

Humble origins seen in festive play

IT'S the dead of winter and the innkeeper's wife is determined to keep her stable spotless.

Then along come Mary, Joseph and some shepherds. Will this hygiene-obsessed woman ever get the chance to scrub her manger properly?

The latest production by Top Cat Theatre Company - *Scrub That Manger!* - is an hour-long family show for Christmas. The traditional Nativity story is told in a new way that emphasises the humble beginnings of the infant Jesus.

Written by diocesan communications adviser Neil Pugmire, it will be touring around the diocese from the end of this month, visiting Hart Plain, Locks Heath, Newport, Buriton, Southsea and Shedfield over Christmas.

"I wanted to write something that would be appreciated by children from the age of five upwards, whether they had ever heard the Nativity story or not," he said. "Although it's always

'SCRUB THAT MANGER!' TOUR DATES

Sunday 30 November
WATERLOOVILLE, Hart Plain Church, Hart Plain Avenue (4pm):
Box office: 023-9264 9265.

Saturday 6 December
LOCKS HEATH, St John the Baptist Primary School, Abshott Road (6pm): Box office: 01489-578082.

Sunday 7 December
PETERSFIELD, Buriton Village Hall, High Street, Buriton (3pm):

Box office: 01730-269390.
SOUTHSEA, St Jude's Church, Kent Road (6.30pm): Box office: 023-9275 0442.

Saturday 13 December
SHEDFIELD, St John the Baptist parish centre, Church Road (7pm):
Box office: 01329-832162.

Sunday 11 January
NEWPORT, St Thomas's parish hall, Town Street (3pm): Box office: 01983-821961.

difficult to find a new slant on the Christmas story, I think the fact that Jesus chose to be born in a dirty stable surrounded by animals is very interesting, particularly in this hygiene-conscious age.

"I heard recently that Jesus almost certainly had head lice - because most people in his era did. That does put a new angle on the paintings you see in church of this angelic-looking, spotless Christ-child!"

This is the seventh full-length production by Top Cat Theatre Company, which includes Christians from across Portsmouth. Previous productions

include *The Screwtape Letters* by CS Lewis, *Walkout!* - an adaptation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the family show *The Adventures of the J Team*.

Top Cat were also behind the *Emmaus Road* sketch that featured giant puppets at last summer's Diocesan Eucharist. The company also provided the entertainment at September's clergy conference.

Tickets for *Scrub That Manger!* can be reserved by ringing the numbers listed next to each performance above. They cost £4 for adults and £2 for children. For more details, see: www.topcattheatre.com



Members of Top Cat Theatre Company get into festive mood ahead of their Christmas tour of *Scrub That Manger*

Prison seminar tackles issues

MERIDIAN TV's Debbie Thrower will host a session organised by our diocese and our Winchester neighbours looking at whether prison works.

Joining her on November 19 at Winchester Law Courts will be Simon Cole, assistant chief constable of Hampshire; David Scott, chief probation officer; Juliet Lyon, director of the Prisons Reform Trust; Sandra Gidley, Romsey MP; and Jim Gomersall, governor of Winchester Prison.

There will be refreshments from 7.15pm before the seminar. To attend, contact David Hinks on 01962-624806.

Carving is arts highlight

THE unveiling of a carving showing the community of Warash was the highlight of a creativity weekend at St Mary's Church.

The millennium carving was the work of Ian Brennan - who has worked at Windsor Castle - and shows God's Spirit hovering over the parish. It is now in place above the vestry door.

It was revealed during a celebration of creativity that saw dozens of parishioners display their own paintings, photos, embroidery, poetry and model-making.

The vicar, the Rev Andrew Norris, said: "The carving has added so much to our beautiful parish church. It acts as a call to be mindful of the community in which the church is rooted.

"Like a stained glass window, it takes us beyond the scene to celebrate God's love, shown in the dove of the Holy Spirit, for all people. It stands as a call to pray."



Ian Brennan, his wife Sue and daughter Emma with the vicar of St Mary's, Warsash, the Rev Andrew Norris

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