

December
2020

EDGEWAYS



The Sacred Heart Parish magazine



Vol. 32 No. 8

sacredheartwimbledon.org.uk



ZoomAlongAdingdong!

**The Edge Hill Players go
off-stage and online**

The secret story of *Silent Night*

*** FREE * but donations are always welcome**

EDGEWAYS – now in its 32nd year – is published every month except August. Thanks to the Parish Council, it is now free, although any donations towards our running costs are more than welcome in the box to the right of the inner church doors. Articles from readers are always welcome.

Contact the Editor

John Symes

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07745 100 596

or via our mail basket by the bookshop in the Presbytery, or email editoredgeways@icloud.com

Advertising

Our very reasonable rates are as follows:

	1/6 page	1/3 page	Full page
1 issue	£12	£24	£72
6 issues	£60	£120	£360
12 issues	£108	£216	£648
Personal lineage:		10p per word	

Rates for colour ads are available upon request.

For details, contact David on **07716 284 28**
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Please make cheques payable to **Sacred Heart Parish**

**Our next edition will be published when Covid-19 allows.
Look for details on the parish website**



**SACRED HEART PARISH
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President: Rev John Clark

Chairman: Sr Patricia

We are a small group of friends doing a large amount of work to facilitate the Social aspects of the Sacred Heart Parish.

We organise and fund a Senior Citizens party in January every year. We organise an annual BBQ for the Parishioners. We provide bar facilities to various Parish Organisations. We donate surplus funds to various Charities.

- Manna, Passage
- Raphael Pilgrimage
- Sacred Heart Youth, Sacred Heart Church

We also partly fund, maintenance of the lounge.

Our Opening Times

Fridays 9.00-10.30. Sundays 8.30-10.30

To Join please contact: Sr Patricia – 07973 950755

No, Christmas is not ‘cancelled’ for us

This Christmas edition of *Edgeways* goes to press (or maybe that more appropriately should be, goes to pdf) with news that the powers-that-be have decreed we once more step back into near-total lockdown, now jazzed up to the more scientifically acceptable jargon of “Tier 4”.

The media has headlined this as “Christmas is cancelled!” Hardly. Bricks-and-mortar shops, restaurants, pubs and clubs, theatres and other venues may have been forced to close, but online retailers such as Amazon and canny supermarkets, takeaways and other outlets that have switched their primary modus operandi to home delivery are still doing a roaring business. So in the secular world of trade, Christmas has not been cancelled so much as mutated – perhaps faster in the direction they were always travelling in.

For Christians, Christmas was never in danger of being “cancelled” since it holds a far deeper meaning in faith than the secular trappings. The first person to try to cancel Christmas was King Herod, and look how successful *he* was. The more radical English and Scottish Puritans had a go at abolishing Christmas in the 16th and 17th centuries, as did the Soviet bloc in the 20th, but with no lasting success.

Of course, Christmas will be different this year. I and many others will miss the glorious Midnight Mass – a highlight of my year – the Christmas Day lunch, the gathering of friends and family on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, as well as the New Year celebrations.

But then – and here’s the irony – I think that in one way this awful Covid-19 pandemic has done me a service. For once, I’ll be concentrating on the true, eternal meaning of Christmas, not on its secular trimmings, as much as I miss them.

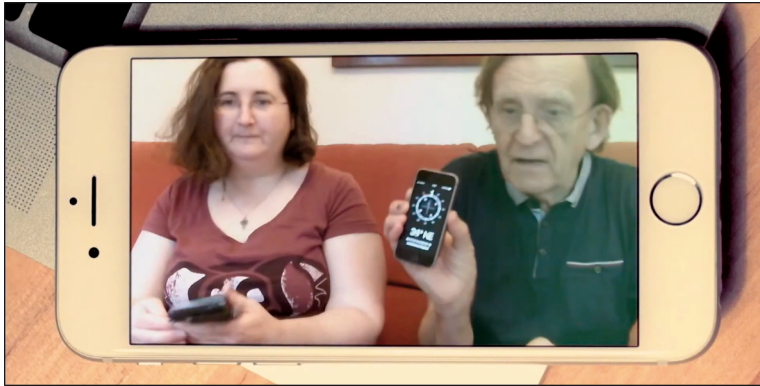
A Merry and Holy Christmas to you all.

