

July 2024

EDGEWAYS

# Sacred Heart Parish Magazine

Vol. 35 No. 6

*sacredheartwimbledon.org.uk*



**Tuesday 25 June**

**Bishop Philip Moger and Canon David  
greet former pupils after Mass  
celebrating 132 years of  
Ursuline Preparatory School**

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

## Are you contagious?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we became very familiar with the 'R number': if the R number was above 1, the virus was spreading; if below 1, it was receding.

In a report for Church Growth Modelling (click [here](#)), Dr John Hayward, a mathematics don at the University of South Wales, uses this concept to analyse the rate of growth and decline of churches in the United Kingdom.

Hayward calculated the R number for the Catholic Church in the UK at just over 0.9: it is not reproducing itself and is heading for decline, if not extinction. The Catholic Church is in a better place than most other denominations, but we cannot be complacent. Hayward remarks: 'It is possible that Catholics ... could just survive, but at vastly reduced numbers.'

In a very interesting paragraph, he reaches the following conclusion:

'The Church of England and Catholics should last until the second half of the century. However, they need to take urgent action now. Stemming losses is not enough. None of us can prevent ageing! Whatever their current denominational emphases, they should put all aside to encourage members to make new disciples who can replicate themselves. Praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit would not go amiss either.'

We might point the finger at ageing among the faithful, reduced immigration, a lowering Catholic birth rate, and a loss of loyalty among younger Catholics. In his general analysis of the denominations, Hayward states that, very clearly, it is the



liberal denominations that are declining the most. He asks: 'Do liberal Christians have insufficient theological reasons to want to spread their faith?'

The analysis prompts further questions. Might the declining denominations have a lukewarm attachment to confessional Christianity? Do they see their religion more in human terms than divine terms? For them, is Christianity more about things *people* do rather than what *God* does? For Catholics, are there cultural reasons why we have failed to spread our faith?

You don't need me to tell you that Mass attendance was severely affected by the pandemic. The big question is: how many people have we lost? Our worry over lower Mass attendance is not financial (that is, simply wanting to preserve the institution): we are close to breaking even in this parish, as you will have seen from

the recent financial appeal. Our concern is for the eternal destination of people's souls.

The bishops, clergy, and diocesan officials obviously have a major part to play if we are to spread the faith and grow the Church. But it is also clear that every single Church member has a role in this. Every baptised person is, by virtue of that baptism, part of the Church's mission.

Expressed in more practical terms, you will know rather better than I do of individual Catholics or families who have stopped coming to Mass or of non-Catholics who may be interested in becoming Catholic.

The parish as a whole also has a role in spreading the faith. What can we do as a parish? How can we use the various media to reach out? What groups would help? What is the Holy Spirit urging us to do in this situation?

Hayward's analysis states that encouraging members to make more disciples is the most important – and necessary – thing we should be doing at this time. It is the most urgent task of our age.

So, what are YOU doing to recruit new disciples? What should YOUR parish be doing to facilitate this?

In short, are YOU contagious?

*Canon David*

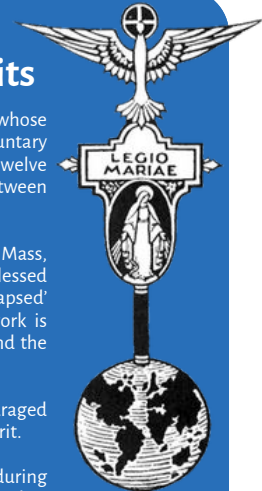
### 17 – 24 August The 'Peregrinatio Pro Christo' visits

Founded in 1921, the Legion of Mary is a lay Catholic organisation whose members offer devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through voluntary service to the Church worldwide. We are excited to learn that twelve Legionaries of Mary – all from Ireland – will visit the parish between Saturdays 17 and 24 August.

They will knock on doors and talk about the Catholic Church, the Mass, the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the role of Our Blessed Lady in the story of salvation. They will particularly encourage any 'lapsed' Catholics to return to practising their faith. These volunteers' work is similar to that of the apostles and disciples of the early Church, and the later missionaries who brought the Catholic faith to these isles.

'Peregrinatio' is a speaking apostolate, but the legionaries are encouraged to be better listeners than talkers, always as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We thank the parishioners who are kindly housing the legionaries during their stay. If you can offer lunch or dinner to a couple of them one day, please contact Thelma in the Parish Office. Please pray for their work.



