George Herbert 1593 -1633

A Resource Pack for Schools

www.georgeherbert.org.uk

2008
Teachers’ Notes

Many of you will already be familiar with the works of George Herbert, but probably don’t know it. Some of our most popular hymns are sung to the words of George Herbert. These days he is considered to be one of the finest Christian poets. He wrote over 160 poems and a book on practical advice for rural clergy called ‘The Country Parson’. He also gathered together a number of witty sayings called ‘Outlandish Proverbs’. We know quite a lot about his life from the biographer Izaak Walton.

The contents of this pack will help learners take an interesting and enjoyable look into life in the 17th Century, meet Herbert and the people of his time, share his skills and develop some of their own. The pack uses a cross-curricular approach and should be considered as a ‘springboard’ for other exploration.

At first viewing George Herbert’s poetry may seem challenging but the pack includes particular examples which, with a little delving, can offer opportunities to extend creative writing skills and develop reflective thinking whilst contributing to religious education and spiritual development. Links to all of George Herbert’s poetry and much more information can be found at www.georgeherbert.org.uk

George Herbert is held in special regard as a significant historical figure for Salisbury, where he spent his last few years. It was here he wrote ‘The Country Parson’ and revised many of his poems. Salisbury has been home to several notable characters, many of whom were writers, throughout its history. There may be people you would like to find out more about in your location. In this way the material offers a ‘stepping stone’ into local history research skills.

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Contents

1. George Herbert: The Man
2. George Herbert: The Writer
3. George Herbert: The Priest
4. George Herbert: The Musician

Each section contains
- Information: historical and biographical details
- Exploration: finding out more about Herbert and his times, what relevance it may have today.
- Activities: opportunities to consolidate learning and experience through creative expression. The final activity on the sheet offers space to provide a pupil record or assessment task.
- Reflection: time to relate learning to wider aspects of life, consider the impact of learning and offer collective worship opportunities using Herbert’s writings

In addition, at the top of each page is a line from one of Herbert’s well-known poems (set to music as hymns). Each one ‘sets the theme’ for the content of the section and may be used to open discussion. Every section has an example of ‘wise words’ from the ‘Outlandish Proverbs’ collected by George Herbert. They have as much relevance today as they did in Herbert’s day and touch on social development themes.
An important element of all Locally Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education is the study of pilgrimage. The concept of travelling to sites of religious significance is one which has been practiced by members of all faiths for hundreds of years and continues today. Many ‘pilgrims’ still visit the church of Bemerton St Andrew’s to see the place where George Herbert was priest and visionary.

For more information and to arrange a visit please go to www.georgeherbert.org.uk

Herbert family crest
Just one of the fascinating details from Bemerton St. Andrew’s Church

Acknowledgements

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Sharon Hallis

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Sarum St Michael Educational Charity for their generous grant towards the resource pack.
Bob Paine: the original idea for schools’ information came from Bob, a retired postman, who has lived all his life in Bemerton and went to school there. He was never taught about George Herbert, and believed this to be an omission from his education since Herbert is an historical figure and a poet of note. It was his wish that the groups ensure a continuation in such knowledge for the next generation.

For further information

(includes The Country Parson and Life of Herbert: Izaak Walton)
George Herbert was born in Montgomery (Wales) and was the seventh child out of ten children. You can see the Herbert children here with their mother beautifully carved on her monument in Montgomery.

Herbert's father died when he was only 3 or 4 years old and his family went to live in London. He was very clever and became a Cambridge Orator, writing poems and making speeches (in Latin) to visiting dignitaries, including royalty. Herbert was known in court circles and to both James the First and Charles the First. Herbert was a clerk to a shipping company and also a politician, for a short time, but chose to be a priest. He finally came to Fugglestone & Bemerton (a small country parish near Salisbury) in 1630 with his wife and three adopted nieces.

He had probably written poetry from an early age. Some of his poems, over 160, show that he didn't always find it easy to follow or understand his faith. He always came back to believing that God was a God of love, and wrote many poems which expressed this belief. You can see an example of this in the first verse of the poem *Antiphon*. Antiphon is when two choirs or voices sing in response to each other.

