

# ...Father Alan Walker

## The Vicar of Saint-Jude-on-the-Hill chats to Diana Brahams

Father Alan Walker has been the vicar of St Jude's Church and the President of the Proms at St Jude's for nearly twenty years. As an active supporter of Suburb and community-based activities, RA events and local-interest meetings he is a familiar figure to many on the Suburb whether or not they are attending members of his congregation on Sundays. He explained to me that the Church of England historically sees itself as serving the whole parish community, not just those who attend church. St Jude's since its foundation has stood in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. Father Alan is a frequent visitor to centres for other faiths and takes parties to the Jewish Museum (yes, he has seen and enjoyed the exhibition of Abram Games posters) as well as mosques and temples.

At 62 Alan Walker is still going strong – vigorous and enthusiastic, but as he has no assistant priest he has sole responsibility for taking every Sunday morning service come rain or shine so holidays and weekends away have to be carefully planned. He will ask a retired priest to step in for him, but the pool of retired and relatively local C of E priests has shrunk so these retired clerics

are very busy and need a lot of notice.

Alan Walker was born and went to school in the North East (Northumberland – not Durham) but left home effectively after gaining his place to read History at King's College Cambridge and came to live in Swiss Cottage and formed an affection for North West London and the 13 bus. After a year studying history at Cambridge he left and took a year out returning to take a degree in Theology which expressed what has proved to be a life-long interest in church history. He had done quite a bit of teaching and decided it would be sensible to gain a PGCE (post graduate teaching qualification) and took the chance to study the problems and causes of dyslexia by attending a course at St Bartholomew's Hospital. He says this helped him understand difficulties with literacy when he spent three years as a master teaching English, History and Divinity at Marlborough College (then an all boys school) and thereafter in his teaching and pastoral life.

After three years, that he described as enjoyable and stimulating, Alan realised that he wanted something different from life and returned to study

at Oxford. He came back to London to share a flat with a group of friends and met the girl who was to become his wife, an art historian called Lucrezia. They travelled to Rome where he taught English and enjoyed the cultural life and visiting churches and Lucrezia studied Art History. They were married in the English Church in Rome.

When they returned to London from Rome Alan had recognised that his future was with the Church of England priesthood and the couple went to Oxford where he took a further theology degree and Lucrezia did post-graduate work and they started their family of three. He was given a junior post at St John's Wood Church where he was ordained at the age of 32 and became the curate there.

His career then took him a short way south along the 13 Bus route to Marylebone Road when he became chaplain to the University of Westminster (as it is now – it was the Polytechnic of Central London when he arrived there). He found his teaching experience to be invaluable when speaking with the students and trying to be of help to them – and always keen to expand his knowledge he took an LLB during his tenure there. He also organised the celebratory service in Westminster Abbey when the polytechnic was reinaugurated as a university.

After eight years of living in a small University flat with his wife and three school-age children a move out to somewhere leafier was an attractive prospect and in December 1994 he was appointed Vicar of St Jude's, the grand and beautiful listed Lutyen's Suburb church that is a landmark with its tall gleaming spire visible from everywhere in the parish; he and his family moved into the elegant adjoining house that is the Vicarage in Central Square. The Church was built in 1909-1910 but not consecrated until 1911.

To celebrate its centenary, Alan wrote a book detailing its history (all proceeds go to raise funds for the Church – a percentage of all funds raised by St Jude's are diverted to help support other C of E churches that have fewer resources). Researching and writing the book 'The Centenary Book of St Jude-on-the-Hill' increased his awareness of Henrietta Barnett's social aims when the Suburb was first designed and took shape over a hundred years ago and which aims, he fears, are becoming lost and not uppermost in the minds of the successive new generations who move in. House prices are high and it is inevitable that only the affluent can afford to buy here now. That does not mean they will not become active in the Suburb though it would be great if more residents were actively involved in communal and RA activities – so if you're reading this do please heed the call. Your Suburb needs you!



CELSAR RODRIGUEZ-DURAN

When you next visit St Jude's it is well worth taking a long look at the dramatic wall and ceiling paintings – and access the website to read the short history of Walter Starmer's life and career that Alan Walker has written which explains how Starmer came to spend ten years painting the Church and which he considered the pinnacle of his artistic achievements. The entry on the website is however a mere taster for the book on Starmer that he has just finished writing and which he hopes will be published next year. This will have illustrations of many of Starmer's paintings that cannot be viewed elsewhere. Sadly, although the Imperial War Museum owns some 30 paintings of Starmer's as he was a semi-official war artist during WW1, none of them were ever displayed and while in store their condition has deteriorated. Alan has received permission to reproduce some of these in the book. Starmer's work recorded the YMCA's role during WW1 (very different from its image now – mostly

gyms and charity shops). They provided much needed rest and recuperation for soldiers when they were outside the trenches and their red triangle motif was a very welcome symbol. They also

record the work of Indian and Chinese workers at the Front.

Next, Alan plans to write a short account of Evelyn Waugh's family's close links with St Jude's that Waugh decried unpleasantly after he converted to Catholicism.

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