## A busy month...

What a lot of stories! So much has happened in and around our parish since the last Edgeways that it is hard to fit it all in – so expect even more from June 2024 in future Edgeways!

After a general appeal, I am now ably assisted by parishioner Matteo Baccaglioni (OW '11-'18), who helps with the editing and layout. Thank you, Matteo!

July Edgeways' front cover shows a photograph taken after Mass on Tuesday 25 June, which gave thanks for 132 years of the Ursuline Preparatory School. The



Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Philip Moger and Canon David, who met with former pupils outside church. There will be an article celebrating the school in a future edition of Edgeways.

## ...means that we have lots to cover!

Following Canon David's call for us to be contagious disciples (*pp.2-3*), this month's Edgeways features a touching farewell from Fr Matthew, reflecting on his time with us at Sacred Heart Wimbledon (*p.5*).

Revisiting recent events in the parish, Ruth Naylor thanks volunteers at the Parish Feast Day on 9 June (*p.6*), and we introduce the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (*p.8-9*), about which Canon David spoke to the Newman Circle on 18 June. Further to the Youth 2000 retreat on 11 May, we offer an overview of this vibrant Catholic young adult movement (*p.7*). We also report photographs from the excellent Sacred Heart Chorus and Orchestra Summer Concert on 22 June (*pp.10-11*).

This month's Edgeways highlights our parish's membership of Merton Citizens, an exciting local alliance we cofounded in

April 2018. At a recent Citizens UK schools conference, Wimbledon College students reflected on the power of community organising (*p.12*) and at the Citizens UK Election Assembly on 1 July, parishioners held national politicians to account (*p.15*). We profile recent events at Merton Citizens, including Refugee Action Week and meetings with local candidates for the General Election (*pp.16-17*).

Parishioners also attended a recent talk by Abbot Christopher Jamison on the 'Language of Grace' in politics (*p.14*). We profile James Decent, a local landscape artist (*pp.18-19*), and conclude with a history of sports on Wimbledon Common (*pp.20-22*).

**I don't know about you, but I am exhausted!**

David Hurst

## Farewell message from Fr Matthew Donnelly

When I arrived at Sacred Heart three years ago, I was excited to find a community that was – and still is – changing and evolving.

Some of the people I first met have moved on or sadly passed away – but the church is ever-new and there is a constant influx of new people and families from all parts of the world who, in new ways, shape and form our community to make it an outward-looking expression of the Universal Church.

Witnessing the Youth Festival we had in the parish over the summer is a case in point. A new generation of Catholic twenty-somethings, really enthusiastic about their faith and bringing expression to it through a deep love for the sacramental life of the Church, especially in their devotion to the Eucharist and sacramental confession, fills me with hope for the future.

The parish's social life is another indicator of its vibrancy in bringing together many groups and cultural expressions of faith, from the high culture of the sacred music tradition here, which is so highly regarded, to the theatrical performances, which include young and old of all abilities. The recent summer ball was great fun to be part of!

The diverse expressions in the liturgy during the celebration of the Eucharist are an example of the depth of faith in many people here; the manner of celebration is always reverent with a sense of the sacred in the presence of the Eucharist. It is



always a joy for a priest to celebrate Mass in our beautiful church!

The works of the Gospel are being carried out; the homeless are served by the night shelter; and those alone or in care homes are visited with the Sacraments. Our Lady is honoured with the Rosary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus is worshipped in our First Friday devotions.

All of these facets of parish life give glory to God and I have been privileged to witness them and learn from my first experience as a priest here. I consider it an honour to have served at Sacred Heart and will miss you. Please remember me in prayer as I take on my new placement in Croydon.

Fr Matthew

## Sunday 9 June Sacred Heart Parish Day – now for the thank-yous!

On Sunday 9 June, the sun shone amid excellent company as we celebrated our Sacred Heart Parish Feast Day in style. After a huge food shop the day before, Alessandro, Andrea, and their army of volunteers from the School of Community formed a production line to deliver hundreds of burgers, chicken, and piles of salad. Margherita, Sandra, and their team served the drinks cold, while Nikki and the RCIA group kept them hot, accompanied by a slice of cake.

