

# KINGS NORTON

## Parish Magazine

### Valuing All Lives

Larry Wright on vulnerability,  
suffering & the pandemic

### The Wast Hills Tunnel

Kings Norton's "stupendous" feat  
of late 18<sup>th</sup> century engineering

### Reasons to be Joyful

Plants & gardens, birds &  
bears, physical exercise,  
Welsh holiness and a holiday  
in Hollywood

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# Welcome

**EDITORIAL**

Joy, it has been said, is contentment in spite of circumstances, the settled assurance that, ultimately, in this life or the next, everything is going to be alright.

Joy comes more readily to some than to others. Temperament and conditioning have large parts to play. But it can, I am told, be cultivated, much as you might nurture a good habit. I'm a slow learner myself, but one of the places to start, they say, is with an attitude of gratitude. Yes, it is a platitude, but perhaps, on this occasion, a helpful one.

What are this month's contributors grateful for?

Growing things, flying things, the little things that make a difference. Vaccines, compassion, empathy and health care. Exercise, contemplation, conversation and entertainment. Generosity, history, ingenuity, hilarity. Blessings counted, challenges overcome, needs provided for. In short, here in these pages you have a potent antidote to the torrent of negativity, pessimism and cynicism which we like to call "the news", which saps our joy and breeds fear. One of our readers described our February edition as "a real tonic" (p.19). We hope this one is too.

I am delighted to be able to welcome a new local writer this month. Claire Lindow, mother of Charles and an enthusiastic kitchen gardener, has taken the plunge. Her article on page 10 will set your mouth watering and your green

fingers itching. Claire is the latest of our readers to respond to our appeal for new voices (p.51). Could you be the next?



*David Ash*



# Valuing all lives

THE PANDEMIC HAS BROUGHT INTO SHARP FOCUS questions about the value of life, the rationing of health care and the purpose of suffering. The Revd Larry Wright offers a Christian perspective.

Are all lives of equal value? For most readers of this magazine, I imagine the answer is a resounding "Yes!" The value placed on different lives is one of the many questions raised by this pandemic. It's been raised because certain groups are clearly more likely to suffer and die from this virus than others, especially the elderly, the poor and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The only way to protect these more vulnerable groups is to give them priority

↓ **Certain groups are more likely to die from this virus than others, especially the elderly.**

in health care, wherever possible, even if it means that less vulnerable groups have their access to medical care limited. When health care is rationed, how do we decide the "value" of each life in relation to the availability of treatments?

During the early part of the first wave of the pandemic, some commentators and experts pointed out that elderly people, especially those living in residential homes, were under-protected as the virulence of the virus and its means of infection were not fully understood. In contrast, the remarkable way in which the millions of vaccines have been delivered to the elderly in such a short time this year leaves no doubt that our nation sees them as a priority for immunisation. Carers and health workers have also been prioritised for the vaccine and other age groups and key workers will be next in line.

In a nominally Christian country like ours, we should be aware of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and foster policies and programmes which protect and support them. This should be a priority whether we are in a pandemic or not. Compassion towards the most vulnerable in our society is for life not just for a pandemic.



PHOTO BY EBERHARD GROSSGASTEIGER





PHOTO BY THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Vulnerability can take many forms. A strong, apparently healthy person with good life prospects and a good standard of living may suffer from unseen afflictions of the mind or emotions. A sudden, unexpected change of life circumstances such as unemployment, bereavement or a serious accident may render a previously able person disabled or debilitated for a lengthy period. Suffering can be arbitrary and, no matter how much we try to lead a healthy, careful, risk free life, illness may be just around the corner. Responding to suffering is one of the topics of our **Lent Conversations** this month and you will find details of how to participate on **page 23**. The widespread suffering caused by this global pandemic has heightened our

understanding of the inequalities which compound suffering.

### All lives matter to God

The Christian message has a thread of valuing all lives woven into its 2000-year-old story. At the time of Jesus, affliction and suffering were understood to have supernatural origins and sufferers were regarded as "deserving" of their fate because they had transgressed against whichever god they worshipped. Greek and Roman religions dominated most of the Mediterranean world of the 1st century with their numerous gods and deities. These pagan gods were viewed as unpredictable and impulsive, striking people down with suffering at a



**The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Team Parish**

whim. Believers would seek healing and protection by offering regular sacrifices to these capricious deities.

## Jesus the Healer

Jesus was a healer. The first three Gospels have twenty-two healing miracles recorded in their pages. Jesus didn't heal everyone who was sick or afflicted; that was not his ministry. Rather, he showed that God is capable of entering into our world of suffering and sharing it with us. Jesus was aware of the widespread belief that sin caused illness, but he used it to teach about forgiveness and mercy (Luke 5:17-39, Matthew 9. 1-9) Compare Jesus' compassion in these stories to the attitude of the religious leaders of his time.

↓ Jesus was a healer. The first three Gospels record 22 healing miracles.

Jesus is recorded as healing the sick, restoring sight and bringing life out of death. In whichever way we interpret these events, Jesus' change of emphasis from illness seen as a punishment to helping to care and be alongside those who are sick was revolutionary. Jesus' desire to heal is not only about the cure of individuals. In St Luke's Gospel (chapter 4), Jesus refers to the healing of injustices in society generally. It's sometimes called the Jesus Manifesto.

In the late 400s AD, there was a pandemic (possibly smallpox) in the Roman empire when Julian was emperor. Julian, who was anti-Christian, complained that the Christians were much better at looking after the sick and caring for the poor than non-Christians in the population. Such selfless service is regarded as one of the major reasons why the Christian religion spread across the empire. Since then, in all the major pandemics which have occurred in countries where Christians were present, they have been at the forefront of caring for the sick and have often died while doing so.

Yes, all lives are of equal value. Yet some will die young, some old and some inexplicably. Human suffering will never be totally eradicated nor death put off forever. No matter how



PHOTO BY THE LUMO PROJECT



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

much we may wish for every person to have equal access to the health and support services, some will not. While fostering compassion and care for all who suffer, whether as Christians or out of other motives, we have a responsibility to be honest about the fact that illness and dying are part of the created order.

All lives are of equal value to God, yet each life has its own personal destiny and purpose. Our destiny is shaped by many factors including our origins, our upbringing and our beliefs. To search for the meaning in our destiny is laudable but not always possible. Ultimately, our destiny is of and with God. Learning to put our trust in God, who values each one of us, whatever our physical

↑ **The Hospices de Beaune, France, a medieval monastic hospital.**

condition, and who will be our soul's eternal resting place, has brought comfort and courage to countless people coping with the reality or inevitability of illness, suffering and death.

*“ We have a responsibility to be honest about the fact that illness and dying are part of the created order.”*



# I Lack Nothing

*It hardly seems possible that my time in training at Ripon College, Cuddesdon and my parochial placement at St Nicolas' Church are nearing their end. Indeed, it seems only yesterday that I was welcomed into your church community. Obviously, due to the pandemic, it has not been the experience I had imagined; but despite the challenges, it has been a great opportunity to explore new and innovative ways of doing ministry. I have especially enjoyed getting to know some of you better through pastoral visiting (when lockdown measures permitted) and phone calls. My great sadness is that I haven't had the chance to get to know more of you individually.*

*When I move on from Kings Norton early this summer, I will be taking up a three-year curacy with the Reverend Dominic Wright in the parish of St Margaret's, Olton on the outskirts of Solihull. I certainly hope that, before my time to move on arrives, we will have had the opportunity to worship together in church once again.*

*I offer here a reflection on my time at theological college and with St Nicolas' Church which I prepared for a recent Ministry Team meeting. It is a personal account, but I do hope it may inspire you to see reflection on Scripture as a way to thrive during these difficult days.*

---



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

**T**hough the theological library with its treasures of knowledge is locked tight; though we are confined to virtual boxes trapped on a wifi signal which is groaning; though the memory of a restful sleep is but a distant memory, the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

**T**hough dreams of weekly excursions to the bucolic Oxfordshire countryside and the peace and stillness of nights away from the sounds of the city have come to naught, the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lay down in the green pastures of my garden, to count and recount my many blessings.

**T**hough the madness and clamour of our world often overwhelm and claw me into its cyclone of worry and despair, the Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul and gives me

glimpses of the calling that He assigned me from before the beginning of time.

**T**hough challenges abound and tough decisions seem only to create more tough choices with outcomes that are neither good nor bad, simply what has to be done to weather this season, the Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake and strengthens my resolve to persevere.

**T**hough I had great expectations; though I grieve for what cannot be reclaimed; though I walk through the darkest valley of sadness for what should have been, I will fear no evil thoughts that I am unprepared for what lies ahead, for You are with me. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.

