

The Saga of the Church Christmas Tree or... the Parable of the Four Helpful Passers-by

Every year at this time a small team get together to put up the Christmas Tree in the Sanctuary of St Mary's Church in Great Bentley. It's a very "ecumenical" team...Richard, Bobby, Mandy and me, and the two Wendys were there too, as usual.

George Wright generously donates a tree every year from the copse of Norwegian Spruce which were planted many years ago on his land and delivers it to the church in time for the Christmas Tree Festival. I ask that it's at most 12 feet high, but his team is always more generous. There we were this morning, a tree definitely nearer 20 ft than 12, with several large branches needing to be removed near the base. I had my handsaw and Mandy her bowsaw, but...

As luck would have it, John Glover's team of tree-surgeons were working in the Churchyard, cutting out deadwood from the many trees there, and one of them kindly came and made short work of that job with his chainsaw (**Passer-by number 1!**). He also very quickly shaped the bottom six inches of the trunk to fit the hole in the stand (invented by our dear friend Peter Allington many years ago) which holds the tree upright, a job which normally takes us ages with a handsaw.



While he was working, we few were wondering how on earth we were going to drag this enormous piece of flora through the narrow porch door and down the aisle in the church, when along came **Passers-by 2 & 3**: Andrew, who was visiting his father's grave and a lovely Irish gentleman, Eric, who was walking his dog Baxter. They agreed to help. Whilst Wendy (the other churchwarden and supervisor!) looked after the dog, the team, now six, pulled and heaved the tree through the doors and, eventually after much effort, to the sanctuary. (If you look carefully on the right, you can just see that Baxter was helping too!)

We managed to get it upright, but it clearly wasn't stable, so we decided we had to reduce its height. This would have entailed a good hour's further work with our meagre equipment, when, with exquisite timing, **Passer-by no 4** appeared in the person of Marian from George's farm, bringing the second tree, to go outside. We explained our problem. He went back to his trailer and lo, a miracle! With the aid of his chainsaw, four feet was chopped off the base and the stump re-tapered to fit the stand. (I really must learn how to use a chainsaw!) He helped us raise it and set it in position.

It now stands proudly, Bethlehem star at its top, dressed with lights, looking magnificent, ready to celebrate the coming of Christ.

We cannot thank enough those kind-hearted (and skilled and muscular!) four **good Samaritans** who answered our plea for help. God moves in mysterious ways! And it goes without saying I am enormously grateful to the regular stalwarts, Mandy, Wendy, Richard and Bobby who come and help every year!

David Branch 28 Nov 2023





**CHRISTMAS
CELEBATIONS
IN
GREAT
BENTLEY**

