



*St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne*

# *AVE*

*Patronal Festival Edition August 2024*



## *Sancta Maria*

*detail of stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral  
(see last page for photograph attribution to Fr Lawrence Lew OP)*

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— **In this Edition of AVE** —  
***Patronal Festival 2024***

*The saint's day of St Mary, our patron saint, falls on the fifteenth of August. This edition of AVE is timed to appear around our Patronal Festival.*

*As usual there are articles written by and large by members and friends of our parish, and which reflect some of their interests, knowledge and activities.*

From time to time AVE has items about churches around the world which are connected to St Mary in some way. We have a couple of those, one local in Kensington, and one at our antipodes.

Traditions of other churches are always of interest. We hear in the Kensington article of a Coptic presence in a church that once was Anglican, and in another article of eastern Orthodox theology and practices around the Eucharist.

Our St Mary's has a long history. Soon after our one hundred and fiftieth anniversary almost twenty years ago, a substantial book on its history was written by distinguished historian John Rickard, a devoted and thoughtful parishioner. Sadly John has died and his funeral will have taken place just days before this AVE appears. Another historian parishioner, and good friend, has written touchingly in this edition about John and of our loss.

St Mary's people are concerned, sometimes in quiet ways, about our world and its peoples. Our Climate Action Group has decided that a time for stronger and visible action is urgent. We hear about what they are doing and importantly we hear about imminent events, including cooperation with other parishes and other faiths.

A recent splendid concert in the church from a visiting Danish choir is evoked by a member of our own choir..

And two parishioners have been on a fascinating trip in Queensland viewing rare bird-life.

Our thanks to all contributors

*David Keuneman*

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*Sheila is a member of the congregation at St Mary's North Melbourne, who has lived in Kensington for more than fifty years.*

## **Changing Churches in Kensington**

Sheila Byard

If you come up Macaulay Road, Kensington on your way to Footscray, whether on the 402 bus, or by car or bicycle, at the traffic lights you will see a



red brick church in front of you, with a row of date palms along Kensington Road, a new suite of buildings on the balance of the church property at 1-11 Epsom Road. For nearly fifty years this has been home to the *St Virgin Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*. But once this was home to the *Holy*

*Trinity Kensington Church of England*, and built as a World War One Memorial church.

### **Coptic Orthodox worship started in Kensington in the 1970s**

Since the first arrivals from Egypt, mostly of well-educated professional background, the congregation has grown, with adherents from the second and third generations, and is now a centre of regional significance, with daily worship services & many different programs including Sunday school, and different levels of youth activity and a Scout groups. The growing congregation has an active social media profile on Facebook for instance.

Father Tadros Sharobeam, who pioneered liaison between the church and local community, also took on the role as principal of St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College, officially opened by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark, in 1991.

**New Buildings 2023-24 :** Planning approval was granted for a new worship space and community building on the site beside the existing heritage church, and some underground parking in 2017. Studio Bright was engaged to develop a design that would be respectful of the setting, in a residential area with mostly single story dwellings nearby.



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As works come to a conclusion in 2024 it can be seen that there is a semi-public courtyard facing the Epsom Road, permitting various gatherings and a protected outdoor area for children in the Early Learning Centre.

Landscape work by Openwork includes an innovative and symbolic hedging along the edge of the site by coppicing *Eucalyptus pulverulenta compacta* alternating with plantings of *Olea europaea* and *Corymbia citriodora*.



**Wurundjeri Days** In the years before the Gold Rush at the beginning of European settlement, the hill part of Kensington was said to be ‘lightly timbered with abundant game’. First Nations people used to frequent the area especially because of the food available from the Blue Lagoon and the nearby rivers. In the 1960s there were still older residents who could recall middens, sites of shellfish feasting for the traditional owners, down across the area now covered by industrial activity on each side of Dynon Road.

### **Anglican worship began in Kensington in the 1850s**

The people who hoped to establish an Anglican congregation in Kensington from the 1860s shared a wooden hall on the site of the McCracken Street Scout Hall, taking turns with a Wesleyan Methodist congregation. These two groups eventually erected brick buildings with Holy Trinity’s modest church from 1889 still to be seen at 23 Wight St, and the Methodist church opposite at 76 McCracken St.

This was a locality that was struggling to meet the social needs and aspirations of local families, both during the 1890s Depression and again during the recession and drought years immediately before the First World War. In 1905 the Borough of Flemington and Kensington was absorbed by the Melbourne City Council. By 1913 the Kensington Primary School had 1,300 students, the second largest enrolment among the State Schools of Victoria.

The Rev Henry Norwood in January 1918 launched a campaign to raise funds to build the new Holy Trinity church saying *Our present buildings are insufficient to carry on our work. Our chief assets, and very valuable ones, are children.* The church was dedicated By Archbishop Clarke in December 1918 was erected at a cost of £3,000.