**T**hough I am undisciplined by nature; though I strive for a perfection that even you, good Lord, do not require, Your rod and your staff comfort me and invite me to kneel before you in prayer, to meet you in the pages of Scripture and to marvel at your goodness and mercy. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.

**Y**ou prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, which are my insecurities and doubt. You anoint my head with oil and breathe your life and promises into my very soul. My cup overflows with anticipation of your gifts, Lord, that are yet to come. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.

**T**hough I do not deserve it; though even now I stumble and fall; though my soul can scarcely comprehend it, surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and never be hidden from my sight. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.

**T**hough I know not what the future holds; though I know not the number of my days; though I worry and plot and plan, I rest assured at last that I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and sing forever of His faithfulness unto me.

**The Lord is my Shepherd. I. Lack. Nothing.**



TAMMY TEAROE  
IS TRAINING FOR  
ORDINATION AT  
RIPON COLLEGE,  
AN ANGLICAN  
THEOLOGICAL  
COLLEGE IN  
CUDDESDON,  
OXFORDSHIRE



# THE HUNGRY GARDENER



NOW WE ARE IN SPRING, one of the most exciting months for the "hungry gardener". It's a time of new awakening as we move towards Easter. Light gives hope of the great things to come, new life bursting from the ground. When you meander through the woods in the Kings Norton Nature Reserve, look at the ground. You will see wild garlic sprouting everywhere. It loves it there.

This time last year, we were hearing the first of Covid coming to our shores and the possibility of a lockdown. The plans, hopes and dreams of my growing projects kept my spirits up through Lockdown 1. It gave me something glorious to look forward to in the midst of significant changes to our way of life.

Why not start dabbling with a bit of food growing for the first time? This is the perfect time of year. Think about the fruit and veg you like and then research which ones are easy to



**Claire is a keen kitchen gardener ably assisted by her 5-year-old son Charles**



## SOME HISTORY

◆The first book to concentrate solely on vegetable growing was Richard Gardiner's *Profetable instructions for the manuring, sowing, and planting of kitchen gardens* in 1599. It included advice on the cultivation of cabbages, carrots, parsnips, turnips, lettuce, beans, onions, cucumbers, artichokes and leeks.

◆Gardiner, somewhat of a philanthropist, was a dyer and market gardener in Shrewsbury. The book was in part written to provide advice in the wake of the grain harvest failures of the 1590s, concentrating particularly on the cultivation of root crops to feed the poor.

◆The active participation of women in gardening was eventually recognised by William Lawson's *The Countrie Housewives Garden* in 1617.

grow at home. You will be surprised with what you can grow in Kings Norton, whether in a garden or on a windowsill. Potatoes, peas, french beans, runner beans, courgettes, pumpkins, sweet corn and tomatoes have all worked well for us without a greenhouse.

There is a whole world of heritage and unusual varieties out there that you won't find in the supermarket. My 5-year old son loves to help me with the planting. He eats peas straight from the pod and thankfully has a passion for broccoli and carrots. He likes to help with sowing the peas. Most importantly we spend time together and share an interest.

When I reflect on last year's successes and "to try again's", I learn a lot. This year my plan is to get better with winter veg and store cupboard favourites. I will be sowing these in March:

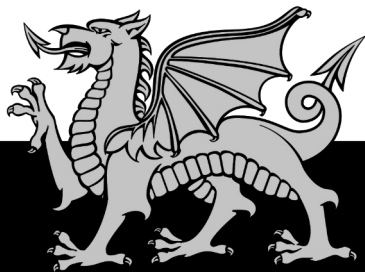
Tomatoes, Welsh onions, leeks, spring garlic, onions. White, red and yellow beetroots. Carrots, broccoli, kale, cabbage, turnip, Brussels sprouts, broccoli raab, kai lan (Chinese broccoli with sweet stems). White sprouting broccoli (I prefer the taste to that of the purple, it's more succulent). Cauliflower, rat tail radish (grown for its pods). Peas and broad beans, salad potatoes. And then there are the flowers and herbs: coriander, chamomile, nasturtium, poppy, bergamot and calendula

No garden? No problem! Start growing in pots on your windowsill. It's so exciting! I grow peas in January and February for salad. I leave about 5cm or 2" on the stem to allow it to carry on growing. Herbs are great, particular coriander. It really adds to any dish.

You don't need to buy seeds either. Maybe there's something in the kitchen cupboards to try? Dried peas or beans? They might just germinate. Great fun for little ones. Put them in damp paper kitchen towel, see if any sprout, fingers crossed! Tomatoes grow well inside on a sunny windowsill or spare space. I have been growing a baby fig tree in my kitchen for a few years. My husband was disappointed we haven't managed chilli peppers this year but we will try again next year!

# JOY IN SMALL THINGS

Dydd Gwyl Dewi Hapus!



Happy St David's Day!

MY HERITAGE is largely Lancashire and Irish. As far as I know, I have no Welsh ancestry, though probably we all have somewhere in our past. Holidays as a child spent in North Wales and school friends of Welsh descent, whose parents were Welsh speaking, have influenced my respect for the country. I am particularly fond of the patron saint of Wales, Saint David. In Birmingham our close proximity to the land of song, and its influence on aspects of our culture is a plus.

St David's Day, 1st March, is celebrated as Spring is on the horizon. Bright, acid-yellow daffodils, one of the symbols of Wales, bring sunshine to the earth, joy to our eyes and hope to our hearts. St David's, in Pembrokeshire, is the smallest city in both population and urban area in the United Kingdom (a useful fact for a quiz) and is the resting place of Saint David.

St. David's Cathedral dominates the whole area. It is built on the site of the monastic community, founded by Abbot David of Menevia, now the city of Saint David's, in the sixth century. The community was frequently attacked by raiders,

including the Vikings. Many of the bishops were murdered. King Alfred, in the ninth century, was so impressed with the religious life and teaching of the community that he asked them to help him rebuild the spiritual and intellectual life of the Kingdom of Wessex. In 1081, William the Conqueror visited the shrine of Abbot David, recognising him as Saint David, and the shrine as a holy place. Papal privilege was conferred on it in 1123 and it became a centre for pilgrimage for the Western world. Pope Calixtus II decreed that "Two pilgrimages to Saint David's are equal to one to Rome, and three to one to Jerusalem"! The cathedral was almost destroyed at the time of Oliver Cromwell and the roof stripped of its lead, a devastating crime with which we can identify. Restoration began in 1793 under John Nash, the Welsh architect and it was finished in the early twentieth century.

The daily life of Bishop David is quite inspirational, if in parts unattainable. His routine, and that of his community, was an extreme



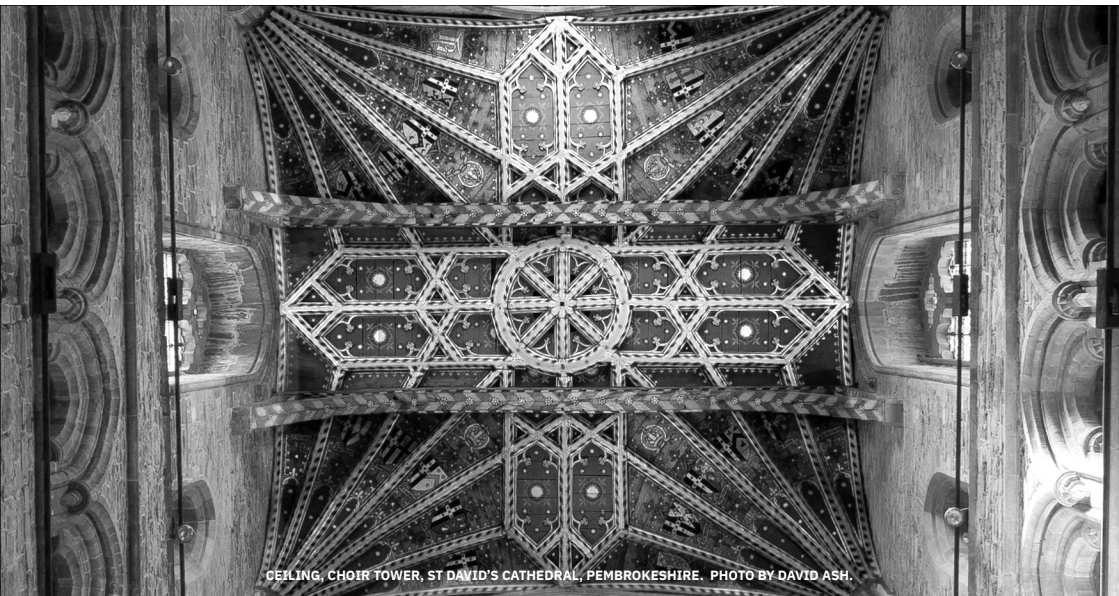
THELMA MITCHELL IS A  
VOLUNTARY CHAPLAIN AT  
BOURNVILLE COLLEGE

of ascetism, the reverse of his aristocratic upbringing. The community lived on bread with salt and herbs, and drank water, which was a dangerous commodity, being frequently polluted and poisonous. They pulled the

plough themselves, without draught animals. They spent the evenings in prayer, reading and writing. Their symbol was the leek, which grew abundantly in their vegetable garden and, according to both a seventeenth century and Shakespeare in Henry V, Act V, was later adopted by Welsh soldiers as an honourable badge of service.

