

The Authorised Version of the Bible

as remembered by Neil Richardson



Don't be silly! That's not me, it's King James V1, during whose reign the famous translation of the Bible was published. It remained the chief version in English from 1611 until 1881 when the Revised Version of the AV was published, well the New Testament in that year and the Old Testament in 1895. The revision contained more than 30,000 changes, but it still sounded old.

I was brought up in a household where the women went to church and took the children, but there was no sense of religion in the home, no prayers and certainly no Bible reading. So I heard the AV and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer during church visits. I was taken to Church from a very young age and quickly became one of those who wears a cassock and surplice as a chorister or when serving at the altar. My parish church was St. Wilfred's Newton Heath, where I was baptised. I can remember sitting and listening to the bible being read in church and wondering what on earth it was all about! The language was mesmerising, but unintelligible to a small child like me.



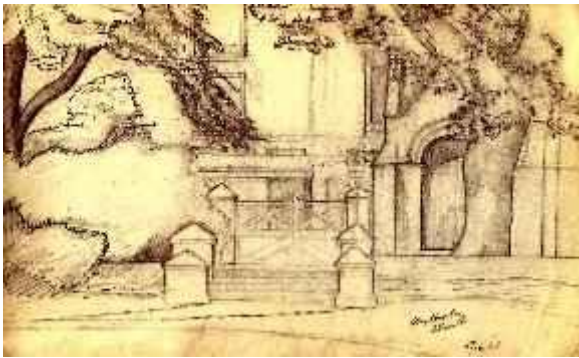
St. Wilfred, Newton Heath

The football ground of the Newton Heath Loco Men's Football team is just about 50 yards to the right of the church, beyond the rectory. The ground was still in use in the 1950's.

At the age of 5, my life took a drastic change as I was deemed to need fresh air, away from smoky Manchester, and from 5 until 10, on doctor's orders, I was sent away and lived most of the year away from the family home and as a Looked After Child, as they are now called, in three different establishments, one in Conway and the other two in Styal and Congleton.

My religious needs were met by the providers of the school and I went to the local church and more importantly, I came under the influence of Nurse Lyons. She was, let us not beat about the bush, a religious nutter and she pushed inappropriate religious material on to me during my stay in Styal, next to the women's prison! I now had a bible and was forcibly made to read it by this brow-beating bully who was supposed to be caring for me. The results of this experience were that I did grow to love the language of the AV but I also got a huge dislike for evangelical Christians and especially those who seek to proselytise, especially proselytise children.

When I returned to the family home aged 10, it was not long before I was reading the lections for Evensong at St. Wilf's, singing in the choir and talking to the clergy, asking questions and building up to what I felt, when aged 14, was a vocation to the priesthood.



The entrance to the College Chapel

In 1969 I left Manchester for London and started training as a teacher at the College of St. Mark and St. John on the King's Road, Chelsea. It was here that I started seriously reading and studying the bible. Of course, I joined the choir in the fine chapel, which I believe is still standing today? I was training to be a teacher of English with RE as a subsidiary subject and so I needed to pass exams on the bible. The serious study of the bible is a deeply satisfying and exhilarating thing to do.

If you have only ever just flicked through it, you won't have got a feel for how interesting, no, gripping it is, so full of issues, ideas, stories, myths and pounding with controversy. The problems with the 17th century language are ever-present, of course, and they need tackling. It takes time. If you just want immediate satisfaction, it doesn't happen. The words are finely wrought, poetic and intricately beautiful examples of the English language 400 year ago. I wouldn't want to use it for our main services, but it does have a function because, as everyone is saying in this 400th centenary year, so much of our language has been shaped and formed by this amazing piece of literary work.

The next stage in my formation was to teach for two years and then I was recommended for training for Holy Orders. Marion and I went with one child, Toby, to live in Salisbury and there at the theological college, (pictured) my studies in the Bible and other theological matters was undertaken for three years, full-time. It was a great time and I still look back on it and the friends we made with great pleasure. The Bible studies took the form of a 2 year course, examined and accredited by Southampton University. It was here that I started to comprehend the fuller picture of how theology reveals humanity and how to manage the



difficulties of living in a world that had a totally different world-picture to that when the different books of the bible were written. It was quite challenging at first and I remember many students being offended by some of the things our tutors taught us.



Oldham Parish Church

My first post in 1974 was an assistant curate, number 2 actually, of the Vicar of Oldham, a town where my family had its roots in the 19th century. The Parish Church was already experimenting with modern language service and the Synod had authorised three series' of revisions which we were eager to use as quickly as possible, but the arrival of a modern language bible took longer. The New English Bible, produced in the 1960s was certainly new and different but many complained of its "Senior Common Room" feel and rather dull effect.

Life in Oldham was never dull with my Vicar around. He was one of the world's great talkers and a man of infinite charm and joviality. I had hopes of learning a lot from James Bentley. Sadly he died in a car crash in 2000.

James was not a man who wanted to ditch the old language material and we still had a traditionally Evensong using the 17th century words for the service and the bible readings at least until I left in 1977.

Now I was put in charge of my own parish, a church which was also the school hall on a huge Council estate. The need was for words which had no questions needing to be asked on this particular parish on the edge of Oldham. It was here that I stopped using the old language for almost everything I did in church.

By the time I arrived at Holy Cross in 1982, I was a convinced moderniser and I would not wish to re-introduce the old language except for special occasions. This view was not popular with Bill McLoughlin! Those of you who remember Mac will recall how he would still use old words for the Creed, saying them out loud while the rest of us were singing the new words to the musical setting. And if we sang a familiar tune to new words, he would dash to the bookstore and sing the original words! Great fun!



One thing I now tend to do is to use the old language for funerals at the crematorium when no special requirements or particular expectations are there to be considered. There is something starkly pointed and unwrapped about the 1662 Funeral Service. It serves a purpose which the more modern language words somehow seem to miss. However, for our main services, I am sure that the modern language is best, especially where the individual is new to the church. We don't live in the past and you don't see AV enthusiasts drawing up at church in a pony and trap, do you?



One of the great ways of hearing the AV language and one of the ways in which it stays in the memory more is to listen to George Frederick Handel's Oratorio Messiah. I have many memories over the years of how this German managed to put a foreign language into a musical form so perfectly. It was truly a major achievement and as we listen to the words and music, we may feel the power of both, pulling at our heart-strings and emotions with tremendous affect!

George Frederick Handel
1685 - 1759