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And the many children certainly came – when the honour board was unveiled at the Holy Trinity Church, Kensington, on the Sunday evening before Anzac Day in 1920, a thousand children were said to have assembled greet Brigadier-General H E Elliott (late Senator ‘Pompey’ Elliott) when came to perform the ceremony. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1691944>

Actually the fund raising campaign had not been entirely successful, later in the year there was a peace bazaar, as a sum of £200 was urgently required as the total debt on the new church was £1,110!

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*Revd Professor Emeritus Robert Gribben is noted for his work in  
ecumenical relations and theological studies*

### **Crumbs of Christ** Robert Gribben

One of my favourite passages from St Augustine (354-430), the early African theologian and bishop of Hippo, is from an address he gave to the newly baptized (Sermon 272, Pentecost). These talks were regularly given at the time during Lent and Easter to those preparing for baptism (*catechumens*) and Augustine gave this one of the last of the 50 days of Easter. He begins by referring back to the liturgy on Easter Eve:

*What you can see on the altar, you also saw last night; but what it was,  
what it meant, of what great reality it contained the Sacrament, you had  
not yet heard.*

The lesson takes place in the same place, so he indicates the altar-table:

*So what you can see, then, is bread and a cup; that's what even your eyes  
tell you; but as for what your faith asks to be instructed about: the bread is  
the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ. It took no time to say that,  
and, perhaps, that may be enough for faith; but faith desires instruction.*

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*The Prophet says, you see, Unless you believe, you shall not understand. I mean, you can now say to me, “You’ve bidden us believe; now explain, so that we may understand.” (Isaiah 7:9)*

And thus, the teaching:

*Some such thought as this, after all, may cross somebody’s mind...: “Our Lord Jesus Christ...rose again on the third day... and ascended into heaven. That’s where he lifted his body up to; that’s where he’s going to come from to judge the living and the dead; that’s where he is now, seated on the Father’s right. How can bread be his body? And the cup, or what the cup contains, how can it be his blood?”*

*The reason these things, my brothers and sisters, are called Sacraments is that in them one thing is seen, another is to be understood. What can be seen has a bodily appearance, what is to be understood provides spiritual fruit. So if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle telling the faithful: You are the body of Christ and its members. (1 Cor. 12:27)*

*So, if it’s you that are the body of Christ and its members, it’s the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the table of the Lord; what you receive is the mystery that means you.*

I’m struck by this idea that we are the bread ‘on the table of the Lord’: it is ‘the mystery that is you’ there. It is true that ‘the body of Christ’ has several meanings – Jesus in the flesh, in the sacrament, and as the whole Church. Symbols are always like that, multi-layered.

An eastern Orthodox Church is a busy place. Before the liturgy begins, people arrive and go to the north door in the iconostasis with a small package in their hand. They give a small round loaf to the priest who does the *prothesis* or preparation. From each he cuts (with a special liturgical knife) a crumb and as he adds it to the paten, he says the name of the person(s) the donor wants remembered. He selects the best of the loaves of leavened bread, often baked at home, and he has a large loaf stamped with a symbolic pattern, enough for the size of the congregation. He cuts out its central cube, which has the Greek letters ICXC NIKA on it (‘Jesus Christ conquers’) and places it on the paten (plate); it is



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called the Lamb. All the bread is crumbed and poured into the wine in the Cup and given by spoon to the communicants.

So, quite literally, they represent those who are present, living and dead. Each crumb is a loved person. And they are ‘eucharized’ over (‘The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving’) and given from the body of Christ, as the Body of Christ, to the Body of Christ. (The remaining bread is passed over the altar and blessed – not there for the Great Prayer – and is given to take home for those who could not come.)

A personal story. In 1963, a Syrian bishop took me to a monastery outside Damascus and introduced me to the abbess Katrin who was 80 years old and regarded a living saint. It happened to be on the day of my late mother’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and I told her. She immediately asked her name. ‘Janet’, I said, ‘but she was a Scot and was always ‘Jenny’. The bishop, listening in, said he would place a crumb for her at the eucharist next day, for, he said ‘at Communion, the gates of heaven are open’. My Church of Scotland mother would be surprised but pleased, I think.

As Augustine wrote,

*‘That too is how the Lord Christ signified us, how he wished us to belong to him, how he consecrated the Sacrament of our peace and unity on his table.’*

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*Charles Sowerwine, a fellow historian with John Rickard and a close friend, penned the following just a few days before John's funeral at St Mary's on August 9<sup>th</sup>. Chips and others spoke eulogies at that requiem eucharist for John. The whole service, with excellent video and audio quality, can be replayed at*

<https://www.multimediasstudios.com.au/john-david-rickard/>

### **John Rickard (1935-2024)**

John Rickard died Friday 26 July at Caulfield Hospital after a short stay. By a curious coincidence, he died near his birthplace: he was born in Caulfield, at home.

