

KNOX CHURCH

love faith outreach community justice

KNOX LIFE

September 2025



Colours in Church

In a recent sermon (Sunday 31 August), I gently accused the people of St George's, Takapuna, of being a bit apologetic about beauty. (http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz/data/sermons/202508310000_Sermon_Archive_551.pdf). I described how they were willing to retire the tired old piece of blue velvet that had hung from the pulpit since Adam was a boy, in favour of different coloured new ones, only on the condition that the new colours were explained each time they arrived. I felt slightly mean telling that story. I'm pleased, though, that I did, because it's caused a couple of Knox people to say "yes, what are the different colours actually about?"

In the olden days, Presbyterian ministers tended to theme their services around Bible readings that just happened to pop into their heads. (This sometimes resulted in well-worn tracks being furrowed in worship.) Since the 1980s, it's been much more common for Presbyterians to follow the "lectionary", a cycle of readings designed to cover most of the Bible's main stories and themes over three years. The readings are organised into seasons based roughly on the life of Christ and the effect it had on the world.

Human Life	Life of Christ	Season	Colour
Before a child is born, parents anticipate and prepare	Before Christ is born, the world longs for the coming of God's Messiah (God's presence and reign)	The Season of Advent , four Sundays leading up to Christmas	Purple
The child is born; parents celebrate but also take on new responsibilities	Christ is born in Bethlehem, fulfilling ancient hopes and promises	The Season of Christmas begins on Christmas Day and lasts for twelve days	White
The child grows and begins to exert an influence in the world	News of Jesus spreads first in his own region, but then to the wider world through demonstrations of his identity (baptism, miracles, transfiguration)	The Season of Epiphany , "epiphany" meaning "showing forth"	Green
The world sometimes responds badly	Jesus attracts growing levels of opposition - interpreted as	The season of Lent is forty days long (plus Sundays). It's a	Purple

to the influence exerted	humanity's rejection of God	season of penitence, confession	
Whether young or "full of years", human beings die	Condemned for his life and faith, Jesus is sentenced to death, and dies	Holy Week includes Maundy Thursday (the night on which he was betrayed) and Good Friday (the day on which he died)	Black or red
	Jesus rises	The season of Easter is forty days long, and follows the spreading of the news of the resurrection	White
Most deceased people, no matter how dearly loved, gradually lose their influence in the world	While the Easter appearances cease after forty days, Jesus continues to be present through the Holy Spirit	The Day of Pentecost marks the ministry of Jesus becoming eternal. The "Church", Jesus' new body, is born. We take up the task.	Red
Some people leave a legacy that enriches the world	Jesus' legacy is his continuing presence through the growing faith and equipping of the church through different ages, including ours	On the Ordinary Sundays after Pentecost we explore the ministry of Jesus (deeds and teachings) and its on-going effect in the world	Green

Colours

1. Purple is the contemplative colour, used in seasons of reflection, preparation, anticipation, waiting.
2. White is the colour of celebration (but not in Asia)
3. Green is the colour of growth.
4. Black is the colour of mourning.
5. Red is the colour of sacrifice (blood) or of energy (flame).

The colours feature at Knox on the falls that hang from the lectern (from where the Bible lessons are read) and the pulpit (from where the sermon is preached). We are so fortunate to have Barbara and Rochelle Howley providing us with a full set. Their crafting skills are wonderful, and offered with great love.

Barbara and Rochelle have also created falls for occasions not regularly featured in the global church calendar - Matariki, Spring Flower Sunday and communion (which we celebrate each month).

You may have noticed that I wear stoles (long fabric scarves draped around my neck) that match the falls. I sewed many of them many years ago when I had access to my mother's sewing machine, but the white one is a Howley original. One of my red ones was made for Rev. John Hunt by Lesley and gifted to me. And the flowers that I pin to my stoles these days come from my garden in Papanui.

Sometimes we depart from the lectionary to explore various themes like the Season of Creation or the Season of Universal Human Rights. We are free to do this!

Arohanui, Matthew



Church Council Notes

In July the council spent some time looking at the financial reports and the projected budget for the next financial year. We are grateful to our treasurer, Charlotte Bryden, and the finance committee who prepare detailed reports every 2 months and serve us very well.

It was noted that the end result for the year ending 30 June was considerably better than had been projected, thanks to giving from Knox members, good income from the hire of our buildings and carparks, and support from the Knox Trust.

The budget for the next financial year was endorsed by the Council and then approved at a congregational meeting on 17 August. It came as no surprise that we are expecting investment income to decrease in line with reductions in interest rates, and increases in insurance premiums.

Some years ago, the Knox Session decided that a generous bequest left to the parish should be shared with local community groups. Every year the interest from this Cunningham bequest is gifted to one or more groups.