John Symes

Ursula’s costumes

One of the great running jokes of the Edge Hill Players’ online show *ZoomAlongAdingdong* was compere Ursula Currall’s costume changes between acts – her most magnificent (and her favourite) appearing on this issue’s front cover. Here were the others:





Emily Westlake and and Martin Hollins' recitation of Rick W Cotton's *Smart Phone – Dumb User* was cleverly imagined and executed, neatly framed by an iPhone

The Edge Hill Players take their show off-stage and put it online

Cruelly denied the chance to stage the Sacred Heart's annual panto by Covid-19, the dynamic duo of Terry Marsh and Wendy Tansey decided there was no reason why parishioners should be also be denied seeing the varied talents of the Edge Hill Players. And so *ZoomAlongAdingdong* was duly hatched and dispatched via [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) on October 30.

From the start, I thought the nature of the production was going to be very much in the spirit of "Hey gang why don't we do the show *right here!*" In a way, it was: the big difference this time was that the "here"



Having been a schoolboy conjurer once myself, I had a good chuckle at Padraig McGillian and his amazing "camelflooge"

meant myriad settings – front rooms, back gardens, bedrooms, the Sacred Heart School Hall and even the church choir loft, rather than the rustic barn Micky Rooney and Judy Garland used to hang out in,

One was prepared for the performing talent on show – we all know EHP has that in bucketsful. There was song, dance, recitations, corny jokes and a, well, kind of magic. What delighted me was the new video production talent on show for that really highlighted what is technically possible in this medium when imagination and technical skill come together. Screens split in two, three, or more. Well, OK, we've seen that on Zoom and Teams, but the seamless vocal integration of two people (Bonnie Rodger and Marie-Claire Lindsay) in two rooms miles apart? The triptych of Megan Affonso on piano, cello and vocals (itself split into a further three screens) frankly left me gobsmacked.

Congratulations to all for a hugely enjoyable variety show, and particularly Terry and Wendy for bringing it all together, and the technical guru editing behind the scenes, Philip Barnes, who made it sparkle.

John Symes



The staging of EHP's next panto, *Aladdin*, may have been put on hold, but we got a taste of what's to come with a split-screen read-through

Talent in triplicate: Megan Affonso gave a virtuoso performance of *Reflection*, from Disney's *Mulan*, that saw her sing, play the piano and cello, seemingly at the same time



Bonnie Rodger and Marie-Claire Lindsay performed a lovely rendition of *For Good*, from the stage show *Wicked*. The harmonies were so good, they could have been in the same room (but they obviously weren't)

Bereavement support

The Bereavement Support Group is very aware of all the people who usually attend the Drop In and are not able to meet just now. Also of all who have been bereaved recently and of some who have lost loved ones some time ago. We would like to let you know that we are available and we offer you support by telephone or by email. Please feel welcome to email Sadie Smith sadiesmith3@talktalk.net or call 020 8946 5198 at any time to be connected to a Bereavement Support Group member.

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and a Happy
'tier-free'
New Year!

The Jesuits in Wimbledon

A year ago this month, the Jesuits formally moved out of Wimbledon, ending a mission that had lasted more than 100 years. Parishioner JEREMY HUDSON, chairman of the Wimbledon Society, has written a brief history of the order's time in SW19, published in the society's December 2020 newsletter and reprinted here with his kind permission

A year ago, on Sunday, December 22, 2019, the Sacred Heart Church's weekly newsletter announced, "The Jesuit community in Edge Hill will formally close today ... It is with much sadness that the community is closing. There have been Jesuits here for a very long time, but now it is time to go, leaving the parish and the schools in very capable hands." Perhaps it is time to review the Jesuits' legacy and impact on Wimbledon.

Founded almost 500 years ago by St Ignatius of Loyola, the Society of Jesus is a missionary order of priests and brothers (aka. "the Jesuits") and the largest Catholic order of men in the world.

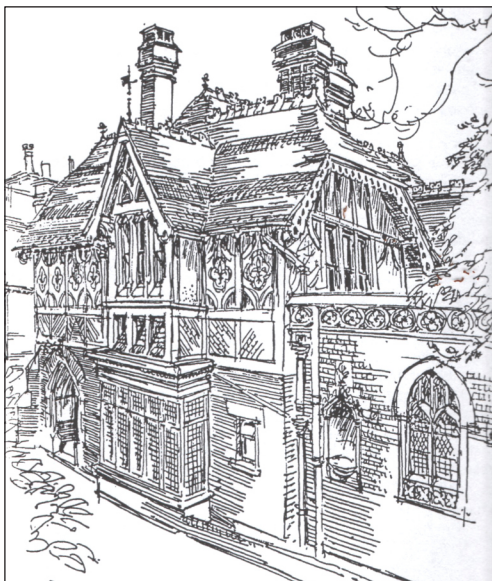
In 1877 the Jesuits came to Wimbledon at the request of Edith Arendrup, of the Courtauld family, from Roehampton, where they had their novitiate, Manresa House.