John graduated from the University of Sydney in 1955. Winning a Shell Scholarship, he obtained a Diploma in Political Science and Economics from Oxford in 1957. What he really loved at Oxford was his theatrical experiences, particularly in Aristophanes' *The Frogs*. This led to a short career in theatre back in Sydney and then in Melbourne, where he returned upon his mother's death in 1962. John played Lun Tha in the Australia and New Zealand production of *The King and I*. It was a huge hit: the tour lasted from December 1962 to April 1964. John enjoyed playing Tarquinius in Britten's opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*. He was active in St Martin's Theatre, then the home of avant-garde theatre in Melbourne. But, craving a more secure income, he turned to another interest: history. He enrolled at Monash University for an MA Prelim (the pathway to post-graduate work for those who have not completed an Honours degree). It soon led to a PhD. He obtained a lectureship in history at Monash in 1971, ultimately becoming Professor of Australian Studies.

John wrote significant works of Australian history, all in his lucid, flowing prose, easily accessible to anyone interested in history. His PhD thesis, "Class and Politics, New South Wales, Victoria and the early Commonwealth, 1890-1910," was published in 1976 and won the Ernest Scott Prize. His greatest historical work may be his *Australia: A Cultural*



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*History*; published in 1988: it remains the definitive work in its 4th edition (2017).

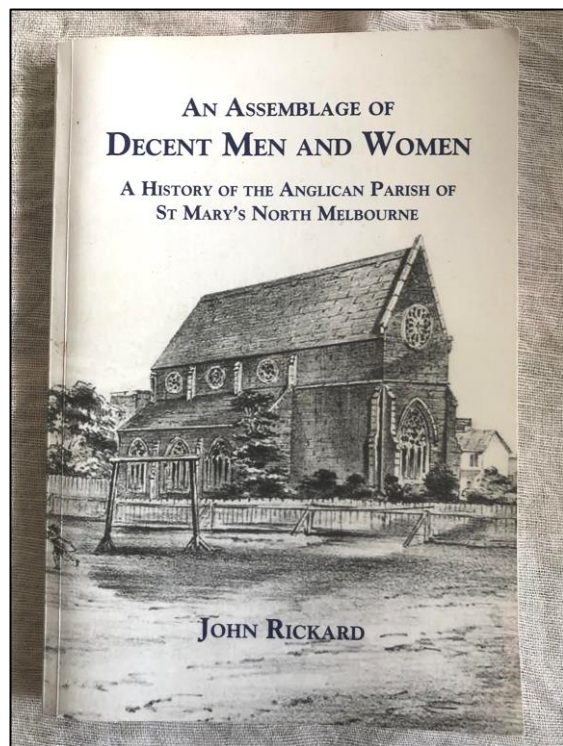
John's second book, *H. B. Higgins, The Rebel as Judge*, followed from John's deep belief in fairness and equality. Higgins wrote the landmark High Court's Harvester decision (1907), which called for "fair and reasonable" wages and laid the basis for Australia's twentieth century industrial system. This book displayed John's special talent for political biography, a form of life-writing in which he excelled. If there is a common thread between theatre and history, it is John's capacity for empathy. That enabled him to understand Higgins as a person, as a lawyer, and as a politician. John's book won *The Age* non-fiction Book of the Year 1984. John broadened his insight in to family and friendship circles in *A Family Romance: the Deakins at Home* (1996), an innovative study, again setting its subject in his personal and family life as well as in his political context.

Perhaps his greatest literary accomplishment is his touching and insightful memoir, *An imperial Affair : Portrait of an Australian Marriage* (2013). Based on letters John found after his father's death, it is a biography of his parents and the story of their marriage through the crucible of his father's affair with an Englishwoman when his father, a Lieutenant in the RAAF, was posted to London. John is touching and insightful about the way that he and his sister Barbara faced the stress that put on their parents' marriage.

John received many honours in his career. He was visiting Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard University (1997-1998) and Monash Visiting Fellow of Australian Studies at the University of Copenhagen (2007). He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1991 and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in 1997. He joined the RHSV in 1973 and was a Councillor from 1975 to 1984. From 1999 until his death, he was active on the RHSV's Publications Committee, and for much of that time he was co-review editor of the *Victorian Historical Journal*.

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St Mary's was to benefit from his talent for history: he has left us "*An Assemblage of Decent Men and Women: A History of the Anglican Parish of St Mary's North Melbourne*" (2008; it is still available from the parish office).



John started attending St Mary's in the 1980s. His musical and theatrical talents quickly shone. He is much remembered for his beautiful readings and for his singing, particularly his chanting of the *Exsultet* each Easter. He also starred as Thomas the Apostle in a medieval mystery play.