Lastly, look out for some of his monuments. Sometimes you may see his year of death written as 1632. This is because the calendar system changed in the years following Herbert's death to the dating system we have now. You can see examples in the images on the next page.
### Antiphon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Praised be the God of love,</th>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>He our foes in pieces brake;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Here below,</td>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Him we touch;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>And here above:</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>And him we take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Who hath dealt his mercies so,</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Wherefore since that he is such,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>To his friend,</td>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>We adore,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>And to his foe;</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>And we do crouch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>That both grace and glorie tend</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Lord, thy praises should be more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Us of old,</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>We have none,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>And us in th’end.</td>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>And we no store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>The great shepherd of the fold</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Praised be the God alone,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Us did make,</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Who hath made of two folds one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>For us was sold.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Activities

- **Herbert’s poem Antiphon** is about God’s great love for all mankind and how men on earth and angels in Heaven cannot find enough ways and words to praise Him. Write your own list of things that Christians believe make God great.
- Design and make a mixed-media banner which would illustrate Herbert’s poem. Ask a local church if they would display it for you.
- Divide into 3 groups and read the poem out loud and dramatically as if it were a ‘choral’ piece.
- Visit your local church to find any other ways artists or writers have praised God with words or images.
- Invite a member of the Christian community into school to talk about their faith.
- Using what you have found about George Herbert write a letter to a friend telling them about this great poet.
- The window (top right) can be found in Salisbury Cathedral. Look closely and talk about the symbols you can see.

### Wise Words:

One stroke fells not an oak

*Sometimes much hard work is needed to do a difficult task and it might take several attempts to get it right!*

### A moment to Reflect……..

- Display pictures of people you consider to have done great things
- Think about what YOU can do and what you might like to achieve in the future
- Read Antiphon and think about why God is important to Christians such as Herbert
- Light a candle Take time to be thankful for your gifts and skills
George Herbert was a great lover of words. We only need to look at his poetry to see this. His poems were mainly about God and the Christian faith. He was interested in how words could be used. His poems and writings are in many styles: conversational, persuasive and reflective, for example. People enjoy his sense of fun and wit in his works. Some poems are written in ‘picture form’ or have clever hidden patterns. Sometimes there is a message waiting to be found in the lines. Find the poem, written by Herbert, called Colossians 3:3………..can you see its message?

**My** words and thoughts do both express this notion,
   That **Life** hath with the sun a double motion.
   The first **Is** straight, and our diurnall friend;
   The other **Hid**, and doth obliquely bend.
One life is wrapt **In** flesh, and tends to earth.
The other winds towards **Him**, whose happy birth
Taught me how to live here so, **That** still one eye
Should aim and shoot at that which **Is** on high;
Quitting with daily labour all **My** pleasure,
To gain at harvest an eternal **Treasure**

## Easter Wings

Lord, who created man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Til he became
Most poor;
With **Thee**
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day **Thy** victories;
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin.
With **Thee**
Let me combine,
And feel this day **Thy** victory,
For if I imp my wing on Thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

People all over the world have found inspiration reading Herbert’s poetry. Often his poems are like listening to ‘conversations’ with God. He was very honest about his faith and sometimes struggled with his beliefs. Christians today may also have doubts from time to time. He expressed his own struggles in his poetry and hoped other people might be helped by reading it.

Despite this, his poems celebrated God’s love and through them he shared his delight with his readers. George Herbert was inspired by the Easter story and tried to create a feeling of ‘soaring’ with great joy. He wrote a poem called **Easter Wings**. (left) You can see how the two verses look like larks’ wings as if the poem was a bird ‘soaring in the sky’.
George Herbert was quite ill for most of his life but still wrote some wonderful poems. He was only 40 years old when he died. Just before he died he gave his writings to a great friend and scholar, Nicholas Ferrar. Herbert remembered all the times he had found it difficult to understand his faith and thought his poems might help others who felt the same, giving them hope. He said to publish the poems ‘only if he thought they might do good to any dejected poor soul’.