The first Mass was celebrated on 2 December 1877, at her house in Cottenham Park Road.

During the next 10 years, Jesuit priests would walk across the common every Sunday to say Mass and hear confessions.

In 1882, when the house became too small to accommodate all the worshippers, the Jesuits opened a school in Russell Road with a small iron chapel attached, dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians.

In 1887, with the Bishop of Southwark's agreement, the Jesuits set up a permanent mission in Wimbledon, based on the new church of the Sacred Heart, being built at



Where it all began: The Abbassieh chapel, which Madame Edith Arendrup added to her Cottenham Park Road home to accommodate Wimbledon's growing Catholic congregation

Mrs Arendrup's expense on Edge Hill.

They agreed to take on this responsibility on condition that they might open a day school and Wimbledon College was opened in January 1892.

It remained in the Jesuits' control until 2011 when its first lay headmaster was appointed.

During their mission in Wimbledon the Jesuits founded two other schools which



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Our programme runs every Monday throughout the year at the Upper Lounge, Sacred Heart Church, Edge Hill, Wimbledon SW19 4LU from 10.30am to 12noon

We serve tea, coffee, cake and biscuits in what is a friendly and encouraging environment. We ask for a contribution of £4 to attend.

For more information please contact Clare on 02089424137 or clare.jefferies@homeinstead.co.uk

www.homeinstead.co.uk/wimbledonandkingston





As well as the Sacred Heart, the Jesuits opened and ran two satellite churches in Wimbledon; St Winefride's, left, in South Wimbledon, from 1905 to 1961, and Christ the King (formerly St Austin's), from 1913 to 1959

continue to flourish today.

In September 1930 the Sacred Heart School opened in Burlington Road, and in 1934 Donhead School was opened as a preparatory school to Wimbledon College, in premises in Edge Hill donated by the Smail family.

Meanwhile, the Sacred Heart Parish went from strength to strength.

Its high point was in the mid-1970s when an estimated 4,200 would attend Mass every weekend.

Two satellite churches were opened before the First World War; first St Winefride's in 1905 to meet the needs of the Catholics in South Wimbledon, who had been attending Mass at St Mary's School. The Jesuits staffed the parish until 1961.

The second was St Austin's Church (later Christ the King) in Wimbledon Park, opened in 1913. The Jesuits handed over its control to the Diocese of Southwark in 1959.

In November 2012 the Jesuits' British Provincial announced that the administration of the Sacred Heart Parish would be handed over to the

Southwark archdiocese at the end of 2013.

The reason given was that the dwindling number of Jesuit priests was causing the Order to "re-position" its ministries in Britain. The formal handover took place in January 2014.

The Jesuits retained their palatial building in Darlaston Road for six more years, during which time it was occupied by priests studying and teaching at Heythrop College and engaged in other ministries in London.

Now the Jesuits' only link with Wimbledon is Jesuit Missions at 11 Edge Hill, the international development arm of the Jesuits in Britain.

For over 60 years Jesuit Missions has educated and supported vulnerable communities in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, promoting social justice, building bridges between communities and accompanying those working on the missions.

Through their work "Wimbledon" continues to be known throughout the world, and not merely for its tennis.





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Celia Wiggins 1930-2020

The Sacred Heart has sadly lost another dynamic member of its community, one who not only participated in but also helped organise myriad parish activities over the years, from pilgrimages to starting a bridge club. Here, TERESA WILSON pays tribute to her sister, Celia Wiggins

Celia was born in 1930 to Lillian and Fred Hayward in the village of Englefield Green, Surrey. Cecilia was five years old when I was born in 1935 and interrupted her life! We had a happy childhood living near the Thames in Runnymede and Windsor Park, where we used to swim, walk and cycle.

Cecilia was nine when war broke out. Our grandparents, who lived in the same village, had five brothers from London billeted on them and we had their sister and soldiers who were dispatch riders.

Cecilia was 11 when she went to Sir William Perkins School in Chertsey. She was a very good pianist – up to grade 9 – and sang in the choir, as she did in the Englefield Green Church. She loved sport, especially cricket and hockey. In her late teens and early 20s she played for the Egham ladies' cricket club and the mixed hockey team – she often came home with a black eye or bruises.