In 1994, the funeral of our mutual friend John Foster led to my coming to St Mary's. In this John Rickard greatly encouraged me and we soon became close. John was a witness at my marriage to Susan and he and Susan soon developed a strong bond. The three of us began to go to concerts and operas together. From 2008, we attended the Ballarat Organ Festival every year. On the way back from that first Festival, John received the call alerting him to throat cancer, which was operated and treated with radiotherapy.

After his operation, John was no longer able to sing but he remained very active, serving on Vestry. Several people recalled that only a few years ago he did a turn as a guest preacher/comedian, presenting as a sermon Alan Bennett's hilarious satire on the classic bumbling parson's sermon, "My Brother Esau is an Hairy Man". (*Google <Alan Bennett My Brother Esau> to see the original and imagine John doing it*). We thought he was going to give a serious talk as part of our evening lecture series, but we soon realised it was comic relief. I liked John's performance more than Bennett's because he didn't rely so much on an exaggerated accent.

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John's health deteriorated this year. He was hospitalised several times before being taken to Caulfield Hospital on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> July. He died three days later. I wrote the following account of his death at the hospital while the doctor was confirming his death.

I received a call from Caulfield Hospital at 2:15 on Friday 26 July and we immediately drove there. We were with John from about 3.00. At 3:30, I left to enable someone else to spend some time with John and I wrote:

Now at Caulfield Hospital and have spent time with John with Susan and Iamm. He is peaceful still breathing but faintly. I gave him a blessing and read the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm in the King James Version. We all recited the Lord's Prayer for him and Iamm blessed him. We can never know what may get through.

I returned about 3:40. Susan was talking to John about past experiences the three of us have shared.

I noticed that he was breathing faintly. I wondered if his soul was seeking escape and I recalled this poem of Thomas Campion and read it to him.

*Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore,  
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,  
Than my wearied sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast:  
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest!*

*Ever blooming are the joys of heaven's high Paradise,  
Cold age deafs not there our ears nor vapour dims our eyes:  
Glory there the sun outshines; whose beams the Blessed only see:  
O come quickly, glorious Lord, and raise my sprite to Thee!*

Shortly after that John seemed to go still. I brought the doctor in and she established that he had died at 4 o'clock, peacefully.

John is survived by his sister Barbara, his niece Lucy, nephew Patrick and their families.

Chips Sowerwine    5<sup>th</sup> August 202

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## Ung Klang Danish Choir – Concert

St Mary's 8pm 23 July 2024

*Parishioner Andrea O'Donoghue, a stalwart of our own choir, provides her notes on a concert given in the church recently by Ung Klang, a visiting choir from Denmark. These nine young women had just been to a choir festival in New Zealand, where they had received gold awards!*

***Oh what a night!***

***Our hush of expectancy rewarded:*** Ung Klang enters the church, each member holding a glass of water, finger on the rim creating mystic music. They are dressed, not uniformly, but in accord. Individual but thematic. Tonality of black, white, silver, grey, charcoal in a variety of style and fabric. Blending beautifully as did their glorious voices.

Attuned to the offerings of the church: singing at the altar rail, in the sanctuary, the baptistery, the aisle. Close up and personal, the congregation included.

***Their repertoire*** bridges language gaps and generations – Danish, English, Traditional, Modern – including re-creation of familiar songs of yesteryear.

A song that particularly captured my imagination: a group of old peasants, bent double with their load of firewood, gossiping,

laughing and possibly badmouthing the absent. The song's name? I don't know! Is

my interpretation accurate? It doesn't matter. I felt it. Song and spirit spoke.

***Coda:*** I chatted to some of the delightful women, admiring their costumes. They were designed to suit their personalities, using environmentally acceptable materials. An example – the lace was from lace tablecloths.

***Our Thanks:***

To Beverley for making this treat possible, and to Jan, Beverley and the St Mary's Team who provided Church, Hall and homey hospitality.



*Andrea with some great Danes*

**Tak Ung Klang!**

*Andrea O'Donoghue*

*July 2024*



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## **Climate Action Group news**

*St Mary's has an active and concerned Climate Action Group, CAG. One of its members is Marion Poynter. Below we reproduce firstly a short article which Marion wrote for the recent edition of the local community journal North and West Melbourne News.*

*Following that, very latest news of an awareness event, to which Marion refers. This Fresk Event is being organised at St Paul's Cathedral by CAG members Audrey Statham and Tim Pilbrow.*

*And finally, details of a Multi-Faith Service at St Paul's Anglican Cathedral (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change).*

### **--- Doing Our Bit to Tackle Climate Change**

Marion Poynter

(reproduced from *North and West Melbourne News*)

In the summer edition of the NWM News Merry Kirby pointed out that Climate Change is an absolute emergency now, and many of us would like do something about it. She indicates that though each of us can individually do something, it is better still if we can join with others to make a contribution.

