

The Flame



Firebirds AGM

March 2023

Report by Firebirds President
Juliet Mountevans



Photo supplied by Angela Chambers

Patsy Wheatley-Hubbard has sadly retired from the Firebirds Committee for health reasons. Her cheerful spirit and common sense will be missed at our committee meetings. This means that despite having a new committee member in Diana Reese, we are still one Firebird committee member short. Please contact Vicke Nugée if you are interested.

The AGM took 20 minutes start to end - BRAVO Vicky! A tour de force, and a shining example to all whose meetings go on too long!

The venue for our AGM was the Cutlers' Hall. The Cutlers were granted a Royal Charter in 1416 by Henry V, the year after the Battle of Agincourt; probably the Charter was in return for a contribution to arming Henry's Army. The Hall, built in the 1880s, was lucky to survive a fire bomb raid in 1940 when only St Paul's and the Hall were left unscathed. You may wonder about the carved elephant at the bottom of the stairs in the photo on the left. This makes reference to ivory, which was widely used for cutlery handles.

Lunch: Smoked salmon with a little edible viola on it, brown roll and butter, chicken casserole with rice & peas, coffee and a mint Wine: Pierre Lacasse Sauvignon Blanc and Dulong Bordeaux Merlot-Cabernet 2020

Table decoration: Tiny white roses and white baby's breath, Silver candlestick with lit candle
Service: Lovely
Company: Delightful (of course!)

A big thank you to El for, again, organising everything beautifully.



DEAR FIREBIRDS,

A big thank you to all the contributors to this Flame. The variety of the articles make a splendid read and I really enjoyed putting everything together (despite my ancient computer giving me grief).

There are plenty more photos of the AGM, which I shall pass on to Peter for the Firebirds website. Peter is on holiday at the moment, therefore it will be a little time before you can view them. Whilst you are on the website (www.firebirds.london), you may find it interesting to look at some of the past Flames. As a kind Firebird said to me recently, it is an interesting record of the Firebird history.

The next Flame is due August time and I'll let you know when I start collecting material a bit nearer the time.

Best wishes to you all.

Erika Gloyn (Masons)

Editor

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DIANA REESE (Bakers)

Diana was welcomed as a new Firebirds Committee Member at this year's AGM. She has kindly agreed to take on the events side of things while El Moss is on sabbatical.

Diana says: 'When not attending Firebird events, I can usually be found taking muddy dog walks in the Kentish countryside, getting hugely frustrated on a golf course or harrumphing at my cards at the bridge table.'

FORTHCOMING FIREBIRDS EVENTS

Thursday 20th April 2023

Visit to the Postal Museum - experience the postal service's subterranean world beneath the streets of London followed by lunch at the nearby restaurant Luce & Limoni.

September 2023

City Walk - the subject is City Art and involves stained glass and sculpture, visiting some of the City Churches.



Detail of Dick Whittington memorial window, St Michael Paternoster Royal, College Hill by John Hayward (1929-2007)

FORTHCOMING PHOENIX EVENT

Thursday 8th JUNE

The Phoenix Masters are entertaining the Firebirds to lunch at the Cavalry and Guards Club in Piccadilly.



UNDER THE MALEVOLENT EYE OF A 1300BC MARBLE MINOTAUR
PHOTO BILL GLOYN

PHOENIX MASTERS' VISIT TO OXFORD

by Bill Gloyn (Past Master Mason)

It was a great pleasure for Erika and I to revisit Oxford after not having been there for over forty years.

We started off by meeting up with the rest of the thirty-strong party of Firebirds and Phoenix Masters for an excellent lunch at 'No 1 Ship Street'. We were joined by Andrew Shapland (Curator) and Natasha O'Farrell (Patrons Manager) from the Ashmolean Museum. They gave us a brief introduction to the current exhibition there – "Labyrinth: Knossos, Myth and Reality".

After we had wined and dined extremely well, we trotted off to see the exhibition, just a few minutes' walk away. For me, it had a special poignancy as my history teacher at secondary school had been an archaeology undergraduate working on the Knossos dig in the 1920's. He made the period come alive in the classroom and my own first visit there was when I was twenty – more than a half-century ago. The Palace at Knossos was where the Labyrinth that housed the Minotaur was supposed to have been situated.

Like so many of the ancient historical stories of the time, the subsequent fifty years have caused the original theories to be re-examined and largely discounted. Without doubt, what has been discovered is an enormous complex but, on current evidence, its actual purpose and even occupants are not entirely certain. Despite some interesting remnants of wall paintings showing bull-riding, there is no evidence of a monster bull having been resident there!