With a nod to the tennis, Rehana prepared strawberries and cream, with demand outstripping supply, and Jude ensured the ice cream didn't melt. The hook-a-duck, supervised by Rob and Lucy, proved incredibly popular and the bottle stall, run by Rachel and Teresa, benefited from the full variety of Wimbledon's wine cellars. Thelma and her team enticed punters to buy raffle tickets with prizes including a giant Toblerone, while the book stall and plant stall offered choices to the green-fingered bibliophile.



Both photographs are by John Stone.



The highlight of the afternoon was the performance of the Sacred Heart Primary School choir on the church steps, rehearsed and conducted by Bonnie Rogers. All the members of the choir communicated such joy and they got a rousing reception. We were then treated to a high-class jazz performance from Grace Angelica and her band.

Rounding off the afternoon, Canon David's call for volunteers to help tidy up meant that the gazebo, put up the previous day in two hours, took just half an hour to get down. Indeed, the whole event was a wonderful witness to 'many hands making light work'.

We felt incredibly blessed to have such a dedicated group of volunteers. Thank you to all who came and all who contributed to a wonderful feast!

And so save the date for the next Parish Feast Day on Sunday 29 June 2025!

Ruth Naylor  
Chair of the PPC

## Youth 2000's mission and history

In early May, the parish was delighted to host its first Youth 2000 day-long retreat in bright sunshine and with a full house of over 200 young adult Catholics.

The 'London Retreat', centred on the theme 'Come & See' (John 1:46), included guest speaker talks by Fr Toby Lees OP and our very own Fr Matthew Donnelly. Among the workshops on offer were 'Vocation', led by Br John Church OP, and 'Grief to Grace', led by Fr Dominic Allain.

Youth 2000 is an international Catholic movement for young people. It was founded in 1990 by Ernest Williams, a young Englishman, in response to Pope Saint John Paul II's call to young people at World Youth Day 1989 in Santiago de Compostella, Spain.

'It is up to you young people that the task falls particularly to bear witness to the faith and bring into the Third Christian Millennium the Gospel of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and to build a new society, a society of love, justice, and peace.'

– Pope Saint John Paul II,  
World Youth Day 1989

The movement inspires young people into a deeper relationship with Christ, and is centred on the Eucharist as 'the source and summit of Christian life'. Its charism is rooted also in St John Bosco, one of the movement's patron saints, and his love for the Eucharist and Mary.



Pope Saint John Paul II in 1988.  
Gregorini Demetrio via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

'Our objective is to see young people set on fire with the Holy Spirit, devoted to the Eucharist and Mary, who invite their generation into a relationship with Jesus Christ, rebuild the Church, and transform society into a civilisation of love.'

– Youth 2000



The Youth 2000 mission team in Walsingham, May 2024. Youth 2000.

Youth 2000 has held events in over 40 countries and has a large presence at World Youth Day. Its events are organised by young people, for young people.

Visit [www.youth2000.org](http://www.youth2000.org) for further information and watch out for the date of the next Youth 2000 retreat at our parish in early 2025, which promises to be another worshipful and fulfilling activity for Catholic young adults.

## Canon David explains: what's the KCHS all about?

On Tuesday 18 June, Canon David explained to the Newman Circle the meaning behind his honorary award as Knight Commander of the Holy Sepulchre (KCHS) of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (EOHSJ).



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 2010.  
Gerd Eichmann via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The EOHSJ is one of two remaining chivalric orders recognised by the Holy See, the other being the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. These chivalric orders should not be confused with papal knights, such as the Knights of Saint Gregory, nor with fraternal men's groups, such as the Knights of St Columba.

The Order consists of some 30,000 knights and dames globally, organised into 60 'lieutenancies'. The Order provides charitable and financial support to the Church in the Holy Land, deploying 10 million euros annually for education, social care, and the institutions of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. It strengthens the Christian life of its members, particularly through regular

pilgrimages to the Holy Land, where the Order supports the faith's preservation and propagation, as well as the rights of Catholics.

The Order traces its roots to the First Crusade, particularly a group of knights commissioned by Godfrey of Bouillon in 1099 to guard the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is built on the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. In 1113, Pope Paschal II recognised this *Milites Sancti Sepulchri* in a papal bull. A decade later, Pope Callixtus II charged the group with specific responsibilities for guarding Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre in defence of Christianity.

