

Brambleton 60th Anniversary. 2018

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Mark 4 30-32.

In April 1943 a corpse wearing the uniform of a Royal Marine officer, was found floating in the sea just off the southern coast of Spain by some fishermen. They took the body ashore where it was examined. Letters were found in the clothing from two British Generals. Those letters, which were handed over to the German authorities, revealed that the invasion of Europe by the Allies would shortly take place via bridgeheads in Greece and Sardinia. As you will know, the whole thing was a carefully planned hoax by British Intelligence to distract and confuse the enemy. The hoax was code-named Operation Mincemeat.

In fact, the Allies began their invasion of Europe in July 1943 just over two months later by landings not in Greece or Sardinia but in Sicily. That action was called Operation Husky.

11 months later, in June 1944, the D Day landings began on the beaches of Normandy. That invasion went under the name of Operation Overlord.

Just 13 years after the end of World War II, in 1958, Operation Mustard Seed was put into action...and that, as you know, was the code-name for the Brambleton project. Why was it given that name? Partly because The Bourne was full of former military personnel who were used to exercises with names like Operation Mincemeat and Operation Husky...so it was second nature to choose a quasi-military name, but partly, I guess, because the dearly-loved and respected Vicar, the Revd Eric Jennings had himself been a Major in the Army before ordination.

The name was inspired of course, by the parable which Jesus told about the Kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed, which though very tiny, sprouts and grows....

If you want to read more about those earliest days take a look at the History of Brambleton which has been so thoughtfully compiled by Dee Leggett.

For those who weren't around at the time let me remind you of some other events in Britain in 1958: Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister; it was the year of the Munich Air crash in which 8 Manchester United players and 15 others were killed; CND was launched by Bertrand Russell; the initial work constructing the M1 was started; *My Fair Lady* opened in Drury Lane, and the first Parking Meters were installed. It was the year which marked the start of Blue Peter and, horror of horrors, it was also the year which marked the invention of Bri-Nylon bed-linen. Can you remember the way in which, as you slid into them, the sheets would light up with a blue flash of static....?

But I want to move away from the national to the local, because the wonderful strength of Brambleton has always been the centrality of the people who worked to create it in the first place and all those who over the years have given tirelessly of their time in serving the community.

When I arrived as the new Vicar in 1981 there were, amongst many others, Roy and Mary Wells, Ian and Grace McGregor; Joyce Marsh and her son, Nick; Tom and Joyce and their cat; Jean and Roy Armstrong, Fred, with his caravan on Hayling Island; Sally and Amanda Wilkinson; Sheila Hayden; Eileen Radford; Elsie Adby, and her daughters Sue and Jan. Bill and Betty Rowland and their daughter Mary; Mary and Christina Norris; Margaret (Gunner) Pound; Peter and Edna Hoare (all the way from Rotherhithe); Sue Swain; Peter and Sheila Fenn and Sandra, their daughter, (who, to my delight, I met again when I was at a church in Bedford); Peter and Barbara Winslade, Malcolm, and Richard...now a much-loved priest in (where else?) St Albans diocese..., Edward and Audrey Gibbon, Glyn and Joy Scribbans, Brian and Yvonne Williams, Peter and Frances Garland. Peter, sadly no longer with us, but his funeral in his Lincolnshire parish was an amazing occasion...the whole village was there. I can still vividly recall seeing crowds of people making their way silently along the pavements to church to acknowledge a fantastic, creative and pastoral priest.

...and inevitably, sadly and dangerously, I am bound to have missed out so many others... please forgive me if your name did not appear in these despatches...

I won't reminisce any more except to say how warm and loving and welcoming and good were the Harvest Suppers, and Sing a Song of Christmas, begun in 1974 where there was standing room only... and the Jumble Sales... and the quizzes...

Let me remind you of the Operation Mustard Seed parable...because that same community activity still continues...and here is even more dangerous territory...but I must mention the Boxing Club and Alice and Rikke Askew (and if you haven't read Tom Easton's 'Girls can't hit' novel based on the club, you must...it's brilliant}. The Boxing Club is a real treasure-house of community spirit.

In total around £45,000 has been spent on the hall relatively recently. Grants, gifts and donations have come from:

The Farnham Institute, The Lions; The Community Foundation for Surrey; Rotary; B&Q for the kitchen units; Cane Adam – all the paint for redecoration; plus Individual donations from the congregation – some were substantial, e.g. individual gifts of over £5K; Parish fund-raising activities

And I must mention Lollipop Nursery... and all the good things that happen there.

Look, you will know the list could go on and on, and I haven't mentioned the work of Ron and Rosemary Mansfield, Tony Williams, Barry Parker, and Becky Speyer, not to mention

Max Hubbard and Nigel Lewis and, of course the immense, self-giving, self-effacing work of our Churchwarden Keith Newman... and Hilary Newman's indefatigable and loving organisational skills

I must stop...

I return again to the parable of the Mustard Seed and Jesus' creation of the parable to explain what God's work on earth was like.

No-one could have foreseen all that would happen here when the Hall was first mooted... but that it is an outworking of God's Kingdom, I do not doubt ...for those with eyes to see, the Kingdom of God is here right in the midst of us.

Wherever people live out their Christian calling and discipleship, there is the Kingdom. That is simply how God is; simply how God works... creating friendships, providing pastoral support, people offering their lives in loving service to others; moving forward together in faith...

You and I have the wonderful and inexpressible blessing of having been called by God to be his church in this place in our generation. We have received so much from the generosity of others, not least from our parish forebears in 1958; it is now our turn to follow their lead and like them to live generously, offering the good news about God to future generations; with the love of Christ in our hearts and with the love of Christ in our lives, we are called to be disciples of Christ simply where we are... gently proclaiming the Kingdom of God in our midst.

The Mustard Seed grows in ways we cannot see or predict...but with God's power quietly at work amongst us we do not lose heart; we keep the faith; we walk in the footsteps of Christ who is in truth, our most loving friend and our most powerful redeemer And so, in his strength and for his sake, we continue his work. Operation Mustard Seed does and will continue to flourish...

So: alleluia for Christ the story-teller; alleluia for you; and alleluia for Brambleton...

The Right Revd Dr Christopher Herbert.