

# St Thomas Parish Messenger

## *Spring 2022*



## **Editorial**

*The death of Queen Elizabeth II, and Christmas looming, are two events which seem to have put people into a reflective mood. This Messenger begins with a thought-provoking insight into the life and times, and Christian dedication, of Queen Elizabeth. That is followed by reminiscences of Christmas spent in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Then comes a very personal account of the life spent at Windsor with the young Royals of the day. Christmas Island and it's not so glorious history makes up our fourth contribution. A brief poem on "Retirement", then some pictures of our very successful Animal Sunday. Have a good read!*

## **Queen Elizabeth II**

*By Revd Dr Noel Cox*

Elizabeth was a gift from God to nation, Commonwealth, and indeed the global community, a beacon of humility, grace, astuteness, good humour, generosity, and deep faith – God’s woman, God’s follower, God’s Queen.

Since her death, our screens and papers have been filled with eulogies from family and friends, from former Prime Ministers, Commonwealth leaders, world leaders, religious leaders from every major faith, royal correspondents, celebrities, and former staff.

We have heard of her extraordinary dedication to duty, of her dignity, of her diligence, of her capacity to change with the times, of her astute leadership of the Royal Family, of her curiosity and intelligence, and her ability to make almost anyone feel comfortable and, more importantly, valued.

We have heard of her contribution to international relations, to trade deals, to tourism, to the Commonwealth, to public morale.

We have heard of her emotional resilience as she dealt with bereavement, and fires, and the divorces of three of her children, and many a scandal along the way.

We have heard of her capacity to forgive, not just to shake the hands of people responsible for killing her soldiers and her husband’s uncle and mentor Lord Mountbatten, but to do so with great grace and a warm smile, like someone who rejoices in peace and reconciliation. But there hasn’t been much about what made her the woman she was. There’s been little attempt in the mainstream media to look at her and her life through the lens of what she said made the difference to her – her faith in Christ.

Indeed, about that, she was crystal clear, and repeatedly so. In her 2014 Christmas broadcast she put it this way:

*‘For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ’s example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.’*

Brilliantly, in an age that is on the one hand increasingly secular, and on the other fraught by religious conflicts, her approach was winsomely inclusive. She pointed to Jesus and how he expanded her capacity to love people with different beliefs. Her approach was testimonial, not argumentative. She told the world the inspiration that

Jesus had been in her own life and left the world to decide if they were interested in being inspired themselves:

*‘I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life. Countless millions of people around the world continue to celebrate his birthday at Christmas, inspired by his teaching. He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served. We can surely be grateful that, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, so many of us are able to draw inspiration from his life and message, and to find in him a source of strength and courage.’*

More broadly, we can see the influence of Christ on her understanding of her job and how she did it. At the heart of this is the extraordinary impact of one particular moment in the Coronation. It was not when the solid gold St Edward’s Crown was laid on her head and she officially became Queen, but the moment that was not televised because it was deemed to be too holy for mass broadcast. It was the moment when, stripped of all her flowing robes, she knelt in a simple white dress and was anointed with holy oil. It was the moment when she dedicated herself to God to serve him by serving her people.

At one level, her Queenship was an accident of birth, an inevitable consequence of her uncle’s abdication, but she saw it as God’s will, as God’s calling, and therefore as something that she would need his help to do. And it was a calling she embraced. Royal biographer, William Shawcross, wrote, ‘She found, like her mother before her... an almost sacrificial quality at the heart of the service.’

Of course, sacrifice is at the heart of the gospel – Jesus giving his life for ours. And it is at the heart of our own discipleship – taking up our cross daily to follow him. But sacrifice is intertwined with service. We no longer live for ourselves but for God and others. And that is what characterised Elizabeth’s approach not only to her own work, but to her understanding of citizenship. So, for example, at Christmas 2012 she said:

*‘This is the time of the year when we remember that God sent his only Son “to serve, not to be served.” He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ.’*

We are meant to be there for one another. Indeed, her broadcasts – Christmas and occasional – tended to highlight the particular qualities she valued – resilience, kindness, neighbourliness.

