

PETER, PYNNORE AND PMF

“St John the Baptist’s, Pinner

This House of God was built and re-consecrated on this site

on 27th October 1321 AD by Peter, Bishop of Corbavia”

If you look up above the South Porch entrance just inside St John’s, Pinner Parish Church – as I did a few years ago – this is what you would see, above the list of Vicars. And maybe, like me, you would wonder: Where is Corbavia? Why him; and Who was he? I had an extra reason for looking up again. With the forthcoming 700th Anniversary of the Church’s dedication, I was thinking of commissioning a new composition for Pinner Music Festival 2021. My curiosity was piqued, and I started on an amazing journey of discovery, culminating in the libretto I wrote for *A Brother Abroad*, by established composer Martin Bussey (who was born and grew up in Pinner).

The story of this remarkable man, **Peter of Bologna**, Bishop of Corbavia, provides a lens through which we can glimpse the mediaeval world. He was a genuinely good man, living in turbulent times, working across England for his last 15 years. He had a deep faith and led a simple life as a Franciscan. I have drawn on many sources, but especially articles by Dr Michael Robson OFM of St Edmund’s College, Cambridge.

The first question is simply answered; Corbavia (Krbava) is a diocese in inland Croatia (centred on Udbina), a sub-diocese of Split. By the time of Peter’s appointment in 1300, it was a titular see, given to members of the Papal Court. Peter served under four Popes: Boniface VIII, Benedict XI, Clement V and John XXII, initially in Rome and then Avignon.

The answer to the second question is recorded: Peter of Bologna was granted by Walter Reynolds, Archbishop of Canterbury, “the faculty to dedicate the Chapel of Pynnore of his patronage on the sixth of Kalends [27th] of October ... 1321.” But who was he?

Peter was born in Crespellano, outside Bologna, around 1260, and took the Franciscan habit early. He studied in Bologna, Ravenna and Modena, and was probably ordained in 1285. In his work for the Papal court he was busy across Italy, France and Belgium. He was evidently well regarded and judged to have the qualities required for John XXII to send him on a difficult mission with two cardinals to broker peace between Edward II of England and Robert Bruce of Scotland in 1317.

On their way North, they were to consecrate a new Bishop of Durham (the choice of Queen Isabella, over a locally preferred candidate). However, in Northumbria they were attacked and robbed by a band of shavaldours (well-to-do rogues) led by Sir Gilbert de Middleton, perhaps in part because of the dispute about the Durham appointee, who was kidnapped; the legation were allowed to travel on, although they were not welcomed by the Durham Prior or monks. The cardinals excommunicated their attackers; Sir Gilbert was later executed.

Peter and a colleague, Aymeric, went ahead to Roxborough where they met Robert Bruce, who received them but refused to accept the Pope’s missive, because he was not addressed as

King, but as Ruler, of Scotland. After returning to Durham, and despite further discussions and messages, the mission was abandoned (although Peter and Aymeric were commended), conflict resuming. The cardinals returned to Avignon, but Peter decided to stay in England, perhaps aware that John XXII was in dispute with a fundamentalist Franciscan sect.

In the following years, Peter served as a Suffragan Bishop in York, Lincoln, Winchester, London and Canterbury, as deputy or during interregnum. Records show him to have been very busy, travelling far and wide. Unlike other suffragans, he maintained a simple life, living in friaries, such as Greyfriars. He seems to have been the ‘go-to’ person for resolving disputes, e.g. a bust-up about the Brondesbury stall at St Paul’s. He died in 1332.

Archbishop Walter Reynolds was active in state affairs, initially supporting Edward II, but shifting allegiance to Queen Isabella. He delegated many regular duties (dedications, consecrations, reconciliations, ordinations, confirmations, blessings, etc.) to Peter. The ‘Chapel at Pynnore’ was under his jurisdiction because of the nearby hunting ground, which had been granted to predecessors a century before.

In *A Brother Abroad*, Martin Bussey’s excellent cantata for baritone, flute, French horn and percussion, Peter reflects on his life and faith as he travels from Greyfriars to Pynnore.

We hope we can go ahead with **PMF-21: June 7th-13th** – but do keep an eye on the website for updates (and tickets from May). Audience numbers are limited to c.65, with other constraints. Our impressive performers include emerging young artists and several with Pinner connections. Here is the current programme:

Monday evening: **A4 Brass**, a wonderfully mellow and entertaining brass quartet.

Tuesday evening: **Pinner Parish Church Choir** perform Handel’s *Zadok the Priest & Messiah* extracts and anthems, including *A Hymn to St John Baptist* commissioned from **Russell Pascoe**.

Wednesday evening: **Revolutionary Drawing Room** – a period instrument string quartet – play Donizetti, Haydn and Schubert.

Thursday lunchtime: **Ariana Kashefi** (cello) and **Maxsim Štšura** (piano) feature Beethoven, Paganini, Faure and Brahms.

Friday evening: **Colin Stone** (piano) plays Bach’s Chaconne (arr. Busoni), Beethoven and Schubert sonatas.

Saturday evening: As well as *A Brother Abroad*, featuring **Marcus Farnsworth** and three young instrumentalists, this concert also includes a vocal consort in Bach **Cantata #30**, anthems and solo instrumental pieces.

Sunday evening: **Festival Evensong**.

Professor Anthony Pinching

Director, Pinner Music Festival