

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

A Gentleman of Letters

Why does Revd Larry write?

The Royal Touch

Michael Kennedy encounters Royalty

Looking Back

How Parson's Hill got its name

July 2025 • £1.50 • kingsnorton.org.uk



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Larry Wright 4

A Gentleman of Letters
Epistles according to Larry

Michael Kennedy 8

The Royal Touch
More stories from a career in P.R.

Adam the Gardener 12

Do you Need a Greenhouse?
Growing under glass

Steve Wright 14

Confessions of a Copper
P.C. Larry Wright tells all

David Ash 16

Begotten Not Made
Deciphering the Prayer Book

Pauline Weaver 18

Do The Little Things
The wisdom of St David

Thelma Mitchell 22

Roman Holiday 2
Pope Leo XIV, an Icon & Dandelions

Alf Rogers 22

Looking Back 4
Parson's Hill & bell ringing

Maggie Sweet 29

A Tour of Millennium Green
...with St Nicolas' Women's Group

M.G.M. 32

Summer at the R.B.S.A.
A Summer Show in Birmingham

Claire Lindow 34

School Gardening Club Starts
Giving children green fingers

Michelle Spear 36

The Anatomy of a Smile
Can you tell if a smile is genuine?

Editor & Advertising Manager

David Ash

editor@kingsnorton.org.uk

Subscriptions

Alison Blumer

subs@kingsnorton.org.uk

Registered Address

Kings Norton Parish Office

Saint Nicolas' Place

81 The Green, Kings Norton

Birmingham B38 8RU

0121 458 3289

Copy for Publication

copy@kingsnorton.org.uk

Text & images for publication should be emailed as file attachments or entrusted to the Parish Office, sealed and marked for the attention of the Editor.

Submission Deadlines

Items for inclusion in the August 2025 edition must reach the Editor by midnight on **Friday 4th July**.

Later deadlines are under review and will be published when more information is available.

Welcome

EDITORIAL

I am not going to attempt to summarise the Revd Larry Wright's nine years of ministry in Kings Norton within the 300 words available to me here. I could not do him justice. Instead, I will let the photographs on pages 39 and 40 celebrate some of the high points of his time among us. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words and is often more eloquent. The photograph on the opposite page was taken on Larry's first day with us, at his Induction by the then Bishop of Birmingham, David Urquhart, in May 2016.

I would like to invite you to join us in church on Larry's last Sunday at St Nicolas' on 27th July, when he will be preaching at both the 9.00 and 10.30 Communion services. Please do come and share in thanking him for all he has done here, as we surround him and Amanda with our prayers and best wishes for the future. If you are unable to be with us on that day, you can also catch him at the 9.00 service on the 6th or the 10.30 service on the 20th July.

St Nicolas' now enters a period of interregnum, the church's term for the time between the departure of one vicar or rector and the arrival of the next. This is likely to last several months. During this period, legal responsibility for running the parish, decision-making authority, and oversight of church worship will lie with the Churchwardens (see p.20), supported by the Parochial Church Council.

Services over the coming months will be led by the remaining members of the Ministry Team, with support from clergy elsewhere in the diocese. Should any changes to the pattern of services need to be made, we will advertise them on the parish website and in future editions of this magazine.

*David Ash*

A Gentleman of *Letters*

As this is the final article from the current Rector of Kings Norton, it will focus upon a new aspect of ministry developed over recent years, a ministry of letter writing. For those of us who still read serious daily newspapers and current affairs magazines, printed or online, there is a particular pleasure in turning to the *Letters to the Editor* section. This is the place where readers respond to events great and small with insight, erudition, humour and even propose ingenious solutions to perplexing problems.

As a response to the pandemic years, in 2022 I set myself a goal of writing regularly to national publications about topics which exercised me or of which I had experience, particularly in relation to Christianity and The Church of England. After an initial twinge of self-doubt

(who would be interested in the thoughts of a Birmingham vicar?) I decided to give it a go. Of the twenty or so letters sent since this impulse began, thirteen have been published in either *The Times*, *The Church Times*, or *The Spectator* magazine.

