

THE GRAPEVINE

The Newsletter of St. Mary and St. John the Divine, Balham

Welcome to the summer 2022 edition of the Grapevine. I am sure we are all looking forward to summer holidays, but do spare a thought and a prayer for those who are struggling and do not have the opportunity for respite and relaxation away from the big city. But we have wonderful open spaces to enjoy locally and on our doorstep is our own Oasis Garden to share with the community. Keep an eye on the community news in the pew leaflet - there is lots going on over the summer and we look forward to our Patronal tea party on Saturday 10 September.

TOOTING LOCAL HEROES

We are delighted that our own Trinity St Mary's School has been recognised as a Tooting Local Hero in a ceremony hosted by Rosena Allin Khan (MP for Tooting) at the House of Commons. Lynn Anderson, head teacher, and all the staff and governors do a fantastic job looking after and providing numerous opportunities for the pupils to achieve really well and get on in life.



Not only our school but also St Mary's church was recognised as a Tooting Local Hero. Congratulations to Berni and the whole team who do so much for the local Balham community.

BALHAM IN BLOOM

The gardening team have picked up the Balham in Bloom 2022 award for the 'Best Organisation' category. The Oasis Garden and particularly the flower beds at the front of the church are flourishing under the careful management of Marian and the team. The roses planted in the autumn are coming into their own now and looking beautiful. We are very lucky to have such an attractive and peaceful haven for all in Balham to enjoy.



From the Kitchen of St. Mary's

Strawberry Ice Cream

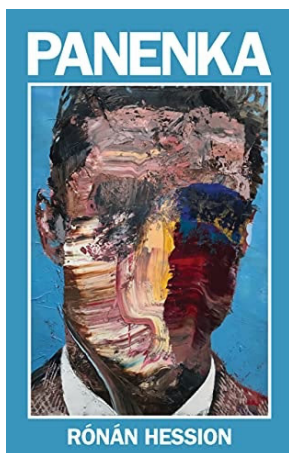
Makes 2 litres

450g fresh or frozen strawberries
1 x 400g can condensed milk
500ml cold whipping cream

1. Place the hulled strawberries in a bowl. Use a fork to mash them to a pulp, leaving a few chunky bits. If you are using frozen fruit, allow them to defrost enough before mashing
2. Stir in the condensed milk into the strawberries
3. Whip the cream until soft peaks form, then mix a large spoonful into the strawberry mixture and fold in the rest carefully
4. Spoon into a shallow container, cover and freeze for at least 6 hours



Our award-winning gardeners



BOOK REVIEW: *Panenka*, by Ronan Hession Julia de Cruz

Even if you're not a fan of 'the beautiful game', there are few of us who can fail to respond to the drama of a penalty shoot-out, that gladiatorial confrontation of player versus goalkeeper, and the isolation of the lonely unfortunate who misses and watches their dreams of glory evaporate. To explain; Panenka was the name of a Czech footballer and is a term used for an audacious penalty aimed straight to the centre of goal and relies on the keeper diving right or left. It's the riskiest of moves, and when it fails, it's a face to the palm moment for anyone watching.

The main character of the book is actually called Joseph, but his crucial penalty miss for the local team 25 years before defines his life, and he carries the weight of the change to his name as a painful form of penance for his failures. Now in his early 50s he lives with his now reconciled daughter, Marie-Therese and her 7-year-old son, Arthur, and does what he can to make amends for abandoning his own family many years before. Panenka also suffers disabling headaches that he calls his 'iron mask' for which a cure is not an option, and much of the story explores the difficulty he has acknowledging and articulating his feelings to those he loves in the time he has left. The book is fairly short (164 pages) but it's so beautifully written, no words are wasted. Panenka's modest surroundings brim with interesting characters that are subtly flawed in a way that allows us to recognise our own shortcomings and relate to them. But it's a chance trip to a local hairdresser that leads to him finding someone with whom he can begin to share his deeply held emotions, let go of the pain of the past and begin to heal. It's a gem of a book that is about hope, love, redemption, and being brave enough to face your failures and recognise that it's the ability to let go of the past that allows us to move on and grow.

OBERAMMERGAU

In June, we joined a 'pilgrimage tour' with friends from St Luke's Church, Battersea for a memorable trip to the world-famous Passion Play, combined with visits to fine Rococo and Baroque churches and castles in South Germany and Austria - a mixture of the sacred and the secular.

In 1632 during the disastrous 30 years' war which cost millions of lives, the conditions were ripe for the rise of plague, probably bubonic. However, the village of Oberammergau was sheltered in part by its location surrounded by hills and the debarring of entry. Nevertheless, the inevitable happened and one Kaspar Schisler, a farm worker, managed to sneak in. Soon he and his family would be dead and some 80 villagers died too. At this point the village councillors met and vowed to perform a Passion Play every 10 years in perpetuity and thereafter there were apparently no more deaths. Only occasionally has it been cancelled, ironically most recently during Covid in 2020.

Perhaps a reason for the overwhelming success of this village's play has been the strict format adopted whereby only village residents (for at least 20 years) can partake in the action and moreover any villager can ask for and expect to play a part, even if only leading the donkey. Social change and the beginning of mass travel in the 19th Century meant that greater numbers of people could attend and its popularity grew, eventually expanding worldwide. One attraction is the unique culture of the 'village' where visitors can stay in the many small hotels often decorated with frescoes with religious themes or nursery rhymes. Often a hotel staff member will be a performer in the play as well you can tell them as they grow their hair and beards long.

The play's production is the opposite of the modern 'minimalist' setting with a small cast. The cast is over a thousand and includes a chorus of over 50 plus a donkey for Jesus, a horse for Herod and two camels. Although an amateur production, it is of a very high standard, partly as a result of initial rehearsals starting over two years before hand. The play runs in two parts for five hours and appeared to us to be word perfect. The extensive choruses are all sung by heart without sheet music.

The format consists in essence of three simultaneous parts:

- Scenes from the New Testament starting with Jesus's triumphal arrival in Jerusalem and concluding with the crucifixion and the resurrection and the empty tomb.
- Explanatory arias rather like an oratorio. The music still used is by the 18th century composer and resident Rochus Dedler who was a contemporary of Mendelssohn and the score is in parts somewhat reminiscent of the latter's work Elijah, with some fine choruses.
- Colourful tableaux centre stage with actors holding static portrayals of scenes from the Old Testament such as The Burning Fiery Furnace and the Dividing of the Red Sea. We thought the tableaux were vital as they linked the story of Jesus with Old Testament prophecies. Historically tableaux were often employed for the benefit of the less literate but today without them the whole play would have become indigestible & lacking in visual impact..

The play is in a sense very conservative in sticking to 'the text', but it has to a degree been adapted to incorporate modern views. Unsurprisingly there has been much discussion of anti-semitism. However, the Director Christian Stuckl, (who has been in post for 30 years so this is his fourth production) has countered this by making efforts to portray Jesus as a Jewish prophet in line with the Old Testament predictions; hence the use of the Tableaux. Judas is portrayed more sympathetically than in some productions; he considers Jesus fulfils the conditions of a liberation leader to free the Jews of Roman rule and his betrayal of Jesus is a result of his disappointment. There is a also degree of discussion included of political dilemmas, with Caiaphas wishing to avoid upsetting Pilate who was exasperated by the situation and Herod who wanted the quiet life.

We all thought the Passion Play had an overwhelming appeal as a 'once in a life time' event. Do go, if you have the chance!

—Evelyn & Sarah McDermott

Nursery rhyme fresco on Oberammergau house

