformed Church
working in partnership with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now.

Signed: _____

Mr Pearson

Date: _____

26.1.2023



www.urc.org.uk/cfl

PREVIOUS COLLECTIONS



LYN'S HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE

We were able to send £1461.57 to Lyn's House following our January Special Cause collections during the weekly concerts and at the Retiring Collection on the 15th January.

The concerts raised £783.96 and the Retiring Collection raised £200.90.



**DISASTERS
EMERGENCY
COMMITTEE**

We had an emergency Retiring Collection for the DEC Turkey/Syria appeal on Sunday 12 February, and sent a total of £1519, including £500 from our York Street Fund.

VISITING MY DAUGHTER IN PAKISTAN:

Christmas 2022 and New Year 2023

Editor: The Downing Place URC morning worship on 29th January 2023, led by the World Church and Public Issues Group, included a video about maternity services in a Women's Christian Hospital in Pakistan. It featured Robert Smith's daughter, Rachel, and I was pleased that he agreed to my request to tell us more about Rachel and the hospital.

Pakistan - a Hard Country. This is the title of an excellent book by Anatol Lieven, which I am currently reading, and it is not an unfair title: Pakistan has never had a stable government, and living conditions in many areas, both rural and urban, are difficult. There were devastating floods in 2010 and again in 2022. However, I have another book, written by one of Rachel's friends, Matthew Vaughan, called *Land of Beauty, Land of Pain*. Although the pain is certainly there, I want to bring out some of the beauty in this article, together with more on Rachel's work than there was time for at the World Church and Mission service led by David Reynolds on 29th January this year.



Rachel took an intensive four-year degree in Nursing Science in Hull, and then took a year out at hospitals in the Indian subcontinent, including six months in the south of Pakistan. After that, she worked as a nurse in Birmingham for some years, in Heartlands hospital, which has many Pakistani patients, before retraining as a midwife with the aim of serving abroad. After a further year studying at All Nations College in Hertfordshire, where she learned about the challenges and



In Rachel's sitting room 2012

practicalities of mission, she joined Interserve, [www.interserve.org.uk – “a global community sharing Jesus' transforming love in practical, wholistic ways among the peoples of Asia & the Arab World”], gathered sponsors and moved to Pakistan in October 2006 (the month after I retired, as it happens). Since then, she has been working at the Women's Christian Hospital (WCH) in Multan, Punjab, after 9 months of intensive language

study in Lahore. Eleanor and I visited her four times (see map above), the last time in 2015, and this year I visited on my own over Christmas and New Year.

Rachel is now one of the Senior Sisters and most of her work involves obstetrics and gynaecology. One of the other Sisters specialises in paediatrics. Rachel is usually in the antenatal clinic in the mornings, checking women who come in for outpatient appointments and often scanning them with the ultrasound scanner (as right, April 2015) – you may have seen her using the scanner on the video that David Reynolds showed. She learned on the job how to use the scanner, first watching experienced users, then doing it herself under supervision, and now she is herself very experienced. She is also on call regularly, which may involve getting up at least once in the night to deal with a problem or to help with a difficult birth; she also assists at Caesarean sections, sometimes during the night if there is an emergency.



She is now the Interserve Country Team Leader, and has responsibility for other Interserve partners in Pakistan, so has quite a bit of admin to do. Fortunately, she has managed to arrange for an admin day once a week. She is currently the only Interserve partner in Multan, but there are four other foreign staff, two Americans and two Japanese, and they all live in the ‘kothi’ – a single-storey block of rooms/apartments (see entrance below), with a dedicated kitchen (and cook) and dining room. Rachel has a flat with her own kitchen, as

do other long-term staff (her kitchen window is shown in the red-brick wall). From time to time people (known as ‘short-termers’) come out for a few months, to help and see what it would be like. The current medical



superintendent, Michele, was one of these during one of our previous visits. There are enough rooms for there to be space for visitors, so on my recent visit I stayed in one of the visitor rooms in the kothi. It has a large high-roofed sitting room (because of the summer heat), a smaller bedroom and an en suite bathroom. No heating except gas fires and small electric radiators, so it gets cold at night!

The hospital was founded in 1899, long before partition, when it was the first hospital in the region specifically for women. Now it regularly has well over 2000 births a year (3563 in 2009, an exceptional year) and currently around 2800 births. Many of the women have come to the hospital in desperation after losing several babies, and often they have their first successful pregnancy at WCH, which has an excellent reputation in the local community.