She belonged to the sea cadets and the amateur dramatic society, which stood her in good stead for her performances in the Edge Hill Players' Christmas pantomimes, to her joy and our delight.

When Cecilia left school at 18 she went on a secretarial course before getting a job in



London at the Blue Circle Cement Company where she spent six years and met her future husband, Michael. They were married in 1954 at Our Lady of the Assumption Church by Father John Preedy, who had known Cecilia all her life.

They first lived in Michael's flat in Kingston with Bar – Michael's sister – until she joined the Merchant Navy.

When their first child, Frances, was born in 1955, they moved to their first home in Walton, where Simon was born in 1956. Nine months later Celia had to have a kidney removed and I looked after the family until she was well again. They moved into Penrith Road, New Malden, and in 1959 Mark was born. They then moved to Bodley Road in the early 1960s, where they spent the rest of their lives.

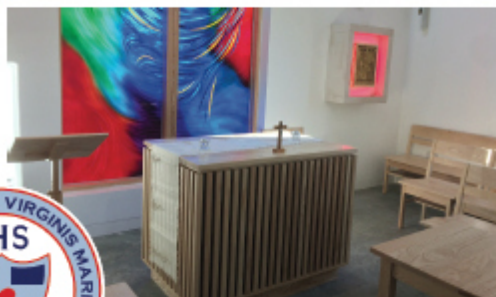
When they first came to the Sacred Heart Church they became very good friends with several other young parents, entertaining on every possible occasion.

Cecilia was an excellent organiser. Among other things she served on the Parish Council, the Finance Committee and the Friendship Group.

She helped Sadie Smith organise and run a number of pilgrimages to Lourdes and Rome. She and Mary Thefaut started



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IN MEMORIUM

the Bridge Club and after that Celia joined the Gemini Club in New Malden. She served on the PTA Committee at Wimbledon College and was a member of the Guild of St Gerard Majella. She also served as a Mass server, was a very good Reader at Mass and was an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist right up the end of her life.

She even took a secretarial refresher course and then worked at the Worcester Park Housing Association into her 70s.

All her children had good educations, went to university, gained degrees and then went their different ways. Simon became a Buddhist, took the name Taravajra and married Tessa, and Mark married Isabel.

After a few years Frances returned to live at home. She was a great help to her parents and a comfort to her mother after Michael's death and again especially during lockdown. As you can imagine Cecilia found the lockdown very frustrating when she was unable to go out with Holy Communion to the Sick or attend Mass. However, Taravajra introduced her to Zoom meetings, which kept the family in touch and it was very useful while Cecilia was in hospital.

As you can see Cecilia had a very active life, made many friends, loved gardening, playing bridge, reading and doing crosswords. She enjoyed going to the theatre, music, entertaining and going to Wimbledon for the tennis with her friend June. She also loved to travel and often went abroad with Michael, who was an export manager.

At the end of August Cecilia and Frances spent the weekend with me in Wyton, Cambridgeshire, and on the Sunday we went to Mass at Buckton. Afterwards Cecilia chatted with friends she had made there. We had a lovely lunch with Gay and Tim. It was a good weekend.

The following Sunday Cecilia had



Celia at an Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist social evening with the much-missed Fr Michael O'Halloran, SJ, in November 2013

massive stroke in the night and was admitted to St George's Hospital. After three days she was transferred to Kingston Hospital.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions we could only visit her three times a week by appointment. Frances and Taravajra shared these visits and I was also allowed to visit. Sadly on October 31, Cecilia died which in some ways was a relief, especially for her.

Sadly because of the lockdown some relatives and many friends were unable to attend her funeral, especially Mark, Cecilia's youngest son, who lives in San Lorenzo Del Escorial with his wife Isabel, who is a doctor. Because of the strict travel restrictions they were unable to come, much to their distress.

Hopefully next year we will be able to have a commemorative Mass to celebrate Cecilia's 90th birthday and her life.

With Christmas coming, oh dear, what are we going to do without her mince pies? She made dozens and distributed them everywhere. She was also well known for her Christmas pudding, chocolate logs, and marmalade. Cecilia will be very much missed by all her relatives and friends. God bless her and may she rest in peace.

Even a donkey can dream

We donkeys aren't beautiful or graceful like the horses rich people ride. Some people say we have ears like the sails of a windmill and that the sound we make could rival the noisy trumpets that brought down the walls of Jerusalem. But we have many uses and we work hard. There is nothing I wouldn't do for my master Joseph, who is kind to me, and for his dear wife Mary.