With this in mind, in mid 2021, Audrey Statham, and a small group of parishioners of North Melbourne's St. Mary's Anglican church — including Helen, Ewan, Margaret and Michael, and Tim— established a Climate Action Group. Meeting once a month on Zoom it aims to discuss such matters as improvements in parish energy use (e.g. switching from gas to electricity), and waste management (effective sorting and composting), and how best to inform and encourage interest in Climate Change in our own and other church communities.

Talks on relevant issues have taken place from time to time in the church. More plans are underway. Tim and Audrey have suggested setting up sessions of a recently invented French card game called Climate Fresk, and there is discussion of how 2024 will be celebrated,

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along with other parishes, as the Season of Creation to encourage creation care. At a date yet to be fixed later this year they plan to host an information with a focus on the particularly damaging role played by methane emissions in landfill upon global warming, and how we can help reduce it. It is hoped a good number of locals will attend.

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## ***Two Climate Change Events at the Cathedral***

### **--- Event : Climate Fresk**

Date: Saturday September 21, 2024, 09:00am to 12:00pm

Venue: Barbara Darling Room, St Paul's Anglican Cathedral

Register: follow this link: <https://bit.ly/3WrG3Eq>

In just 3 hours, the collaborative Climate Fresk workshop will teach you the fundamental science behind climate change and empower you to take action. Climate Fresk (La Fresque du Climat) is an interactive climate science education workshop based on an interactive card game developed in France by Cédric Ringenbach.

This session is suitable for people with different levels of knowledge and understanding of climate change. There is no charge for this event, however registering to attend is essential as there are only a limited number of places available. Morning tea will be provided. So why not register this Season of Creation to take part in Climate Fresk and reflect with other Melbourne Anglicans on how we can together better care for God's Creation.

Organised by the Social Responsibilities Committee of the *Melbourne Anglican Diocese* and the Climate Action Group at *St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne*, in conjunction with members of the Australian *Climate Fresk* facilitators' network. If you have further questions,

email: [tim.pilbrow@socialcontext.com.au](mailto:tim.pilbrow@socialcontext.com.au)

### **--- Event: Multi faith service at St Paul's Anglican Cathedral** (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change)

Date: Tuesday 17 September, 10am

Information: <https://www.arrcc.org.au/flagships>

Venue: St Paul's Anglican Cathedral

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*Michael's origins are at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in north-eastern England.. His knowledge of the area and its culture is rivalled only by his devotion to Newcastle United Football Club.*

*He adds here to our knowledge with one of our occasional articles on the subject of – Churches called St Mary's –*

## **St Mary's Chapel, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

Michael Golding

The ruins of the medieval chapel of St Mary's, Jesmond, and the nearby St Mary's holy well associated with it, are located in a lush green enclave in the suburb of Jesmond, Newcastle-upon Tyne, in the north east of England. From at least the 12th century, when the chapel was built, the location was an important pilgrimage site. In a Papal letter of 1428 Pope Martin V describes it as a place "to which resorts a multitude on account of divers miracles wrought therein through the merits of St Mary the Virgin". Yet its origins are obscure and disputed. Some write of an apparition of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus in her arms. Others aver that the chapel contained relics brought from the Holy Land during the Crusades. A third source asserts that Joseph of Arimathea once took a drink from the well, declared it to be excellent, and pilgrims flocked to the site. With the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century the site fell into private hands and secular usage, but, as I discovered during a recent visit, it remains a place of prayer and pilgrimage for some.



*Chapel Ruins*

My visit took place in February this year. In medieval times Jesmond would have been at most a small rural village outside the then compact town (now city) of Newcastle. Pilgrims would have stayed in inns on Newcastle's aptly named Pilgrim Street and exited the town walls via the Pilgrims' Gate, probably on foot. As for me, I took a Tyne and Wear Metro

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train just a few stops from the centre of Newcastle and then walked a short distance through the prosperous and lively suburb of Jesmond, better known these days for its night life and upmarket housing than its pilgrimage locations.

Although it was winter the weather was outstandingly good: blue skies and bright sunshine giving real warmth and heightening the colours of the banks of daffodils and snowdrops that fringe the site and of the verdant green lichens that soften the ancient stones of the ruined chapel. There was a helpful information board at the site but I learnt more from further research at Newcastle City Library after my visit. Remarkably few hard facts are available from written medieval records and those that exist mainly concern issues of ownership and appurtenant rights rather than things that would have interested me more such as a description of the buildings and their contents, the experience of the pilgrims and the miraculous origins of the chapel and well. There is a link to a drawing of a reconstruction of the chapel below, although much of this is conjectural.