### EOHSJ at a glance

#### Sovereign of the Order:

The Pope

#### Grand Master:

Fernando Cardinal Filoni

#### Grand Prior:

Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa,  
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

#### Headquarters:

Palazzo Della Rovere, Rome

#### Official church:

Sant'Onofrio al Gianicolo, Rome

#### Patron saint:

Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Queen of Palestine

#### Motto:

'Deau lo Vul' ('God wills it')

The Kingdom of Jerusalem fell in 1291, and knights who returned home to Europe continued their traditions locally. In England, the Order's first priory was completed in Warwick in 1109 by Henry de Newburgh, a Knight Crusader and the first Earl of Warwick.

In 1342, Pope Clement VI entrusted the Franciscans with custody of Christian sites in the Holy Land. Mindful of its history, the Franciscans continued the Order's traditions: investiture ceremonies for new knights featured on the itineraries of Christian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem.

After a short-lived and unsuccessful attempt to abolish the Order in 1489, Pope Alexander VI reserved the title of 'Grand Master' for the papacy, though later popes relinquished the title to the restored Latin Patriarch.



Knights at an investiture ceremony in Fulda, Germany.  
Dieter Schmitt via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)



Knights at a procession in Paderborn, Germany.  
Dirk D. via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The restoration of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847 revitalised the Order after a period of obscurity and uncertain purpose. Since then, the Order has financed the construction of forty schools in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, whose running costs it maintains; the schools collectively number around 19,000 students, two-fifths of whom are Muslim.

In 1888, the Order admitted its first Dames, and from 1932, knights could be invested in their places of origin, not just Jerusalem. The Order is closely connected to the Vatican and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Order also guards the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris.

Being a Knight or Dame is a lifelong commitment to lead a Christian life that witnesses to the Order's mission. Knights and dames organise a calendar of events in their localities to strengthen their spiritual growth and raise awareness of the Order and its activities.

# Saturday 22 June Sacred Heart Chorus and Orchestra Summer Concert



**PART I**  
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)  
'Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor' (c. 1800)  
Soloist: Giles Kennedy



**PART II**  
Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)  
'Mottetto per San Paulino' (1877) & 'Messa di Gloira' (1880)  
Soloists: John Upperton and Nick Marsden



Photographs by John Stone

## Wimbledon College students celebrate community organising



“Power can feel limited in this country, especially as we 17-year-olds cannot vote. But when we work together, we can be powerful. With our energy, there can be a tsunami of change!”

— John, 17, Wimbledon College

On Tuesday 2 July, a group from Wimbledon College, accompanied by their chaplain, James Potter, gathered with over 200 other young people, teachers, and school leaders from all over England and Wales in the parish hall of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Pimlico. This was a day of celebration, reflection, and inspiration, sharing how the Catholic schools in attendance are living out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching through community organising.

The event was arranged by a team of teachers and chaplains who work in Catholic schools and are engaged with Citizens UK. The event celebrated the existing community organising work taking place in Catholic schools and inspired others to get involved; it also served to launch a new Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising toolkit for schools and colleges.

Guest of honour Cardinal Vincent Nichols discussed his previous work with Citizens UK, and reminded the young audience that we are all on a ‘journey guided by our faith, strengthened by hope, and led by our desire for charity and justice’. He offered his prayers and blessing for Citizens UK’s organising work in Catholic schools and colleges, including the new toolkit, and agreed to share our work with Pope Francis on his next visit to Rome. There is a hope that a delegation can visit the Vatican to share this work in person.

Raymond Friel OBE, Chief Executive of the Caritas Social Action Network, reminded everyone of the upcoming Year of Jubilee and how schools can make pledges that link to their work with community organising. He explained the connection between love and justice and reminded everyone of Pope Benedict XVI’s call to have a ‘heart that sees’.

“Every win is a win, big or small. Persist, try, try and try again!”

— A participating young person

Anita Motha, Chief Executive of the charity Million Minutes, celebrated the work of the different campaigns that the young people had been involved in. She reminded them that they are the ‘living catalysts for change’. As she put it so well: ‘You are inspiring!’

Schools and colleges featuring in the toolkit celebrated and shared some of their work, explaining where they have been living out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching through the model of community organising. Andy Lewis, Deputy Headteacher at St Bonaventure’s in East London, said: ‘It was a real coming together of so much great work – the achievements of these young people are incredible – securing the Living Wage at large companies, reduced bus fares for a whole region, ensuring greater funding for mental health support in schools.’