Joseph had told me that we needed to go on a long journey to Bethlehem because the ruler had ordered everyone to go to their home towns for something called a 'census'. Mary was expecting a baby so I carried her on my back most of the way.

When we came to Bethlehem we found the inns were full because of the census so poor Mary and Joseph had to stay in the stable of one of the inns with me and the innkeeper's cow and great big ox.

And there the baby was born. The stable was dark but the little one seemed to spread light all around him.

Then strange things started to happen and my long donkey ears came in useful

for picking up all kinds of information.

First a group of rather ragged shepherds came bursting in, saying they had seen angels who sang of the birth of this very special Baby who was to be the Messiah, the saviour of the world.

Later on three richly dressed men arrived, saying that they had seen an especially bright star that had led them there. They fell to their knees and offered precious gifts for the Baby – gold, frankincense and myrrh – but I thought swaddling clothes would have been more useful!

However they warned Joseph and Mary that King Herod was looking for the Child. He wanted to kill Him because he feared the Child would one day displace him and rule over the kingdom.

These wise men told Mary and Joseph to take the Baby and flee to Egypt which is what we are doing now – a long trek across desert sands, but no matter how tired I am, I must help Joseph and carry Mary and the Baby to safety.

Sometimes we stop for a rest and when I doze off, I dream that the Baby has



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grown into a wonderful young man, a great teacher. Crowds follow Him as He rides on a donkey like me. They are waving palms and shouting in praise of Him, calling him the Messiah, the Son of God Himself, for that is who He is, our special precious Baby.

Rosanne Gomez



Illustration: Moya Hogarth

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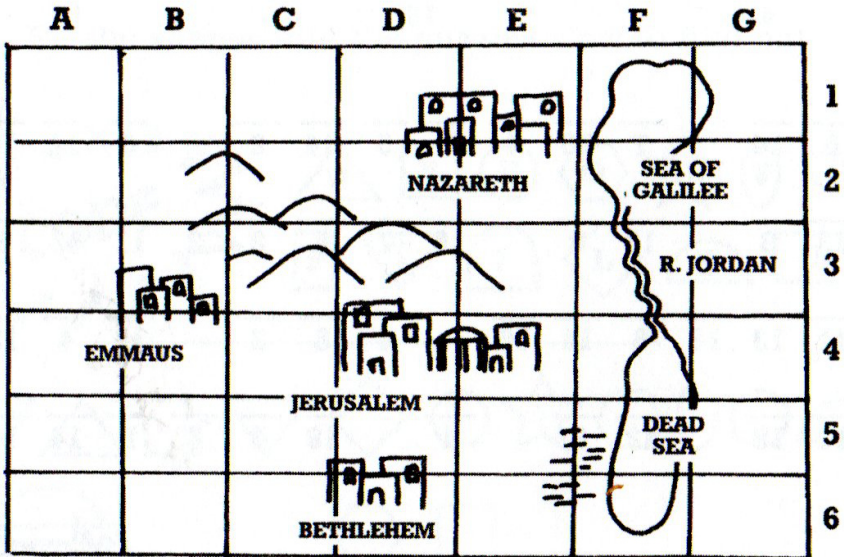
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A Saviour is born!

The Emperor Augustus Caesar had ordered a census. Everyone had to return to their hometown

Using the directions below follow the route that Joseph and Mary took



Directions

1E, 1D, 2D, 2E, 3E, 3F, 4F, 4E, 5D, 5C, 6D

CHUCKLES

Q: How do you treat someone who has lost their Christmas spirit due to lockdown?

A: Nurse them back to elf!!

Q: What's a Christmas tree's favourite sweet??

A: Orna-mints!

Q: What do you call an obnoxious reindeer??

A: Rude-olph!

Q: What did the grumpy sheep say when everyone wished him a Merry Christmas?

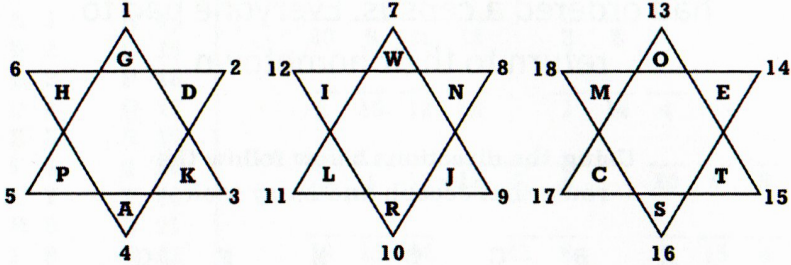
A: Baaa – humbug!