Intrinsic to that understanding of ‘fellow-feeling’ was her understanding of what it meant to be a good neighbour. Indeed, time and again, in her Christmas addresses, she referred to the parable of the Good Samaritan, summoning us to serve our neighbours and our countries in whatever role we found ourselves. Indeed, in 1980 she offered a comprehensive picture of neighbourly citizenship that is unmatched in contemporary public rhetoric. That address highlighted unselfish service as the key to citizenship ... and she cited examples from every sphere. From health care to the armed forces, from central government to voluntary organisations, from hospital staff to neighbours caring for neighbours in need. And then she closed that section of her address with these words:

*‘To all of you on this Christmas Day, whatever your conditions of work and life, easy or difficult; whether you feel that you are achieving something or whether you feel frustrated; I want to say a word of thanks.*

*‘And I include all those who don’t realise that they deserve thanks and are content that what they do is unseen and unrewarded. The very act of living a decent and upright life is in itself a positive factor in maintaining civilised standards.’*

It is as if the Queen had internalised the truth of Colossians 3:17. Yes, we can... ‘do whatever we do for God.’

How refreshing to find a global leader who recognised so clearly the value and beauty of a life lived kindly.

Indeed, Queen Elizabeth’s understanding of her role was, it seems, similarly shaped by a robust biblical framework. So back in 1957 she said:

*‘I cannot lead you into battle, I do not give you laws or administer justice but I can do something else. I can give you my heart and my devotion to these old islands and to all the people of our brotherhood of nations. I believe in our qualities and in our strength. I believe that together we can set an example to the world which will encourage upright people everywhere...’*

This is a remarkable vision. It is not a vision of military superiority, economic dominance, ideological hegemony, creative brilliance, or sporting excellence but of moral example, a vision that would not inspire envy or fear but encourage generosity, justice, kindness, ‘uprightness’. It is similar to God’s original hope for the people of Israel in the Bible, that they would be ‘a light to the nations’.

We see a similarly robust vision in her commitment to the development of the Commonwealth, arguably one of her greatest achievements. When she became Queen, it consisted of eight nations, primarily ruled by white men. Today, it consists of 54 nations and territories. The development of the Commonwealth can be ascribed to one thing, the determination, the warmth, and relational skills of the Queen. When she took the throne, she said:

*'The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace. To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races I shall give myself heart and soul every day of my life.'*

It was an idea that comes straight out of the biblical promise of a day when the tanks will be turned into tractors, or as Isaiah 2:4 puts it, 'swords into plough-shares'. A day when nation will not fight against nation, when peace will reign across the globe. Queen Elizabeth knew that it would only be fully realised when Christ returned and creation is renewed but that did not stop her working to create a context in which understanding could grow, cooperation flourish, and inequalities be addressed. And if all that were not enough, she seemed to enjoy life – riding and horses and dogs and family and nice clothes and mimicking people and the occasional gin before lunch. But even here in the way she chose to spend her leisure time we saw her Christian devotion expressing itself. She didn't *have* to invite a different cleric every weekend of her six-week Balmoral holiday to spend time with her family but she did. She didn't *have* to drive herself to the Sunday service in the church on the Sandringham estate when she was there but she often did. She didn't have to find out the names of the Sunday School prize winners and choose and present their prizes but she did.

There's certainly no doubt about the identity of the King our Queen served. Nor is there any doubt that the prayer that her people have so often prayed (perhaps without realising that it was a prayer) was answered. God saved our Queen. Our Queen *was* 'gracious' and 'noble' and 'victorious' in the things that really matter – hope and faith in Christ, love of God and of the people she'd been empowered to serve.

Indeed, there can be few greater indications of God's mercy and grace to our nation, despite our idolatrous turning away from him, than to have given us a Queen who loved us so faithfully and pointed us to him so clearly.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the gift of his servant Elizabeth.

And may God grace our King in his reign as he graced his mothers in hers.



## Our first Christmas in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*By Leith Hamilton*



I remember thinking about September or October time that I should be making a Christmas pudding. Old habits die hard. We had several Christmases without family, in London where we thoroughly enjoyed the snow and wintery scenes. But, back to the pudding!