‘However, it felt like only the beginning: we will now be working out our next steps with the support of key Catholic organisations, and with the blessing of

“We [young people] are ready to demolish the divides of our society and rebuild stronger.”

— A participating young person

Cardinal Nichols. We look forward, with great hope, to sharing and celebrating this work with the Holy Father in Rome.’

Young people from Catholic schools confidently co-chaired the event and conducted a panel discussion with other young people engaged in community organising within Citizens UK chapters.

Grainne Byrd, Director of Faith and Ethos at Cardinal Newman Sixth Form College in Brighton, said that students ‘co-chaired and presented at the event with wisdom, clarity and confidence’. She added: ‘It was a truly inspiring event. The stars of the day were the young people, whose vision of love and hope for the common good was such a welcome antidote to the self-interest so often displayed in modern politics.’

Citizens UK bring communities together to achieve meaningful change for the common good. For more information, visit [www.citizens.org.uk](http://www.citizens.org.uk). If you wish to get involved on behalf of the parish, contact David at [dthurst52@gmail.com](mailto:dthurst52@gmail.com).

*This article was adapted from a report in Independent Catholic News ([click here](#)) attributed to the Caritas Social Action Network. It includes additional reporting in a press release by the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton ([click here](#)).*

## Parishioners listen to Abbot Christopher Jamison on the ‘Language of Grace’

The Catholic Union held its Summer Gathering in bucolic surroundings at Worth Abbey on Saturday 6 July. The programme included prayers and Mass in the abbey with Gregorian chants sung by the Benedictine community.

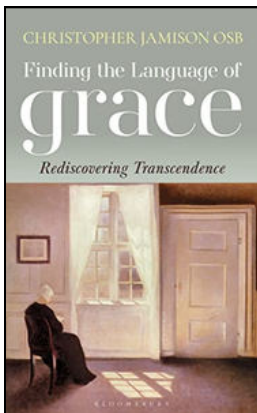
Attending parishioners William Rhind and David Hurst enjoyed conviviality and interesting presentations. The sold-out gathering was the Catholic Union’s first major post-election event. Guests enjoyed a presentation by Baroness Sheila Hollins, former parishioner and the current President of the Catholic Union, about the importance of listening and consensus-building in policy formation and the legislative processes.



Photograph from the Catholic Union

After lunch, Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB, President of the English Benedictine Congregation, gave an engaging talk about how one could detoxify politics through rediscovering the language of grace. He expanded on the themes in his most recent book, *Finding the Language of Grace: Rediscovering Transcendence* (Bloomsbury, 2022), which shows how the ways in which we listen, speak, read, and write can all be channels of grace.

Founded in 1870, the Catholic Union of Great Britain is dedicated to the advocacy of Catholic values in Parliament and public life regardless of political affiliations. It offers members regular news updates about Catholic public affairs and invitations to lectures and evening receptions. For more details and to join, visit [www.catholicunion.org.uk](http://www.catholicunion.org.uk).



## Citizens UK holds politicians to account before the General Election



On Monday 1 July, just three days before the General Election, Citizens UK hosted an assembly at Methodist Central Hall in Westminster to meet with Angela Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Lord Richard Newby, Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, and Sara Gezdari, the Conservative candidate for Richmond Park.

Several parishioners attended: Sacred Heart has been one of the seventeen active members of Merton Citizens since the alliance launched in April 2018.

Accompanied by musical interludes from selected schools and powerful stories of lived experiences, the audience of over 2,000 members of Citizens UK alliances heard how the three speakers and their parties would work with them on important issues if they were elected.

The issues presented were finalised after a two-year listening campaign and can be read on Citizens UK’s website at [www.citizensuk.org/campaigns/citizens-manifesto](http://www.citizensuk.org/campaigns/citizens-manifesto).

The assembly addressed issues including paying the Living Wage to social care workers nationally, building a fair and legal pathway to citizenship for qualifying refugees, and providing safe and affordable homes. Real stories of people experiencing these hardships and the pledges made by the speakers can be viewed on [Citizens UK’s website](http://Citizens UK's website).

If you are interested in learning more or in joining the parish’s Merton Citizens group, please contact David at [dthurst52@gmail.com](mailto:dthurst52@gmail.com).