No room at the inn

The time came for Mary to have her baby, but there was no room at the inn. What did she and Joseph do?

Use the Christmas code to find out



16 6 14 7 10 4 5 5 14 2 6 14 10
 16 13 8 12 8 16 7 4 2 2 11 12 8 1
 17 11 13 15 6 14 16 4 8 2 11 4 12 2
 6 12 18 12 8 4 18 4 8 1 14 10

LUKE 2:7



CHUCKLES

Q: What do Santa's little helpers like to eat to stay warm in the North Pole?

A: Elf-abet soup!

Knock-knock!

Who's there?

Doughnut

Doughnut who?

Doughnut open this gift till Christmas!

Q: What did the weatherman tell his wife was the forecast for Christmas Eve?

A: "There's a 100 percent chance of rain, dear"!

Q: Why did Santa Claus get a parking ticket on Christmas Eve?

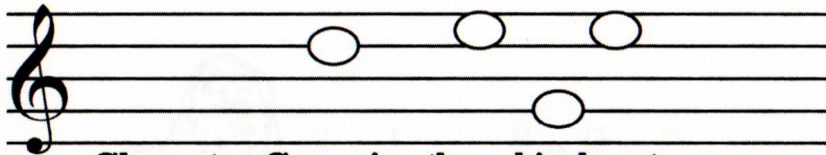
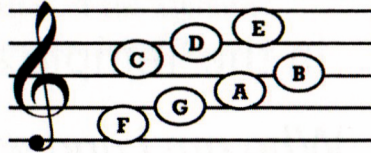
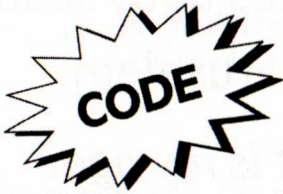
A: He left his sleigh in a Snow Parking Zone!



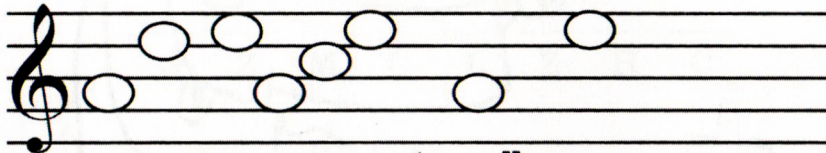
A host of heavenly angels

A host of angels appeared to nearby shepherds and told them where to find Jesus!

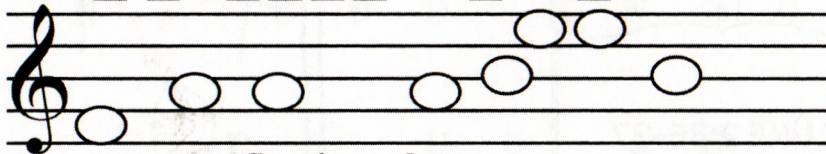
Use the musical code to find out what the angels sang



Glory to Go_ in th_ hi_h_st



n p_ _ _ _ to _ll m_n



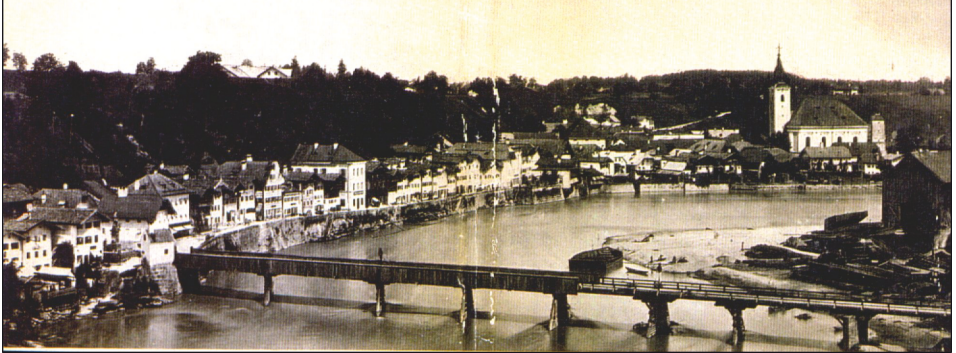
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LUKE
2:11, 14

The tale of a Christmas carol

It is one of the world's most enduring Christmas carols and one of the best-selling songs of all time, but for nearly 200 years, the story of its genesis was obscured in myth. JOHN SYMES looks at the twists and turns in the strange story of Silent Night