*Daffodils and Primroses*

The first mention of the chapel in written records is in the Northumberland Assize Roll of 1274, which reports that five clerks helped a man accused of murdering a Flemish merchant escape from Newcastle jail and then claim sanctuary first in the chapel and later at Tynemouth Priory. The ruins themselves suggest an earlier origin (Brewis, 1928). The original nave of the chapel is no more, but the chancel arch includes a Corinthianesque capital typical of the early Norman period and can be reliably dated to between 1100 and 1125. This makes the chapel the earliest surviving ecclesiastical building in Newcastle and an early Norman building project of any kind in this region, which was not finally subdued by the Normans until the last quarter of the eleventh century. One might almost say that first the Normans built their eponymous “New Castle” and next they built the chapel of St Mary’s.

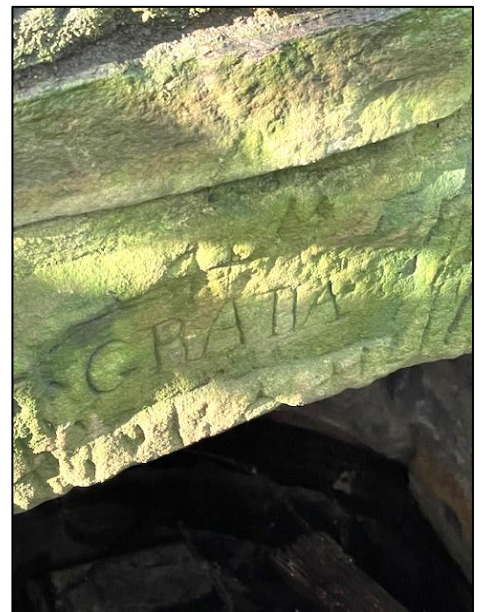


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In the fourteenth or early fifteenth century the chancel was twice enlarged and almost entirely rebuilt, presumably as the popularity of the chapel increased and numbers grew. Later in the fifteenth century a side chapel was built to the north of the chancel. Brewis (1928) contends that this was a chantry but was also used to control the flow of pilgrims, who could enter via the main door to the nave and exit via the chantry so that incoming and outgoing streams of pilgrims would not meet and cause congestion. This in turn suggests that there was something for pilgrims to venerate, perhaps a relic of some kind. There was also a nearby hospice associated with the chapel of which nothing now survives as it lies beneath a housing estate. The finding of human remains suggests that there was also a cemetery.

The first secular owners of the chapel after the dissolution saw fit to remove the lead from the roof causing deterioration in the fabric. For a while the hospice became a dwelling and the chapel a stable but these uses ended. Having passed through several owners the sites of both chapel and well are now under the care of Newcastle City Council and protected as listed buildings

After visiting the chapel I walked due east for just over one hundred yards to St Mary's well. Although the spring is no doubt ancient the current stone well may be no earlier than the late seventeenth century. Several stone steps, flanked by a convenient modern handrail, lead down to a small circular stone opening with a stone head above it inscribed with the word "GRATIA". Local legend has it that the head was once inscribed with the words "AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA" ("Hail Mary, Full of Grace") but (per Dendy, 1903) a puritan erased this leaving only "GRATIA" legible. I have my doubts. I can see that a puritan would prefer the vernacular to Latin and would object to the veneration of the Blessed Virgin (Luke 1:28 notwithstanding), but why he would leave one word rather than erasing the entire sentence is beyond me. It seems more



**GRATIA**

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likely that when the owner, a Mr Coulson, enclosed the well (Bourne, 1736) he used a reclaimed stone from some earlier monument which had been destroyed and only the “GRATIA” was left.

I am also unconvinced by the stories I have read that the number of steps corresponds to the number of the apostles or, bizarrely, to the number of paragraphs in the creed. I am inclined to think that the number of steps was conveniently chosen to help people pass from high ground to low and for no other reason.

To continue in a sceptical vein I think I can dismiss the theory mentioned in my opening paragraph that Joseph of Arimathea drank from the well and was so pleased with his experience that it became a pilgrimage site. I found this story in the work of Robert Gilchrist (1825), a poet, and one, I suspect, with a vivid imagination and a taste for English folklore. Joseph begins to crop up in Arthurian legend around the twelfth century although he doesn't usually get as far north as Newcastle, being more commonly found in the west country. Still, I rather like the story even if it is a fiction.

So what is the origin story? If one accepts that the etymology of Jesmond is “Jesu Mount” then some colour is given to the theory of the existence of a story that there was an apparition of the Virgin with the baby Jesus in her arms at a nearby cliff. An alternative etymology is “Gesemue” from the Old English “mouth of the gushing river”. Opinion is divided as to which is to be preferred. Inherently more plausible is the story that the chapel was built to house a relic. Veneration of relics was common in medieval England and the chapel does seem to have been set up to facilitate veneration at least after its fifteenth century expansion. Of course, in attempting to find an origin story I am not contending that the apparition occurred or that the relic was genuine.