David's teachings are still achievable, however, and resonate down the centuries. He cared for the poor and healed the sick. His last words to his followers, summing up his life and teachings, were, "Lords, brothers and sisters, be joyful, and keep the faith and your creed and do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about." The command to "Do the little things" has passed into Welsh culture and is often quoted.

When this strange, unknown time of pandemic is all over and we are allowed to travel, socialise and enjoy those small things we took for



CEILING, CHOIR TOWER, ST DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, PEMBROKESHIRE. PHOTO BY DAVID ASH.



granted, I would love to visit St. David's and its ancient cathedral settlement. Something to look forward to!

Just one year ago we celebrated St. David's Day in church with bunches of daffodils. We didn't have much of an inkling of what lay ahead. Perhaps that was just as well. So, if you thought that this month you would escape yet more reflections on the pandemic, I'm afraid not. One day, perhaps!

The eternal winter of Covid moves into its second Lent. As the anniversary of the first lockdown on 23rd March 2020 approaches, I cannot believe that I am still writing about it. One of our congregation recalled, "My memories of that weekend last year (the weekend of St. David's Day) was trekking around so many supermarkets looking for toilet rolls! Not much social distancing and most people not wearing masks. Looking back it seems so foolhardy but I guess we were in a different place then."

If this pandemic has taught us anything it is about the preciousness and fragility of human life. I don't want to be a Job's comforter but the Black Death pandemic of the fourteenth century was assumed to be all over after 18 months. However, there were more resurgences, not once, not twice but five times over the next few years. The Black Death, a bubonic plague, is now thought by some scientists to have been caused by a virus, though it is still attributed to the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium.

The plague, spread by flea-infested rats who hosted it, reached London from Asia via mainland Europe in the autumn of 1349. It was thought to have been brought by a seaman who came to Weymouth travelling from Gascony. This plague had spread across the entire country by the summer of 1350. It totally wiped out some places and bypassed others. Between 50% and 60% of the population of Europe died. There was a subsequent shortage of labour and reduction



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

of wages. This, in turn, led to the Peasants' Revolt in England 1381, which contributed to the ending of serfdom.

The only weapons to beat a pandemic known in the fourteenth century were barefoot processions to the sites of shrines, penitence and prayer. We know now that the former was lethal, a super spreader: walking closely together, rubbing shoulders, no masks; but we could try some penitential prayer. The fourteenth century pilgrims believed that the plague was caused by greed, scorn and malice which invited God's punishment. Now some are

saying that we are being punished by our grievous treatment of the planet. A discussion for the future.

Today we **do** have the hope of the efficacy of the anti-Covid vaccines which are becoming more and more available to a wider population. Though it would be good if the teachers, for example, became a priority too, many of whom are risking their health as they actively educate the children of key workers.

In the meantime, we need to prepare for the long haul back to anything resembling normality. We can take joy in small mercies meanwhile, and do the little things. One day, it will end!

When the lights are turned back on, with movement and meeting returning, I wonder if life will be at Ground Zero, starting from scratch, back to the beginning. Or will we go back to where we left off? I doubt it. There have been too many changes, too many fears, too much sorrow, just too much has happened. The new normal will be the new strange in many ways, a time of reconstruction and re-learning.

In an ideal world we would be able to keep the good we had gained and to become better people. I close with some words of the Irish poet,

Brendan Kennelly, which seem to encapsulate our current mood and hope. Enjoy the small things!

***Though we live in a world that dreams of ending***

***That always seems about to give in***

***Something that will not acknowledge conclusion***

***Insists that we forever begin.***

*(Brendan Kennelly, Irish poet, Professor Emeritus of Modern Literature at Trinity College, Dublin)*

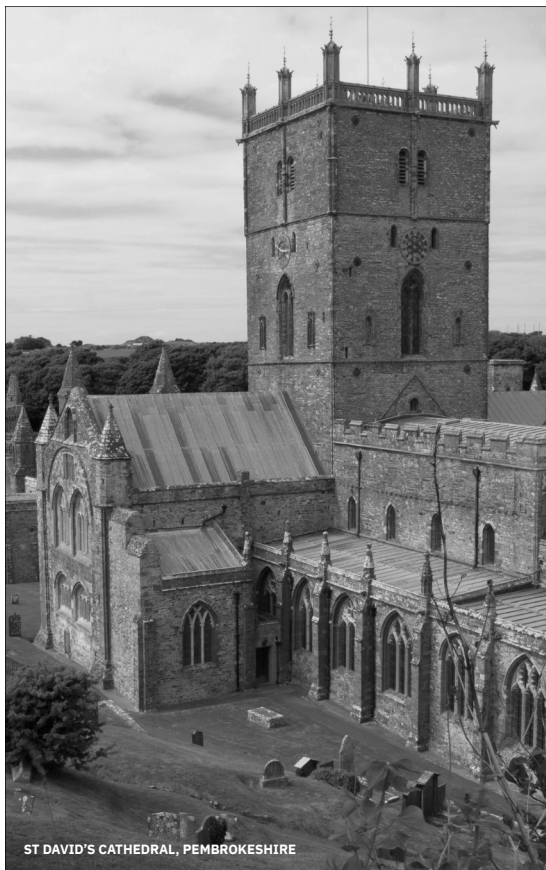


PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

ST DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, PEMBROKESHIRE

# The Care and Feeding of Phalaenopsis Orchids



As I write this, I am glancing out of my window. I can see a blanket of snow and there's more promised. It looks like my theory of milder winters as a result of climate change may be faulty.

As I promised last month, here are my tips for keeping your Christmas gifts of Phalaenopsis Orchids happy and blooming for years to come.



**Situation.** In front of, but not touching a window, not facing south unless you have net curtains.

**Temperature.** If you are comfortable sitting in your room then your orchids will be too.

**Watering.** This is the biggy!

**EITHER :** apply one tablespoonful of water to the top of the compost every week, slightly more in the Summer. I recommend using a 500ml mineral water bottle to which you have added five drops of pot plant fertiliser.

**OR:** every two weeks, stand your pots in the sink to which has been added lukewarm water to a depth of about 10 cm. Add 3ml of liquid fertiliser to the water and allow your plants to soak for 15 minutes. Take them out of the water and allow them to drain for ten minutes. Wild Phalaenopsis do not live on the ground of a steamy jungle but on the top branches of trees, hence this watering regime.

Roots and flowering stems will appear. Stems will go up and roots will trend downwards and are greeny silver. They can be gently guided into the compost.

**Do not cut off the roots.** I know they look a bit untidy but they are as important as the leaves for photosynthesis.

After about 12 months, your plant will need re-potting. I recommend using a 16 cm top diameter clear plastic orchid pot. You can simply stand this on a saucer or, for appearance's sake, place that pot inside a 16 cm plastic translucent outer pot with a space to accommodate excess water. It stops the roots from rotting. You can buy recycled glass ones but they are rather expensive. When repotting, remove any brown, dead roots and shorten the main stem at the base so you can get your plant nicely tucked into its new pot. Use fresh compost and do not pack it down too much.

Using correct orchid compost is important. I recommend one based on composted bark chips together with water-retaining chips made of ceramic or some similar material: very free draining! Avoid a compost with added sphagnum moss. Pots and compost are available on Ebay, amongst other sites, and are also stocked by most of the DIY gardening departments.

So there you are. A bit daunting, but you can look forward to spectacular blooms all year round. The Phalaenopsis is the queen of house plants! Some of mine are nine years old, so I am doing something right.

## **Tree of the month**

**It's tree of the month time.** I am reminded that we might get an invasion of waxwings from the continent. All berry-eating birds will thank you for planting a berry-bearing tree in a corner of your garden. The mountain ash is a great choice. You might like to seek out the native, and now rather rare, *Sorbus torminalis*

or Wild Service Tree and do your bit for the environment.

## Plant of the month

My **plant of the month** selection is a very hardy perennial which actually prefers shade and will be very happy planted amongst ferns where nothing else grew before. The Pulmonaria or Lungwort, so named because its leaves, which appear slightly behind the flower stems, green with silver spots, resemble little lungs How strange! I think they are quite attractive. The flowers appear in February and are available in blue, white, red, pink and even blue and pink on the same plant. The leaves get bigger and turn brown after the flowers are finished and should be cut back, at which stage they will be replaced with new, fresh, growth or they will disappear completely. Panic ye not, because their pretty flowers will appear next spring as if nothing had happened. Pulmonaria are cool plants!