The site still draws many visitors – far more than when I first went there. The myth of the Minotaur, and the bravery of Theseus in capturing it, still excites us – with our grandchildren loving the stories of Ancient Greece as much as their parents did.

It was great to have such an interesting combined outing in 'The Shires', as Phoenix Chairman Mark Chambers was keen to point out. Thanks are due to him and Events Secretary John Nugée for making the arrangements and ensuring that our visit ran so smoothly.

Details of the exhibition, which runs until 30th July, can be found at - <https://www.ashmolean.org/exhibition/labyrinth-knossos-myth-reality>



ABBA VOYAGE

by Elisabeth Ward (Painter-Stainers)

I was thrilled when, in 2021, Tony bought tickets for us both to go to see ABBA Voyage at their new, purpose-built venue in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Unfortunately, this was postponed, due to Covid restrictions until the Summer of 2022.

The wait was worth it – we loved it!

In fact, I loved it so much that at the end of January this year, I went again with three Firebird friends. Sue Wichtowski, Valerie MacPherson and Sally Douglas. Valerie and Sally were particularly keen as they travelled from their homes in Scotland and Devon to be there, Sue and I from nearer afield.

We started our adventure eating cheese fondue in the 'Alpine Hunt' restaurant Haugen, next to the Olympic stadium by Westfield shopping centre, then made our way on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) to Pudding Mill Lane station (glorious name!) which is located immediately opposite the ABBA Arena.

The ABBA Arena looked like it had been built by Ikea. A wide, wooden, hexagonal bright and colourful open area where Sue had arranged for us to have drinks before the show. The place was full of people, all ages, wearing various amounts of glitter and sequins.

ABBA had unofficially split up in December 1982 and despite renewed interest in the band from the 1990s onwards, mainly due to the success of Mamma Mia!, the members had repeatedly refused to re-form. However, this all changed when they were approached to make a virtual concert using avatars.

The concert featured virtual avatars (dubbed ABBAatars), depicting the group as they appeared in 1977. The digital versions of ABBA have been created with motion capture and performance techniques with the four band members and a visual effects company. The ABBA band members wore motion-capture suits as they performed 22 of their songs, and while the choreography is based on the band members' real movements, visually they are captured from younger body doubles. The digital band, using the songs' originally-recorded vocals, are accompanied by a 10 piece live instrumental band on stage.

The effect is extraordinary. While you know that the groups' singing is not real, it sounds real, due to the originally recorded vocals and the live band and backing singers who are really there. The movements are perfect, even the jokes and the perfectly timed 'ad-lib' bits add to the strange reality of being at an excellent avatar concert.

It ends with the four members of ABBA as they are now, appearing on stage for a curtain call. Not them, of course, their Avatars.

COLD WATER SWIMMING

by James Winterbotham (Skinners)

If any sharp eyed Firebird happened to notice that I was looking a bit more be-draggled than usual at our last Zoom tea party it was because I had just come back from my daily swim (or daily madness as Emmeline calls it) in the North Sea. It is just a short bicycle ride away from our home to Southwold and every day that I am able, summer and winter, I try to get down to the water for a dip, waves permitting. It has become one of the great pleasures of life as well as my personal strategy to beat Covid. Eccentric perhaps, deluded probably, but so far it has been working.