Facts are few, conjectures are common and some people are simply making things up. I will venture a conjecture of my own. The story of the apparition is an ancient one which predates the Norman Conquest and was centred around the holy well. The Normans arrived with their preference for building in stone and soon constructed a chapel at a suitable spot close to the miraculous well. At some point a relic of the Virgin was acquired and the chapel was expanded to facilitate veneration. As Catholic doctrine teaches the assumption of the

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body of the Virgin into heaven the relic might have been strands of hair or an object associated with her during her life on earth. I have no idea how to begin to prove any of the foregoing.

I would like to add something about my thoughts and feelings on visiting the chapel and the well. I have read that there is a large library of works that analyse what the Germans call *Ruinenlust* (the desire for ruins) or *Ruinensehnsucht* (the longing or yearning for ruins), so it is quite a complex subject it seems. Ruins, I read, allow for “the bittersweet contemplation of the transience of all things, perhaps a little of the piquancy of living on in the rubble, but also moral instruction on human vanity” (Luckhurst, *Gothic*, 2021). Transience was certainly in my mind. There was also regret and a sense of loss, which I often feel when contemplating the beautiful buildings and objects destroyed at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries or later, but we have other buildings and other objects and, most importantly, we have the God to whose glory they were dedicated.

I thought of the pilgrims too, of their piety, as I suppose it to have been (although anyone who has read Chaucer will know that English pilgrims can be a mixed bag). One twentieth century reconstruction of a pilgrimage to the chapel (Latham, 1912) sympathetically describes the pilgrims thus: “some smitten with remorse to purge them of a foul crime; some stricken with disease to seek healing”. In contrast Newcastle’s first historian (Grey, 1649) writes that the pilgrims “with great confluence and devotion came from all parts of this land **in that time of superstition**” (emphasis added). Piety or superstition? I doubt that the choice is quite that simple.

What are we to make of the present day pilgrims, if I may call them that? People continue to visit the chapel and the well to pray and reflect and they leave objects at the site of which the following is an incomplete list: votive candles, photographs (of the departed, I presume), pebbles inscribed with personal names, a figure of an angel, holly, a pine



*tokens left by visitors to  
the well*



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cone, flowers, a depiction of the (contested) apparition of the Blessed Virgin at Medugorje, a handwritten prayer to the Blessed Virgin in Latin asking to be kept safe, a wooden cross with a Remembrance Day poppy, a framed photograph of the late Queen. Piety or superstition?

I read that a local Catholic priest occasionally holds masses in the chapel ruins. I was unable to verify this but I hope it is true. If so, whether or not the infant Jesus ever appeared in His mother's arms in this place He is present still in the ordinary miracle of the eucharist.



*tokens left by visitors to the chapel*



*chapel ruins*

*Link to a reconstruction of the chapel:*

<https://newcastleheritage.org/newcastles-parks/jesmond-dene-heritage-panels/st-marys-chapel/>

*There are too many sources to list them all. I can supply details on request.*

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*Margaret and Michael Noble are assiduous bird-watchers who are actively involved in not only watching but also cataloguing and habitat preservation in local regions. Here they recount their recent trip much further afield.*

### **Rare Chances**

*Margaret Noble*

In June this year, we went on a guided tour to Western and South Western Queensland to see the birds and the sights. We had become aware of the opportunity last year as a place we would like to visit but might never venture on our own, so after some discussion we decided to go ahead. As the tour dates got closer, I had a look at the itinerary and promptly became rather anxious as I fully realized the extent of the driving distances involved each day. The longest day was over 500 km and we also had to fit bird watching into that! As we had been on a similar tour from Cairns to Iron Range (nearly three quarters of the way to the tip of Cape York) with the same company and guide a few years ago we were confident that it would be well organised, but with that much driving would it become tedious? Birdwatchers are a varied bunch and some can be very intense; would ten people crammed into two cars for long periods of time all get along?

The internet makes it easy to research road conditions and follow blogs about other people's travels, and as usual there were good and bad things said about roads, accommodation and experiences.

So we were prepared for a few unexpected things to happen and for the roads to be a mix of good and very bad. As the date of our Mt Isa flight approached, we noted with some trepidation that it had been raining quite

heavily around many of our destinations and that some of the key roads were closed. Would the trip go ahead in some altered form or be cancelled altogether?