The first letters tended to be responses to articles or news reports involving Christianity. For instance, an article in *The Spectator* about the legend of the child Jesus visiting Cornwall with Joseph of Arimathea as the basis of the lyrics to the hymn 'Jerusalem'.

Sir, As a former Cornish vicar, I know precisely what 'Jerusalem' is about ("What bow — and why is it burning?", 9 July). It refers to the legend of Joseph of Arimathea visiting Cornwall with a young Jesus at his side on a trading mission. Therefore those feet did walk and Countenance Divine shine forth upon England's green and pleasant land.

The legend has no historic veracity, but the Cornish will not be dissuaded from claiming the



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish

Lamb of God set foot in Cornwall long before the Church appeared

Another letter challenged the regular sniping at Christianity by *The Times* columnist Matthew Parris.

Sir, If Matthew Parris were a believer and attended a parish church regularly, he would soon discover that most parishioners take very little notice of anguished debates taking place at the higher echelons of The C of E. In 30 years of parish ministry, my experience is that most congregations focus upon the challenges and opportunities of providing good-quality worship, keeping buildings in good repair, pastoral care for all and engaging with local communities. Moral and ethical questions are addressed through prayer, teaching and sharing experiences. This is where people experience different viewpoints on a range of moral questions among people they pray with every week.

Other topics covered by these missives from Kings Norton included: the value of community policing, the pride of young people in cadet forces, questioning the need to know Queen Elizabeth II's exact cause of death, suggesting it would be of public interest to know who had turned down honours and why. All were

published and a few elicited replies in subsequent editions.

There is a particular pleasure in getting one's own parish mentioned in a published letter. When a controversial ordinand was declined a curacy in the Diocese of London, Matthew Parris of *The Times* (again) took a swipe at the bland conformity of the Church of England bishops and how risk averse they are to the ordination of unconventional clergy. This prompted a letter explaining the history of The Reverend Wilbert Awdry. As a pacifist in 1940, he almost gave up finding the second curacy he needed until the then Bishop of Birmingham invited him to serve at St Nicolas', Kings Norton. Not only did he serve with distinction in the parish throughout the Second World War but, while here, penned his first 'Thomas the Tank Engine' stories.

Sir, Douglas Murray's comment piece raises issues of the leadership of the Church of England's conformity to particular world views ("Belief in its own sin is subverting the church", May 24). His reference to the block on Calvin Robinson's ordination, due to his not sharing these world views, has historical echoes. In the early 1940s a young curate named Wilbert Awdry almost left the priesthood because he was a pacifist and could not find a

bishop to give him a post in the midst of the struggle against Nazism. When all seemed hopeless, the Bishop of Birmingham offered him a post in Kings Norton. He served in the parish with distinction throughout the war years. He also created the stories of 'Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends'. The wrong sort of priests are often just what the church needs in troubled times.

There have been letters on more topical, controversial issues. After a particular media commotion about asylum seekers deceitfully using conversion to Christianity as a means of securing refugee status, a letter explaining how our parish provides a rigorous conversion process which is pastorally sensitive but also realistic was printed in *The Times*.

Sir, The case of Abdul Ezedi has raised questions about the asylum system ("Braverman blames CofE for 'bogus' asylum cases", Feb 5). As a priest who has assisted dozens of asylum seekers to convert to Christianity, I have always ensured that the conversion process is rigorous and lengthy. The process involves meeting with other converts so they too play a role in discerning an applicant's motives. Better still, we have a convert who is now a licensed minister and she acts as another assessor. No process is perfect and a minority of

converts, like other Christians, will go on to commit crimes. Though we do our utmost to support, we must also be realistic.

Artificial Intelligence and its potential for good or harm is an ongoing concern for the media and rightly so. A letter to *The Times* proposed that AI might be seen as a spiritual evolution for humankind, not only a scientific advancement. This debate continues.

