

Lower Bemerton

As we reach the end of the path and turn left into Lower Bemerton, we should hear the bell of St. Andrew's church tolling – this is the same bell rung by George Herbert to summon his parishioners over four hundred years ago. A separate village in Herbert's time, Bemerton is now a very large parish but our walk takes us along what would then have been the main route to Wilton and the country seat of his kinsmen, the Earls of Pembroke.

St. Andrew's Church

Our walk ends in George Herbert's little 14th century church. The unusual highly coloured altar cloth, designed by Jane Lemon and worked by the Sarum Embroiderers' Guild, is a depiction of his poem, 'The Flower', which Helen will read:

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring;
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shrivel'd heart
Could have recover'd greenness? It was gone
Quite under ground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;
Where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickning, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
We say amisse,
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
Which when we once can finde and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us, where to bide.
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

This is an excellent poem with which to finish our ambulatory celebration of Herbert's life and poetry, since it is one of his greatest lyrics, demonstrating his intimate conversation with God, his fine rhetorical skills and his vivid sense of the ups and downs of Christian life.

Alec Roth will talk to us about his composition in 2007 of his hymn setting of this poem, and then we shall hear it sung by Sally Bradshaw.

The event will be drawn to a conclusion by Helen Wilcox.

Visit the Group's website at www.georgeherbert.org.uk



The George Herbert in Bemerton Group

GEORGE HERBERT WALK

Monday 31st May and Tuesday 1st June 2010

PRESENTERS

Judy Rees

The convenor of the George Herbert in Bemerton Group since 2002, Judy spent her working life in church ministry. It is largely due to her dedication to and enthusiasm for the life and works of George Herbert that he continues to be celebrated locally with a vibrant programme of events every summer.

Helen Wilcox

Helen is Professor of English at Bangor University, Wales. One of her principal areas of interest is seventeenth century English religious poetry and prose. She has published many articles on the works of Herbert and his contemporaries. Her annotated edition of Herbert's poems was published by Cambridge University Press in 2007.

Jason Battle

As Salisbury Cathedral's Head Carver, Jason has sculpted a number of statues for the West Front, including George Herbert, St. Aldhelm and Canon Ezra. His statue of Herbert was funded by The Friends of Salisbury Cathedral and completed in 2003.

Alec Roth

A composer and conductor with a longstanding association with the Salisbury International Festival in collaboration with local author and poet Vikram Seth, Alec's setting of 'The Flower' was one of the new George Herbert hymns included in 'Another Music', published by the Royal School of Church Music in 2007.

Sally Bradshaw

Sally is a distinguished international soloist, singing teacher and opera director whose association with The George Herbert in Bemerton Group goes back several years. In 2009 she performed in St. Andrew's Church as part of the Group's event 'Sounds of Music in George Herbert'.

THE WALK

We are told that George Herbert (1593–1633) habitually walked from Bemerton to Salisbury and back twice a week to attend services in the Cathedral and to make music with the Cathedral musicians. We cannot know the exact route he took: there have been many changes over the intervening four hundred years, although the water meadows over which he must have passed are still much the same as he knew them. Today's walk represents Herbert's journey and reminds us of the brief but significant time when he was Rector of Bemerton from 1630 to 1633.

ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE WALK IS ALONG PEDESTRIAN PATHS, OUR ROUTE TAKES US ALONG SOME ROADS WHERE TRAFFIC COULD BE A DANGER. PLEASE BE WATCHFUL AND TAKE CARE, ESPECIALLY IN LOWER BEMERTON.

The Window

Our walk begins inside Salisbury Cathedral under the stained glass window commemorating George Herbert, the much honoured priest and writer whose posthumously published volume of poems, 'The Temple', contains some of the greatest devotional lyrics in the English language. The window was designed and constructed in 1953 by Christopher Webb of St. Albans.

After a short introduction from Judy Rees, Helen Wilcox will read the poem depicted in the window, 'Love-joy':

As on a window late I cast mine eye,
I saw a vine drop grapes with J and C
Anneal'd on every bunch. One standing by
Ask'd what it meant. I (who am never loth
To spend my judgement) said, It seem'd to me
To be the bodie and the letters both
Of *Joy* and *Charitie*. Sir, you have not miss'd,
The man reply'd; It figures *JESUS CHRIST*.

Helen will say a few words about this dramatic and ironic lyric, and link it to other poems by Herbert in which the poet makes use of the idea of windows ('The Windows', 'The Elixir') and the power of the letters of Jesus's name ('Jesu'). All of these examples highlight the immediacy, ingenuity and spiritual impact of Herbert's poems

The Statue

We now move outside the Cathedral to the West Front, with its many statues including one of George Herbert. Commissioned by The Friends of Salisbury Cathedral, this statue was sculpted by Jason Battle and dedicated in September 2003. Jason's intention was to depict Herbert as he was during his time as Rector of Bemerton: in his late thirties, wearing priestly garments and holding a book and quill to represent his literary skills. Jason will say a few words about his work on the sculpture.

Town Path

Leaving the Cathedral Close via the High Street Gate, we walk briefly along the busy High Street until the junction with traffic lights, where we turn left. Passing Church House (the Salisbury Diocesan offices) on the left and the Masonic Hall on the right, we cross over Crane Bridge and walk through Elizabeth Gardens to Long Bridge, which marks the start of Town Path, the ancient route connecting the city to the village of Harnham.

The Water Meadows

Halfway along Town Path we pause briefly to enjoy the tranquillity of the water meadows and admire the splendid view of the Cathedral from the west. At this point we shall hear Herbert's poem 'Sepulchre':

O blessed bodie! Whither art thou thrown?
No lodging for thee, but a cold hard stone?
So many hearts on earth, and yet not one
Receive thee?

Sure there is room within our hearts good store;
For they can lodge transgressions by the score:
Thousands of toys dwell there, yet out of doore
They leave thee.

But that which shews them large, shews them unfit.
What ever sinne did this pure rock commit,
Which holds thee now? Who hath indited it
Of murder?

Where our hard hearts have took up stones to brain thee,
And missing this, most falsly did arraigne thee;
Onely these stones in quiet entertain thee,
And order.

And as of old, the law by heav'nly art
Was writ in stone; so thou, which also art
The letter of the word, find'st no fit heart
To hold thee.

Yet do we still persist as we began,
And so should perish, but that nothing can,
Though it be cold, hard, foul, from loving man
Withhold thee.

In this outdoor setting, Helen will comment on the poem and on the relationship between words, stones and the inner spaces of devotion in Herbert's poetry.

North Harnham and Broken Bridges

Continuing to the end of Town Path, our route takes us past The Old Mill (now a public house and restaurant) into the northern fringe of Harnham, in Herbert's time a separate village like Bemerton but now a part of greater Salisbury. We walk through Middle Meadow, where once again there are good views of the Cathedral, to the start of the path to Lower Bemerton. From here we walk through lightly wooded country and across the Broken Bridges towards Lower Bemerton.