*Dunes*

Off we went, spending a couple of days around Mt Isa finding birds that we might not see further south, before meeting the touring group for dinner the evening before the trip – eight guests and two guides who were to travel in two

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4WD vehicles. All were friendly and companionable and understandably keen to get the most out of the trip, so that was one potential problem sorted. The guides related how the tour had almost been completely disrupted by the rain. But, at the last minute, their plans B, C and D for alternative routes could be put aside as the roads to Birdsville, the first big target, had opened and could be managed. As it panned out, I was glad we were not driving ourselves as the road to Boulia, our first stop, was a single lane of bitumen – when one of the B-triple or quad road trains were coming the other way, getting off the road was the only practical strategy as they give way to nobody. Mostly the roads turned out to be quite good, even the gravel ones.

The rain turned out to be a blessing – no parched outback to be seen. Everything was lush and green with large amounts of water collected in any depression and the birds were having a ball. The route took us from Mt Isa down to Birdsville, then easterly around the corner in western Queensland to Cunnamulla and finally back up the middle to Longreach. The plan was to get in to overnight stops by 5pm each night but we never managed it once. The poor guides inevitably drove into the twilight each evening and it was the fault



*very rare Letter-winged Kites*

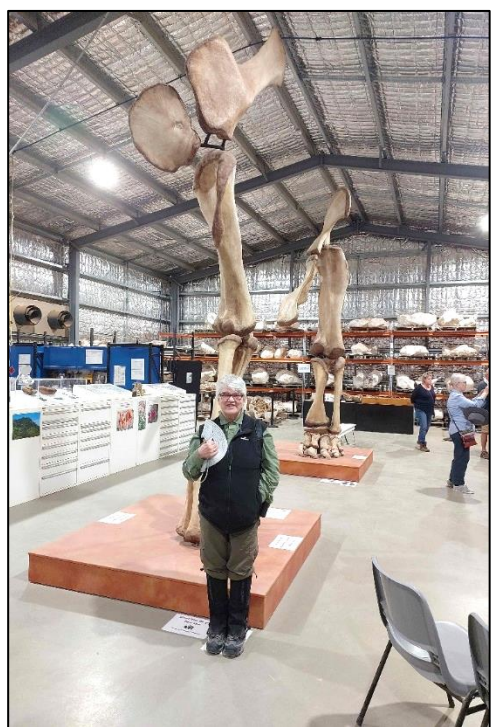
of those pesky birds!! Each day we seemed to be in good time, but a new rarity would pop out late in the day and we would all pile out of the vehicle for observations and photos and that would be 30 minutes added to the journey.

A typical day would see us up early for breakfast and then off to a nearby spot to find what wildlife was around. This could be at a waterhole, or river crossing, or a likely patch of woodland or grassland. In this way we were able to memorably experience such things as Brolgas trumpeting in the stillness; Red-winged Parrots flashing in the morning sun; and on one occasion a male Bustard calling for company, with frontal sac extended, head raised to the sky and emitting a deep, almost inaudible roar. After the morning stop, we would head off down the road and the day would

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evolve, with a mix of opportunistic and planned stops for sightings or target species. Over dinner each night we'd go over the day's events to confirm, catalogue and celebrate what we'd seen.

Steve, the birding guide, has incredible skills. His knowledge of habitat and of bird calls meant that he found us many things which we would never have even noticed without him. He did get a bit down on himself on the rare occasions when he failed to find or at least hear one of the target species, but his joy when something rare turned up was infectious. He did unfortunately manage to leave his beloved Bluetooth speaker at some remote patch of bush, but he



*Lifesize replica bones of  
Australotitan Cooperensis  
(Eromanga Natural  
History Museum)*

knows the location and will probably find it again the next time he goes there! The idea with the speaker is that it gets put somewhere away from the group and then the call of the target species is used sparingly to try to encourage the birds to react so they can be located. Our second guide, Tonia, provided complementary all-round skills, readily naming most plant species we came across, not to mention mammals, reptiles and butterflies, and she has a keen eye for indigenous artefacts and presence in the landscape. We were in good hands.

In total, we saw about 190 species of birds. Some of the rarer or hard-to-see ones included Bourke's Parrots, Letter-winged Kites, Kalkadoon Grasswrens, Hall's Babblers, Grey Falcons, Gibberbirds, Inland Dotterels and Flock Bronzewings. We got to travel down part of the Birdsville Track, stay at the Birdsville Pub, see

the dinosaur fossils at Eromanga, the beautiful flat vistas and the spectacular red sand hills in a time of moisture, and saw plenty of the animals and plants that may not come again for many years. We would probably never have ventured out there by ourselves.

And the long drives were not that tedious at all!

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## PATRONAL FESTIVAL edition of AVE, August 2024, St Mary's North Melbourne

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**The cover photograph *Sancta Maria*, a detail of a stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral is taken by Fr Lawrence Lew, OP, Dominican priest based in London, who has an extensive collection of his fine photographs on the Flickr database.**

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the great Kulin nation. We acknowledge their leaders past present and emerging and offer them our respects.

*Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the parish of St Mary's, the Anglican Church, or its members.*

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