This year we are supporting Moana Va, a Pasifika Collective celebrating the Rainbow community. They plan to use the money in the production of podcasts and online story telling. Moana Va has strong links with Knox.

Members of our Shalom group prepared an extensive submission on the Regulatory Standards Bill. This was endorsed by the Knox Council and submitted to the Parliamentary select committee considering the bill.

Jean Brouwer
Knox Church Council Clerk

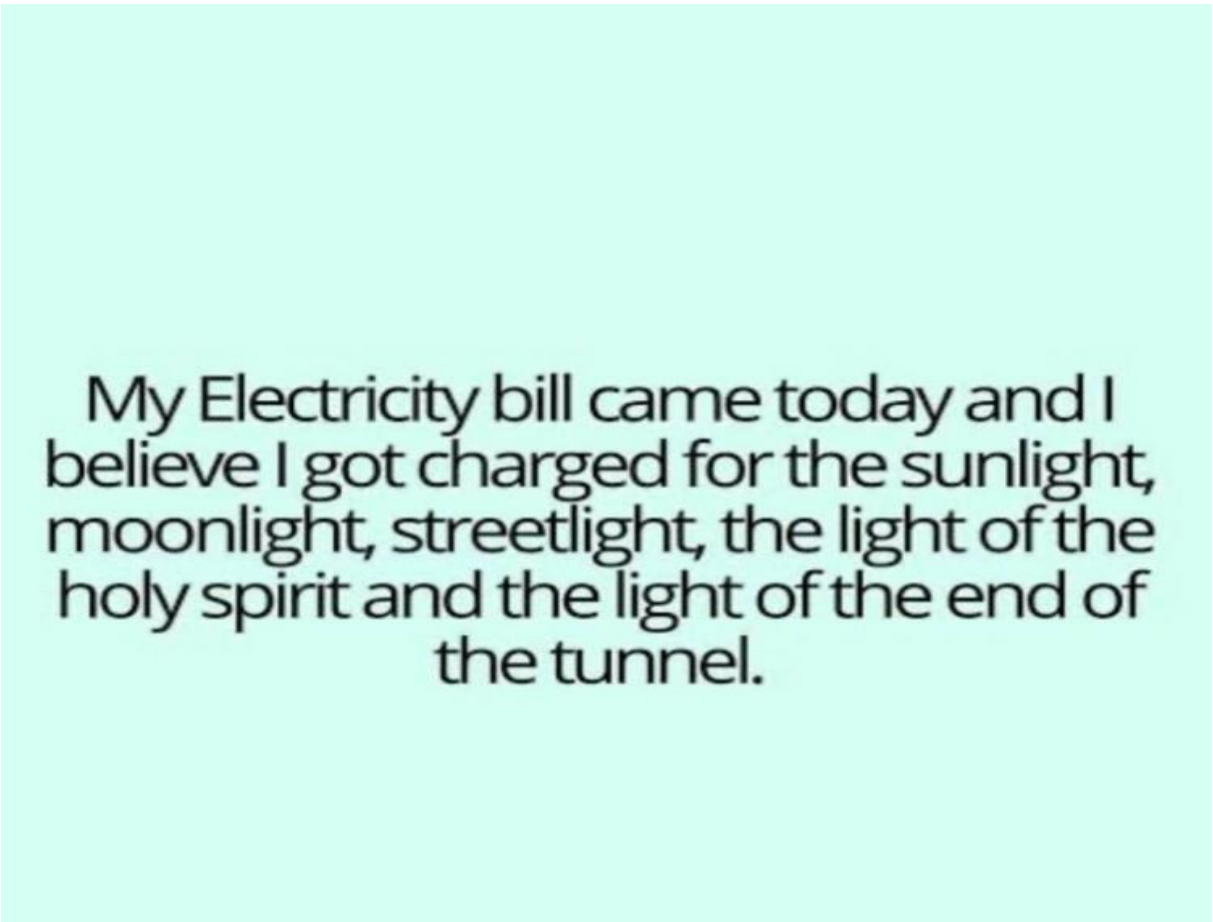
Hinewai Reflections - The artwork of Hugh Wilson

Orders are being taken for a 300 page book featuring 170 artworks of birds and plants by Hugh Wilson. Published on fine quality paper, the book includes Hugh's informative and anecdotal comments on each drawing. Profits from sales will go to support Hinewai Reserve, the wonderful area of native bush above Akaroa, where Hugh is the manager.

Hugh grew up in Knox Church as his father, Mac Wilson, was a much loved minister here. Hugh is a hugely respected botanist (with several botanical books to his name), as well as an accomplished artist and he has a quirky, humorous way with words. The book is being edited by the writer Sarah Quigley, who is Hugh's niece, and it will be a high quality production. It will be available early next year and advance orders are requested in order to determine the print run.