The hospital is a very safe place to be, but security outside is another matter. I have never personally seen any problems, but no foreign staff are now allowed out except in a car with an armed policeman in the car. That is very different from our first visit over New Year in 2007-08, when Eleanor and I could wander freely in the local streets without anyone looking after us.

Over the years, Rachel has been very good at taking time off to show us Multan and other parts of the country. We have visited Lahore, Karachi and other parts of the Sindh province, Islamabad and Rawalpindi and two historical sites dating back to the ancient Indus civilisations. On our 2015 visit, we even hired a jeep and went on a walking tour, with a guide, up in the hills, in the Khagan Valley north of Islamabad (see map above).

This year, we did not venture out of Multan, but I enjoyed seeing all the rituals that accompany a Pakistani wedding, which occupied a lot of my first week at WCH. It was a Christian service, held outside on a beautiful and quite warm sunny day in a wedding venue on the edge of the city, but there were also three

pre-wedding events held in evenings in marquees in the hospital compound. These were cold events, but interesting. The bride is the daughter of the Nursing Superintendent, Sister Sosan, and the first event was her ‘bridal shower’, with lots of dancing. The second involved anointing the bride with oil, and the last one, the ‘mendhi’ (Urdu for henna) involved everyone in the audience going up in pairs, anointing her hands with henna and feeding her sugary sweets with a small spoon. All the events finished with a meal, and they all required everyone to be in fancy clothes (or, for the men, to wear a suit and tie). Here are some photos. The first shows Rachel with her four colleagues Toshiko, Ruth, Michele and Takami and the former medical superintendent (second from the right), Marion; the second, Rachel in the entrance lobby of the kothi.



The wedding venue



the bride and groom, Noveen and Abeel

After an overcast and cold first week, the weather improved, the sun shone and in the afternoons I was able to sit out in the back garden and read in the sun. We were also invited out to lunch or dinner at least half a dozen times, mostly to houses on the compound. The night I arrived, we went out for dinner with the Administrator, Mr Peter Massey, and his wife (seen on right). The whole kothi went out for lunch on Christmas Eve; in the evening, the Junior Hostel girls came round, were given small presents and sang carols – in Urdu but with familiar tunes. Kothi presents were exchanged in the afternoon of Christmas Day.



Rachel also took me on a tour of the (very few) tourist spots in Multan, which we had also visited on previous visits. One of these is the Blue Pottery workshop, which makes very distinctive stonework pottery with delicate hand-painted decoration. We have several of the mugs at home, and I brought back some plates as presents for the family.

There are also two shrines to Sufi holy men and what was originally a fort but is now a museum telling the story of Multan; there is a view over the city from the roof. We first visited the two shrines, and at the larger one a passer-by offered to take our photo.



Later we went onto the roof of the old fort and took a photo of the larger shrine and of the city. The photo of the city shows it shrouded in dust (and probably pollution), and also shows red kites perching in a nearby tree. These kites are a common sight in the city and in the hospital compound.



The photos in this article are almost all from my most recent visit, but are only a tiny fraction of the many photos I have accumulated over our five visits to Rachel. Perhaps I might give a talk sometime in which I could show a wider selection that includes our earlier visits.

Robert Smith



Cambridge Bible Society Action Group invite you to a
Spring Supper and Talk

‘The Old Testament and the Environment’

Guest speaker: Dr Hilary Marlow,
Vice-Mistress, Director of Studies and Postgraduate Tutor,
Girton College
Honorary Canon, St Albans Cathedral

Friday 10th March 2023 at 6.30pm

Queen Edith Chapel, Wulfstan Way, Cambridge CB1 8QN

The talk will be live-streamed at 7.45pm No tickets required.

Supper £7.00 on the door

Please email penny.f.flynn@gmail.com to reserve a supper place
or for the live stream link.

There will be a second-hand book sale, cash only, so please come prepared.

NEWCOMERS' LUNCH

We would like to welcome anyone who has been coming to Downing Place recently (in the last year or so) and so invite you to a light lunch of vegetable soup with bread (gluten free available) on Sunday March 12th, after morning worship. It would be good to have some time to get to know you.