## Seed catalogues : approach with care!

It's great fun to peruse the colourful seed catalogues either those you can find online or those which arrive through the post. One tip is that the illustrations can be a bit misleading so avoid anything described as "unusual" or "curious"; but vegetable growers should not be put off from trying new varieties as they can be improvements over the old ones. I can remember having to destring "miracle" sugarsnap peas. They really are stringless now.

May you all have a very happy growing year. Sitting down in your own garden and enjoying its beauty has not been banned!



SORBUS BERRIES



PULMONARIA  
SISSINGHURST WHITE



# Raising the Roof

At long last, after many months of fundraising, planning, setbacks and delays, work has begun to repair the roof over the baptistry of St Nicolas' Church.

In mid-February, we took delivery of the enormous beam of English oak destined to replace the centuries-old original which had rotted, making the roof unsafe.

If all goes according to plan, it won't be long before the scaffolding which has been protecting the roof from the elements since April 2019 can be dismantled.



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# New Magazine

*We asked you for your reaction to the new look magazine introduced last month.*

*You have left us in no doubt of what you think, here's a flavour. Thank you.*

- ## Layout – Your Feedback
- “[I’m writing in ] joyful praise of the new-look magazine, which is utterly stunning! I have run out of superlatives. Just wow!”
  - “The cover is really appealing. You want to see what is inside and the content did not disappoint. A really interesting mixture of articles. Well done to all concerned.”
  - “I’ve spent the whole morning reading the new Parish Magazine. I was riveted.”
  - “Varied, interesting and so professionally produced. A real tonic during lockdown too. Grateful thanks to all concerned.”
  - “My neighbour was so impressed that she is considering a subscription.”
  - “I confess that I thought your previous one was already streets ahead of most the parish magazines that come my way, but I do like the cleaner layout.”

# Do we really need to walk 10,000 steps a day?

*Lindsay Bottoms, a scientist specialising in the relationship between exercise and health, investigates a widespread myth.*



PHOTO BY GUY BASABOSE

When it comes to being fit and healthy, we're often reminded to aim to walk 10,000 steps per day. This can be a frustrating target to achieve, especially when we're busy with work and other commitments. Most of us know by now that 10,000 steps is recommended everywhere as a target to achieve – and yet where did this number actually come from?

The 10,000 steps a day target seems to have come about

**↑ To reach the 10,000 step goal you would have to walk 4-5 miles a day. More if you have short legs!**

from a trade name pedometer sold in 1965 by Yamasa Clock in Japan. The device was called “Manpo-kei”, which translates to “10,000 steps meter”. This was a marketing tool for the device and has seemed to have stuck across the world as the daily step target. It's even included in daily activity targets by popular smartwatches, such as Fitbit.

Research has since investigated the 10,000 steps a day target.



The fact that some studies have shown this step target improves heart health, mental health, and even lowers diabetes risk, may, to some extent, explain why we have stuck with this arbitrary number.

In ancient Rome, distances were actually measured by counting steps. In fact, the word “mile” was derived from the Latin phrase *mila passum*, which means 1,000 paces, about 2,000 steps. It’s suggested the average person walks about 100 steps per minute, which would mean it would take a little under 30 minutes for the average person to walk a mile. So in order for someone to reach the 10,000 step goal, they would need to walk between four and five miles a day (around two hours of activity).

But while some research has shown health benefits at 10,000 steps, recent research from Harvard Medical School has shown that, on average, approximately 4,400 steps a day is enough to significantly lower the risk of death in women. This was when compared to only walking around 2,700 steps daily. The more steps people walked, the lower their risk of dying was, before levelling off at around 7,500 steps a day. No additional benefits were seen with more steps. Although it’s uncertain



*“The World Health Organization recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week.”*

whether similar results would be seen in men, it’s one example of how moving a little bit more daily can improve health and lower risk of death.

While the World Health Organization recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week (or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity), research also shows that even low-intensity exercise can improve your health, though moderate-intensity exercise improves it to a greater extent. This means your steps throughout the day can contribute to your 150 minutes of target activity.

Activity can also help mitigate the harms of sitting down for long periods of time. Research has shown that people who sat for eight or more hours every day had a 59% increased risk of death compared to those



sitting less than four hours per day. However, they also found that if people did 60-75 minutes per day of moderate intensity physical activity, this seemed to eliminate this increased risk of death. Therefore, potentially undertaking brisk walking could help mitigate the negative effects of sitting for too long.

Recent research at the University of Texas has also demonstrated that if you're walking fewer than 5,000 steps a day, your body is less able to metabolise fat the following day. A buildup of fat in the body can also increase a person's likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes. This is further supported by previous research which shows people who walked less than 4,000 steps a day could not reverse this decreased fat metabolism.

Increasing physical activity such as your step count reduces your risk of death by improving your health, including by reducing

**↑ Small amounts of physical activity have a positive impact on your health**

risk of developing chronic illnesses such as dementia, and certain cancers. In some cases it helps improve health conditions such as type 2 diabetes. Exercise can also help us improve and maintain our immune system. However, based on the current research out there, it appears that getting 10,000 steps a day isn't essential for health benefits. Half that target appears to be beneficial.

If you want to increase how many steps you get daily, or simply want to move more, one easy way to do that is to increase your current step count by about 2,000 steps a day. Other easy ways to move more daily include walking to work if possible, or taking part of an online exercise programme if you're working from home. Meeting with friends for a walk, rather than in a cafe or pub, can also be useful. And given that even small amounts of physical activity positively impact your health, taking regular breaks to move around if you're working at a desk all day will help to easily get more physical activity.

**Lindsay Bottoms, Reader in Exercise and Health Physiology, University of Hertfordshire.**

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# The Lent Conversations 2021

*In the Eye of the Storm*

*God and Faith in a Time of Pandemic*

**Weds 3rd March at 7.25 pm**

Suffering and survival

*Attitudes to affliction, dying and healing in the Gospels*

**Weds 10th March at 7.25 pm**

Worship in the storm

*How does widespread suffering influence our worship?*

**Weds 17th March at 7.25 pm**

Face masks and masquerades

*Christian attitudes to worldly authority in the New Testament*

**Weds 24th March at 7.25 pm**

A new Heaven and a new Earth?

*Longings and visions for when the storm subsides*

**Weds 31st March at 7.25 pm**

Lamentation and celebration

*How shall we celebrate Easter in the face of so much suffering?*

Sign into Zoom using the codes below or, if joining by telephone, dial 0203 901 7895 or 0131 460 1196 and use the keypad when prompted to enter the same codes. Calls are free.

**Meeting ID: 440 633 7519**

**Passcode: 123123**

# Foodbank

Last month, I wrote about issue of bias. At the *B30 Foodbank*, we often see another type of bias, one of various degrees of disconnect between the donor and the recipient. Sometimes, it manifests itself when the donor seems to think that out-of-date goods are acceptable as donations, reminiscent of the Victorian and Edwardian mindset of “giving broken meats to the poor”. Sometimes, it is at almost the opposite end of the scale. Luxury items are given, either because the donor does not comprehend the circumstances in which many of our clients live, or is simply offloading unwanted gifts. At other times it seems that donors are attempting to improve the lifestyle choices of our clients by giving decaffeinated teas and coffees, dairy-free milks, gluten-free options and other “alternative” dietary items.

When I was at school, I was taught a Native American proverb which has stayed with me. “Never criticize a man until you’ve walked a mile in his moccasins.” Our teacher wanted us to understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. It is empathy that our clients require. Whilst we may never be in the situation where we simply do not have enough



SYLVIA FOX  
IS THE MUSIC  
MINISTER AT  
ST NICOLAS’  
CHURCH  
AND A  
RETIRED  
PHYSIO-  
THERAPIST

income to cover our bills, we can use our imagination to explore how that must feel, to understand the sort of help that we might need. Those who turn to foodbanks do not need designer or “lifestyle” foods. They need something basic and nutritious to tide them over for three days whilst other agencies begin to unpick the reasons why they are in crisis in the first place.

I had a long conversation with one donor who was horrified to be told that “healthy eating” or “plastic free eating” were the preserves of the rich. The latter is certainly true at the moment. But the rich have the responsibility to follow and support those sustainable options in order to bring prices down. Plastic wrappings have, in some cases, become temporarily essential again. There is no way we can give out an unwrapped toothbrush, for instance.

Healthy eating is perfectly possible using tinned foods. The canning process means that they are usually less than two hours old before going through the process, and thus retain their nutrients well. Tins are also a much more economical way of providing food, as tinned items are less expensive and the cans can be recycled.