Price will be \$80 which includes packing and postage within NZ. Order forms and payment details are available in the foyer entrance to the church or contact the Knox office to obtain the order form and detailed information via email. Orders can also be made directly through the Hinewai website < Hinewai.org.nz > under the Hinewai Reserve section.

As only one print run is envisaged this is probably your only opportunity to purchase this wonderfully original book.



My Electricity bill came today and I
believe I got charged for the sunlight,
moonlight, streetlight, the light of the
holy spirit and the light of the end of
the tunnel.

COMING SERVICES AND EVENTS

The Season of Creation, 2025 focusing on the animals

7 September The Axolotl



The axolotl has piqued the curiosity of medical researchers because it has the capacity to grow new body parts. Seemingly, a major part of how it does this is to avoid growing scar tissue. What is the place of the scar in Christian spirituality? Does any of us not actually have one kind of scar? Are some scars beautiful? Or, inspired by the axolotl, what new thing ought we to seek to grow, instead of our familiar scars? What might the new limb do?

14 September The Octopus



Recently, it has been discovered that octopuses are more intelligent than previously had been appreciated. In light of this, calls have been made for greater octopus care and management. While recognition of intelligence, and a commensurate recognition of new responsibility for welfare seems good, does our emphasis on intelligence reveal some of our blind spots re. other important aspects of living things? Is intelligence the only thing to be valued? How to approach the "dumb" octopus.

21 September Blessing of the Animals



In our annual service of the blessing of the animals, we include the industrial animals who serve our economy well, but also the animals at home who teach us much about love. We'll do an audit of which animals are most economically productive, and why we persist in caring for those who are "unproductive".

Photos of pets who can't be with us on the day (either because they like to be at home, or because they're not with us anymore, **can be sent to the office by 12:00 noon on Wednesday 17 September.**

28 September
The Kennel



The kennel becomes a motif for a "home for the animals". We'll look at how the degradation of various delicate environments has affected the welfare of vulnerable species, and we'll revisit the idea of human dominion that sits on the edge of the Creation. What responsibility do human beings have to preserve a home for the non-human animals of the world? What do we let slip in the phrase "dog house"?

October 5

Jazz Communion

Bus Group Outing



Kaiapoi Bridge

Something a bit sad but also heart-warming from the Sunday Star Times 31 August 2025

Compassionate Judge drew many online fans.

People from all over the world have lined up to pay tribute to Frank Caprio, a retired US municipal judge who found online fame as an empathetic jurist and host of the television show 'Caught in Providence' at memorial services in his home state of Rhode Island.

Caprio, who won hearts with the folksy humour and compassion he brought to his courtroom, had pancreatic cancer and died on August 20, aged 88.

His family said they had been moved by the outpouring of support since Caprio's passing and the "thousands of requests from people around the world" who wanted to pray with the family at his service.

"In some areas – or most areas – there's some tension right now around the world, and people want to see that there is some humanity and there is some compassion and there's some kindness" his son, David Caprio, said.

He hoped his father's message and example would live on after his death.

"He had a position of authority as a judge, and he used that authority not to punish people, or not to be harsh to people, but he used that authority to help people."

Frank Caprio billed his courtroom as a place "where people and cases are met with kindness and compassion." He was known for dismissing tickets or showing kindness even when he handed out justice.

Providence resident Freida Adams, who waited in line to pay tribute to him, came before him in his courtroom for a parking ticket – an interaction she never forgot. She says he asked her for her story, and she told him about being a foster mother to 27 children over the years. He was moved. "He had so much compassion and love. He said – You know what? Since you were a foster mother, you don't have to pay it."

Riccardo Giannini flew in for Caprio's services from France, where he said Caprio's death had been all over the news. "It's amazing – the simplicity, the kindness, and how far that goes," he said.

According to his biography, Caprio came from humble beginnings, the second of three boys in an Italian immigrant family. He said he learned compassion from his father, who would wake Caprio and his brother at 4am to accompany him on his route delivering milk. His father also worked as a fruit peddler.

"I saw first-hand how other hard-working people couldn't afford to pay their bill, and I saw how my dad treated them."

In a 2017 interview with the AP Caprio said he knew his courtroom might be the only interaction with the justice system many people ever had, and he wanted it to be a positive one.

"I think there's a sense that there's lacking in understanding and compassion and kindness with the institutions of government. I'm not trying to change the world, but I'm trying to do my part to dispel those thoughts, those feelings."



Deep Sea Fishing

Timeless story from a trip to the US in 2017:

I haven't done a lot of sea fishing in my time. As a small boy, growing up in Nelson, we'd go spearing at night for flounder on the mudflats using old acetylene car headlights or in Admiralty Bay, French Pass with friends of my father, pulling up blue cod literally by the bucketful.