Sir, The emergence of artificial intelligence may indeed jeopardise humanity ("Plans for British AI watchdog to keep tabs on global threats", Jun 3). However, we have been here before. All religions claim special knowledge relating to the apocalypse or utopia, the end or a new beginning. What AI presents is a series of options that equate to a technological future beyond the present constraints of human imagining. Religions refer to this "beyondness" as the transcendent, the unseen influence on our lives and futures. AI may be regarded as a scientific development but it may also be a spiritual advancement of the like we have not experienced before.

Recently, *The Spectator* magazine included an article on AI avatars of historical figures who are being used for educational purposes. However, the scripts provided

for these avatars by contemporary writers are filled with 21st century terms and sensibilities. Imagine an AI Jane Austen avatar saying how 'hot' Mr Darcy is!

AI-generated avatars are also available, at a price, for anyone who has a digital presence. This has far-reaching pastoral implications for ministry to the bereaved. A trend is emerging by which grieving next-of-kin pay for an avatar of a deceased loved one, who will recite a script, in their actual voice, at the flick of a switch. This prompted a letter to *The Spectator* explaining the effect that such a trend could have on funeral and bereavement ministry.

Sir: *AI-generated avatars of historical figures mouthing 21st-century platitudes is indeed a dubious development ('The ghastliness of the AI ghouls' , 26 April). Equally questionable are the companies offering grieving relatives a means of digitally 'resurrecting' a dead loved one as an avatar. For a price, the deceased's digital history is 'harvested' and a speaking image provided. This has far-reaching implications. If a dead relative can be conjured up on a screen at the press of a button, it may assist the grieving process but may also distort or prolong it.*

When this project began, I admit to a certain sense of

pride and vanity as letters were published, but this soon wore off. Rather it re-emphasised for me my long-held conviction that it matters that Christians participate in public affairs at all levels. It matters that we are well informed. It matters that we are willing to go beyond the headlines and slogans to scrutinise current events and to see where our faith is relevant and necessary.

The latter part of the New Testament has a series of letters (epistles) written to the early church communities with advice, encouragement, teaching and, at times, strong words of rebuke when communities were not living up to the standards expected of them as followers of Christ.

There are also published collections of letters from Christian leaders and others which have stood the test of time and which continue to be reprinted. Two such examples are the *Letters from Prison* of two of the 20th century's most significant Christian leaders, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Junior.

The modest contributions of a rector from Kings Norton will be soon forgotten. However, if, along the way, they encouraged one or two people to ponder their attitude to faith and life events, it will have been worth it.

THE ROYAL TOUCH

More Stories from a Career in P.R.

Several readers have told me how much they enjoy my whimsical reminiscences from my time as a public relations man with the Rover/Land Rover motor companies, particularly those involving members of the Royal family. So here are a few more Royal stories.

I will say again that, in every way, the direct experience I have had with members of the Family, either person-to-person or in watching them at dedicated events, has always impressed me deeply. So, though some of these stories are amusing, I'm relating them with admiration and respect.

My earliest experiences were with the Health Service. I joined the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board in the early 1970s, an organisation which then became the West Midlands Regional Health Authority. There, I was involved in almost any activity which involved the local and/or

national media, including Royal visits.

Members of the Royal family were always ready to support positive health service developments, such as the opening of new hospitals or significant new medical facilities; the celebrating of anniversaries for key sites; and the formal thanking of staff involved in specific initiatives or particularly demanding situations.

The most significant of the latter was during the aftermath of the devastating Birmingham bombings in November 1974, when two pubs in the centre of the city, The Tavern in the Town and The Mulberry Bush, were blown up without any effective warning. The two hospitals involved most extensively in dealing with the confused rush of victims, many with life-threatening injuries, most others requiring very urgent and complex treatment, were the Birmingham Accident Hospital on Lee Bank, and the



**MICHAEL
REMINISCES
ABOUT HIS
CAREER**

Birmingham General Hospital in Steel House Lane.

My job was to help the hospital staff, who were under desperate pressure, to control the literal hordes of reporters from local and national media who invaded each hospital within minutes of the bombings, demanding information and access to and/or pictures of victims and those who were supporting them. It was all so dramatically immediate: I was literally summoned from my bed to go to the Accident Hospital to help control the press, who were actually putting at risk urgent and essential treatment.