We find that our clients do not want decaffeinated drinks either. When life is at crisis point, a small amount of “buzz” from a



welcome hot cup of tea is much needed. The decaffeinated varieties can follow with lifestyle choices when life returns to something like normal.

One donor was quite adamant that we should be providing the means to make bread. The ingredients are, however, only the starting point. For bread making to work, you have to assume that the client has an oven, the space to prove the bread and fuel for the oven in the first place. All this is impossible if you are homeless and sheltering in a Travel Lodge.

Another item that has caused a lengthy correspondence with a donor has been nappies. Disposable nappies are an expensive and non-sustainable product but, if you do not have access to a washing machine or the electricity to run it, if you have no buckets, no safe, toddler-free places to put them and so forth, then cloth nappies are not a viable option.

**↓ Making your own bread is virtually impossible if you are forced to live in a hotel room.**

The other thing you need in order to be able to enjoy many of these sustainable options, be it food or household products, is time. Many of our clients are in work, but theirs is zero-hours "gig-economy" work, where they must take every hour offered in order to pay their bills. This means that there are few free hours for the niceties of creating fresh food or doing additional washing.

My explanation when talking to donors such as these usually goes something like this. "We are an aid agency, although we work in this country, not abroad. We provide first line food aid. Once that aid is in place, then the reasons for the food and financial crises can begin to be addressed. Only then can issues of sustainable living be thought about."

Our clients are not unaware of ecological issues, they just do not have the means with which to address them.



PHOTO BY NADYA SPETNITSKAYA

## **YOUR PARISH CHURCH**

If you cannot find what you are looking for here, you will probably find it on the Parish Website ([www.kingsnorton.org.uk](http://www.kingsnorton.org.uk)). Alternatively, please ask questions at the Parish Office, which is open between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm, Monday to Friday.

**81 The Green, Kings Norton, Birmingham, B38 8RU • [parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk](mailto:parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk)  
0121 458 3289 • [www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam](https://www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam)**

## **THE MINISTRY TEAM**

Team Rector..... The Revd Larry Wright  
Assistant Rector..... The Revd Eliakim Ikechukwu  
Parish Lay Minister ..... Pauline Weaver  
Curate (Pioneer) ..... The Revd Catherine Matlock  
Honorary Assistant Priest ..... The Revd Jayne Crooks  
Methodist Minister..... The Revd Nick Jones  
Lay Readers ..... David Ash, Fay Fearon, Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki  
Lay Preacher ..... Steve Wright  
Music Minister..... Sylvia Fox  
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator ..... Chris Gadd

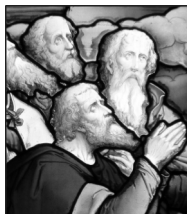
## **THE CHURCH WARDENS**

St. Nicolas' Church..... Peter Hay & Julie Hill  
Hawkesley Church ..... Jim Clarke  
Immanuel Church ..... Sue Hartley

## **OTHER CONTACTS**

Parish Administrator & P.C.C. Secretary..... Judy Ash  
Acting Finance Officer ..... Simon Hill  
Safeguarding Coordinator ..... Annette Dickers  
Regular Giving ..... The Revd Jayne Crooks  
Flower Arranging (0121 486 2837)..... Alison Blumer

**W**e are a Church of England Team Parish serving all in Kings Norton through St Nicolas' Parish Church, Hawkesley, in partnership with the Methodist Church, and Immanuel District Churches.



We believe that the church in Kings Norton exists to be a worshipping, transforming partnership in Christ, to live out God's radical hospitality for all and to be equipped for work in God's world

**D**uring the Covid-19 crisis, we have had to suspend all our usual activities including many church services. That does not mean, however, that church has ceased to be active. Some of our services have moved online.



When possible, there is a 10.00 am service on Sundays at St Nicolas' Church with a limited number of places. If you want to attend, you must book before noon on Friday by calling the Parish Office on 0121 458 3289.

Join in an Anglican service at home on Sundays	<a href="https://bit.ly/2KYtrE3">bit.ly/2KYtrE3</a>
Our 9.30 am family service on Sundays	<a href="https://bit.ly/2K8KzTS">bit.ly/2K8KzTS</a>
Our 10.00 am service from St Nicolas' on Sundays	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ocP1TI">bit.ly/3ocP1TI</a>
Our 10.30 am service from Immanuel on Sundays	<a href="https://bit.ly/3oby8Jc">bit.ly/3oby8Jc</a>
Occasional midweek morning & evening prayer	<a href="https://bit.ly/3pMgOLi">bit.ly/3pMgOLi</a>

**For the latest changes and updates, see the weekly newsletter, which is available on the Parish Website at [www.kingsnorton.org.uk](http://www.kingsnorton.org.uk)**

# How is history written and who writes it?

Zoe, aged 10, Glasgow, Scotland

THINKING ABOUT WHO WRITES HISTORY is very important if we want to figure out how it is written. Lots of things influence how we see the world. This includes our education, where we come from, whether we are male or female, rich or poor. All these things affect how historians write the history of people, families, communities and societies in the past.

For a long time, the people who wrote history were mostly educated men: from the “father of history”, the ancient Greek Herodotus who lived over 2000 years ago, to medieval monks such as the Englishman Bede, and 20th-century university professors like Eric Hobsbawm. Often, they wrote histories about great men, great wars, and empires that set out to conquer the world.

In the 20th century, this began to change. People from

different backgrounds were writing history and making their voices heard. For instance, for a long time the history books about countries like India, which had been part of the British empire, were written by British people who focused on the story of the empire.

Now, people from those countries are writing their own history. Also, more women and people from poorer families go to university. Their experiences and outlooks were very different from those of the older historians, and it has changed how history is written.

For example, books about Victorian Britain used to explain that men went to work and women stayed at home. This is because the historians writing these books focused on people like them: they read the letters and diaries of educated, middle-class people, and looked at the paintings or photographs that were taken of them. These letters and photographs told them that men went to work and women managed the home.

For women historians and those from a working-class background, this did not look right. What about the maids and cooks working in those middle-class homes? What about the seamstresses who made the expensive dresses in



DR  
MARION  
LÖFFLER IS A  
READER IN  
WELSH  
HISTORY AT  
CARDIFF  
UNIVERSITY



the photographs? What about the women and girls working in the textile factories of northern England and the coal mines of south Wales?

The history of Victorian Britain was rewritten because the next generation of historians focused on different groups of people and searched for different source material.

So, how is history written? Every historian attempts to find evidence to build their story of the past, but there are two ways they tend to go about it. One way is to start with a theory. They might theorise that nations, such as Italy and Germany, are modern developments, and that they only really appeared in the last few centuries.

They will research how nation states, such as the UK or Germany, were formed in the 19th century. Or they might have a theory that nations go way back to the early middle ages. Their evidence may be the different cultures, clothes and languages of the English, the Scottish and the Welsh.

Other historians discover an interesting person, group of people, object or place, and want to find out more about them. I am writing about Thomas Stephens, a rebellious chemist from south Wales who wanted to make life in his



PHOTO BY DAVID HOLT

community better for all, and who, like me, wrote history books.

When I opened the first archive box filled with his manuscripts, I could smell the Victorian cough medicines he prepared for the iron workers around him and almost imagine his world, so I just had to know more about him.

History is not only written, it is re-written by every generation. However brilliant an exploration of the past is, it will always be influenced by the historian's background and identity. The next generation – perhaps you – may ask different questions, look for different sources, and write it differently.

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▲ WOMEN  
WORKING AT  
THE  
WOOLWICH  
ARSENAL IN  
LONDON IN  
1917

# The Wast Hills Tunnel

## “A Stupendous Work”

*Though it's now a facility for gentle walks, angling and narrow-boat cruises, the Birmingham to Worcester Canal was once a thriving industrial highway, playing a key role in the evolution of Kings Norton from a rural economy into a significant manufacturing centre.*

The definitive history of the canal was published in 2005. Called “The Worcester and Birmingham Canal, Chronicles of the Cut”, it was the work of the late Revd Alan White, for many years Chaplain and Head of the Mathematics Department at Bromsgrove School and later Priest-in-Charge of Tardebigge Parish, through which the canal runs. Among the fascinating stories he tells about the development of the canal in Kings Norton is the planning and digging of the remarkable Wast Hills Tunnel.

On 17 March 1797 the rural calm of Kings Norton was broken by the clamour of church bells, the banging of guns and the blaring of trumpets. Most of the 3,000 or so locals probably didn't realise it, but that day was set to become one of the most important in the history of Kings Norton: the



**MICHAEL  
WRITES  
REGULARLY  
ON LOCAL  
HISTORY**

opening of the Wast Hills tunnel, which would ultimately take the Worcester and Birmingham through to Worcester.