I always had Shreddo (a commercially packed suet) fixed firmly in my mind and in the recipe. So, I set off to the souk (a wee roadside shack) which sold beef. The carcass hung in the shop and I indicated that I wanted the fat sitting firmly around the kidneys. This comes with heaps of fibres, which all had to be extracted from fat. Done at home, much to the fascination of our maid, Terre. Anyway, a pudding was made, and hung in the kitchen until Christmas Day. It was delicious and fibre free!

Christmas Day in Ethiopia is not celebrated until January 7, and called Genna in Russian, Greek, Eritrean and Serbian Orthodox churches. Ethiopians take 43 days for Christmas. Genna is 12 days before Timkat on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January and is the orthodox Christian occasion to mark the baptism of Jesus Christ in the River Jordan.

However, we stuck with December 25 and went to St Matthews international church in Addis Ababa. Most services were in English. The church was established in 1954 after Emperor Haile Selassie donated a piece of land for the purpose.

Ethiopian Christianity, the largest religion in the country, dates back to the fourth century AD.

Being in a foreign country is a good time to gather with other foreigners and this we did, spending the day with friends, also at a loose end and especially good when family are visiting. The Coptic calendar is seven years behind the rest of the world.

*Isaiah 43:3 For I am the Lord, thy God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour. I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Sebastian for thee.*



## **My Grandfather, Albert**

*By Janet Anderson*

It's funny when things happen, which jog your memory. The passing of Queen Elizabeth II brought memories flooding back, of my Grandfather Albert.

My family, on my father's side, had close association with the Royal Family over many decades. My Grandfather, Albert, was a guardsman in the second regiment of the Household Division, the Coldstream Guards. He enlisted as a nineteen-year-old in 1897. Britain was facing economic problems, unemployment was high, so many enlisted in the Navy and the Army.

Albert saw no future in the family business as a wheelwright and coachbuilder, as the new-fangled motor car seemed a threat to the traditional transport trade. He was attested, and the recruiting officer saw a tall (over six foot) man suitable for the Guards. He worked hard, and was found to be good shot and was soon promoted.

Queen Victoria died in 1901, but the war in South Africa raged on. Soldiers were needed, and Albert spent four years in South Africa and grew to love the country and developed an understanding of the people – all of the people.

Returning home, the troops hoped for peace, and military life settled into a rhythm of parades and garrison duties at Windsor, and later at the Tower in London. Albert renewed his friendship with Margaret, the daughter of a captain in the Royal Engineers. It was a love match. They were married in the Garrison Chapel at Aldershot, and immediately (well, almost!) produced a family of five; four boys and one daughter. Albert adored children and his own were a joy to him. Margaret was the discipline, Albert the fun.

While in Windsor, the NCO's had a great deal of time spent with the junior Royals – Princes David, Albert, Henry, George, and Princess Mary. The royal children enjoyed "being soldiers", and reveled in the company of the sergeants, who put them through drills. My grandfather Albert's children were accustomed to playing with the young royals, whose characters became clear as they grew older.

Albert and a skilled friend made the royal children miniature rifles based on the .303 used in South Africa, and the children became very proficient watching the real soldiers and picking up on any deficiencies.

The First World War took Albert away again, and his wife and children had to find a new home. Families of absent soldiers were not allowed to live in married quarters, and the Windsor landlords hiked rental prices beyond the scope of soldiers' wives to pay. This was too much for Margaret, who put on her best hat and went to the Lord

Mayor of Windsor's Parlour to sort it out. She succeeded, and overnight the problem was solved. Soldiers on the Western Front did not need to know their families were homeless. Peter, my father, was born in the midst of this farce.

Albert survived WWI and came home bearing a military medal for valour, modest about the circumstances which led to its being awarded. It was seventy years before those circumstances became known to the family.

During WWII Albert marshalled his family and undertook fire watching and other such voluntary work. He also read books to his grandchildren and left an indelible mark on their lives.

To King, Queen, family and country he truly was "*Nulli Secundus*" – second to none, and his spirit is still alive and well.

# Christmas Island

*By Ron Hamilton*



There are two Christmas Islands; one in the Pacific and one in the Indian Ocean. I am talking about the latter. The Island was the destination of my first overseas travel.