With hospital administrators, we managed to drag the media off the corridors and into a suitable area and advise them that they would have to wait until the situation had been assessed and there was something to tell them. They did so very reluctantly, until we were able to talk to them about the numbers of victims received by the hospital, typical injuries, and the general nature of the treatments that were being given. That was all. Clearly, they could not be allowed to film victims, doctors or nurses, let alone interview them. It was a frantic and

unprecedentedly demanding period for everybody involved.

It was much less pressurised when, several weeks later, the situation had settled and it was time for the nation to express its thanks to all those staff who had committed so much time and skill to dealing with that horrendous situation. The primary event was the visit of Her Majesty The Queen to meet staff from both the hospitals at the General Hospital.

I had looked after the press on a number of Royal visits to the region's hospitals before then, normally for the opening of new facilities. Princess Alexandra, Princess Anne, Princess Margaret and the Duke and Duchess of Kent were normally guests of honour, and I had come to admire the way they spoke to people with grace, patience and kindness, putting them immediately at ease.

But even so, I wondered how Her Majesty was going to cope when she entered an immense room at the General in which as many as 200 people were gathered to meet her; not just to hear an address from her, but to receive her thanks personally. Yes, she walked around that formidable gathering of people talking to each and every individual with knowledge and concern about

the challenges they had faced. It was an immense and demanding challenge which she met without any signs of fatigue, indeed with constant enthusiasm.

I saw that Royal skill in action again a few years later when I was at Lancaster House in London at an event organised by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to acknowledge its sponsors, of which the Rover Company was one. Its Patron was Diana, Princess of Wales, and she was there to meet and greet every guest, again at least 200 of them. At this stage, she was still relatively young and inexperienced in royal events, and most of us there hardly expected her to carry out the meeting and greeting role with the usual royal aplomb. But she

did it wonderfully well, speaking to all attendees in groups of four or five, and leaving us all with positive impression of ROSPA and most especially, of the Princess herself. Her charisma was almost breathtaking.

The only time when, at similar occasions, I noticed the slightest indication of stress for a Royal guest of honour was when, after one of the Royal Princesses had completed another exhausting programme of meeting hospital staff, she was invited to have a cup of tea with the senior administrator. I'm sure I heard her say "I'd rather have a G and T."

I met members of the Royal family in many other contexts. I recall Prince Charles coming to

▼ PRINCE
CHARLES
INSPECTS THE
NEW AUSTIN
METRO



Longbridge in 1980 for an advanced test of the great new hope for the motor industry, the Austin Metro, which was to replace the Mini. He wasn't known as a car buff and I don't think the senior executives present expected much from him in the way of knowledge, but he impressed everyone with his understanding, if not his driving skills!

A more committed vehicle person was Princess Anne, who attended a number of events when I was PR Director for the Land Rover group. She came to officially open the company's dramatic new on-site 'Land Track' off road testing facility at Lode Lane in Solihull. Full of the most demanding off-road challenges: steep gradients, including some up which the vehicle had to climb steps; treacherously slippery mud traps; bonnet-depth water troughs and another steep slope designed to test how far a vehicle could lean sideways at an angle without tipping over.

To the delight of the assembled press, the Princess refused to be driven around the track by a specialist off road driver, but took the wheel herself. Photographers, gleefully expecting a disaster, clambered to the top of the 'sideways lean' hill. Little did most of them realise that the

Princess actually held a Heavy Goods Vehicle Driver's Licence. It was good fun to see them all scatter as she mischievously drove a Range Rover almost straight at them at a much steeper angle than anyone expected!

Another very distinctive memory I have of a Royal meeting was when two Land Rover colleagues and I were invited to Kensington Palace for a private meeting with a Royal Prince about our potential sponsorship of an organisation of which he was Patron. I'd never visited a Palace privately before, and I was prepared to be very impressed. So I was rather underwhelmed when we were shown in through a somewhat unprepossessing back entrance (not the famously ornate main gates), and introduced to the Prince in an equally unimpressive, rather faded meeting room.

