

## ***ST JOHN'S URC CHURCH MARSH GREEN***



## ***CHRISTMAS 2023 NEWSLETTER***

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Our Harvest Newsletter spoke of the progress the church was making in the absence of a Minister. We are still making good progress, but how the world is shifting around us! The Ukraine conflict rumbles on, a horrible new outbreak in the Middle East brings no credit to any party involved and threatens global stability, the COP28 climate summit shows how even now world leaders - including our own - lack the commitment to deliver the changes that are needed quickly enough, and in our own country the pressures caused by immigration are such as to put at risk cherished freedoms and rights which we championed in the past.

So at this Christmas time, we need to hold ever more strongly to the messages of peace and love which are at the core of the Christmas story, to support each other in a time of stress and uncertainty, and to make our little church a place where we continue to be positive and forward looking, resisting the temptation to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the troubles around us. Just as Christmas marks the start of the Christian story, so may the New Year be a positive time for all of us, and may we go forward in good heart.



## ***SERVICES over CHRISTMAS and in JANUARY***

**17 Dec**

Nativity Service led by Junior Church

**24 Dec**

No Morning service

**6.30 pm** Carols by Candlelight

**25 Dec**

***Christmas Day*** Service - Jean Gibbons and Judith Jordan

**31 Dec**

Worship led by Sue Rowe

**7 Jan**

Epiphany – Ian Fletcher

**14 Jan**

Worship with Communion – Ian Fletcher

**20 Jan (Saturday)**

**12.30pm** A short Prayer Meeting in the church to which members of churches in the Edenbridge Churches in Covenant are also invited. Followed by:

**1.00pm** 'Soup and Sandwiches'.\*

**21 Jan**

Worship led by Gary Bradford

**28 Jan**

Worship with Peter and Hilary Brand and special visit from local musicians Dan and Victoria Hulme

\*There will be events in other churches on other days as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.



***Marsh Green Christmas Lights Switch-on***



## ***“I wish you all a Merry Christmas”***

I am someone who has always favoured ‘Happy Christmas’ as a greeting, rather than ‘Merry Christmas’ However, having read an article in Banstead Church’s newsletter, I may be converted.

The use of this greeting apparently dates back to 1534 when the Catholic Bishop John Fisher sent greetings to Thomas Cromwell. The meaning of ‘merry’ then was ‘pleasant, peaceful and agreeable’.

In 1833, the carol ‘God rest you merry, gentlemen’ was published. ‘Merry’ then, used as an adverb, meant ‘stay peacefully content’. (The reference to gentlemen was because the carol is addressed to the shepherds in the account of the nativity.)

So, this year I wish you all a very Merry Christmas, with the hope that you will stay peacefully content this Christmas – as well as being happy.

**ELIZABETH RICHMOND**



## **ECO NEWS**

We had the annual eco service ( slightly spoiled by the rain!) about looking, listening and sensing our environment.

Our hedgehog tea highlighted the plight of the dear little creatures, followed by the release of 5 hoglets rescued by Jason in the village.

This has been further consolidated by the erection of hedgehog crossing signs in the village

The nature reserve has been maintained with the help of many willing volunteers including Polly Dumbrek's sheep and under Anne's careful guidance.

The starting up of Forest church and the John Muir Project will hopefully encourage the youngsters to maintain an interest in the church and the environment.

### **This Winter – Advice (adapted) from Ecotricity (Church energy supplier)**

#### **Heating your home**

- Radiators – adjust thermostatic valves on your radiators to the temperature you need for each space. If you don't have these just turn off the radiators in any rooms you don't often use.
- Bleed your radiators if the heat doesn't get to the top. You will allow air to escape which will help your radiator work more efficiently.
- Get smart with your heating. Think about when you actually need it on and the temperature it is at. You could set your heating timer to turn off an hour before you leave in the morning – your home will still stay warm, and you'll save an hour a day of heating. You could also think about doing this at night.
- Make sure you keep doors shut and draw your curtains early – it's an easy way to save energy!
- Add a jumper before turning up the thermostat

#### **Doing household chores efficiently**

- Washing your clothes at a lower temperature can help you save energy. Doing your laundry at 30°C (rather than 40°C) cuts the cost by 38%
- Only wash clothes when you have a full load.

