

Summer School 2015

God's Story, Our Story: Imagination and Inspiration in the Bible, Church and World

The major part of the 'study' portion of my trip away was participation in the Biblical and Theological Summer School at Ripon College, Cuddesdon (Oxfordshire, United Kingdom). Here are some brief reflections about my experience of the Summer School.

I had an engaging week focused on the theme of story. There were lots of wonderful speakers in a beautiful setting with a diverse group of participants from all over the world. We were also taken on a number of excellent excursions linked to the theme with a focus on Alice in Wonderland, Shakespeare and CS Lewis.

Sunday 5 July

- Students of the college registered us and showed us to our rooms. We then gathered to meet others over afternoon tea in the common room.
- **first plenary:** Bishop Humphrey Southern (Ripon Principal) - new to the college - introduced the theme and invited us to share about our expectations in small groups
- this was followed by welcome drinks then dinner
- summer school participants came from all over the place. predominantly Church of England, and then some from Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting (me). countries represented: UK, Northern Ireland, Norway, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Hong Kong/China, New Zealand, and Australia (me)



Monday 6 July

- **plenary 2:** Jesus the Storyteller - Rebecca Dean, new Testament tutor. parables – their purpose, meaning, and context: they're about raising questions – 'thought experiments'.
- **plenary 3:** The Story in Stone - Rev Prof William Whyte, St John's College, Oxford. buildings being stories - a form of text - a way of communicating ideas and performing theological practice. we looked in particular at 19th century gothic architecture and examples on campus and on PowerPoint.
- **plenary 4:** Poetry, Imagination and Faith - Rev'd Malcolm Guite - chaplain at Cambridge, renowned poet. he read us poetry and then unpacked it. He used his own, plus that of Seamus Heaney. a highlight of the week! Read more about him here: <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/>
- social event in common room, run by students - quiz night. my table actually won!
- compline (evening prayer) - the chapel is astounding. the worship is 'foreign' with plainchant singing and lots of paper with instructions to negotiate

Tuesday 7 July

- **plenary 5:** Panel discussion; Telling the Story Today. facilitator, Jennifer Brown (Cuddesdon School of Theology and Ministry and Placements Tutor)
asked questions of the panel: Barbara Brown Taylor, Mark Oakley, Malcolm Guite, Tony Price). defining story in the context of faith; how has story shaped their own engagement of faith. a lighter session. was good
- **plenary 6:** the story through preaching – Rev Prof Barbara Brown Taylor.
another highlight. based on a lecture she gave about theologian Frederick Buechner, about truth... defining truth.
Read more about her here: <http://www.barbarabrowntaylor.com/>
- **excursion** to Christ Church – Oxford
guided tour of Christ Church (a church which is both cathedral and college chapel). amazing place. historical. storied.
home of Alice in wonderland. the author (writing as Lewis Carroll) was a lecturer at Christ church college. he told the Principal's daughter the story and she asked him to write it for her. we saw the tree that alice would have played under.
lots of stories around the cathedral - more a tour of the stories that the cathedral holds in its pictures, memorials and windows.
then to afternoon tea at the deanery at Christ church. the dean is new - up to recently, the loved principal of Ripon. the deanery is essentially a small palace - huge house to live in! we were offered tea and coffee and a very small selection of packet biscuits(!). we were able to go outside and relax on the lovely lawns - where Alice's tree was.
we then had to time to walk around Oxford and explore
evensong at Christ Church - I was seated right next to the choir. quite an intimate experience of transcendent worship.
more time to kill in oxford - went with my new New Zealander and Northern Ireland friends to the pub where CS Lewis spent time
public lecture at Christ Church cathedral - Barbara Brown Taylor - she spoke about her new book (part of her book tour) – Learning to Walk in the Dark. Interesting message about redeeming darkness. another highlight of the week.

Wednesday July 8

- **Plenary 7:** "Living the story: vocation and mission, joys and sorrows" - Bishop Henry Scriven
Talking about mission and how failure has been an integral part of his call. He told us his story and then unpacked Luke 9 in relation to mission and how much failure was part of it. (4 wonderful things and 5 disasters happened to the apostles)
Whatever our failings, doubts, disappointments, God still wants to choose us. Encouraging for ordinary folk like us!
- **Plenary 8:** Storytelling - Rev'd Tony Price
After telling us a few stories, he challenged us to learn a bible story from memory to tell others.
- **Plenary 9:** CS Lewis Imagination and Faith - Professor Alastair McGrath on
A lecture that McGrath has given elsewhere, adapted for us with *story* and *imagination* in mind for our summer school. Chronicled Lewis' journey from atheist to believer in God to Christian.