If you are thinking of coming for lunch, it would be helpful, but not essential, if could you let the Church Office know by phone on 01223 756635 or by email elaine@downingplaceurc.org

Jenny Jacobsberg
jenny.jacobsberg@ntlworld.com



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2023 A WOMEN LED, GLOBAL, ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

“I HAVE HEARD ABOUT YOUR FAITH”

Our sisters in Taiwan are sending us blessings with the service they have prepared for World Day of Prayer 2023. Taiwan is an island rich in natural resources and culturally diverse. The women of Taiwan share the issues faced geographically, politically and socially and also their hopes for the future. We join with them as we give thanks for the beautiful island and people of Taiwan and encourage one another in our faith just as Apostle Paul did in his letters.

World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation which enables us to hear the thoughts of women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns and prayers. An international committee is based in New York and there are national committees in each participating country. Regional conferences meet to consider the service and local groups make their plans.

Finally, **at Downing Place, Cambridge on Friday March 3rd 2023 at 10.30am** all are welcome to gather to celebrate the service prepared by the women of Taiwan.

The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 120 countries. It begins in Samoa, prayer in many languages travels throughout the world --- through Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas before finishing in American Samoa some 38 hours later.

Downing Place is hosting this service this year. For this to be warm and welcoming it will be good to have a number of people to welcome and help with a cup of coffee after the service.

Please be in touch with Deborah McVey 01223 410 332 if you would like to help or take part in the liturgy which the women in Taiwan have created. Look on the WDP website www.wwdp.org.uk to see some of the lovely artwork and background to the service as it would be good to make a creative focus for the service. All ideas welcome.



*A programme of
French and English
Choral Music
sung by aLUMNI
conducted by Stephen Armstrong*

*Downing Place Church
CB32 3EL
opposite John Lewis*

*Saturday 11th March
at 7.30pm*

Tickets £10.00 ON THE DOOR or Eventbrite below

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/concert-of-french-and-english-choral-music-tickets-533520683727>

DIARY

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Wed	01-Mar-23	Dementia Compass Exercise Group	11:00am	Gibson Hall & Emmanuel Rm
Wed	01-Mar-23	Lunchtime Concert - Ivan Hovorun (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	02-Mar-23	Midweek Worship led by Revd John Proctor	11:00am	Church
Thu	02-Mar-23	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Fri	03-Mar-23	Women's World Day of Prayer	10:30am	Church
Sun	05-Mar-23	No Choir Rehearsal - Cambridge Half-Marathon		
Sun	05-Mar-23	Sunday Worship with Communion led by the Revd Dr David Cornick	11:00am	Church
Sun	05-Mar-23	Open Table Social Gathering - Bring & Share Meal	7:00pm	The Hub
Mon	06-Mar-23	Officers' Meeting	4:00pm	
Tue	07-Mar-23	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St. Athanasios Church
Wed	08-Mar-23	Dementia Compass Exercise Group	11:00am	Gibson Hall & Emmanuel Rm
Wed	08-Mar-23	Lunchtime Concert - Jonathan Lee (organ)	1:00pm	Church
Wed	08-Mar-23	Property Group Meeting	7:00pm	Zoom
Thu	09-Mar-23	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Professor David Thompson	11:00am	Church
Thu	09-Mar-23	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	09-Mar-23	Cambridge Early Music - Linarol Consort with James Gilchrist	7:30pm	Church
Sat	11-Mar-23	aLUMNI Concert (see p.26)	7:30pm	Church
Sat	11-Mar-23	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	12-Mar-23	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Downing Place URC
Sun	12-Mar-23	Sunday Worship led by Revd Dr Robert Pope with a retiring collection for the Kite Trust	11:00am	Church
Sun	12-Mar-23	Newcomers' Lunch (see p.24)	12:30pm	Gibson Hall
Mon	13-Mar-23	REMINDER - Book into the Gibson Lunch by 9am today		
Mon	13-Mar-23	Lent House Group	2:30pm	Rooms 1 and 2
Tue	14-Mar-23	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St. Athanasios Church
Tue	14-Mar-23	Lent House Group	7.30pm	Zoom
Wed	15-Mar-23	REMINDER - Last date to submit items for April's 'Place Matters'		
Wed	15-Mar-23	Dementia Compass Exercise Group	11:00am	Gibson Hall & Emmanuel Rm
Wed	15-Mar-23	Lunchtime Concert - Cambridge Chamber Ensemble	1:00pm	Church
Thu	16-Mar-23	Elders Meeting	7:30pm	Zoom
Thu	16-Mar-23	Gibson Lunch	12:30pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	16-Mar-23	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	16-Mar-23	Midweek Worship led by Alan Rickard	6:00pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sat	18-Mar-23	Easter Synod Meeting		Stowmarket URC
Sun	19-Mar-23	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Sun	19-Mar-23	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Diane Kenaston	11:00am	Church
Sun	19-Mar-23	Open Table Communion Service	7:00pm	Church
Mon	20-Mar-23	Lent House Group	2:30pm	Rooms 1 and 2
Tue	21-Mar-23	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St. Athanasios Church
Tue	14-Mar-23	Lent House Group	7:30pm	Zoom
Wed	22-Mar-23	Dementia Compass Exercise Group	11:00am	Gibson Hall & Emmanuel Rm
Wed	22-Mar-23	Lunchtime Concert - Darrell Smith (bass) & Anne Applin (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	23-Mar-23	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	23-Mar-23	Midweek Worship with Communion led by the Revd Alex Clare-Young	1:00pm	Church
Sat	25-Mar-23	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	26-Mar-23	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	26-Mar-23	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Lance Stone	11:00am	Church
Sun	26-Mar-23	Church Meeting	12:30pm	Church
Sun	26-Mar-23	Solidarity Scripture Meal - Saying Sex	7:00pm	Gibson Hall
Mon	27-Mar-23	Lent House Groups	2:30pm	Rooms 1 and 2
Tue	28-Mar-23	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St. Athanasios Church
Tue	28-Mar-23	Lent House Group	7:30pm	Zoom
Wed	29-Mar-23	Dementia Compass Exercise Group	11:00am	Gibson Hall & Emmanuel Rm