- Don't use a tumble dryer if you can possibly help it. Use free-standing airers in the winter (hang outside in summer).
- Use the hob or microwave where possible. Keep lids on saucepans. If you do need to use an oven don't pre-heat for longer than necessary and cook more than one thing at a time.
- Another great tip is to batch cook. It's a good way to reduce energy costs and save time.
- Only ever put the amount of water in the kettle that you need. Otherwise, you are throwing away money.

### Sort out your appliances

- One of the easiest ways to save energy is to turn off your appliances at the wall when not using them. The average UK household spends £55 (45kgCO<sub>2</sub>e) a year on appliances left on standby.
- Train your family to turn off the lights when they're not in the room. It's such an easy way to save energy.
- Get yourself a smart meter. This will help you see how much energy you're using and when.

**HAVE A GOOD (AND GREENER AND CHEAPER) CHRISTMAS!**

**LIZ CROTHALL**





## **PETS AT HOME**

This will be our first pet-less Christmas for nearly forty years. When our children were small we had guinea pigs and rabbits.

Next came the cats. The first were **Bubble** and **Squeak**, then the wonderful **Basil** and his sister **Polly** (Fawlty Towers?) and latterly **Tigger** and **Jasper**.

While we still had all six cats, we got our first dog, **Duke**, a Welsh springer spaniel, from Last Chance - a real softy! In December 2008 we went to Belgium for the Christmas Markets in Brussels and Bruges. In our party were a mother and daughter from Westerham Hill. They ran an animal rescue, and showed us a picture of **Molly**, an English springer found tied to a lamp post in Croydon. We were interested, but unfortunately a couple were going to view her the next day. They decided that they wanted a male, so on our first day back home we went to see **Molly**, taking **Duke** with us. It was love at first sight, and she came home with us, renamed **Holly**. After **Duke** died, we re-homed **Snowy**, a West Highland terrier (previously known as **Candy**). The grandchildren loved the dogs and **Holly** especially was so good with them.

Sadly in November we had to say goodbye to **Holly**, almost 15½ - it broke my heart!

We intend to get another dog (or two!) in the Spring. If you have pets at home, value their companionship - our house seems so empty now!

**Gary Bradford**





## ***OXTED URC Christmas Tree Festival 2023***

**18 th - 20 th December 4.30 pm-6:30pm**

I am writing this note in November, but I expect you will be reading this in December and be already planning your own Christmas preparations.

Here is an update on my planning...

Ten years ago, David and Celia Butler introduced the idea of our church hosting a Christmas Tree Festival and since then a festival has been held every two years.

The last one in 2021 was a challenge. Due to the pandemic; it was uncertain right up to the night before whether we would be able to go ahead. However, the participating charities were all enthusiastic to carry on and under strict Covid restrictions we welcomed 234 visitors into our church, many of them children.

This year I invited 36 charities. Thirty-one have currently taken up the challenge to decorate a tree to reflect their organisation. We are welcoming four new charities.

Two had heard on the grapevine about our Tree Festival and were keen to take part. I am thrilled, as sadly some charities were not able to join us this year for various reasons.

With thankfully no restrictions in place this year I plan to have a craft table for young children. Moyna will be selling a wonderful array of Transform Trade goods, Christmas music will be playing, and we will have simple festive refreshments.

No Christmas Tree Festival would be complete without one of Sheelagh Crampton's brilliant quizzes, and I am very pleased she has agreed to compile one again this year.

The entrance fee will be £2 for adults, children will be free. CASH ONLY but change will be available at the entrance table. Beside each tree will be a labelled bucket

for visitors to donate to the charity should they wish to. Half of the entrance money will go to Crisis and, as in previous years, that amount will be matched by the Legacy Committee. The remaining entrance money will be distributed between the participating charities. The Tree Festival is a wonderful opportunity to welcome people into our beautiful church and is a lovely community event.