About 15 years ago a group of us headed offshore out of Moeraki in a charter boat, again targeting blue cod. In water temperatures typically of 8-10 degrees, in biting nor' easterlies, in the southern ocean, hundreds of fathoms beneath the keel, dressed typically in several layers of thermals and jackets.

However, I did spend a great deal more time in my teens and twenties, fly and lure fishing in lakes and rivers, mostly in Nelson and Canterbury. I still have all mine, and since his death in 1988, most of my dad's gear as well. I even bought a new pair of chest waders this past winter, in a moment of nostalgia, hoping perhaps to re-visit some of those earlier haunts in due course.

Nevertheless, we're in Florida, on the West Coast, near Fort Myers in a pleasant location called Charlotte Bay, staying in a well-appointed motel complex right on the water's edge. There's a feeling of this being an opportunity too good to pass up, to my way of thinking. Offshore fishing in the 'States has an iconic "culture-within-the-culture" reputation, particularly in the South, so we make enquiries as soon as we arrive.

We're pointed in the direction of Capt. Ralph Allen and his "King Fisher Charter Boats" fleet and sure enough there're two spaces remaining aboard tomorrow's trip offshore. Marti (who hasn't fished anywhere, since as a 10yr-old in the vicinity of the Panama Canal) and I turn up for an 8.00am departure with four others and our crew of John (Skipper and retired HR-person, he tells me) and Matt aboard 35' "Island Girl". The RAM architecture of my brain suddenly and unexpectedly finds a match for "Pop-eye, the Sailor Man", not altogether reassuring and I don't gauge spinach to be a regular dietary component here either.

It is barely a month since Category 5 Hurricane "Irma" ripped through this very area. Evidence of her passing is minimal now, although John explains how they literally stripped the dockside of anything that wouldn't survive

those 285kph winds and took the larger vessels out into Charlotte Harbour where they stood the best chance simply moored to various anchor points. All survived intact and it took only two weeks to reinstate all the infrastructure to recommence operations. I nevertheless find it more than surreal to be driving past the very spots where CNN's Anderson Cooper and others gave the watching world their "Breaking News" blow-by-blow (quite literally) commentaries, just days ago.

Today's forecast is for 33 degrees and a 10-15 knot northerly. Astonishingly however, to us New Zealanders, the water temperature in the bay and well out to sea is 30 degrees. This whole area is also very shallow - we're heading 18-20 miles offshore to John's favoured spots where it's still only 70 feet deep. This, apart from the fishing potential, is part of the equation that conspires to fuel the enormously destructive storms that spawn in the Eastern Atlantic at this time of year and head unerringly for the narrow strip of ocean on either side of the Florida Isthmus.

Safety briefing out of the way - "If you see me grabbing my life-jacket, it's time to grab yours!", we're soon heading down the Peace River into Charlotte Bay, the 5.9 litre Cummins diesel pushing us along at 20 knots into a lumpy, white capped sea and quite quickly, out of sight of land, despite the depth-sounder often showing only 40' beneath our keel. The noise of the diesel engine is overwhelming making conversation virtually impossible. After a while, I give up - my NZ English isn't John's native dialect and my combination of phrases and gestures is, in the heat and noise, quite an effort.

Some two hours later John cuts the diesel, Matt drops the anchor and silence descends. It's still very hot although the breeze is very welcome. There's a 1-2 metre swell running and a very lumpy chop on top, the 'calmest' John assures us of the last three days. Yesterday, he now reveals, very little 'fishing' was possible - everyone on board was seasick. We're glad of our Dramamine.

We begin pulling up small-ish local species - Lane Snapper, (intricate yellow striping), stunningly coloured Red Grouper (to fit in we must pronounce this 'grooper!'), Amberjack, with the occasional Remora (attach themselves to larger fish to clean them of parasites). Catchable limits are strictly observed - all the Grouper are released (under 24"), but neither is there anything here about which to write home. I'm beginning to realise why the renowned American author of the 1920's Zane Grey, headed for

NZ and wrote extensively of his encounters there with the big gamefish of the southern ocean, Striped Marlin and the like.



However, as if to pre-empt any confusion on my part, John is quick to show me iPhone footage of a Swordfish, 'caught' within Charlotte Bay at the beginning of the summer, with a sword length of, yes, 15 feet! Fisherman's tale? It's hard to get an accurate perspective from the iPhone footage.

They're a protected species now, so it doesn't feature on the "Top King Fisher Fleet catches so far" billboard.

