

## Extract from 2018 Annual Report – Narnia Festival

### **Narnia – A Festival for all ages**

During the week 7 – 11 February we hosted a Narnia festival based on the book *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. From November 2017 invitations had been sent out saying: “When Lucy opened the wardrobe door she and her sister and brothers discovered a world beyond their imagination. A world frozen by evil but a world not without hope. Together they helped Narnia to rediscover faith, hope and inner strength. We invite you to join us and walk through the wardrobe and experience Narnia yourself.”

The aim of the festival was to welcome our local community into the church, to build friendships and share something of what we believe as Christians. Thinking it would be helpful to have a numerical target it aimed at welcoming 10% of our parish population through the wardrobe. This equates to just under 1,300.

On the Wednesday and Thursday, school groups from local primary schools were welcomed into Narnia. We were also delighted to welcome packs of Brownies, Guides and Beavers from across Bramhall. On Friday we opened to the general public expecting a quiet day but the stream of visitors kept flowing steadily. In the evening we hosted a gala evening with live music, drinks and evening tours. This was followed by two full days of visiting on Saturday and Sunday rounded off with a celebration service and fireworks on Sunday evening.

The whole event went beyond most of the expectations of the planning group. Whether it was the atmosphere created by what became a forest of Christmas trees with real snow, the constant sound of “Wow!” as people entered the wardrobe, or the family atmosphere of commitment from church members turning up whenever they could to help, it led to the joy of having so many visitors that we ran out of space and time. **In total almost 2,000 visitors visited Narnia.**

The Festival was a true success in bringing together the church community and the wider community of Bramhall. When the set-up team arrived in Church on the Monday morning at the start of the festival they knew something great was going to happen; when they left the following Monday lunchtime, just like Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, they couldn’t believe how great Narnia was.



## Extracts from 2020 Annual Report – Wonderland Festival

# Wonderland Festival 2020

*A personal view by organiser Sue Taylor*

On 30th January 2020, the moment that would determine whether 18 months of planning would come to fruition arrived. On that Thursday evening the church was stripped of all its furniture, chairs stacked and stored (who knew the vestry could hold so much!) and children's space dismantled. All of this captured on a time lapse camera, eventually to feature in our very own film of Wonderland. Several of us stopped to take stock, take a deep breath and with faith began to transform St Michael's into Wonderland!

So how, why and when did we find ourselves in this situation? In 2018 St Michael's had hosted a magical 'Narnia' experience. Over 2000 people attended and one of the overriding comments as people left was 'What are you going to do next?' For those of us involved the answer was brief: "nothing for some time!" We agreed to have a few months off to reflect, to mull over the week, to accept the plaudits and to breathe!

In August a group of people met to make a decision. 'Could we? Should we undertake another festival for 2020? The answer was an overriding 'Yes' and so it began. Which book? What theme? We identified possibilities, read and re-read books and eventually a consensus was reached: we should recreate Wonderland! In dark, cold February we would transform St Michael's Parish Church into our very own Wonderland. We would bring about some post-Christmas cheer! Little did we know what lay ahead!

Our remit was clear. This was outreach, it was for the community of Bramhall, it would be a free event and it would put St Michaels at the heart of the community. Calum set the bar high! **We should aim for 2500 visitors** and we should involve as many church members as possible.

As the festival drew to a close on the Sunday, **we'd had almost 3000 people** through the doors of St Michaels. The service that took place was joyous, a celebration of community. As we cleared away after the service, the organising group sat together, to reflect on our experiences and to read some of the comments in the visitors' book.

'Brilliant, a fantastic way of bringing the book to life'

'What a lovely event, so much hard work'

'Absolutely Inspirational'

'An incredible event'



## Extract from 2023 Annual Report – Oz Festival

### Festival 2023: The Wizard of Oz 2023: A Personal View

And so it began! In November 2021 a meeting, somewhat delayed by the aftermath of the pandemic, was arranged to discuss the Wonderland Festival held in 2021. The aim of the meeting was to reflect on the festival, the outcomes and discuss what if anything we should do in the future. Fortunately, between us, we were able to conjure up memories of what ostensibly had taken place 9 months previous.

Having reminisced, laughed, shared our thoughts, the conversation inevitably turned to what we would do next. Should we, could we replicate our success or should we go out on a high? If the decision was to undertake another event, what should that be? Group members were tasked with going away to think, pray and return with some suggestions in 2 weeks time. Ideas came thick and fast, Peter Pan, Wind in the Willows, a childrens' authors event. One idea shone out - The Wizard of Oz. Mindful that previous festivals had led to comments such as 'You took us to a different world' and reminded us of the desire to perhaps escape from the world if only for a short period of time. The story of the Dorothy and her journey, her friendships and the realisation that there is no place like home resonated with everyone. The Wizard of Oz was the choice. On 17<sup>th</sup> December the group sat down to watch the original film starring Judy Garland as Dorothy. Quickly ideas came to mind, scenes emerged and group members volunteered or were volunteered to undertake roles. The journey had begun. A date was fixed, meetings arranged, monthly, then fortnightly then weekly. A huge demand on peoples' time, but productive and fun.

Following the by now well oiled format of previous festivals Oz started to come to life. Scenes were identified, and one by one, letting imaginations run wild, things started to come together. From the transformation of the lounge, journeying into a farmyard, complete with straw, animals etc, through Munchkinland, meeting the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion, surviving an encounter with the Wicked Witch, we arrived at the Emerald City. And what a city that was, designed and built by Peter Illingworth and his trusty band, who would have envisaged scaffolding in the Nave as the city grew! What a showstopper. So many talents emerged, costume designing, crafting, cake making, potion making, ticket organising. The team went into overdrive.

As 2022 progressed excitement built. How would it be, would it be compared to Narnia and Wonderland? We had already decided that this would be our last festival; we didn't want to become stale. A year into planning and requests for volunteers went out. To be guides, to staff the kitchen, to make cakes, wash tea towels, do odd job, water flowers. So many roles and St Michael's responded brilliantly.

In February 2023 we opened our doors to the community. **We welcomed almost 3000 people**, all excited and happy to be there. It's fair to say we were well received and people hopefully gained a different perspective on Church and our community. For all involved, the friendships, the laughter and huge sense of community will be long remembered.

There are far too many people involved to single out individuals for thanks; perhaps the exception should be Calum, who not only took an active role but allowed us to transform St Michaels into a different world. Along the Yellow Brick Road we were all reminded of the need for kindness, courage and wisdom as we journey through life, not a bad lesson to take away.