

THE MESSENGER

SURVEYING THE WONDROUS CROSS

Christians believe that the death of Jesus, rather than his life, teaching, miracles, or even his resurrection, is at the heart of Christianity. Ultimately he came to die and give his life for the human race, in order to set us free from death's power. The foolishness of the cross, wrote Paul, is wiser than human wisdom. That is why the cross is the universal symbol of the Christian faith.



Latin cross on St Michael's vestry roof

Many of us are travellers these days, thinking nothing of crossing and re-crossing the world in a spirit of enquiry and adventure as well as in pursuit of the best beach or warmest sun. Have you too been struck by the many forms the cross takes in different places? Nobody knows how many variations there are in representations of the cross, but one eminent member of St Michael's congregation drew seven different basic shapes on his morning service sheet in under thirty seconds! Perhaps we can simplify this – George Willard Benson in his fascinating book "The Cross – its History and Symbolism" suggested there are only three or

four fundamental cross shapes or forms, the most familiar being the Latin, the Greek and the Tau.

There is no historical record of when the cross came into common Christian use; in fact for the first two or three hundred years after Christ's death the sign of the fish – (the symbol of baptism) – was the immediately recognisable emblem for groups of early Christians.

In the West we are most familiar with the Latin cross; often in its most simple form, but also often highly decorated; perhaps embellished with carving and jewels.

There are many variations; for instance the beautiful Celtic crosses with the ring round the arms – was that for structural strength or to demonstrate the all encompassing word of God. Personally, I love the pilgrims cross with a sharpened end to push into the ground so it could be planted to watch over the sleeping pilgrim on his long journey.



Greek cross on an embroidered hassock at St Michael's

Then of course there is the Greek cross most commonly found in the Eastern Church with all four arms the same length and form. The St John's or Maltese cross is well known in the West.



It was when in the Middle East I saw a Tau cross (which is a simple T shape with no upper arm), which first sent me on a quest to explore the character and shape of crosses. Some say that the Tau originated from the Egyptian Ankh, others that Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and this has significance as it represents the fulfilment of the revealed word of God.

This is just a flavour. When you are in or near a church, of any Christian denomination anywhere in the world – look outside and inside – attend a service – observe the symbol of hope and resurrection that we all have in common and marvel; be it in a processional, on a rood screen, in a painting or a stained glass window, on the spire of a great cathedral, a memorial, a grave stone – wherever – and be reminded of our shared Christian belief, symbolised by the diverse and fascinating depictions of the cross.
by Jane Bendall

ON THE GRAPEVINE

Let the Organ Thunder



David Hawkett our organist at St Michael's has played the organ ever since he was a schoolboy.

He is a typical Blackheath resident living in the local community for many years, but still travels the world with an open and enquiring mind. He loves walking and has recently discovered the joys of flotilla sailing.

He works for Transport for London where he does computer modelling of impacts of transport policy on traffic congestion. His career in transport has taken him to work in 15 different countries over the years including a fascinating spell in Albania and another in Hanoi.

Music is more than a hobby and he finds it thrilling to play at special celebration services. One of his great joys is the range of sounds that an organ like St Michael's can produce – "however loud they sing I can play louder!" Whenever a quiet reflective mood is needed he can gently rein the instrument in.

David has played mighty organs with 5 manuals (keyboards), but he says that we have a fine organ in church with its 3 manuals and the usual 30 notes in the pedals. Some of the pipe work probably dates back to 1721 although the main organ was built around 1834.

So next time you hear the organ thunder when you are at a service – look up and think of David.

ST MICHAEL'S LIMBERS UP!

ST NICK'S TROUNCE

ALL ANGEL'S LADIES AT DARTS

By John Bartram

On a cold and blustery January evening, the church hall rang out with squeals of delight as 30 ladies from St Nicholas and St Michael's battled it out on the darts board.

A small handful of gentlemen supporters stood discreetly and safely at the back. But when the match started many of the players were clearly better than one lady who had admitted: "If it just hits the board I'll be happy."

Their darts had plastic flights instead of feathers, but still flew through the air. Some did land on the floor and a few smacked into the cork surrounds of the boards. The ladies, including several beginners, whooped with delight when they hit their target. Playing in pairs, each team had to start on 501 and end with a double to win the game.

Both vicar's wives played, as the vicars were said to be at home looking after the kids - it was clearly a night of role reversals; the soft drinks and wine flowed and the large cold buffet disappeared steadily. The men's teams had bought in a curry for their match, but the ladies were naturally better prepared on the food front.



St Nicholas edged ahead, then St Michael's pulled back to be only one game behind at 5 to 4, but the home team put in a strong finishing burst to win by 9 games to 5. But the result was really only secondary. The decibels level on a pleasure meter would have registered something close to 100%.

EASTER FUN AND SPORTS

On Easter morning, after the all age service, there will be fun and games, for all age participants in the church garden. There will be of course, our traditional Easter egg hunt, but sadly only for the children.



PING PONG DIPLOMACY FAILS ST MICHAEL'S

Ping pong diplomacy clearly failed St Michael's Wonders on a cold March night, as they were thrashed 20 games to 9 at home on the table tennis table by the St Nicholas' Allstars.

The Allstars have no table of their own, before the match the Wonders did the Christian thing and allowed their opponents to practice on the table in St Michael's church hall.

Doubles matches were played by men and women and both vicars took part amid much fun and laughter, food and wine. After their earlier defeat by St Nick's at darts, the Wonders will now have to wait until the cricket season starts to live up to their name.