We up-anchor and move spots a bit - 2 miles here, 2.5 there. John's very proud of his local knowledge - a total of 1781 co-ordinates in his database, he tells me. But even he is getting a bit weary of proceedings, lighting up more cigarettes ("NO SMOKING" signs notwithstanding) as the stiflingly humid afternoon wears on. We're so unused now to cigarette smoke anywhere in a public space, it only adds to our feeling of trapped discomfort. We see turtles, enormous jellyfish, endless streams of sargasso weed and not another vessel in sight. My mind wanders to the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner. I relieve myself of this potentially morbid introspection by reaching for the Welch's mango and orange juice, which together with the aforementioned brand of grape juice, seems likely to ensure our survival by day's end.

It's about 3.00pm. John announces we'll make our final casts of the day and head back. Then, in an instant, it all transforms. "Bob" from Kansas hooks onto some huge sea creature and it's all on. Matt and John scramble for nets and gaff. Between them, all three wrestle a 35lb Cobia onto the deck. It looks to me like a Tuna body but with a more flattened head. It's triumphantly proclaimed to be great eating. High-5's all round!

Then, just as John comments that this species often travels in small family groups, we spot another 'shape' circling us - "James" this time, (who's brought along his 80's+ dad, "Ed" who lies exhausted on the engine cover for much of the day's proceedings. Marti & I have cast nervous glances at him throughout the journey. "Caroline" married to Bob, offers him ice compresses. I rehearse lines from the Anglican prayer book in case a burial at sea is indicated. James is in the prime spot with a baited line already over the stern - barely 3 feet under the surface, the fish takes it, and a second struggle ensues. This is classic stuff. A bigger net is produced, and finally with what seems a 'titanic' effort another, this time 51 lb Cobia is thrashing around on the deck. John dispatches it. We marvel. High-5's again. It's apparently the largest of its species caught by the Company this season. The size is only exceeded by the crew's relief at having delivered on their undertaking - "... throughout the year we will catch nearly 100 different species of fish. Different types of fish are "HOT" at different times, (sic) we know what's happening "NOW"!!"

We up anchor and turn for home into a stiff northerly with a classic mid-afternoon topical thunderstorm developing off the starboard bow. John wants to out-run it. We crash and thrash our way towards land, still un-

sighted. Every bone-jarring hammer blow onto white-capped seas, convinces me that Friday's agenda should include a visit to the chiropractor. John lights up, each time furtively dangling the evidence outside the cockpit window. My window won't stay shut. I'm periodically drenched. John's cigarette isn't.

We disembark onto the Company's dock, right on time at 5.00pm to the rumble of distant thunder. John's thinking "chiropractically" too he tells me. Now I notice Capt. Ralph checking over the boat - for bends and/or breakages I wonder...

John and Matt begin to expertly gut and fillet our catch, right on the dockside. There's a none-too subtle marketing opportunity here - a constant stream of holidaying American seniors (just our crowd) stop by to chat and enquire - what, where, when and how? Ralph confidently announces his as being "A second generation fishing charter company". If he floated an IPO (Initial Public (share) Offering), I'd be sorely tempted.

An hour or so later, there's, what to our eyes, looks to be an enormous quantity of beautifully prepared fresh fillets laid out. James announces that he doesn't eat fish. Ed, on the other hand, does. Seemingly against the odds, he's survived the day's exertions and looks reinvigorated. The white-heron look-alike, resident egret "One-toe" has also been royally fed the scraps. We are offered a third of the day's catch. The suggestion is that we take the first meal's worth next door to the very smart fish restaurant, where the chefs will cook it to our preferences and serve it with accompaniments for \$10 a head. I'm in pescatorial heaven. John, meanwhile, has put the remainder in the Company's freezer from which we later retrieve it and weigh up our options. Soon we'll have to move on to join our extended family in Orlando - theme parks, birthdays to be celebrated, meals out. We think we'll donate the remainder of the catch to others we've met here.

I stagger into the shower and then to bed. I doze off, thankful that the waders and the rest of my gear await my return home. Meanwhile, I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have passed this way and, together with Marti, to have created another series of memories that are the quintessential heartland, here in America.

Murray Winn

I thought the folk of Knox might like to know the words to the very beautiful choral music, 'Look to the Day', the choir sang on Sunday 31st August. It was written and composed by John Rutter, a very well-known British choral composer and musician. What is probably not known so well is that John Rutter's son Christopher was killed in a car accident while a student at Clare College in Cambridge, John Rutter's alma mater. The words of this choral work demonstrate to me the calibre and spirit of the person he is, and the important role music can play in our lives in so many ways.