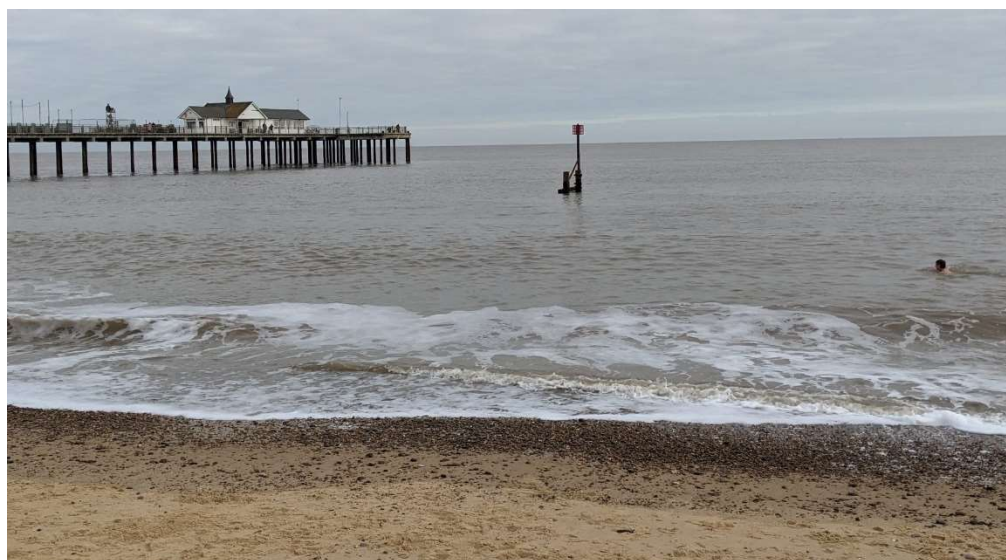
“Cold water swimming” is defined as swimming in water less than 15 degrees Celsius. Given that it is rare for the North Sea to warm up beyond 15 degrees we are actually cold water swimming all year round. February's average is 5.5. You get accustomed to cold water quickly – they say after 5 or 6 swims. It does take your breath away and the trick is to walk in slowly and manage your breathing. Once in, you are completely focused on survival, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, so it is a wonderfully “cleansing” experience. At this time of year, however, it is quite a short one - a few minutes at most.

I have become very much more attuned to the weather. Southwold beach faces East, sheltered from the prevailing South Westerly winds, so the sea is usually quite calm even in a brisk wind. But winds from the North above 20 mile an hour will create waves that are just too powerful to risk, despite the excitement. Getting in doesn't pose much of a problem – in the worst case you can dive through the oncoming wave into the smoother water beyond. But getting out can be much trickier – if you can't find your footing, or time your scamper out in the short lull between waves, you end up in the “washing machine” which, on a shingle beach, can be pretty painful. Waves apparently come in 5s or 7s so you spend a lot of time trying to count and judge your exit!

The local RNLI came to give a talk in December – to a Southwold audience of 28 women and two men, which says something! Most Southwold locals swim as a group at 7am – far too early for me – and I will swim alone usually in the last of the daylight, but always within sight of people on the shore, by the Pier. My only companions are seagulls, the occasional seal and dogs chasing sticks.

The thrill of getting out, into a 'Dryrobe', dressed and warmed up is hard to beat – again the trick is to get socks on as quickly as possible. The 10 minute cycle ride home is great for rebuilding core temperature and the halo of virtue lasts a good hour.

The downsides? Not many really except sand in my hair, and then on the AGA (when allowed to dry my towels). I wouldn't miss it and it would be hard now to live anywhere that is not by the sea! I wonder how many Firebirds out there share this passion.



**SOUTHWOLD PIER, JANUARY
2023 – MY HEAD IS JUST
VISIBLE TO THE RIGHT OF THE
PICTURE**



FIREBIRDS CHRISTMAS TEA PARTY AT FENWICKS

15TH December 2022

by Rose Mahony (Plasterers)

This joyous event which had been so well attended in pre-Covid times faced a number of challenges this year. Rail strikes were planned for the 13th, 14th, 16th and 17th December. This left the day of our party free from industrial action, but with no guarantee that the trains would be in the right places at the right times. If you add to that the Arctic temperatures that were making any trip outside a very chilly experience, then it is understandable that the number of Firebirds who were actually able to make it to Fenwicks was considerably reduced.

However, those of us who managed to turn up were treated to a magnificent spread of delicious finger sandwiches, fruit and plain scones with jam and cream and a selection of very indulgent small cakes, not to mention several glasses of fizz and as much tea as we could drink. As the stands of goodies were placed on the tables, there was some amazement that what we thought was to be shared between four was actually for just two people. We all did our best, but doggy bags were required!

Although the numbers were low we were delighted that our President, Lady Juliet Mountevans, was amongst us and the party was made even merrier by the presence of former Air Pilot consort Christina Fegredo who was celebrating her birthday that day. We were very happy that she chose to spend some of it with us. We drank a toast to her and another to all the absent friends who were unable to join in this year.

Thanks must go to El Moss for (yet again) organising what has become a regular pre-Christmas treat. It can't have been easy this year, but as usual everything worked out according to plan.

Next year will be the last time we will be able to meet at Fenwicks as the store is due to close in early 2024. It is to be hoped that circumstances will be more favourable and many more of us will be able to enjoy the good company and fine food that the store provides. There was much discussion about alternative venues; what everyone agreed on, as we finally had to go our separate ways, was that this is a Firebird tradition which we would all like to continue,



PHOTO ERIKA GLOYN

This was the snow on our drive at 6 am on 12th December 2022. As you will remember, the snow and icy temperatures stayed with us for over a week.