In those days the Islands were reached from three airports: Singapore, KL and Perth. Flights were every ten days and each departure point was used in turn. I departed from Singapore. Had departure been from Perth, I would have landed in Cocos enroute. We were in a B373 and I was not happy with the landing at Christmas Island – it was such a bump I thought we had crashed.

Christmas Island is halfway to South Africa and about 200 miles south of Krakatoa. It was named by Captain William Mynos, when he sighted the Island on Christmas Day, 1643.

New Zealand's interest stems from the large deposit of rock phosphate. Much of it spread over the farmlands of Australia and New Zealand in the form of Superphosphate. Much of the rock was excavated using powerful diggers, placed on small railway wagons, and transported to shoreside crushers before being loaded onto ships. As the Island is the top of a largely submerged mountain top, ships were able to berth almost alongside the land.

I was travelling with John, a senior member of New Zealand's Ministry of Agriculture (as was). Our objective was to develop the Government's position on installing oil-fired calcifiers for converting low grade rock to A-grade rock. It was an ill-timed proposal as the world was then facing the first oil shock. Also, although we did not know it then, a man named Bob Hawke was working to change the status of the workers on the Island. The people on the Island were a cosmopolitan lot. The Island was run by a Commission owned by the British Phosphate Commission. Managers were mainly British or Australian. The workers were mainly Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese. There was an Australian High Commissioner. We attended the wedding celebration of his daughter the night we arrived. As we stood on the sweeping lawn, drinking bubbles and watching the sun set behind the palm trees, the Island seemed like a paradise.

We were to spend ten days as the guests of the Commission. Because of its isolation, we were guests for dinner every night! Better, we were allocated a house, with a fridge topped up with beer every day. Try as we did, we never quite emptied it.

Christmas Island was the southern-most point of the Japanese invasion during the war. Their occupation bequeathed large areas of Acacia trees, initially planted to camouflage machine gun nests. Much of the Island's cover was huge trees, which were felled to provide access to the phosphate rock. These provided their own challenge; several were the nesting places of the Abbott's Booby - in fact, the only known nesting place for this large migratory bird. By the time of our visit, the nests were protected and miners had to excavate around occupied trees until the chicks left their nests. Parent birds had their own hassles - when they returned to nests to feed their young, Frigatebirds attacked them to make them drop their food for the chicks.

Excavated areas were set between pinnacles of unsuitable rock – leaving a stark “moonscape” appearance. The Commission was engaged in developing nurseries of replacement plants.

Besides the Booby bird, crabs were another wildlife feature of the Island. King crabs are famous, with little red crabs even more so. At breeding time, the Island is carpeted with these little fellows making their way to the sea for breeding. Driving, it is impossible to avoid committing major slaughter. One day, several of us set off in a barge to try fishing. I was wise enough to take anti-seasick pills. The flat-bottomed

barge bounced all over the ocean.

Our visit was for phosphate rock purposes. The combination of the oil price and Hawke's "mainland wages for the rank and file" made the phosphate operation uneconomic and it closed. Today, the Island is used to hold criminals and Australian overstayers. A bit sad.

## On Retirement

Teach me to slow my pace, to leave behind  
The Frantic bustle. Help me to unwind.

Past history now, the need to toil and strive,  
But grant, Lord, that I do not lose the drive  
For self-improvement. Help me still to find  
Some useful way to exercise my mind.

Give me some heights to scale,  
New Skills to learn,  
New Friends to make,  
Fresh causes for concern.

Grant that I may enjoy the sweet delights  
Of grandchildren, without the sleepless nights.  
Help me help where needed, otherwise  
Let me resist the temptation to advise.

Teach me to find the time, Lord, to be still,  
But let me not have too much time to kill,  
And if old age and I come face to face,  
Help me to greet it kindly, with good grace.

*(c) Mavis Clark.*

*Supplied by Joan Osborne, from material collected by Steven Osborne*



## Animal Sunday

Animal Sunday was held on 9 October. Approximately 14 animals attended, and behaved impeccably, as did their owners! The cats were a little shy, but I think all but two or three of the dogs got their picture taken. Thanks to Katherine McIntyre QSM for taking and supplying these pictures, and also the picture on the front cover.



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