It looks a little dilapidated now, though it's still used nearly every day. But its unimposing portal hides the fact that it was an engineering feat that generated considerable local pride. At 2,726 yards (2,492 metres if you must) it is one of the longest canal tunnels anywhere in the country, and it's dead straight: from a certain angle, you can actually see through to the other end, even though that's more than a mile and a half away.

Its opening day was historic, because the extension of the Worcester and Birmingham canal through to and beyond Kings Norton was to play the key role in the evolution of the village from a gentle agricultural economy to a

bustling industrial hub. A number of businesses of national importance opened up in the village to take advantage of the canal network, the equivalent of today's motorway system, which allowed the receipt of raw material, and the dispatch of finished goods to major locations around the country.

The overall canal project began in Gas Street Basin in 1792 and progressed so quickly that by the winter of 1795-6 it had reached what is now the junction with the then embryonic Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. But having reached Kings Norton, the project now faced perhaps its biggest challenge: the formidable task of tunnelling through Wast Hills to reach the other side, in Hopwood. Geographically, the hills were the highest area on the

▼THE NORTH  
END OF THE  
WAST HILL  
TUNNEL

proposed route, so high and long that they could not be surmounted by systems of locks. A tunnel was the only solution.

It was initially regarded as an insoluble barrier. The main Birmingham newspaper, Aris's Birmingham Gazette, said "The practicability of (a tunnel) was treated with the greatest ridicule and reprobation: it was said that the embankments, the deep cutting and the tunnel could not be executed".

In fact, though highly complicated and potentially dangerous for those involved, the tunnel proved to be a remarkably efficient project. It was to be of double width, allowing barges to pass each other. One of the options was to consider whether there should be a towpath alongside



PHOTO BY GILLIE RHODES (CREATIVE COMMONS)

the canal for the length of the tunnel, but this was discounted, probably on the basis that it would necessitate a much wider tunnel and significant extra cost. It was also decided that, because of the nature of the local soil, the tunnel would need to be brick-lined throughout to protect against collapse. Trials established that no less than 3500 bricks would be needed for every yard of tunnel; nearly ten million bricks for its full length!

Of course, in those days and for decades after, barges had no engines. So, without a towpath, there were two options: human effort or an immense stationary engine that could provide power to pull them through by rope or cable. The famous Birmingham engineer Matthew Boulton submitted a proposal for such an engine, but it was never followed through. It was decided instead that metal handrails would be positioned on each side of the tunnel so that bargees could pull their boats through. In the event, that proved far too arduous for even the strongest bargee, so that the process known as legging, with people lying on their backs and using their legs

against the tunnel wall, became the norm. Even legging could to prove too much: within living memory, a powered tugboat used to be moored at the entrance to the tunnel and would pull barges through.

By early 1795, the time was ripe for the actual construction to begin. A number of contractors were taken on by the Worcester & Birmingham Canal Committee, the main one being Richard Jones. He and his team of labourers were to be paid the sum of £4.10.0 (four pounds ten shillings) for each fully completed and lined yard of tunnel.

Excavation and construction took just two years to complete: the rate of progress was estimated to have been about 130 yards of fully brick-lined tunnel per month. Close by the northern (Kings Norton) end of the tunnel, on open fields in what is now the area near the white-painted Tunnel Cottages (early residences for canal keepers and still an evocative sight), a works depot was set up, with a timber yard, a smithy, a carpenter's shop and a store. The contractors were also given permission to build

▼THE TUNNEL COTTAGES ORIGINALLY STOOD IN OPEN FIELDS AT THE NORTH END OF THE WAST HILLS TUNNEL



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH



"barracks" for the growing number of workers involved.

Most of the earth removed during excavations was spread out on the ground surface above the tunnel, giving rise to areas near the northern portal still remembered as "The Mounds". Near the Tunnel Cottages, the horses that would tow the barges from, and back to, the centre of Birmingham to the tunnel were stabled overnight.

To the credit of the contractors, there were no fatalities during construction. However, there was a great deal of illness, sometimes serious. Labourers were expected to work long hours in the cold, dark and damp of the tunnel, with only candle light available. While the constructors employed their own doctors, serious cases were transported regularly to Birmingham General Hospital.

The tunnel was structurally completed through to Hopwood in early 1797 and was "watered" (filled with water) in March of that year. It subsequently proved exceptionally stable and free from collapse. The initial cargoes carried on the Midlands' canal network were almost wholly of coal from the Black Country coalfields, coal that would be such a vital factor in the powering of the many industries that were setting up along the canal banks and, of course, coal that would provide domestic warmth.



PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

#### ▲ "LEGGING IT" THROUGH A CANAL TUNNEL

So the opening ceremony on 27th March was a historic day for the economy of the south Birmingham area as a whole. The first barge through was the Committee's barge, at the head of a number of other coal barges of 60- and 80-ton loads, passing through the tunnel and landing at a brand new wharf in Hopwood. Aris's Birmingham Gazette called it "this stupendous work" and continued: "The country manifested their cordial satisfaction on this occasion by the ringing of bells, etc, and the first vessels were received in their passage through the tunnel (which occupied one hour and four minutes) by the discharge of guns; and the music of horns, clarionets (sic), etc added to the pleasure of the day."

*"The Worcester and Birmingham Canal, Chronicles of the Cut" by The Revd Alan White can be ordered through the website of Brewin Books, the publishers of local interest books in the Midlands ([www.brewinbooks.com](http://www.brewinbooks.com)).*

# RLK Solicitors, Kings Norton

You may have noticed that there have been some changes at the solicitors' on The Green.

In October 2020, RLK Solicitors Ltd acquired the business of Bourne Harris LLP. RLK have been long established in the Edgbaston area and are very excited to take on this new venture which means that we are able to offer a wider range of expertise to all our clients, new and old.

Many of Bourne Harris's former staff continue to work from the Kings Norton office providing a personal and friendly service to their clients and offering a familiar face. David Bourne continues to work as a consultant for the firm and is currently heading the Family and Matrimonial Department.

The change, however, brings the advantages of more professionals with a broader scope of knowledge. We have recently undergone a complete refurbishment of the Kings Norton office and have invested in new technology and telephone systems to further improve the efficiency of our service.

We continue to provide legal services and advice in the following areas:-

- Commercial and Residential Property
- Wills, LPA's and Probate
- Family and Matrimonial
- Commercial Litigation
- Bankruptcy
- Business Interruption

If you are a business that has been affected by the pandemic then we are currently undertaking free reviews of business insurance policies to see whether you may have a claim for business interruption. Many insurance companies are denying cover for Covid-related loss. Further information can be found on our website or you can email your insurance schedule and policy documents to [lucy@rlksolicitors.com](mailto:lucy@rlksolicitors.com) for a free check. If we think you do have a claim we can undertake your case on a 'no win, no fee basis'.

We continue to offer competitive rates for residential conveyancing matters and work closely with many of the local agents.

Our wills and probate department is now headed by Mrs Joyce Bennell who has many years of experience in the field and is the Birmingham Regional Director for Solicitors For the Elderly.

RLK has a well established commercial litigation department headed by Satish Jakhu that ensures we can offer the best quality advice to our clients.

We are still open during the pandemic but are only seeing clients where necessary and by appointment only. Many matters can be dealt with over the phone or we are happy to arrange video calls.

Please visit our website for further information [www.rlksolicitors.com](http://www.rlksolicitors.com) or call us on 0121 451 1661, or email us at [knenquiries@rlksolicitors.com](mailto:knenquiries@rlksolicitors.com).

# Funerals Dec 2020-Jan 2021

8 Dec	William Joseph Cuthbertson	77	SN.Bu.CY
9 Dec	Christopher Maurice Hunt	51	SN.Bu.CY
14 Dec	Agnes Louisa Glasford	90	SN.Bu.KN
15 Dec	Keith John Humpage	48	SN.Cr.LH
17 Dec	April Dunkley	30 min	Bu.KN
18 Dec	Vera June Smith	88	SN.Bu.QN
4 Jan	Michael Arthur Harris	74	SN.Bu.CY
5 Jan	Edwin Burley		Cr.LH
7 Jan	Margaret Jean Hooper	85	SN.Bu.KN
8 Jan	William Kenneth Bryan	93	Bu.CY
12 Jan	Jake James Timmis	12	SN.Bu.CY
14 Jan	Joan Sharp		Cr.LH
27 Jan	Steven Watterson	51	SN.Cr.RD
27 Jan	Raymond Palmer	66	SN.Bu.KN

**SN** : Service at St Nicolas' Church, **Bu** : Burial, **CY** : Churchyard,  
**Crematoria** - **LH** : Lodge Hill, **KN** : Kings Norton, **QN** : Quinton, **RD** : Redditch

## THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2021

This year's World Day of Prayer takes place on Friday 5th March. It begins close to the international dateline, and continues for the best part of 36 hours as it moves steadily around the world.