Lesley Hunt

Look to the Day

Words and music by John Rutter (1945)

Look to the day when the world seems new again
Morning so fresh you could touch the sky
The earth smells sweet and ev'ry flower looks bright
Shining in a dewy light as you wander by
Taking the time to enjoy each moment
Tasting the fruits spread along your way
Knowing there's time to spare
Dreams you can dream and share
Look to the day, look to the day

Look to the day when the earth is green again
Promise of spring after winter's sleep
The sounds of life returning fill the air
Music that's forever there for your heart to keep
Deep in the earth lay the seed of life renewed
Quiet and strong till the time of spring
Life in each bud and shoot
Life in each flower and fruit
Look to that day when earth shall sing

Look to the light that will drive out darkness
Look to the hope that will conquer fear
God's strength uphold us till the fight is won
Till we see our task is done when the day is here

Look for that day when there shall be no more pain
Sorrow and sighing shall pass away
Pray for the day to come
Trust that the day will come
Look to that day, look to the day

Lord, we give thanks for the gifts of life and health
Plant a new seed in our hearts, we pray
Help us to see, O Lord
How it could be, O Lord
Look to the day, look to the day

Recycling

At a Shalom group discussion the topic of recycling came up – especially looking for places to take used food containers/products which the Council does not recycle - particularly food and beverage containers (commonly known as tetrapaks), caps and lids.

I said I would compile a list of places in Christchurch, what they accept, and how they would like to receive them. See the following.

Bobbi Laing

SOFT PLASTICS RECYCLING SCHEME –

Various Supermarkets, The Warehouse Stores

The Soft Plastics Recycling Scheme has rolled out throughout New Zealand and you can take any soft plastics to the drop off points listed on their website. Note that soft plastics are those that scrunch in your hand and don't pop back into shape.

Collection Points - tetra paks/food cartons/caps/lids:

- **ReStore (Habitat for Humanity)** 189 Waltham Road, Sydenham, Christchurch
- **Kilmarnock Enterprises**, 21 Lodestar Avenue Wigram
- **New World Wigram – 51 Skyhawk Road, Wigram**

Which plastics can we collect?

- Flip-top/hinged caps
- Screw caps
- Milk bottle caps
- Ice cream container lids
- Yoghurt and dip lids (please do not include peel-off film)
- Supplement bottle lids
- Household cleaning lids
- Shampoo & cosmetic lids

No coffee cups or lids please!

Which metals can we collect?

- Crown caps (bottle caps)
- Jar lids
- Ring pull caps
- Wire from sparkling drinks
- Metal screw top caps
- Aluminum lids
- Wine lids
- Food tin lids

No coffee pods please!

- **RICHMOND COMMUNITY GARDEN - Riverlution Eco Hub - Community Drop Off Station** – 46A Vogel Street, Richmond



- **THE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE** is setting up a recycling workshop with plastic shredder and collection point. For full details visit their website.
 - Wine bottle tops and metal lids for the Christchurch Kidney Society
 - Plastic lids (resin codes 2 and 5)
 - Chip packets - Chip Packet Project NZ
 - Face masks
 - Razor blades
 - Oral care Colgate brand only

- **WEA** – 59 Gloucester Street, Christchurch

Canterbury Worker's Education Association has a drop off hub for metal and plastic lids.

- **SUMNER HUB** – 57 Nayland Street, Sumner

Wooden crates outside the Sumner Hub for collection of:

- Plastic bottle tops to Eco Pirates
 - Toothpaste items to Terracycle (Colgate) or Grin (Grin plus other brands)
 - Wine bottle lids and can tabs to Christchurch kidney society
 - Nespresso capsules to the Trees for Canterbury recycling programme
-
- **CREATIVE JUNK** – 25 Disraeli Street, Addington

Note that they are a drop off point for any resources that are not accepted in the council recycling systems. Recycling projects can pick up anything they need from there but they do not actively funnel materials to recyclers (unless agreed). The types of resources that are collected by local recycling projects include:

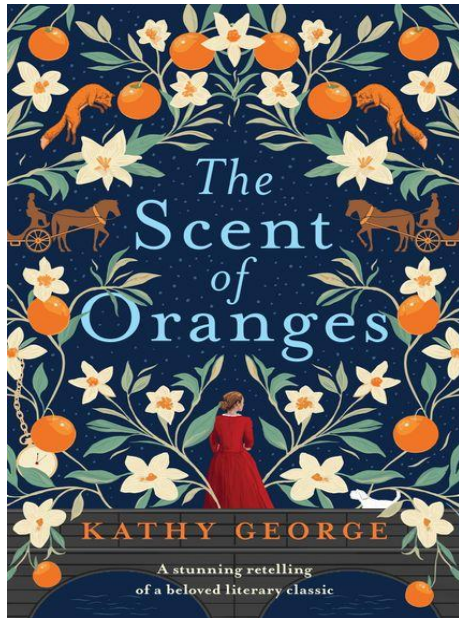
What can we use?