Do come along, bring your friends and neighbours, and enjoy the beautifully decorated trees. We are looking forward to seeing you!

Don't forget to bring loose change to pop in the buckets.

Our Carol Service will be at 5pm on Sunday, the 24th of December. The trees will still be on display so the church will look splendid as we enjoy the carols and each other's company on Christmas Eve.

Thank you for all your support.

**Lesley Mitchell**

*"I am looking for a Christmas Card that contains inclusive language, and yet retains the richness of 16th century English and is overtly Christian whilst being sensitive to the multi-faith patterns of our day ... any suggestions?"*



## ***BRIDGES – THE WARM HEART OF EDENBRIDGE***

I thought it was about the right time for me to bang the drum again about BRIDGES so cover your ears but keep your eyes open.

I'm sure that most of you know about BRIDGES, the community café in the old Ebenezer Chapel in the High Street.

And if you can't picture it, you will find the café next to the Istanbul takeaway. It has been said that "if you live in, work in, or are visiting Edenbridge, take a break from your job, your routine, or your shopping; and come in for a "cuppa" or light lunch. Relax in pleasant surroundings and meet people, or just to relax and be quiet. Child-friendly, disabled accessible, the BRIDGES Centre is for everyone in the Edenbridge area."

So, I would encourage everyone to pop in and see what BRIDGES has to offer. BRIDGES has been very successful in attracting more visitors in the last year or so, but we have been unable to open for as many hours as before Covid because a number of our volunteers decided not to come back when we re-opened after the pandemic. We are currently only open on Monday to Friday mornings but would really like to be open for longer during the week and on Saturday mornings so could you think about whether you could volunteer to work a shift once a fortnight.

There are three roles:

Cook – cooking breakfasts, toasting sandwiches, re-heating pre-cooked meals etc. (Michelin stars not needed).

Servery – serving our visitors with drinks and cakes and taking orders for the above-mentioned hot food.

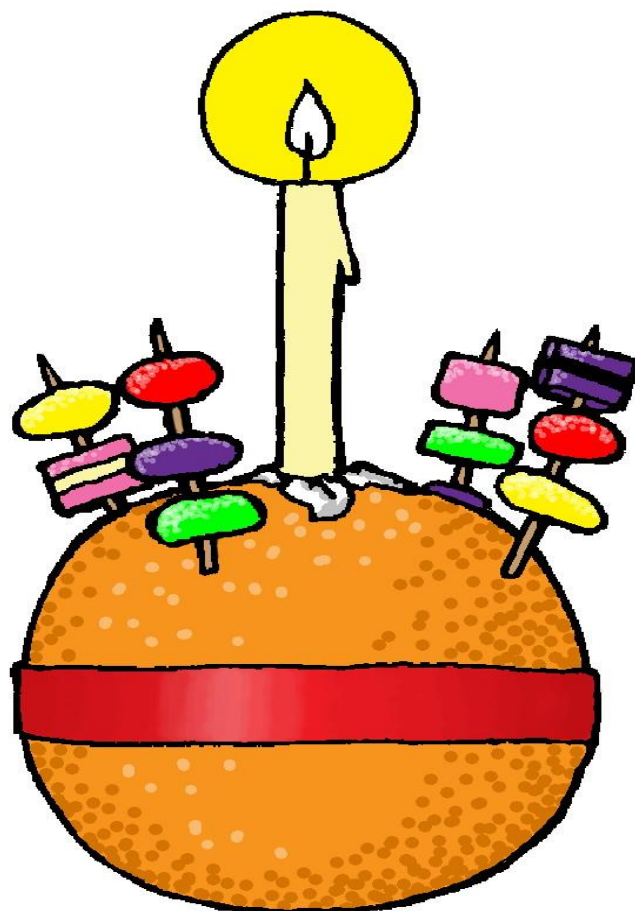
Kirchen Assistant - washing up (we have a dishwasher) and generally helping in the kitchen.

If you are interested, please speak to me or call in to see Mary Perrett, our manager (not on a Thursday), or give her a call on 868186.