Locally, the service will be available by service sheet. If you have been a regular attender in previous years, you are likely to receive one in the post. If you would like to receive one, please contact the Parish Office. There will also be an audio presentation, which we hope will be available on the internet and on local churches' social media pages. We are not going to try to livestream the service. If the technology lets us down, please read Matthew 7:24-27. Pray for the people of Vanuatu, an island in the South Pacific, and for all those who are working for justice, health and development around the world.



# Joy has wings

Like so many of us during the latest lockdown, Pauline finds joy in contemplating the wildlife in her garden.



Hopefully, by the time you read this, Spring will be well and truly here. Even as I write this, the afternoons are lighter and the snowdrops are popping through. But we have had rain and fog and snow this winter which have added to the general feeling of gloom.

One of the highlights of the snow, though, was having time to watch the birds. They seemed to really appreciate the feeders and having time to just sit and watch has been a real bonus. You notice their personalities: the robin who is very territorial and who will chase away the dunnock. Occasionally the dunnock gets brave and chases the robin.

There are the long-tailed tits who flit around in a group and don't seem to stay in one place for more than a couple of seconds. All the other types of tit tend to come and go as they

please. They seem to snack all day. We've a female blackcap who likes to sit right in the middle of the feeder and peck away. The female blackcap doesn't actually have a black cap at all, but a red one. It took a bit of detective work and various bird books to discover what type of bird she was the first time we saw her. Now she is one of our garden regulars. We have five different types of bird feeder all hung in our forsythia bush so that we can see them easily from inside. There is a mixture of feed too: mealworms, seeds, fat balls and fat blocks. Luckily, Wilko's has a good selection of reasonably priced feed and you can order on line, so its easy to keep all of the feeders topped up.

Then there are the pigeons. The lazy, fat pigeon wasn't seen much in the snow. The way he usually waddles across the lawn, I don't think he could manage in the snow. He likes to feed from the food which the others drop on the ground. I can't believe that he can actually fly!

One afternoon we had an amazing flock of redwings, so



PAULINE IS  
THE LAY  
MINISTER AT  
ST NICOLAS'  
CHURCH,  
KINGS  
NORTON

many it was hard to count them. They seemed to stay and feed and then move to another part of Kings Norton, as I've heard many reports of them around the area. What was really funny was that, on the weekend of the RSPB *Big Garden Birdwatch*, during which we were asked to count how many of the various birds we could see, the feeders were the quietest they've been all winter. Do you think they knew?

It reminded me of that advert for "Kit Kat" in which the photographer is waiting to take a picture of a panda and nothing happens. He gets bored, turns round and sits down to eat his chocolate and while he does the pandas emerge on roller skates, perform a routine and disappear back inside before the photographer turns

around. He misses the whole thing.

Then, of course, there is the squirrel. He is very cheeky and very ingenious. He is determined he is going to feast on our bird feeders and despite our best efforts to keep him away he still manages to get to them. I've seen him upside down hanging by his back legs from the branch above and stretching from the trunk with only one leg on the feeder. He takes no notice of Ginny, who barks at him regularly, and just sits there looking at her. Even if he does run off he only goes back on to the fence and then comes back again. He's certainly persistent.

I wonder what characters you have noticed in your garden or out on your walks?



▼MOST  
BRITISH  
ROBINS ARE  
SEDENTARY,  
DEFENDING  
THEIR  
TERRITORIES  
YEAR-ROUND,  
WITH MANY  
FEMALES ALSO  
ESTABLISHING  
THEIR OWN  
WINTER  
TERRITORIES.



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH



# Nailing Your Cake to the Drawing Board

*It's not just during Lent that you can't have cake. Especially if you intend to eat it. David Ash explains, with the help of a bear, some butter and a handful of assorted Europeans.*



↑ David Ash is the Head of the Faculty of Languages at King Edward's School Birmingham and a Lay Reader at St Nicolas' Church

I spend much of my time every week reading and correcting texts in foreign languages written by young people who have moved beyond the shallows of GCSE into the deeper waters of the International Baccalaureate. The school where I work, King Edward's in Edgbaston, doesn't teach A Levels and has opted instead for an international curriculum, one of whose distinctive features is that every pupil, whatever his strengths and weaknesses, has to study at least one foreign language until he leaves us and moves on to university. That is as true for aspiring medics or lawyers as it is for future engineers or musicians.

As you would expect, the less-gifted linguists can find it quite a challenge; but it's a testament to their hard work that even pupils who see themselves as future

specialists in mathematics, economics or geography routinely get to the point after year or so where they can hold a fairly fluent and detailed conversation in one or more European languages about topics as diverse as global warming, human rights or the perils of the internet.

There is one aspect of advanced language study, though, which poses more problems than most for the student to whom languages do not come naturally and that is the need to break free of the temptation to translate literally. An example may help. There is a wonderful expression in Russian: медведь на ухо наступил (*medvyed' na ukho nastupil*) The phrase contains four words. If you take each one in sequence and translate it with the help of a dictionary, here's what you get: "bear – on – ear – stepped".

At first sight, it's nonsense. If you then apply a little knowledge about how Russian grammar works, you can produce a reasonably sensible translation, but it gets you no closer to the intended meaning. A literal

translation of “медведь на ухо наступил” would be “a bear stepped on his ear”. The translation now appears to make sense, but we are nowhere near what the speaker intends us to understand. A bear stepped on his ear? Why? What was he doing so close to a bear? Why isn't he in hospital? Or maybe, why is he still alive? A literal translation of the phrase turns out to be useless and, in this case, its meaning is probably unguessable.

PHOTO BY BECCA



What you need to solve the puzzle is an understanding of what linguists call “idiom”. Simply put, idioms are word pictures. The imagery they draw on often has deep roots in the culture where they originate. There are dozens of idioms in Russian which feature bears because, until quite recently, bears featured largely in Russian peasant life. There are relatively few in English, because, apart from Winnie the Pooh and Paddington, we haven't had to face bears in the British Isles for centuries.

Our English idioms tend to feature more homely items like pennies, hats, drawing boards and cake. But more about that in a minute because, before I move on, I must put you out of your misery and tell you what a Russian has in mind when he tells you that a bear stepped on his ear. What he means is that he is tone deaf, he can't sing in tune,

he is unmusical, you wouldn't want him in the church choir because he would growl away on the back row and ruin the harmony. Just as he would, presumably, if his hearing had really been damaged by an improbable but unfortunate encounter with a bear.

One of my favourite English idioms has, as I hinted just now, to do with cake and it is, if I can risk a pun, deliciously English. You can't have your cake and eat it. I wonder what a Russian would make of the phrase if he tried to translate it word-for-word? Or a Frenchman, for that matter?

Well, if you were talking to a Frenchman, you could point out that there is a very similar word picture in his language: “On ne peut pas avoir le beurre et l'argent du beurre”, which means “You can't have both the butter and the money which you will

▲ МЕДВЕДЬ -  
THE BEAR, A  
CENTRAL  
CHARACTER IN  
SO MUCH  
RUSSIAN  
FOLKLORE

# LENT

get if you sell it". You can see that both expressions are getting at the same thing. Both describe those situations where we are faced with a choice between two good alternatives but we have to give up one to obtain the other.

Spanish is even richer in idioms than French. A Spaniard has quite a selection to choose from. To sample just two, he can opt for an idiom rooted in Roman Catholic culture : "No se puede estar en misa y en procesión" (you can't be at Mass and take part in a religious procession at the same time), or, like the Frenchman, he can hark back to his ancestors' peasant origins: "No se puede tener la chancha y los veinte" (you can't have the pig and the twenty pesetas for which you plan to sell it). And so we could go on, through dozens of languages, illustrating how common it is, in human societies, to have to make a choice between two mutually exclusive options. In Albania, you can't go for a swim and not get wet; in Germany, you cannot dance at two weddings at the same time; in Italy, you can't have a full barrel and a drunk wife. **In short, you have to get off the fence and make your mind up.**

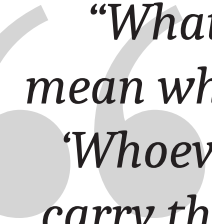
**L**ent is well under way, that six-week season of the church's year set aside for reflection and restraint, prayer and fasting, as we prepare ourselves to follow Christ through the story of his death in Holy Week to his resurrection at Easter (4<sup>th</sup> April this year). It's a time when, traditionally, we return to some of the harder sayings of Jesus recorded in the New Testament and wrestle with their implications.