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THE BELL RINGERS OF ST. MICHAEL'S

If you live near St Michael's then you may have heard our bells recently. We have a very enthusiastic team of about nine bell ringers at St Michael's, ranging in age from 5 to 12 years old. Here are some of their thoughts about bell ringing:

"I like ringing the bells because it is fun and I can stand on a step so the rope doesn't lift me up, and I like ringing the heavy bell.

We ring the bells every Sunday before the Service starts in the morning. I have never rung Church bells before except in 2010 on 3rd January.

We have two bells and they make a "Ding Dong" sound and I ring the "Dong" bell.

I think ringing the bells matters because it reminds people who live nearby to get to Church on time, and the sound echoes over Blackheath.

"My Dad used to ring Church bells and my Granddad and my Aunt still ring the bells at their church".

Ben Croucher, aged (nearly) 8

"It's great ringing the bells because they lift you up in the air and they sound nice"

Isaac Croucher, aged 6



Sarah and her bell ringing team

"I like ringing the bells because they make a huge noise, and you go up in the air sometimes, and because if you ring Ding!, then straight after Ding! you get Dong!, it makes Ding! Dong!"

Ethan Christie, aged 5

"I like ringing bells at St Michael's. It is hard work because the bells are uper-super heavy. I like ringing the light bell because it is easier to ring and there is more space to ring it"

Billy Watkins, aged 10

Jo Watkins, aged over 12, commented:

"I like to hear the bells on Sunday because I like the sound of bells - we don't have enough bells in this country. It's a nice sound. It's a nice Sunday morning thing."



Our bell ringing team hopes you enjoy our bells!

by Sarah Burnard and friends

HAPPY CHILD INTERNATIONAL



Happy Child International is a charity which through faith has transformed lives of street children and their families who suffer from abandonment, neglect, violence and oppression in Brazil's largest cities. Through their work they combat these injustices, giving hope for the future and bringing children and their families long term solutions.

On Friday 23rd April Sarah de Carvalho, founder of Happy Child International, will talk about her faith, her call to mission and her experiences of working among Brazilian street kids. 10.30 am at St Michael's Church – all welcome. Tea and coffee will be served from 10.00 am and there will be helpers to look after small children at the back of church during the talk.

...and if you are inspired by Sarah's talk or just want to learn more about the Christian faith, whether or not you call yourself a Christian, a course SIMPLY CHRISTIANITY can be for you.

by Carolyn Watkins

SIMPLY CHRISTIANITY

– a 5-session course explaining the basis of the Christian faith simply and clearly, in friendly and informal surroundings. The Friday Morning Mum's bible study group will be running this course instead of their usual meeting, at 10.00-11.00 a.m. on Friday mornings, during the first half of the summer term starting on 30th April.

Tea and coffee served from 9.45 a.m. and there will be helpers to look after small children. Please call Carolyn Watkins on 020 8856 4656 for more information.

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SERVICES IN APRIL AND MAY

St Michael's is a Church of England Church, and our main morning service is at 10.30 am.

The first Sunday of the month is a shorter all age service, and on the other Sundays children leave for Sunday school after about 15 minutes. There is a crèche for under 3's. On the second and fourth Sunday of the month the service includes communion.

The evening service at 6.30pm is quieter and more reflective, with communion on the first and third Sundays of the month.

The fourth Sunday of each month there is a Book of Common Prayer Communion at 9am.

Good Friday 10.30am

Service of Witness at Whitfield Mount on the Heath (Procession leaves St Michael's at 10am)

Good Friday 2pm

One Hour Meditation at St Michael's

Easter Eve 8pm

A traditional service celebrating the resurrection with a candlelit communion service which begins in the church garden with a bonfire symbolising the new light of the Risen Christ as Easter dawns. Service followed by refreshments.

Easter Sunday 10.30am

All Age Communion Service

WYCHCROFT WEEKEND

There will be an away weekend from 7-9th May at Wychcroft which is a Diocesan country house near Godstone in Surrey. Olive and Gordon Kuhrt will be leading sessions on PARENTING.

There is room for 36 people and if you are interested, please contact the Parish Office.

11 O'CLOCK CLUB

Meets on the first Wednesday of each month and is open to all, churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike. We begin with coffee and biscuits in our halls at 11 am and then listen to a talk by an invited speaker. These are the talks and activities that are planned for the next three months:

7 April "The Lost Shop-scape of Victorian Greenwich", a talk by Anthony Cross.

5 May Sylvia Bird tells us how to arrange the new Spring flowers.

Each event begins with coffee and is followed by a light lunch in the church halls and for all this we charge a very modest £3.50.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK

May 9th to 15th

HOLIDAY CLUB

A date for your diary in July Thursday 29th - Saturday 31st inclusive. More details in the next Messenger.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

February - Thomas and Dorothy Jones

ASK SEEK KNOCK

Why do we pray together? Because Jesus told us to. What do we expect when we pray together? Jesus says "ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you". Because prayer works.

The next prayer meeting will be on Thursday 8th April at 8.15 - 9.30 p.m. in the Church Hall and then on Thursday 6th May at the same time - you are welcome.

Please pray for Christians in Morocco where foreign Christians have recently been expelled without explanation and in particular for the family that St Michael's supports in their work with the vulnerable.

If you have any specific requests for prayer or would like someone to listen and pray with you, please do contact Sandy Christie, our Vicar on 020 8852 5287. All calls will be treated in the strictest confidence.

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St Michael's: making time for the things that matter

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