He was politeness itself as we were offered tea, but as our discussion began I realised with an increasingly irresistible fascination that one corner of the sofa on which he was sitting was supported by three rather well-used bricks! I was transfixed, it was so different from what I'd expected. As I shook hands with him and left, I found myself fervently hoping that he hadn't noticed where I'd been looking for most of our discussion!

Do you need a greenhouse?

As I write this there is some very welcome rain falling, and then gales are forecast, which are not so welcome! This neatly brings us to promised hints and tips on greenhouses.

For now, I will put to one side the use of polytunnels, which are very useful for growing vegetables and bedding plants in quantity, often in less-than-ideal conditions. Incidentally, I was fascinated by a gardener from Shetland whose whole garden was in one long polytunnel. This included the forty-two-day tomato, which unfortunately cannot be obtained in the UK at this time. (Premier Polytunnels have a very good range, if you are interested. You can find them on the internet.)

Back to greenhouses. A light metal house with a pull-over plastic cover and a roll-up door can be had very cheaply from Lidl, Aldi and other DIY chains. Buy them early in the Spring when there may be special offers. I paid £40 for mine as a temporary measure three years ago and I am still using it, albeit with a new cover replacement this year.

I recommend a floor area of 143 square centimeters as a minimum. 143 x 216 cm is even better. There are some new ones selling online at £64.14 with shelves included from a company called D4P. Anything smaller will have a tendency to become an oven as the temperature rises. The roll-up door will need to be secured open in sunshine.

A long way up the price scale is one in wood or extruded aluminium framed houses. They are expensive but will look good and their glass panes will enable you to check your plants from the outside. Opening roof lights are essential, especially automatic openers. They will have to be bought separately but are well worth it. Then you can say goodbye to runaway overheating. If you are assembling these by hand it is definitely a minimum of a two-person job (I speak from experience).

After all that, do you really need a greenhouse? You can grow hardy annuals and hardy perennials perfectly well in a light but sheltered area of patio

or terrace. A lot can be done with a modest seed bed of decent soil.

July is the time to be sowing seeds of plants for overwintering next year. Here are some plants which are tough and free-growing. My kind of plant! Incidentally, this list is compiled with an AI overview which seems quite intelligent.

Foxglove – watch out for new varieties.

Sweet William – will often become perennials.

Forget-me-nots – when they have finished flowering, pull them up and put them on the compost heap to prevent rampant self-seeding.

Bellis perennial - single, double or giant.

Winter flowering pansies.

For starting in the greenhouse:

Aquilegia

Delphinium

Echinacea

Scabious

I quote from the AI: 'By sowing these seeds in July, you will be well on your



way to a beautiful and colourful garden in the coming months and years.' Wow!

Now, with a storm on the way, I am going to check that my small greenhouse is secure. By the way, I find plastic cable ties very useful for bringing together the plastic cover and the framework of a lightweight greenhouse.



Confessions of a Copper

When the parish Men's Group were planning this year's programme, we found ourselves short of a speaker for the May meeting. I can't recall who made the suggestion, but someone said, 'Larry, you were a police officer before you became a priest. That would make a great subject for an open meeting.' Larry replied that he had given a similar talk before and would be happy to speak for us.

So it was that a small but enthusiastic audience gathered to hear our Rector share his experiences as a young man in the newly-formed West Midlands Police force. He began with a brief history of policing in England, explaining the principles on which the force was founded, and evoking memories of how many of us first encountered the local bobby, often through television programmes like 'Dixon of Dock Green'.

Larry then spoke about his training and his early days as a Probationary Constable. After qualifying, he was assigned his own patch. This was back in the day when the neighbourhood bobby was a central figure in the community. Officers on the beat got to know local residents and, just as importantly, people got to know them. A traditional bobby knew the business owners, recognised which children belonged to which families, and noticed when something seemed out of place. Larry became someone people felt comfortable approaching with their concerns.