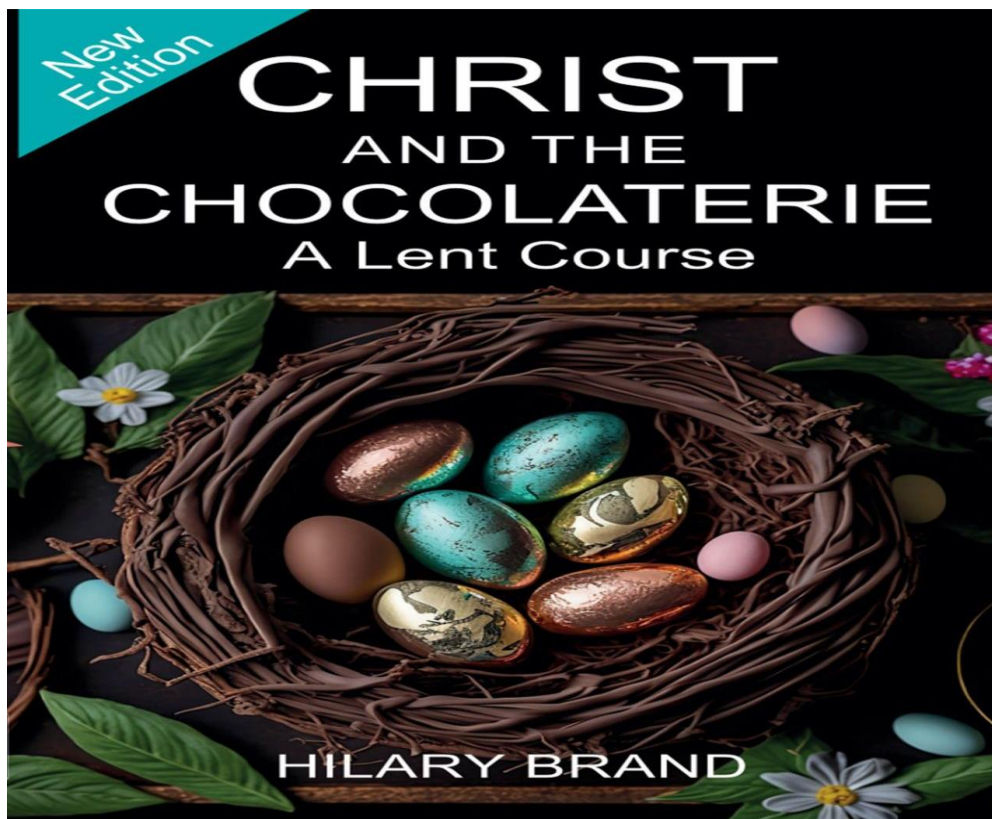
Other voluntary roles are also vacant! If you have capability to help with building maintenance, taking minutes at Trustee meetings (6 per year), making applications for grants, sorting archived paperwork, or any other skill that might make light work of someone else's burden, please get in touch with Mary.

We shall also be advertising for a Deputy Manager in the New Year. The job will be for about 18hrs pw throughout the year. Please consider whether you know anyone who could be the 'right' person for BRIDGES and point out this opportunity to them when the advert comes out. I'll make sure that details are in the Church News in due course.

**Mike Musgrove**







“Christ and the Chocolaterie” is the title of the Lent Course to be run on five Wednesdays in Lent, starting on February 21 st . We are very lucky that the author is ‘our’ Hilary Brand and Hilary will lead the course. The basis of the course is the film “Chocolat” with excerpts shown each week. It is about far more, however, than whether to eat chocolate in Lent and touches on issues of loving acceptance versus inappropriate control, change versus the status quo, as well as enjoyment versus self-denial.

The five sessions are entitled: Giving up- the Prelude to Change, Giving out - the Power of a Gift, Getting Wise - the Possibility of Change, Getting Real- the Power of Acceptance, Growing up - the Process of Change.

Each session uses film clips as discussion starters and then relates them to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, and ends with a short meditation and prayer.