Non-toxic, clean & safe items like:

Aluminium cans & lids	Nails, nuts & bolts & cogs
Art supplies	Natural materials
Baby food jars with lids	eg pinecones
Beads	Paint – watercolour
Bangles & jewellery	acrylic & oil, tempera
Bike tubes	(No house paint or
Brushes & rollers	spray paint)
Bubble wrap	Paper
Buttons/zip/thread/lace	Photos
Candles	Piano parts
Cards & wrapping paper	Pop sticks
CDs/floppy disks	Puzzles (doesn't matter
Christmas decorations	if pieces are missing)
Colourful & shiny	Records
Materials	Ribbon & bows
Cones from thread &	Rubber bands
yarn	Shells
Corrugated cardboard	Stamps & pads
& Corflute	Stencils & Stickers
Crystals, Rhinestones	Springs
& Diamantes	Tennis balls/containers
Fabric book samples	Tops of wet wipe packets
Feathers	Transfer letters & numbers
Film canisters	Velcro
Flowers – fake	Wallpaper rolls &
Leather	sample books
Magnets	Wine corks
Matchboxes – empty	Wire/chicken net
	Yarn

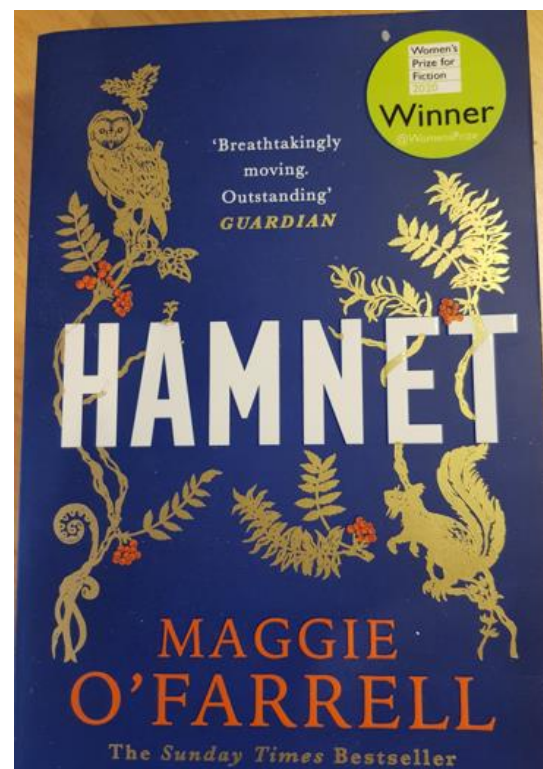
Book Reviews

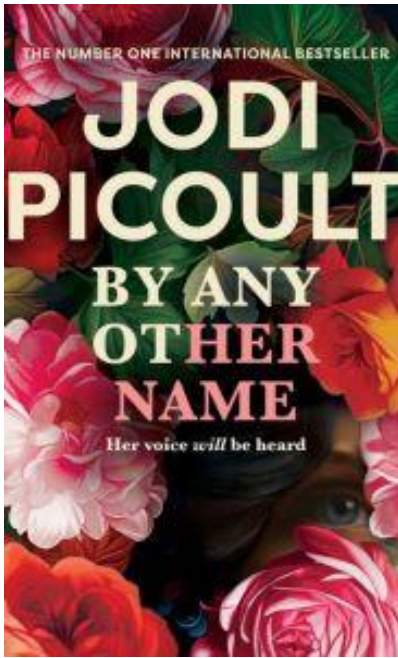
This time we look at some books which are a bit unusual, with an unashamedly female bias. Modern writers enhancing old masters - and some quirky murder mysteries.



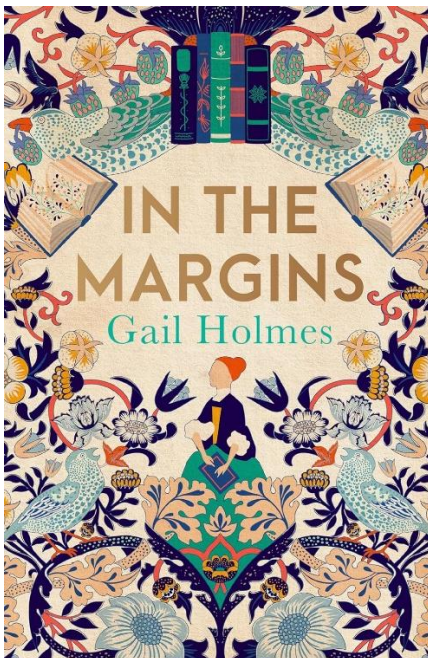
The Scent of Oranges (2024) by Kathy George fills in the gaps in the life of Nancy in Charles Dickens' **Oliver Twist** (1837). In the original book it is Nancy who, at her own personal cost, saves Oliver from the likes of Bill Sykes and Fagin and gives him a new life. Kathy George brilliantly recreates the life, language and harsh realities of the 19th century London underworld, familiar to many of our own ancestors who escaped by emigrating to New Zealand. This latest book has won literary awards and is a heart-rending masterpiece.