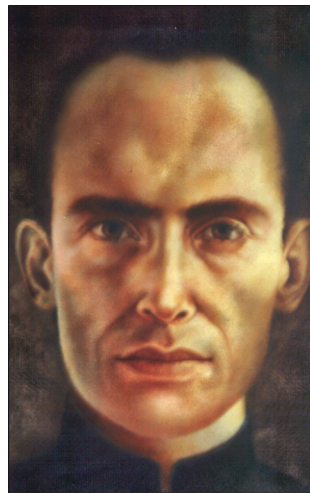
The Austrian town of Oberndorf in 1890, where *Silent Night* was first performed publicly on Christmas Eve, 1819

If asked to name the three best-selling-songs of all time, most of us would have little difficulty with the first two: *White Christmas*, by Bing Crosby, and Elton John's 1997 reworking of his *Candle in the Wind*. Which order you place them depends on when you last took notice of such things. For years, Bing reigned supreme, only to be overtaken for a few years by Elton's overwrought paean in the wake of the death of Princess Diana. The Irving Berlin-penned seasonal perennial has since regained its supremacy.

But the third? Well, it's sung by that man again, Bing Crosby, who released it in 1935, but it's not a pop song in the traditional sense. It's a carol: *Silent Night*.

A mainstay of Christmas Masses for two centuries, *Silent Night* has two enduring myths attached to it: that it was sung by German and English soldiers across the trenches in their national renditions (*Stille Nacht/Silent Night*) during the unofficial "Christmas Truce" of 1914 (true), and that it

was first performed in the parish church of the small Austrian town of Oberndorf in 1819, and was written in one night to be accompanied by guitar, because either an attack by hungry church mice or flooding had rendered the organ mute (true – up to point).



A reconstruction of the face of Fr Joseph Mohr, the humble parish priest who co-wrote *Silent Night*

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Joseph Mohr's original handwritten manuscript for *Silent Night*, dated 1816, two years before it was first performed, and showing it was specifically written for a guitar accompaniment

To find out the true story of *Silent Night*, we must turn to the unlikely figure of Austrian author, actor and film producer Hanno Schilf, a man who, on the urging of his mother – who wanted him to take a break from his usual gangster movies and make a film more to her tastes (such as the story of *Stille Nacht*) – began researching the carol. His research led to the rewriting of the history of *Silent Night* and even a museum totally devoted to it.

Schilf started in the Steingasse, high in the Alps above Salzburg, where Joseph Mohr was born on the December 11, 1792, the illegitimate son of Anna Schoiber – who already had two illegitimate daughters – and a soldier, Franz Joseph Mohr, who did little more for the child than bequeath his name before deserting the army and doing a flit. The household, which also

included a grandmother and a cousin, lived in a small, damp room and earned its living spinning and knitting.

For her latest “carnal offence” – bearing an illegitimate child – Anna was fined nine florins, more than she earned in a year. So she accepted the offer of a rich townsman, Franz Joseph Wohlmuth, to adopt Joseph as his godchild. This generous offer was in fact a double-edged sword: Wohlmuth was the Salzburg executioner. Poor young Joseph thus had two black marks against his name.

But in Salzburg, salvation came with music: he had a fine tenor voice and a natural gift for learning instruments, including the guitar, the violin and the organ. He soon came to the attention of the Salzburg Cathedral choirmaster, Johann Nepomuk Hiernle, who took him under his wing and



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by way of completing the semi-illiterate youth's education, had him trained to be a priest.

Joseph was ordained in 1815 and sent to the parish of the village of Mariapfarr, high in the Alps above Salzburg. It was also the village of his father and here he met his grandfather for the first time (Joseph never met his father).

According to Schilf, the old man was to die only a few months later but they were able to spend one Christmas together. With its high alpine peaks and deep valleys, and thus cut off from the main centres such as Salzburg, this area of Austria was unusual in its liturgy. In Mariapfarr, the Mass on Christmas Eve included German singing and folk instruments (strictly forbidden in areas closer to the main centres) as well as the usual Latin litany. "It made a deep impression on Joseph and inspired him to write his own carol, which we know as *Silent Night*, *Holy Night*, in the next year, 1816."