LONDON'S COFFEE HOUSES

by Vicky Nugée (Weavers)

When we talk of coffee houses to day we think of those chains of cafés run by companies such as Costa Coffee, Starbucks and Cafe Nero, serving a wide range of teas, coffees, smoothies and snacks.

These are not a modern phenomenon. In 17th and 18th century England, coffee houses were also popular places for people from all walks of life to go and meet, chat, gossip and have fun, whilst enjoying the latest fashion, a drink newly arrived in Europe from Turkey – coffee.



In 1652 the first coffee house in London was opened on St Michael's Alley, off Cornhill, set within a warren of medieval streets. In truth, it was less coffee house and more wooden coffee shack, but it had the enviable advertising distinction of being situated below the spire of St Michael's Church, visible all over London, so easy to find. It was operated by Pasqua Rosee, a servant or possibly valet to the businessman Daniel Edwards, who was an importer of goods from Turkey that included coffee.



This plaque stands on the wall of the Jamaica Tavern in St Michael's Alley. The site of Rosee's original coffee house was re-built after the great fire of London in 1666 and re-opened by another proprietor as the Jamaica Coffee House. Re-built again in the 19th Century, it continues serving drinks under the name of the Jamaica Wine House.

There doesn't appear to be a definitive name given for Rosee's establishment. Some accounts refer to it as being called "The Turk's Head," while the plaque in St Michael's Alley today refers to "The Sign of Pasqua Rosee's Head." Indeed, it was Rosee's own profile which graced his coffee house sign. Resplendent in a turban and sporting a twirly moustache. The image of the head of a man of Turkish origin became the default sign for all coffee houses.



Coffee houses caught on as an alternative to inns. In December 1660 Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary: "[Coll. Slingsby] and I in the evening to the Coffee-house in Cornhill, the first time that ever I was there. And I find much pleasure in it through the diversity of company – and discourse." By 1663 there were over 80 in London.

The coffee itself was a truly diabolical brew. One early sampler likened it to a "syrup of soot and the essence of old shoes", while others were reminded of oil, ink, mud, damp and manure. It was taken black, with sugar from our new colonies in the West Indies and it was very bitter and full of grounds. Furthermore, the beans were roasted on-site, which meant not only that the end product could be quite hit-or-miss, but also that the coffee house could be filled with acrid black smoke.

Nonetheless, people loved how the “bitter Mohammedan gruel”, as *The London Spy* described it in 1701, kindled conversations, fired debates, sparked ideas and, as Pasqua himself pointed out in his handbill *The Virtue of the Coffee Drink* (1652), made one “fit for business”. Until the mid-seventeenth century, most people in England were slightly, or very, drunk all the time. Drink London's fetid river water at your own peril. The arrival of coffee triggered a dawn of sobriety that laid the foundations for truly spectacular economic growth in the decades that followed as people thought clearly for the first time.

Since the coffee houses provided a public meeting place away from the drunken hooliganism of inns and taverns, they became fashionable places for the chattering classes to meet, conduct business, gossip, exchange ideas and debate the news of the day. Polite conversation led to reasoned and sober debate on matters of politics, science, literature and poetry, commerce and religion, so much so that London coffeehouses became known as ‘penny universities’, as that was the price of a cup of coffee. Influential patrons included Samuel Pepys, John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Isaac Newton.



Each coffee house had a particular clientele, usually defined by occupation, interest or attitude, such as Tories and Whigs, traders and merchants, stockjobbers, lawyers, artists and clergymen, and men of fashion and leisure. Several great British institutions can trace their roots back to these humble coffeehouses: the London Stock Exchange had its beginnings in Jonathan's Coffee House in Exchange Alley in 1698. Auctions in salesrooms attached to coffee houses were the beginnings of the great auction houses of

Sotheby's and Christies. Lloyd's of London had its origins in Lloyds Coffee House on Lombard Street, run by Edward Lloyd.

Yet these signs of success also led the way to a new kind of coffee house: one that was less about knowledge, and more about entertainment; less about commerce, and more about criminality. With hundreds of coffee houses, each business had to offer a unique selling proposition. At some, you could have a haircut or a doctor's examination while sipping your coffee. But some forms of ‘entertainment’ were far less savoury. At The Hoxton Square Coffeehouse, their draw was inquisitions of insanity. A suspected ‘madman’ would be tied up and wheeled in for questioning by the customers. For just the price of a coffee, you could vote on whether these pitiful prisoners were actually sane – or whether they should be sent to the asylum.

