

Foreword – exercises in creative writing and gentle satire around the fictional church of St Pythagoras & All Angles, to maybe give you a smile and a split infinitive. Views are not necessarily mine, and certainly not endorsed by the Church of St Michael & All Angels.

Since the meme of St Pythag's & All Angles emerged from a minor typo in a concert advert early in 2014, there's not been any real explanation of who this previously unknown Saint may have been. Thanks to the “Sermon” preached by Bishop Rick at the recent Installation Service at St Pythag's here in Pychester, the story can now be told...

It seems it was a visiting Victorian scholar who, in the silence of the Library at Pychester Cathedral, rediscovered the Life of St Pythagoras as recorded in the Codex Dinhamensis, also known as the Pychester Anglo-Saxon Book (PASB). When a new Parish was carved out in 1861 to serve the industrious workers on the northern edge of Pychester, it was named after St Pythagoras and a thrusting neo-Gothic edifice was erected to the glory of God and consecrated in 1868.

The Life of St Pythagoras.

Who was St Pythagoras, many of you may be wondering? Obviously he is not the ancient Greek mathematician and philosopher, born 570BC on the island of Samos, who travelled in Egypt, and set up a community of followers on the sole of Italy around 530BC, dying in Metapontum around 495BC - that would be silly. A timey-wimey backstitching of Christian sainthood into the classical era via blue boxes or any other means is not what we are about!

No, our St Pythagoras is a little known (some might say previously unknown) but well-travelled and rather longer-lived 3rd century AD contemporary and friend of St Cecilia. Born on the Mediterranean island of Typos around AD200, he grew up on the triangular shaped island of Sicily.

In his gap year he travelled in Gaul observing Druid re-enactment ceremonies involving sets of well-tuned Carnyces, those tall decorated Celtic war-horns, an idea he and Cecilia worked on to construct their first portable chamber organ as depicted in many paintings of the patroness of musicians.

Not wishing to be the square on the hypotenuse of a celibate love triangle with Cecilia and Valerian, young Pythagoras narrowly avoided martyrdom in Rome and fled to Syria and Lebanon. He had heard tell of vibrant grass-roots Christian house-churches unencumbered by hierarchy.

But they were not small groups of friends sitting around pebbles and olive-lamps strumming lyres, drinking coffee, eating chile con carne and following some primitive Alpha&Omega course. No, they were large well-organised gatherings, ecclesia of 50, 80, 100. The wealthiest Christian in the town or village would give a large room in their house to be set aside, decorated with murals of the Good Shepherd and the Saints, and dedicated for worship, intercession, fellowship and instruction, the original wi-fi, with a separate baptistry if there was room.

Moving on to Alexandria in Egypt, around AD230 he was ordained deacon and priest by Patriarch Demetrius and studied theology briefly with followers of Origen. Pythagoras completed a $\Phi\Delta$ on 'Comparison of the Rubrics in the Egyptian Book of the Dead and Christian Funeral Rites', and studied the astronomical works of Ptolemy in the silence of the great Library.

During his earlier travels in Gaul he had heard tell of an ancient observatory in Britannia, so he decided to take advantage of the Roman Empire's open borders and trading links while he could and took a one-way passage with the firm “Stan & Deliver” as on-board chaplain and tutor to the children of a Tin trader heading for Cornwall.

Following in the footsteps of the holy Lamb of God himself, he traversed the green and pleasant land of Wessex, where he was welcomed as an itinerant preacher and singer of psalms and ballads.

In Pychester, known then as Castra Piscis, he lodged with a metalworker, Oscarius, and his family on a hill just north of the city wall, where they had a kiln a safe distance from other buildings.

The Anglo-Saxon Vita Sancti Pythagoris records how during Blessed Pythagoras's visit a firing of voluptuous bronze statuettes of the goddess Venus miraculously came out as beautiful gold statues of Mary Mater Dei bearing her Son Jesus. Oscarius and his whole household were converted to Christianity, sold Madonnas instead of idols, and soon a church dedicated to the Psalmist David was built on the site, and the rest is history.

Pythagoras encouraged the nascent Abbey at Sherborne, and introduced the Chi-Rho symbol to the mosaicists of Blandford Forum who used it when decorating the floors of the Villas of rural Christians up the Stour Valley. (A late 3rd century XP mosaic from Hinton St Mary is now in the British Museum.)

Recalling the words of Julius Caesar, “Veni, vidi, vellies”, Pythagoras made a pilgrimage to the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury, and fell in love with a melifluous young Romano-Briton, Lonicera, and took her as his wife. They established their own new-age community near Stonehenge, starting a lineage of wise and bearded sages; it is possible that British so-called heretic Pelagius (b.360) and the wizard Merlin may be among their descendants.

As mathematician, musician and mystic, Pythagoras was renowned for his inclusive, nuanced approach to teaching, always trying to see all angles of a subject, and working for harmony. He is also credited with playing an early form of Croquet among the ancient stones.

With the need for a more bishops in the West Country, in AD 260 they made the perilous journey to Rome, visiting Peregrine of Auxerre en route. In a short-lived experiment well ahead of its time, Pope Dionysius elected and consecrated Pythagoras and Lonicera to be co-Bishops for Wessex and advised them to find a third, gay bishop, since Trinities, triumvirates and triangles often, but not always, modelled the strength, mutual interdependence and sacrificial love of God.

Thus all manner of things seemed well with the world of Christian ministry to the West of Britain, but in the century after Blessed Pythag's death, the Sarum Bubble became isolated from the rest of impoverished Wessex, the populus got angry, rebelled, broke away from the Roman Empire and entered the Dark Ages.

Would there be an Arthurian golden age of adventure and feasting, or was that just a myth from the imagination of Mallory or Enid Blyton? Justin of Lambeth would have you put your hope in agile flourishing entrepreneurs benefiting the richest and the poorest – Roman capitalism reborn. But as Theresa of May said, Christ has no vote on Earth but yours, so stop moaning, someone's got to sort out this mess and let me get on with SPQRexit, if only I could remember where I put that Article L.

Only with the 19th century Celtic Revival was the multi-cultural, multi-faceted life of St Pythagoras rediscovered and reinvented here in the far south-west. Indeed, it is claimed that his right humerus was brought back to Pychester in the 7th century and placed within the High Altar Ego of the Anglo-Saxon Minster church.

So let us ponder on the life of this wide and gentle Saint, and consider which part of this fabulous story you might want to emulate here at the Church of St Pythagoras & All Angles?

Richard Barnes – this version Thursday 21 July 2016.