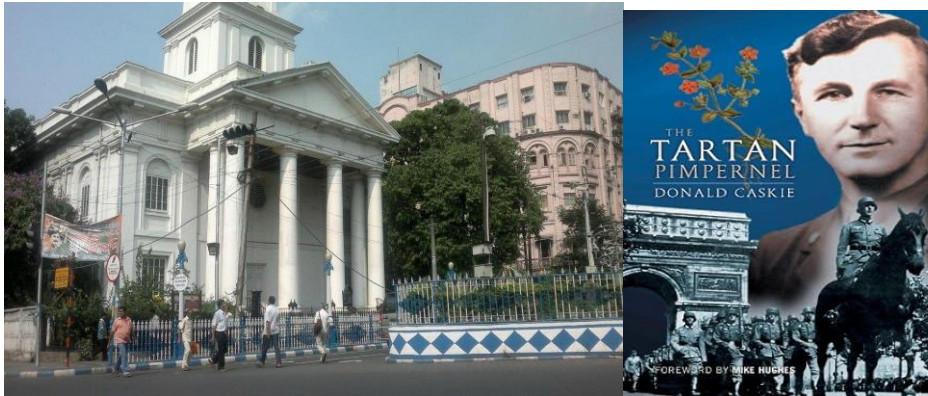
We are inviting members of other churches in the Edenbridge Churches in Covenant to join us for the course.

There will be more details nearer the time.

## ENDPIECE - FAR-FLUNG CHURCHES

Last year I wrote an article about some visits to cathedrals in East Anglia. I thought I might write a bit more about churches we have visited or seen in the wider world. It's not that we've sought out churches, but we've come across quite a few in our travels and these are some of the more interesting ones.

As a boy, I first became aware that reformed churches were spread beyond Scotland when a Greenock man called John Cook, whose family I knew, went to India to become Minister of the Scots Kirk in Calcutta (Kolkata).



**St Andrew's Church, Kolkata, today**

**Rev Donald Caskie**

Then when my older brother got married, the clergyman who officiated in my sister-in-law's local church turned out to be quite famous. His name was Donald Caskie, and during the war, as Minister of the Scots Kirk in Paris, he became known as The Tartan Pimpernel because of his work in smuggling people from France into Spain and out of the reach of the German authorities.

Obviously the old British Empire had been responsible for building many churches in unexpected parts of the world, and not least in India. I remember passing one of the oldest churches in India, St James's Church, Delhi with the Secretary of State for the Environment.. We were meant to be visiting it as a break in a crowded day of meetings that had begun when we landed at 7.00 am and was ending when we flew out at 1100 pm. But the Indian Environment Minister unexpectedly asked us to meet him at lunchtime and so we had no break at all. We got our own back when he came to London and we got him to visit St Matthias, the East India church in London Docklands (the Secretary of State was an enthusiast for church architecture)!

Barbara and I went back to St James Church another time when we were on holiday in Delhi, but it was closed for restoration and we didn't get in then either. The church was founded and paid for by Colonel James Skinner, a buccaneering type who formed his own cavalry regiment called Skinner's Horse and had 14 wives. It is said that when it was nearly completed he visited it and when he saw in many places that