At only a penny to enter and with free refills, London citizens from *any* social class could visit a coffee house – meaning that many could also be haunts for criminals and prostitutes. The coffee house fell out of favour towards the end of the 18th century as the new fashion for tea replaced coffee. They gave way to the exclusive gentleman's clubs of the late 18th century. Revived in the Victorian era and run by the Temperance Movement.

However it wasn't until the late 20th century that coffeehouses were ‘re-invented’ by companies such as Starbucks, Coffee Republic and Costa Coffee – although who knows what 18th century gentlemen would have made of skinny lattes, macchiatos and espressos!



AROUND THE WORLD IN 30 DAYS

by Sarah Mosse (Broderers)

This trip really started in 2019 when I decided to have my DNA tested. I was adopted as a baby and in those days no medical records went with you. As I now have 10 grandchildren, I wanted to know if there was anything nasty genetically round the corner. I felt it was important. So imagine my surprise to discover that not only was I half Italian but also had 6 sisters and a brother that ranged in age from 35 to 67 and they all lived in Canada.

We had not seen our son and his family in Australia for 3 years because of Covid so we started planning and it quickly turned into a trip round the world. We would start in Canada, go on to Vancouver Island to visit a cousin and then on to Australia to visit our eldest son Patrick and his family. We were to start in Calgary and as anyone with a love of horses knows, that is the home of the greatest horse show in the world, The Calgary Stampede. It has been on my bucket list since I was a small child.

Our travels started on July 12th 2022, on our 47th wedding anniversary as it happened. We boarded



the flight at Heathrow and turned left instead of right. Peter had booked us on Business Class for all the long haul flights - the best present in the world!! We arrived in Calgary 11 hours later. My sister and her husband met us at the airport, a rather surreal experience to spend two weeks with a complete stranger, but it turned out to be huge fun for us all and we all got on famously.

The stampede was everything I had imagined it would be. My sister had got grandstand tickets for the main show and there were lots of other things to see as well.

We saw Bucking Broncos, Bull riding, Barrel Racing, Chuck wagon Racing, Children riding Sheep, and huge Draft horses pulling massive weights. The food area was heart attack alley; if you could fry it they did, Mars bars, corn dogs and even ice cream.



We left Calgary and headed for the mountains The Rockies. We visited Banff and Jasper, where we saw a grizzly bear and her cub, elk and glaciers galore. The scenery was spectacular.

We ate at wonderful rustic restaurants and marvelled at this beautiful country which was so diverse in every way. Deep fried food, mountains, white water rapids, wild animals and the longest, straightest roads we had ever seen and no traffic. On the plains you could drive for literally miles and not see another car and if you did it would be enormous – their parking spaces are twice the size of ours.

Columbia Icefield (Alberta Glacier)



From there we went to Vancouver Island. We saw whales and humming birds and the most beautiful gardens. It is semi tropical because of the Gulf Stream, so completely different from mainland Canada. My cousin propagates new varieties of roses, he is the David Austin of Canada.

A short hop across to Vancouver and down to Los Angeles to pick up our next long haul to Sydney. This is where the only disaster of the whole trip happened, Peter managed to lose his glasses in No Man's Land between Canada and the USA.

Local guest at a Lodge where we stayed

Eventually we boarded our flight and again had lovely little pods to sleep flat in. After dinner that was served on china with metal knives and forks, there was just time for a movie and bed. This is definitely the way to travel.

I have never crossed the date line before, so losing a whole day was most disconcerting. Tuesday, 27th July 2022, was a complete non-event; in fact it did not exist!! We left Los Angeles on Monday evening and arrived in Australia on Thursday morning.

It was wonderful to see Patrick's family again after so long. The three granddaughters have grown up so much. On the second day we went to Grandparents Day at the youngest one's school. A short service telling us how important we are in their lives (!!), then a visit to the classroom to meet her teacher, a very handsome Lebanese guy, then on to the library where we were asked to donate a book. It was a lovely day – we should do it in this country as well. We stood on the touchline of an all-girl football match: it's a long time since we did that, freezing rugby and football games for the boys in those days and netball for Gina.



A visit to the beautiful Blue Mountains where we were given the Original UGG boot for our birthdays, mine are bright pink and so cosy.