Hamnet (2020) by the prize-winning author Maggie O'Farrell is about Shakespeare's son, Hamnet. Shakespeare had two daughters and a son, Hamnet, who died of cholera in Stratford in 1596, aged 11. For four years he did not write anything. Then came the play **Hamlet**. In those days the names Hamnet and Hamlet were considered the same, entirely interchangeable in the records. What happened in those four years? Maggie O'Farrell has written this engrossing book, grounded in research, about the life of Shakespeare's family in Stratford, and the devastating blow dealt to Shakespeare by the death of his only son.





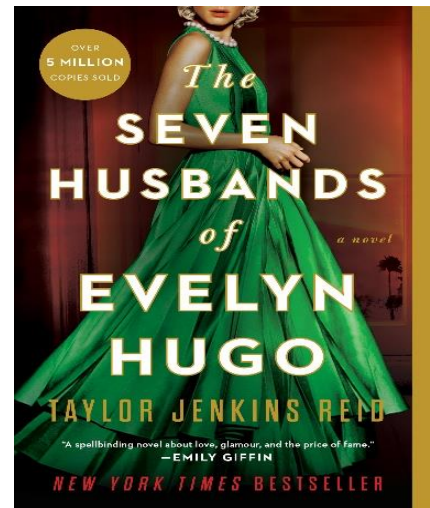
However, the equally prizewinning writer Jodi Picoult proposes the opposite in **By Any Other Name** (2024). After vast research, she claims that William Shakespeare, a full-time actor and theatre manager, did not even have time to write all the plays printed under his name! Many of the plays, especially those with strong female characters, were written by Emilia Bassano, a real person who was mistress of the Lord Chamberlain. Emilia had even been to Elsinore castle, the detailed setting in Hamlet, whereas Shakespeare himself had not. Her portrait is shown at the end of the book amidst 40 pages of references and quotes from the plays! I must admit that I found this book thoroughly compelling.



In the Margins (2024) by Gail Holmes is inspired by the life of Frances Wolfreton (1607-1677). In 1647 England, there was civil war and in 1649, the start of the Commonwealth, led by Oliver Cromwell. It was illegal to own any books except certain Protestant religious tracts. Frances hid and added to her mother's collection of "entertainment" books, including plays by William Shakespeare. Her collection is one of the most significant surviving book collections of the period. This novel reimagines the life that Frances and her family lived, constantly under threat.

And now for two quirky murder mysteries and two World War II updates.

The Seven Wives of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid (2017). The reclusive Hollywood star Evelyn Hugo tells her story to a young woman reporter. And what a story!! Gradually it emerges, told to the young magazine reporter, Monique Grant. Why was she chosen for this prestigious task? And why were there seven husbands? This lively tale kept me engrossed to the last page.



The Maid (2022) by Nita Prose introduces Molly Maid who works as a maid in the Regency Grand Hotel in a large Canadian city. Her motto is “I am your maid. I know so much about you. But when it comes down to it: what is it that you know about me?” Molly discovers a guest dead in bed. With her acute observation of seemingly trivial details, she solves the murder ahead of the police. This is the first in a series of four (so far!) – all available from the Canterbury Public Library.

Janet Skeslien Charles: The Paris Library (2021) is an enthralling book based in the American Library in Paris. A real place, where the author herself worked for a while. Set in two time frames: before and during World War II, when Paris was occupied by the Germans and re-creates those terrible war years; and 1983-86 in a tiny town in Montana. We get to know Odile, who begins work at the ALP in 1939 (she is bilingual) and through the war, then in her later life in Montana, where she lives next door to Lily, a troubled young woman. The author has also worked at the ALP and is bilingual. Her previous book is **Moonlight in Odessa**.

And the latest gripping, thoroughly researched book by the fabulous Natasha Lester: **The Mademoiselle Alliance** (2025). This is about a real person: Marie-Madeleine Fourcade who ran the largest Resistance network in France during World War II. There are authentic-sounding interactions with real people: her second-in-command, with whom she had a son, the members of the Alliance network which she set up, her mother and her two daughters for whom she managed to find sanctuary in Switzerland. An MI6 Commander explains: “Fact had outpaced fiction in producing the copybook ‘beautiful spy’”. Spoiler alert: I could not put down this book!!

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