Schilf has some interesting conjectures on where Mohr's inspiration for the words of *Silent Night*, quite apart from the obvious religious ones. The year 1815 saw two major events affecting Europe: the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which left much of Europe geographically and economically ravaged, and far away, the huge volcanic eruption of Mt Tambora in Indonesia, which sent an ash cloud around the world that caused darkened skies and crop failures (1816 was known as the "Year Without A Summer"). Silent nights, indeed

After a short sojourn in Salzburg due to ill-health in 1817, Joseph was moved to the new parish of Oberndorf. Here he had the good fortune to work along with the liberal-minded man Father Joseph Kessler and together they arranged mixed German-Latin masses, of the sort Joseph had encountered in Mariapfarr. These proved popular with the parishioners – but too popular for the archbishop, who promptly showed his disapproval by removing



Franz Xaver Gruber, teacher and friend of Mohr and co-composer and promoter of *Silent Night*

Kessler. He was replaced by the traditionalist Georg Heinrich Nöstler, who rejected the use of German in church outright. Joseph and the older priest soon fell out. Nöstler thought Joseph's guitar-twanging in church inappropriate for a priest and counter-liturgical, and complained to the archdiocese.

Perhaps surprisingly, the consequent inquiry found in Mohr's favour, so an outraged Nöstler resorted to underhand means: spreading stories about the more unsavoury aspects of Joseph's upbringing. He succeeded in undermining the young priest's moral authority to the extent that even Joseph's closest friend, the teacher and organist Franz Xaver Gruber, whom he had credited with writing the music of *Silent Night* in his original manuscript, seemed reluctant to be seen with him.

But was that just for show? Because it is here that Gruber steps out of the shadows of co-authorship and into the limelight as *Silent Night*'s primary promoter.

It was Gruber who later spread the story that days before Christmas Eve in 1818, when Mohr's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, the Oberndorf church organ broke down, so it was impossible to hold Midnight Mass in the traditional way. According to this story, Mohr approached Gruber with a poem he had written, *Stille Nacht*, and asked for it to be set to music with a guitar accompaniment to be included in the Christmas service. It was, Gruber said,



Fr Joseph Mohr's grave today

completed in a single night and, no doubt accompanied by much grumbling, the traditionalist Nöstler agreed it could be included in the Mass. So it was that Mohr was able to perform *Silent Night* for the first time. "Under normal circumstances, it would never have been acceptable for a German song to be played with guitar accompaniment in church," says Schilf.

A nice tale, but as we know, incorrect in a fundamental detail: Schilf's own research uncovered the original manuscript of *Silent Night*, written in Mohr's own hand and dated 1816. And as for the church organ? Yes, it did break down, but Schilf suspects (although he admits he has no hard evidence) that this was due to intervention by a larger animal than the official culprits, mice: Franz Xaver Gruber himself.

What isn't in doubt was the carol's success. It was picked up by two travelling families of folk singers, the Strassers and the Rainers, who included it in their shows. The Rainers once performed it for an audience that included Franz I of Austria and Alexander I of Russia, as well as making the first performance of the song in the United States, in New York City in 1839. By the 1840s the song was well known in

Lower Saxony and was reported to be a favourite of Frederick William IV of Prussia, to whom Gruber told his much-embroidered story of the song's genesis.

As for Mohr? Unfortunately, the arguments between the two priests flared up once more in July of the next year, so Joseph applied for a transferral and in October 1819, he left Oberndorf for Kuchl, a market town in the Salzberg region. In the next nine years, he moved

through 11 parishes: Golling, Vigaun, Hallein, Krispl, Adnet, Anthering, Koppl, Anthering again, Eugendorf and Hof. Eventually he was given care of his own parish for the first time, in Hintersee in 1827.

Mohr died on December 4, 1838, in the alpine town of Wagrain (today best known as a ski and summer biking resort and the original home of Atomic Skis). He left this world as poor as he had entered it, having given everything to the people who needed his protection and support. There wasn't even enough money for a proper funeral.

For a long time, Mohr's part in his own great enduring legacy was forgotten. It wasn't until Hanno Schilf uncovered the 1816 manuscript that the central role of a humble priest working in a backwater parish high in the Austrian Alps in creating one of the world's most enduring Christmas carols was at last recognised.

† You can hear Bing Crosby's 1935 version of *Silent Night* on YouTube [here](#). A search for *Silent Night* will also bring up versions by singers as diverse as The Temptations, Sinéad O'Connor, Mariah Carey, Bros (!), Celtic Woman and my favourite, [Nat 'King' Cole](#).

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Adoration of the Shepherds, by Gerard van Honthorst, 1622

“I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.”

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*