

How is Easter for you? Do you have vivid memories of it from your childhood? I do.

For many years my mother built and stocked an Easter Garden in the children's corner of our village church in Hampshire, near to the gallery staircase and door to the choir vestry. It was big: about 5 metres square. The tomb was made from a cast iron water tank, lit inside and dressed with flat stones, including one to be rolled away on Easter morning. A wall either side of the tomb was built up with flint stones abutting apple boxes. The hill up to the crucifixion site of Golgotha was constructed of netting supported on posts and trestle tables. Latterly a stream was introduced, with pumped, re-cycled water in the foreground. The grass was made of moss which the gardener collected up from home. And then, of course, came the plants and flowers, lots of them – potted azaleas, cyclamens, hydrangeas, forsythia even one or two of my mother's prized orchids – and concealed vases of primroses, daffodils, narcissi and lilies. The biggest worry was the cherry blossom – pink and white, arranged to resemble trees. Depending on whether Easter was early or late, the blossom was forced into bloom in the boiler house or suppressed in the cold, dark school room. Finally, the figures were carefully placed around the scene: the risen Jesus with Mary Magdalene at his feet, the angels (winged, of course), and John, with Peter bringing up the rear holding his midriff as if with a stitch. Once my mother discovered that someone had got too close and had decapitated one of the figures.

It took my mother two weeks to build the Easter Garden. The first week was pure manual labour with her sons wielding the barrow. The second week was just her in private – meticulously decorating the garden and arranging the colour schemes.



The area was curtained off until first thing on Easter Sunday morning. Finally, the garden was opened up in time for the first Eucharist. The effect was monumental. I swear there was not another garden like it in the county or possibly in the whole country. Certainly, the famed Easter Garden at St Paul's Cathedral paled into insignificance by comparison. My mother kept the garden going for two whole weeks until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter. Many visitors came as the garden's reputation spread. It was featured at least once on local TV.

The story of the Easter Garden is perhaps an allegory for the birth and development of the Church. The early beginnings of toil and labour; the gradual flowering and nurturing and then the triumphal blossoming of Christian faith around the world empowered by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

May your Easter be equally triumphal.