Thursday July 9

- **Plenary 10:** When the Story Breaks - Rev Dr Joanna Collicutt McGrath - lecturer in psychology and theology
has written about the psychology of Christian Character formation.
"As we settle into a story, God has a habit of breaking in and messing things up". "People leap forward when

their settled perspective of the world is disrupted". "Post traumatic growth" "a sign of growth is that the traumatised become the storytellers, they witness to the story"

- **Plenary 11:** Old Testament Perspectives - Dr Hywel Clifford – narrative in the Pentateuch
- **Excursion:** Stratford-Upon-Avon

we had an afternoon to explore this pretty village, the birthplace of Shakespeare
in the evening we saw Othello at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. A riveting production – harrowing.



Shakespeare's birthplace

Friday July 10

- **Plenary 12 and 13:** New Testament story and worship - Revd Dr Michael Lakey – New Testament Tutor and assistant curate at Dorchester on Thames
the surprising narrative of Paul's conversion (Damascus Road experience)
story situated within story. We situate ourselves in a story that is in a story that is in a story. Stories overlapping stories.
helping people understand the Story through liturgy. Ritual helps us to believe. 'speech act theory'. Rituals perform, transform, enact
- **Excursion:** Headington Quarry Church and The Kilns (CS Lewis)
a fascinating afternoon, visiting the church then home of CS Lewis. Sitting in the pew that Lewis always sat in, walking through his home, seeing the typewriter his manuscripts were typed on.. all in a built up suburban area amongst ordinary homes.



View from CS Lewis' study

- **Gala Dinner:** in the college dining hall, included presentation of certificates
the participant from Hong Kong presented the Principal with a flag of the Hong Kong Police. I realised too late
- Summer School Reflections for BCUC chats

that this was my opportunity to present the gift I had organised from Uniting College! I gave it to the Principal over drinks after dinner. (a signed copy of Denise Champion's book *Yartha Wandatha*)



Gala dinner: Principal's speech

Saturday July 11

- **Plenary 14:** unstructured session led by Jennifer Dean and Bishop Humphrey Southern (Principal). Invited feedback and discussion from participants about the week. Next year's theme will be "Migration" with Rev Dr Susie Sneider

summary of participant feedback that I agree with:

"..our story is caught up in God's story and that is expressed in his people"

"we are inside the story"

"God gave us imagination... the baptised imagination"

"shaping of identity through story"

"we assume we know each other's story. We need to take time to listen to each other's stories"

"losing our story – a person with dementia saying to a chaplain: Don't let God forget about me"

"Eucharist as re-memberance"

"living books in a library in Canada – can check out a person for an hour – biographical or issues based"

"the word himself was waiting on her word (Mary)" Malcolm Guite

"untold stories, suppressed stories, fear of telling the story because of ramifications" – Northern Ireland

"providing safe places to tell stories"

"in some ways we can only know our own story through other people"

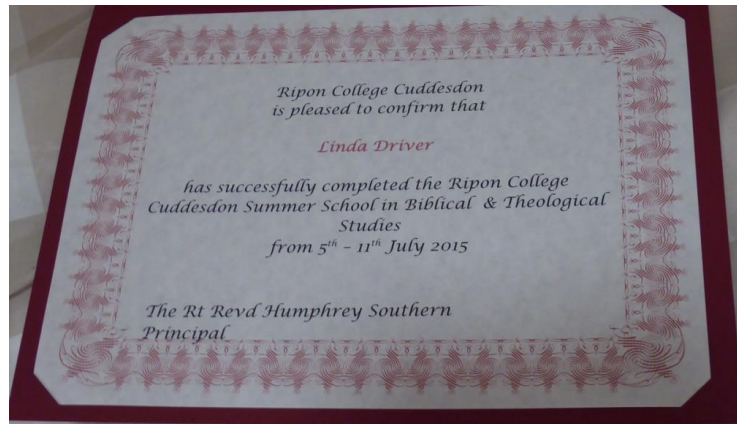
"being made in the image of the One who empowers and redeems our imaginations who helps is make a new imagined future together."

"Hope through others' stories and how God has worked through them"

- **Closing Eucharist:** held in the Chapel – used Prayer D: *This is his story. This is our song. Hosanna in the Highest.*



the college chapel



If you would like to know more about anything I have mentioned please feel free to ask ☺

Linda Driver
September 2015