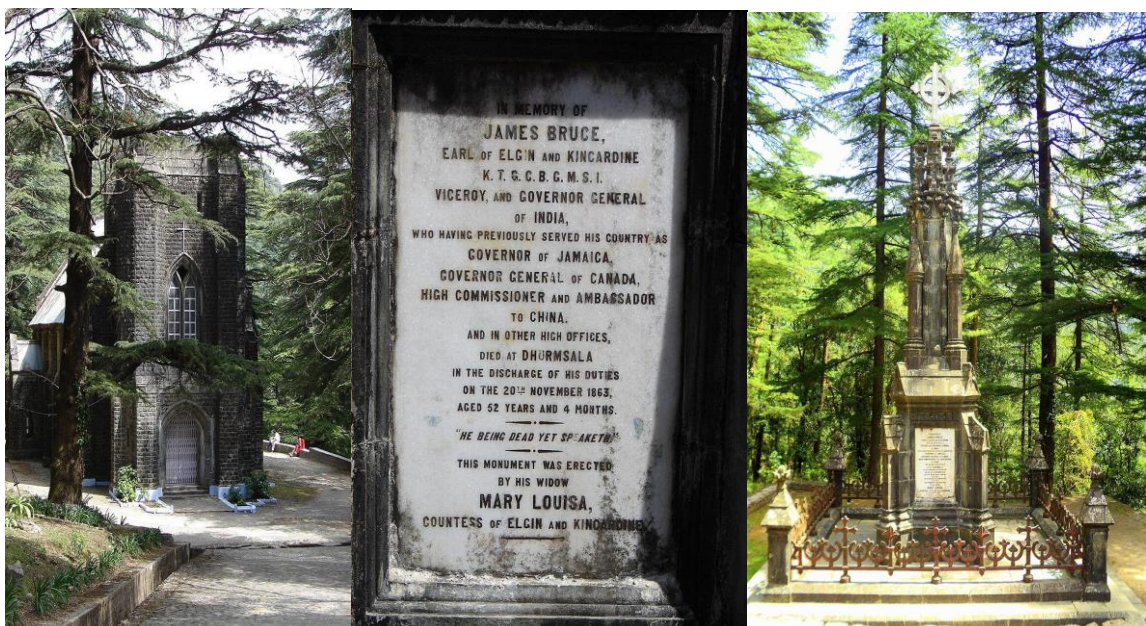
the Christian symbol IHS (meaning Jesus) was displayed he called on the architect and told him that his initials were JHS (JH Skinner) and that the spelling was wrong!



**St James Church, Delhi.**

St James was a grand church, where the Viceroy worshipped. But we came across another church in a most unlikely place which had an even more direct connection to a Viceroy.

Just to the north of Dharamshala, in the foothills of the Himalayas, is a place called McLeodganj, which is the base of the Dalai Lama in exile from Tibet. Apart from getting my first ever stencilled cappuccino there which said 'Free Tibet' we came across a small church called St John in the Wilderness.



In this remote place we found the grave of, and an elaborate memorial to, one of the leading British Statesmen of his time. Lord Elgin, son of the Lord Elgin who acquired

the Parthenon Marbles, had been Postmaster General, the Governor of Canada who gave it responsible self-government, led a Western Expedition to Beijing and forced a Treaty on the Chinese Emperor, turned down a Cabinet Post and was immediately asked to be Viceroy of India. He died of a heart attack, aged 52, while crossing a Himalayan rope bridge at a high altitude and was buried in the nearest churchyard!

Elsewhere in India, the province of Goa was never run by the British but was a Portuguese territory until it was invaded by independent India in 1961. The Portuguese drove out of the coastal towns in Goa anyone who would not convert to Christianity, so there are many Roman Catholic churches there still. At Christmas 1999 our older daughter, Katy (Cat) was spending her gap year working in a Mother Theresa orphanage near Lucknow and we joined her for Christmas in Goa (only 1000 miles away!).