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Wed	29-Mar-23	Lunchtime Concert - The Himley Duo	1:00pm	Church
Thu	30-Mar-23	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	30-Mar-23	Midweek Worship led by Jane Bower	11:00am	Church
Sat	01-Apr-23	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	02-Apr-23	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	02-Apr-23	Palm Sunday Worship with Communion led by Revd Chris Baker	11:00am	Church
Sun	02-Apr-23	Drop In Spaces: Sensory Space for Neurodiversity	2:00pm	Downing Place URC
Sun	02-Apr-23	Open Table Social Gathering	7:00pm	The Hub

MEMBERS PREACHING ELSEWHERE

5 March	Janet Bottoms Liz Caswell Janet Tollington	Fowlmere Holy Trinity, Bottisham Melbourn
10 March (Fri)	Deborah McVey	Primrose Croft Care Home (11am) All welcome to join Deborah for this!
12 March	Liz Caswell Deborah McVey Janet Tollington	Stetchworth & Cheveley Trinity, Burwell Fulbourn (am)
19 March	Chris Baker Penny Flynn Janet Tollington	Littleport Methodist Bassingbourn Stetchworth & Cheveley
26 March	Janet Bottoms Liz Caswell Deborah McVey Janet Tollington	Melbourn Trinity Church, Burwell St Luke's, Cambridge Salisbury

LECTIONARY FOR MARCH 2023

These are the readings suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary, as in ROOTS, the material used by our Children's Ministry team. They may be altered if that is the preacher's wish.

5 March Lent 2

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 121

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

John 3:1-17

12 March Lent 3

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:5-42

19 March Lent 4

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

26 March Lent 5

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

2 April Palm Sunday

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:1-2.19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66 OR

Matthew 27:11-54



LUNCHTIME CONCERTS - WEDNESDAYS AT 1PM

Free Lunchtime Concerts with a retiring collection for our monthly Special Cause. Booking is not necessary. Come and bring friends!

1 March	Ivan Hovorun (piano)
8 March	Jonathan Lee (organ)
15 March	Cambridge Chamber Ensemble
22 March	Darrell Smith (bass) and Anne Applin (piano)
29 March	The Himley Duo

<https://downingplaceurc.org/lunchtime-concerts/>

MAGAZINE EDITOR: Tim Rowland

ITEMS FOR MAGAZINE:

Please send items to both Tim Rowland and Ann Auger
(ann@downingplaceurc.org)

WEB EDITOR: Jess Uden

Please send all items to be included in the April edition to both Tim and Ann by the cut off date of **Wednesday 15 March**.

The April edition will be available from **Sunday 26 March**.