## What does Merton Citizens do?

Citizens UK is the largest, most diverse and most effective people-powered alliance bringing communities in the United Kingdom together to win meaningful change. Merton Citizens was established as a separate alliance in April 2018. As of July 2024, its subscribed members are:

- Sacred Heart Wimbledon
- Wimbledon College
- Faith in Action Merton
- SW London & St George's NHS Trust
- YMCA Wimbledon
- Wimbledon Salvation Army
- Mitcham Salvation Army
- Raynes Park Community Church
- Mitcham Parish Church
- St Barnabas, Mitcham
- St Mark's, Mitcham
- Trinity United Reformed Church
- Christ Church, Colliers Wood
- St John the Divine Church
- Holy Trinity & St Peter Church
- St Mark's Academy, Mitcham
- CitizenZoo

### Friday 7 June Recognition at the Merton Partnership Civic Pride Volunteer Awards

At the awards ceremony hosted at the Arts Space in Wimbledon Library, our parish was one of the seventeen constituent members of Merton Citizens that won the award for Volunteer Team of the Year.

The ceremony included a screening of a project film about Merton Citizens' mental health support hub at St Mark's Academy, Mitcham. It also mentioned Merton Citizens' work on Empathy First training, the Living Wage, and refugee resettlement.



### Tuesday 18 June Refugee Action Week

As part of national Refugee Action Week, over 60 people – mainly students – met at St Mark's Academy, Mitcham, to discuss practical ways in which our borough's school communities can be more of a sanctuary to refugees and asylum seekers.

### Monday 17 and Wednesday 19 June Meetings with electoral candidates

Members of Merton Citizens met with two of Wimbledon's candidates at the General Election: Eleanor Stringer, Labour, via Zoom; and Paul Kohler, Liberal Democrat, in person at the YMCA.

At the meeting, we discussed our many overlapping priorities and how, if elected, the candidates could work with Merton Citizens on key issues, especially social housing in the borough. After his election, we are in contact with Paul about our future cooperation on these issues.



### Monday 1 July Election Assembly in Westminster

See page 15 for details of the Election Assembly at Methodist Central Hall, which was attended by Merton Citizens, and at which we secured pledges on key issues from politicians representing their parties nationally, including Angela Rayner, now Deputy Prime Minister.

If you are interested in learning more or in joining the parish's Merton Citizens group, please contact David at [dthurst52@gmail.com](mailto:dthurst52@gmail.com).



## 'Inspired by light' local artist James Decent



Local oil-painting artist James Decent paints landscapes of our own, very beautiful Wimbledon Common.

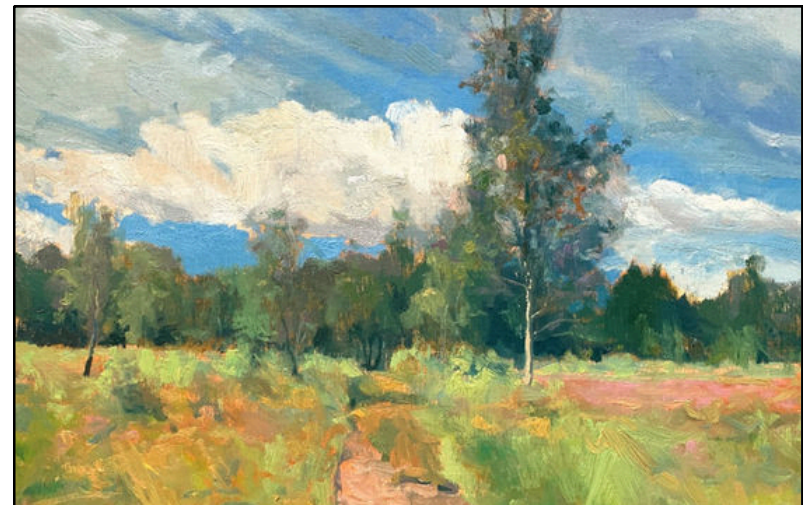
James grew up in Sheffield and now lives in Southfields. From an early age, he created artworks that reflected the contrasting landscapes of countryside and city. His works have been exhibited in exhibitions and competitions in the South Yorkshire region.

James' skills as a draftsman led him to study architecture in Nottingham and London, where he won prizes for his design from the Worshipful Company of

Chartered Architects. He was nominated for the RIBA President's Medal.