On the right you can see Nicholas Ferrar and George Herbert in the windows at Bemerton St Andrew’s Church, with Ferrar holding Herbert’s writings.

**Trinitie Sunday**

Lord, who hast form’d me out of mud,  
And hast redeem’d me through thy bloud,  
And sanctifi’d me to do good;

Purge all my sinnes done heretofore:  
For I confesse my heavie score,  
And I will strive to sinne no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,  
With faith, with hope, with charitie;  
That I may runne, rise, rest with thee.

The poem *Trinitie Sunday* seen here on the left is a cunning use of words and structure which invites the reader to become familiar with the concept of 3………to remind them of the three-fold nature of God as described in the Trinity: God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is written in the original spelling.

**Activities**

- When people die there is often an ‘obituary’ - a chance for people who have known them to write good things to celebrate their life. Write an obituary for George Herbert.
- Paint or draw an Easter picture which celebrates the joy of the occasion, just as Herbert did in words.
- Find out about life in Salisbury in the 1630’s…..poverty?…..disease?……..discovery?……..rural life?
- Write a poem which praises God and could be used in your school worship or local church.
- Create a poem in the shape of an object. Try out some ideas here and then make a beautiful version for display!
- For interest! Longest poem: *The Sacrifice*  Shortest poem: *Bitter-Sweet*  Puns: *The Sonne*

**Wise Words: When a friend asks, there is no tomorrow**

*Good friends will do anything as soon as possible because of their care and loyalty for each other*

_A moment to Reflect………._

- Display a range of writing ‘equipment’ *Think about* what would YOU want to write about? What is so important that you might want to share it in a poem or story? *Read* *Trinity Sunday* and think about what it means to lead a good life  
- Light a candle *Think about the sort of person you want to be and what is important to you*
In 1630 George Herbert became Rector of Fugglestone with Bemerton, near Salisbury, a small parish of about 200 people, many of them farm workers. As priest he led daily services, preached, celebrated Holy Communion, baptised and buried...as did all priests. Here you see the chalice which he would have used to give the wine at Communion. One of his poems states very clearly that he had given his whole life and service to Jesus as His priest:

*Lord, Thou art mine, and I am Thine*

He wrote a ‘guide book’ full of practical advice on being a country parson and said:

*The country parson is exceeding exact in his life, being holy, just, prudent, temperate, bold, grave in all his ways.*

He called the book ‘a mark to aim at’. He thought it was good to set high standards: he wrote ‘he shoots higher that threatens the moon than he that aims at a tree’.

Once a week Herbert would walk across the water meadows, a system of open fields and drainage for the city (still in use today), to Salisbury Cathedral. He met with friends, shared in worship and socialised. He was a well-known and respected figure locally. There are many stories of his wisdom and kindness. Izaak Walton tells one of them. On his way to the Cathedral one day, Herbert helped a traveller whose horse had fallen under its load. Look for Salisbury Cathedral in the background. The picture reminds us of a Bible story which Jesus told...which one? Other stories tell of Herbert and his wife visiting the homes of people who were ill or poor. They were well known for giving them comfort and aid.

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From “A Country Parson”
A list of priestly skills
Knowledge
Courtey
Charity
Praying
Preaching
Comforting
Teaching
Healing
Being fatherly
Being joyful
...and more!
Herbert knew his garden well and that the plants he grew could be used for healing. Many of his parishioners would come to him for help if they were suffering. St.Osmund (an early Bishop of Salisbury) was also known as a ‘healing man’ and would have used herbs for helping people’s illnesses. Here are some of their uses:

**Sage:**  Pain relief for mouth or throat ulcers

**Thyme:**  An antiseptic

**Basil:**  Prevents sleeplessness

Try growing herbs at school!

### Activities

- **The Call** reminds us that Jesus is at the centre of a priest’s life. Find in the Gospel where Jesus says ‘I am the way, the truth, the life’  Make a poster about the statement.