It is not surprising that we tend to tapdance around the edges of some of the Bible's more challenging passages. Even in church,

PHOTO BY THE LUMO PROJECT



we don't spend much time talking about the tough choices with which Jesus confronts those who want to follow him. But Lent gives us the chance we need to pause, reflect and focus. What, for example, does Jesus mean when he says **"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"**? This season offers a space in which to ask that question.



*"What does Jesus mean when he says, 'Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple'?"*

Over the past two thousand years, there have been some who have chosen, and many who have been forced, to take this and other so-called hard sayings of Christ literally. They have got off the fence and walked the path of faith and obedience knowing that to do so would lead to their persecution and death. Many have done so joyfully, strengthened and inspired by Jesus' example. Untold thousands are still doing so today, largely ignored by politicians and the media, which is why you haven't heard of them.

But what of those of us who are not yet exposed to such risk, for whom persecution, if we are aware of it at all, means little more than the sneer of a colleague or the incomprehending looks of friends and family when we tell them of the faith that makes sense of our lives? How are we to "carry the cross", to count the cost and to follow Christ?

The word "cost" is a good place to start. Some of our greatest theologians have warned of the dangers of convincing ourselves that the Christian life is simply a matter of receiving the good things that God wants to give us with no thought of what we owe him in return. One of those theologians, a German pastor called Dietrich Bonhoeffer, had a lot to say about what he called "cheap grace". Bonhoeffer was hanged when he was only 39 for speaking out against the Nazis and, controversially, for being part of a plot to assassinate Hitler. Like Jesus, he knew the risks he was taking in speaking truth to power and, like Jesus, he didn't pull his punches.

"Cheap grace," he wrote in one of his best-known passages "is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, [...] absolution without

personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

“Costly grace,” he continued “is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. [...] Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son [...] and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.”

Bonhoeffer’s point could, I suppose, be boiled down to a simple statement : even though the forgiveness and love of God are a free gift, offered to all, Christian faith, if it is to be authentic, should cost us something.

It is important to be clear here. He is not saying that we can buy God’s forgiveness or his favour by behaving in particular ways. God’s grace is always free and never deserved. He is saying that the life of faith, lived with integrity and seriousness, will include self-discipline, self-examination, confession and repentance, a deliberate effort to avoid sin and the humility to ask God for what we need.

It will also lead us to reflect on the potential consequences of what we are signing up for. “Which of you,” asked Jesus, “intending to build a tower, does not at first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?”. If we are serious about following Jesus and intend to make a public declaration of that in baptism or confirmation, we are wise if we stop and think before we stand up to be counted. This is a decision which, one day, could cost us more than we bargained for. If you will forgive me for mixing my metaphors, when the chips are down, will you have your cake or eat it?

This, I think, could form part of the answer to the question, “What does it mean to carry my cross in 2021?” and it’s a particularly appropriate question for this season of Lent . In a tolerant society such as ours, where nailing our colours to the Christian mast is unlikely to cost us a great deal, carrying the cross may mean, for now, shouldering those responsibilities which the church has always seen as central to Christian living.



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▲ DIETRICH BONHOEFFER IN 1939. HIS BOOK “THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP” HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A MODERN CLASSIC.



First and foremost, it has to do with listening attentively to Jesus, taking seriously his call to put him first, others second and ourselves last. It means, as the prayer at the end of the Communion service puts it, living and working for his praise and glory and not for our own. And that, in turn, implies that we are called to hard choices and real sacrifices, sacrifices of time, of energy, of money, of talent, of patience, of generosity. It means being present to others and serving their needs with no thought of reward or reputation. Jesus does not call us to a life of ease. The church is not a feel-good movement. There is work to be done.

“But,” you may be asking, “why bother? What makes all this worthwhile?” In St Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells a story about some servants who were given a share of their master’s wealth and invited to invest it during his absence. It’s a story about making the most of the time, the opportunities and the talents that we have been given, and it ends like this:

*“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’*

*“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

Well  
done,  
good and  
faithful  
servant.  
Come &  
share your  
master’s  
happiness



PHOTO BY THE LIMO PROJECT

# Hooray for Hollywood!



PHOTO BY JARED LISACK

The year was 1960. The P&O liner *SS Chusan* was berthed at San Pedro, the main port of Los Angeles. It was a happy, compact ship and the Americans seemed really to enjoy the atmosphere.

We had a day to go before the passengers embarked and so a good chum and I decided to take the day off. I hired a car from Hertz, a blue Chevy sedan and, once I had got used to the automatic gearbox and to having to drive on the right, we were off. We joined the freeway to drive the 10 miles to Sunset Boulevard. Back in Britain, we had hardly any motorways in those days so it was a bit scary to be in four lanes of traffic travelling at some speed.

We parked on Sunset Strip, the 1.5-mile stretch of the boulevard which passes through West Hollywood. I was interested to see the names of the stars embedded in the cement of the Walk of Fame, some accompanied by the star's handprint. We passed Grauman's Chinese Theatre, where

many film premières used to be held, and then drove to Beverly Hills to see the stars' mansions. It was quite a spectacle! But the big highlight was a visit to Universal Studios.

After a short wait, our small group was welcomed by our guide. These days, tours bring in a lot of business for the studios, but ours was very informal and friendly. We did it all on foot and were given a good insight into how the camera fools the eye.

One set we visited was designed to look like a log cabin. All the paintwork had been dulled for the colour cameras and the set had been built an eighth smaller than lifesize to ensure that the actors looked taller. The set of a Western town was built on the same principles. We saw a stuntman crash through a balsa wood window shattering glass made of clear toffee. Another fell off a roof onto a pile of cardboard boxes. Our tour then took us through a small valley in which there was a pool. Our guide explained that this was one of the sets for the TV series "Wagon Train" (1957-1965). When a horsedrawn wagon was pulled through the pool, the camera angle and the editing would ensure that it looked as if it was crossing a river.

Have you ever wondered how they used to film those scenes when a character sinks into quicksand and disappears? Well,

close by the "Wagon Train" set was a quicksand site. It had a moveable, concealed platform which could be lowered beneath wet sawdust while the actor shouted for help. Mystery solved!

Our guide told us of an incident which had occurred a few weeks earlier. A Biblical epic was being filmed, possibly either "Spartacus" or "Exodus", both released that year. In one scene, a shepherd and some sheep were called for. Some of the flock escaped from the lot and caused complete havoc on the freeway. By the time they had been rounded up by police they had caused huge tailbacks.

As our tour came to a conclusion, our friendly guide said that we were welcome to use the commissary or café. The place was busy, filled with extras, many of whom were in costume. As we enjoyed our coffee and food, we were able to chat to Roman soldiers, a knight in armour and a chorus of dancing girls. It was all great fun and they loved our English accents!

At this sad time, I have watched quite a lot of films on TV, ones which can take your mind elsewhere. Even some of the Biblical epics, which are sometimes rather overdone, can give solace and remind us of our Maker. So, despite it all, I will say "Hooray for Hollywood!"



**Eddie Matthews' latest maritime adventure takes us to sunny California.**

# St Nicolas' Choir ca.1952



The participation of girls and women in church and cathedral choirs is a more recent phenomenon than many of us realise. It was Salisbury Cathedral which, as recently as 1991, became the first English cathedral to form an independent foundation for girl choristers. That is not to say that the choirs of some parish churches had not invited female voices into their ranks much earlier than this; but it does point to a well-established English tradition of admitting only boys and men into the choir stalls. It's one which was probably rarely questioned until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and it was not without benefits. As David Poulter, director of Music at Liverpool Cathedral, said in an interview in 2016, "therein lies our source of adult altos, tenors and basses". The difference in tone between boys' and girls' voices is also appreciated by some who, even today, prefer to keep them separate for the purposes of choral singing.

In 1952, within living memory, the choir of St Nicolas' Church was typical of its time. If, having read Marion Löffler's article about history on p.28, you were to attempt to draw conclusions from the "primary source" shown here, you might surmise that the Anglican church was an all-male institution in the 1950s, or at least heavily segregated along gender lines. In some respects, you would not be wrong, even though this picture illustrates only one small aspect of church life at the time. (The Editor has on file an impressive, nay, intimidating photograph of a vast gathering of the St Nicolas' Mothers' Union from a decade or so earlier, which reinforces the impression of segregation. If it doesn't confirm who wore the trousers, it at least establishes who had the best hats!)

Sixth from the left on the third row back stands Peter Rowlings, who kindly sent us this photo for publication. He sang with the choir for about 3 years. We know that the vicar of the period was The Revd Edward George Ashford and that his choir master, to his left was a Mr Thomas of Bromsgrove County High School. Do you recognise anyone else?

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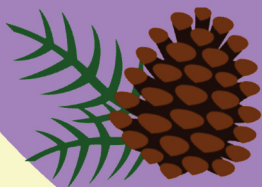
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