James's primary interest is light and colour. Inspired by the techniques of artists John Singer Sargent, Joaquin Sorolla, and William Nicholson, James is interested in resonating a contemporary yet timeless ambience, connecting with people and places. He is also a director of London-based architecture practice Decent Goodfellow.

**For more information, including prices, visit [www.jamesdecent.co.uk](http://www.jamesdecent.co.uk) or email James directly at [jdecentart@gmail.com](mailto:jdecentart@gmail.com).**



# A history of sports on Wimbledon Common



As the tennis championships at the AELTC once again draw to a close, we wonder: did you know that various sports have been played on the Common over its long history?

## Riding (1236)

Humans have been riding on the Common since at least the 13th century, and today still ride from the Wimbledon Village Stables, which are believed to be the oldest recorded riding stables in England.

The late Richard Milward, a renowned local historian who taught at Wimbledon College, discovered that the first recorded stables belonged to the Lord of Wimbledon Manor, and are detailed in the Estate's accounts of 1236–37.

The stables on their current site, behind the Dog & Fox, were founded in 1915 by William Kirkpatrick and named Hilcote Stables. On William's retirement, his daughter Jean took over their management, continuing to visit the stables until her death in 2005.

From 1969, Hilcote Stables was leased to Colin Crawford. When it was sold in 1980 to the current owner, Carol Andrews, it was renamed Wimbledon Village Stables.

## Cricket (1854)

Cricket has been played in Merton since the mid-17th century. Mitcham Cricket Club is the oldest ground in the world.

Professional matches are thought to have started on Wimbledon Common in the

## Poor William Pitt...



In 1784, after a boozy night of merriment hosted by William Wilberforce (left) in Wimbledon, Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger (centre-right) was not his usual self. Struggling to start his ass on the ride back across the Common while Wilberforce's was in full swing, a passer-by exclaimed: 'What will nobody kick the Minister's A-!' Thomas Rowlandson's print, now in the British Museum, immortalises the incident.

mid-1800s. The first games were played close to the Windmill, using tents as changing rooms. Wimbledon Cricket Club was founded in 1854.

Wimbledon Village Cricket Club played on the Common near the Rushmere until the 1980s, when the wicket's maintenance became too difficult. Nevertheless, cricket is still played on the Common close to the Telegraph pub in Putney Heath, and Putney Cricket Club has a pitch on the south side of Putney Lower Common, on Common land.



## Shooting (1860)

The National Rifle Association was founded in 1859, following the Napoleonic Wars and fearful of a French invasion to make certain that soldiers and the public were able to defend themselves; could they shoot, could they shoot straight, could they shoot the right guys!

In its early decades, the NRA hosted its annual meetings on the Common. Queen Victoria fired the first shot at its inaugural meeting in 1860 (pictured above).

## Golf (1860s)

The London Scottish Golf Club is considered the longest continually played-upon course in England. No one is sure exactly when golf was first played here, but seven holes were picked out in the early 1860s by members of the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers, who were stationed on Wimbledon Common.

A number of the holes, such as Long Butt, Running Deer, Blockade, and the Long Hole, were originally laid out along the lines of rifle ranges. Old bullets are occasionally still found on parts of the course.

From this first club came the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club and the Wimbledon Common Golf Club. The history of the Ladies' game on the common is also interesting.

## Bowls and bowling (1914)

Putney Town Bowling Club's bowling green and clubhouse is on the Common's westside, next to Oasis Academy.

## Rugby (1865)

The Rose & Crown was the clubhouse and changing rooms of the Wimbledon Rugby Football Club. The first recorded game was against Richmond on Wimbledon Common in 1865. In 1871, the Club's captain, recuperating from a broken leg, wrote the first rules of rugby from his home in Wimbledon Village.

## Hockey (1883)

Hockey was originally played on Saturday afternoons by local residents who would go to the Common with a ball and shaved ash sticks. To determine your side, local outfitters produced pink and maroon caps – the only colours they had – and these remain the colours of the Wimbledon Hockey Club, founded in 1883.

The club was founded so cricket players could exercise over winter. Disagreements led to the club standardising the game's rules after centuries of informal play.



Photograph from Wimbledon Hockey Club.

### Football (1758)

Old Central School was founded for local boys in 1758 on Camp Road. The boys played football on the Common, eventually forming Wimbledon Old Centrals Football Club (WOCFC), which became Wimbledon FC in 1905. The WOCFC used the Fox & Grapes for its changing rooms.