- Look at the list of characteristics and skills which Herbert says a priest should have. What else do you think a priest needs to be a good representative of the church?

- Design a special place to worship as an architect would. Make a 3D model if possible. What do you need to consider?

- Visit your local church. What do you notice about the building, objects and furniture in it? Write a ‘guide’ book to help new members of the church find their way around.

- Find out about Salisbury Water Meadows and draw a picture of Herbert walking to Salisbury Cathedral Evensong (make sure you put the Cathedral in the distance).

### Wise Words: He that endures is not overcome

*If you keep trying at something you wish to achieve you will succeed and not be beaten*

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**A moment to Reflect……..**

*Display a cross, some herbs and a Bible to illustrate Herbert’s life  *Think about people you may know who do their best for others  *Read The Call and think about how Christians devote their whole life to Jesus by trying to be like Him  *Light a candle Remember the worldwide family of Christians, ask God to love and guide them in serving others by living according to Jesus’ teachings
The God of love my shepherd is

What sort of instruments do you think George Herbert might have played?
This is a lute seen here on a kneeler from St Andrew’s, the Bemerton Church. It is a stringed instrument still played today and was very popular in Herbert’s lifetime.

The two windows below are also from St Andrew’s. They show the Alpha and Omega symbols. The Bible says that God is the beginning and end of everything, ever...even before creation! Herbert, in his words and music, wanted to celebrate the concept that God is all powerful and always with us.

Today many craftspeople are still inspired by George Herbert and his poetry. The list includes musicians, artists, builders, carpenters, poets, calligraphers...and more. The photo (over) shows Jason Battle, stonemason, crafting a statue of George Herbert which can be seen on the West Front of Salisbury Cathedral. The altar frontal (right) in Bemerton St Andrew’s Church reflects the ideas in Herbert’s poem

“The Flower”

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! E’en as the flowers in spring

In this poem, Herbert explores the idea of plants which appear dead in the winter but bloom again in spring. He uses this to compare our life journey. We all suffer dark and sad times but can find new hope and happiness.

You may know this hymn but did you know George Herbert wrote the words?
Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King.
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly:
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and king.

Herbert used to walk across the water meadows to the Cathedral for Evensong which he called ‘heaven upon earth’. Then he would join Cathedral musicians and enjoy playing music with them. He composed tunes to his own poems but sadly none of them have survived.

Since his death some of his poems have been set to music and churches all over the world sing these hymns as they worship.
Do YOU sing in your school worship? What sort of words and music do you have to tell the Christian Story?
Edmund Hampton, a young musician, composed a new tune to be used as a hymn for one of Herbert’s poems (Gratefulness) in the hymnbook Another Music, published 2007 by the Royal School of Church Music and the Bemerton groups.

Edmund said:

“I have been described as a hymn fanatic – I like singing hymns and the chance to compose motivated me. Big, bold tunes with a dramatic organ accompaniment are a particular favourite of mine. George Herbert’s poetry can be difficult to understand at first glance but a thorough exploration helps to get to grips with what he is saying in his poetry.”

Activities

• ‘Compose’ music to reflect God’s everlasting nature. Explore the Creation story in Genesis to help you.
• Make a special cloth for your school worship table (or even the altar in your local church for a festival e.g. Easter) Think of symbols and colours you could use.
• There are many musical versions of Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd. Find a version you like, as a class, and learn to sing it.
• Make a collage which explores the idea of Jesus as a ‘shepherd’. You can find some help in the Gospels to give you ideas.

Wise Words: The best mirror is an old friend

If you want an honest opinion about yourself ask someone you trust and who has known you a long time

A moment to Reflect……...

*Display images of different times in our lives from babyhood to old age  *Think about people who are important to us during those stages of life e.g. family, teachers, nurses, friends etc  *Read The Flower and think about how Christians welcome God into their lives  *Light a candle Take time to remember your families and friends and the people who may have influenced your life