We were coming to the end of our jet tour round the world, with sadness we boarded our final flight home. We were woken up as we approached Munich and were given a lovely breakfast. A short stopover in Munich and onto the final leg to London Heathrow where immediately after boarding we got another breakfast. We touched down an hour later, 30 days after we had taken off.

The Three Sisters at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains

It was a fantastic once in a lifetime trip and I got to meet part of my family that I never knew I had. After this trip, I will definitely only fly Business Class to Australia for any future trip we make in that direction. Sorry Hubby, your fault!

OXFAM AND THE DEC

by Georgina Hall (Water Conservators)

The Disaster and Emergency Committee (DEC) is made up of a group of UK based international charities that make a collective effort to help prevent and minimise the seriousness of emergencies and disasters. These charities are among the first responders and have a specific role to play in this effort so there is an effective response with no duplication. For example Save The Children takes the lead in reaching children and supporting families, The Red Cross/Red Crescent leads by distributing essentials, providing first aid, medical and crisis support while Oxfam takes the international lead for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, (WASH) technologies.

Last year I visited Oxfam's Supply Centre based in a warehouse in Bicester. The Supply Centre has a team of dedicated staff with expertise in WASH technologies, procurement, warehousing and export logistics. It purchases, stores and distributes emergency humanitarian equipment in disasters, for Oxfam programmes and other charities.

Even in disasters it is not easy to take goods across borders without strict checks and copious amounts of paperwork. Taking a lorry full of blankets for example, is not viable and is too slow. The Bicester Supply Centre supplies specialised WASH equipment in disasters and is registered as a Known Consignor. This means that the facility, goods and staff have been pre-cleared to enable the cargo, without the need for further security checks, to be dispatched by airfreight at short notice. This saves both time and money.

The Supply Centre is a vast hangar with goods all packed up ready to move. One piece that caught my eye had been developed from a submission in a competition by 2 school girls. They had devised a handwashing stand which recycled the water. Unusually, the girls had sited a mirror on the water reservoir. When the prototype was tested in the field it was found that the hand washing station with the mirror was the most popular and those using it spent longer washing their hands. No-one before had considered the need or advantage of giving refugees access to a mirror when washing their hands.



Another consideration was the use of latrines by female refugees. In some cultures women were reluctant to be seen going into a toilet and so they would hold on to nightfall and relieve themselves in the surrounding fields under the cover of darkness. This made the women extremely vulnerable. As a priority Oxfam supply them with solar head torches. Later they build screened toilet blocks for Women Only. Inside the screens, alongside the toilet blocks there were also clothes washing and general washing areas and benches. Female refugees were very happy to use this facility - taking their washing, meeting other women for a chat and going to the loo!

If you would like to explore more of Oxfam's contribution to current DEC response to the earthquake in Syria and Turkey and the Oxfam Supply Centre see the links below.

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/dismal-conditions-shelters-hundreds-thousands-people-syria-and-turkiye-lack-water>

<https://supplycentre.oxfam.org.uk/?currency=GBP>

ONE YEAR ON

by Sue Thompson (Actuaries)

On Thursday 23rd February, the eve of the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Peter and I attended a concert at St Martin-in-the-Fields given by the Carice Singers, directed by George Parris. We hadn't heard of this group before, but the concert, entitled "An Estonian Vespers" and including music by Arvo Pärt, sounded interesting, so we decided to go. We were not disappointed!

After a short introductory speech by the Estonian ambassador, we were treated to some glorious singing of extraordinarily evocative music. As well as three works by Pärt, Estonia's most famous citizen, there were also pieces by lesser-known but equally gifted composers Ester Mägi, Evelin Seppar and Galina Grigorjeva. It's good that women composers are finally gaining greater recognition. The choir sang effortlessly and beautifully some very challenging music, and in five different languages!

The concert ended with a moving rendition of Prayer for the Ukraine, composed in 2014 by Valentin Silvestrov. As it came to an end there was a long and emotional silence before the audience burst into applause and a standing ovation.

Every time I see



a sunflower,
I think of you.
Fleeing from shells that hit
your homeland,
running from tanks that
invade your space.



Leaving soldiers to fight for you,
many of your friends have died.

You should be free
to wander peaceful roads
but that cannot be
for now
but maybe
one day
you will come back
to find sunflowers growing.

I can't put a name,
a voice or a face
to your person.
but whoever you are
in Ukraine
I think of you.

Annie Ellis