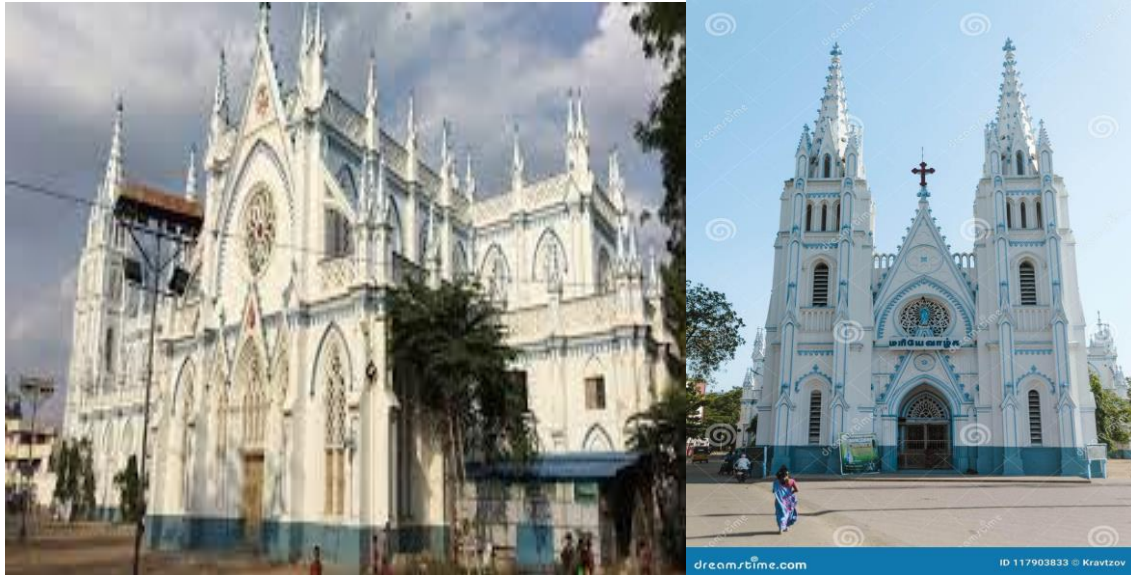


### **St Alex Church, Calangute**

Goa celebrated Christmas in style. Throughout Calangute, where we stayed, there was a crib-building competition, and virtually every house and commercial building along the main street had its crib outside - even the Chinese takeaway where they didn't quite understand what was going on but created a display of giant illuminated rabbits outside! Above is St Alex church. We went to the midnight mass which was conducted in one of the local languages. We sat in the back row of the church and enjoyed the service which was enlivened by stray dogs wandering through the church, flashing fairy lights wrapped around the saints and along the balconies and sporadic electrical failures. But by 12.45 it was still going on and showing no sign of ending, so we decided to slip quietly away through the door in the middle above - only to find that by now the courtyard outside, shown above, was now occupied by at least 1000 people, and perhaps more, tightly packed. As we eased our way through them we could see their surprise that we were leaving so soon but it was too late to turn back so we sidled on for what seemed a very long time before we broke free!



Lastly in India I should mention St Mary's Cathedral, Madurai, in Tamil Nadu (South India). The 2 pictures below show it from different angles. We were looking for a church built in the early nineteenth century for local Christians designed by a Madras military architect. We thought this was it. It was only as we went round that we became aware of anomalies which made it unlikely that this was an 1820s church. And indeed it was the wrong building, and the present St Mary's was built in 1969!



### **St Mary's Cathedral Madurai**

Somewhat further East, in 2002 (I think) we went to China and took a cruise down the Yangtse River through the Yangtse Gorges. On a Sunday morning at 09.45 as our boat approached a mooring by the riverside in the city of Wuhan we were astonished to hear clearly the tolling of a church bell. When we got ashore, we set out to find it and soon came across a very packed church where the Sunday service was about to start. We were pressed to come in but, remembering our experience in Goa, and as the boat had only stopped for an hour or so, we declined - with some difficulty I might say as they were very pressing. Wuhan had been a 'Treaty' port - although it was many hundreds of miles from the coast it had had a European and American Settlement - and this was a relic. In fact when I looked it up for this article, Wuhan has a Catholic Diocese with an Archbishop and a Cathedral! I think the photo below is the church we visited, but I can't be quite sure!



**Holy Family Church, Wuhan**

Further east still, or west if you go the other way around, two very different churches. This year we visited the Anglican Church in Jasper, Alberta, just at the foot of the highest mountain in the Rockies. It could almost have been on an English village green, were it not for the trail of Elk poo on the pavement outside!



**St Mary and St George, Jasper.**

And, not so far away, in Sitka, Alaska, which was the capital of Alaska before the USA bought it from Russia, there was **St Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral**, now marooned on a small traffic island - a triumph of ambition over reality but sadly shut so we couldn't see inside.



These are just a few, and I haven't even touched on European churches yet!!!

**ALAN RIDDELL**

**Footnote from Barbara (with a nod to Gary's article)**

My favourite memory of visiting churches was Lincoln Cathedral where they encouraged us both to come in together with Badger the dog. When there was 2 minutes silence for prayer at midday the only sound in the vast building was the heavy breathing of a by then rather elderly Badger.