### Rowing, running, and cross-country (1867–68)

In modern times, Wimbledon Common hosts Parkruns and the Wimbledon Windmilers. But during the 1867 winter, the Thames Rowing Club (est. 1860) wanted to keep fit, and so decided to organise a 2.5-mile steeplechase on the Common. This was the first organised cross-country event in Britain. After a series of successful races, the Thames Hare and Hounds Club was founded in 1868. It is vying to be recognised as the oldest formal running club in the world.

### Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields (REMPF, 1925)

Owned and managed by the Commons since 1925, the REMPf has 10 full-sized football pitches. It is the London Cornish Rugby Club's homeground and local schools compete there. During the Rugby Sevens in March, over 1,200 games are played in just four days.

From May to September, the REMPf hosts the Putney Magpies Aussie Rules Football team. In June 2002, 230 people trialed for the newly-founded AFC Wimbledon at the REMPf.

In 2007, UK Ultimate Frisbee held their championships at the REMPf; the following year, they hosted the European Ultimate Frisbee Championships.

### Curling (1895)

Enlarging a disused gravel pit in 1895 enabled the famous Scottish winter sport to be played on Wimbledon Common during frosts. The Curling Pond today has an abundance of water snails, smooth newts, and whirligig beetles. Another curling pond was once by Wimbledon Common Golf Club on Camp Road; the site is now occupied by a car park.

### Other sports

Archery, or 'toxophily', was conducted on Wodhayes Road. And duelling was also once common on the Common...though be warned: while duelling is a sort of sport, it can be rather fatal!

And of course, we cannot forget the Common's favourite sports: recreational cycling, dog walking and just...walking!

*This article is adapted from 'History of Games on the Commons' (click [here](#), pp.3-4) by Wimbledon and Putney Commons.*



### PARISH DIARY...

Sun 21 July onwards	First Holy Communion & Confirmation registrations
Mon 22 – Sat 3 Aug	Fr Matthew away
Mon 29 Jul – Thu 1 Aug	Altar-servers' summer break
Thu 1 – Sat 31 Aug	Occasional visits by Fr David Hunter
Sun 4 – Sun 11 Aug	Canon David away
Thu 15 Aug	Feast of the Assumption (Holy Day of Obligation)
Sun 17 – Sat 24 Aug	Legion of Mary: Peregrinatio Pro Christo (p.3)
Mon 9 Sep – Fri 4 Oct	Interim caretaker required
Thu 12 – Sat 14 Sep	'Kiss Me Kate' by the Edge Hill Players (p.24)
Sat 26 Oct	9.30am – 4.30pm 'Building a Better Marriage'

### Baptisms

We welcome into the family of the Church the following who have recently been baptised: Oscar Bruno Pietro Johann Bottriel-Adams, Evelyn Madeleine Scarlett Bottriel, Nicholas Christopher Watson Orton, Mariastella Crosara, Violet Anna Hume, Isabel Frances de Quay, Louis Christopher Frederik Murphy, Alba Mariuluz Jimenez, Elodie Eden Cowie, Stella Charlotte Pescatore, Leon Aleksander Badowski, Wilfred Noah Lane, Ava Naomi Monica Gordon, Aidan Timothy Keane, Anya Jane Rocher, and Jackson Philip Rocher.

### Weddings

We congratulate the following newly-weds: Albert Leroy Cabral and Rebecca Louise Marrett; Alexander Augusti and Kamila Sielski; and Leo Edward Grosvenor Leclercq and Taylor Linh Nguyen.

### Deaths

We offer our sympathies to the family and friends of: Hugh McCluskey, Peter McGurk, Maria Levita Almeida, Louis James, Alana Russell-Gear, Theresa Marian Spencer, John Harrison, Harry Evans, and Teresa Kay.



### Would you like to write for Edgeways?

Do you have an article that you think would be a great addition to YOUR parish magazine? We're always open to contributions! Contact the editor at [dthurst52@gmail.com](mailto:dthurst52@gmail.com).

**EDGE HILL PLAYERS PRESENTS**

**KISS  
ME,  
KATE**

**12, 13, 14 September 2024**

Tickets available  
via our website soon:  
[www.edgehillplayers.com](http://www.edgehillplayers.com)

**Music & Lyrics by Cole Porter  
Book by Sam & Bella Spewack**