His work inevitably exposed him to some of the darker aspects of human experience, and it was clear from his talk that many of these memories still stay with him. These experiences led him to a deeper exploration of his faith and greater involvement in the church.

Before long, Larry was given the opportunity to drive a police car. This allowed him to cover more ground, but also brought the responsibility of pursuing other motorists. He attended a course to learn how to drive safely at speed. With a glint in his



STEVE IS A
LAY
PREACHER
AT ST
NICOLAS'

eye, he described the thrill of driving a powerful car from Birmingham to Wales at high speed!

The tone of the talk then shifted. Larry took us back to the Handsworth and Lozells riots in 1985, when officers had little protection from a storm of bricks and bottles save for a few borrowed dustbin lids. He spoke with equal emotion about the Battle of Orgreave in 1984, in which police and striking miners clashed violently.

Policing was changing. Although British police were not as militarised as some of their counterparts abroad, change was on the horizon. Larry trained as a member of the Special Patrol Group, equipped with the tools and tactics to manage public disorder. Community-based initiatives were having some effect, but not enough.

Larry was changing too. One incident during the riots had a profound effect on him. He showed us news footage of an interview with an officer who had been driving a van attacked by a mob. The driver was badly injured when bricks smashed through the windscreen. There was an audible gasp when Larry revealed that he had been in the back of that van. But it was what happened moments later that left the deepest mark.

As Larry leapt out, truncheon raised, ready to defend himself, he was shocked by the violent impulses that surged within him. He remained on the force for a while after this, but realised that policing was no longer his calling.

As he continued to explore his faith, Larry felt a strong call to ordained ministry. He was accepted, and after completing his training, served as a curate in Australia. He could have stayed Down Under, but knew he needed to return home.

Larry educated, enlightened, and challenged everyone who heard his talk, leaving us with much to reflect on. We thank him, and wish both him and Amanda all the very best as they leave Kings Norton this summer.



▲ POLICE
CONSTABLE
2833 LARRY
WRIGHT, AGED
18 YEARS.

Begotten, Not Made

How often do we use words without fully understanding their meaning? If you have attended a 9:00 a.m. service at St Nicolas' Church, it's likely that some of the words you've spoken or heard, though familiar, contain hidden depths you may not have had the chance to explore.

After a recent morning service, during which we used the language of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP), I had preached the sermon and was saying goodbye to the congregation at the door. I consider this one of the most important moments of any service: an opportunity for the minister and congregation to connect, share feedback, ask questions, or simply chat.

As people were leaving, one lady suggested that St Nicolas' might offer explanations, or even modern English translations, of some of the more obscure 17th-century words and phrases used in traditional services like BCP Holy Communion. Since the BCP remains the official prayer book of the Church of England, it's entirely reasonable for anyone attending worship to want to understand what they are saying.

Her suggestion led me to reflect on how we might make the language of our traditional services more accessible for everyone who attends, particularly those who are unfamiliar with churchy jargon. I suspect that we may even have one or two older worshippers who know the traditional service inside out, but who, as lifelong learners, would welcome a bit of clarification here or there.

That is how this article was born: as an experiment in 'digging down' into one word of the liturgy in order to mine some of the buried treasure within it. If you find it helpful, please tell me and, who knows, it might turn into a longer series.

Begotten, Not Made

The Anglican Church has three official creeds or statements of belief: the Nicene, the Apostles', and the Athanasian. The Athanasian is long and complex and is almost never used. The Apostles' Creed is recited during Morning and Evening Prayer and at baptisms. The Nicene Creed, formulated at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, is used in services of Holy Communion.



DAVID IS A
LAY READER
AT ST
NICOLAS'
CHURCH

It is when reciting the Nicene Creed that Christians declare their belief in 'one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds [...] begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father.'

Why is this important and what is the significance of the word 'begotten'?

In most contexts, 'to beget' means 'to become the father of' someone. It can also mean 'to give rise to, or cause,' as in 'violence begets violence.' The three forms of the verb are 'to beget, begat, begotten.' You'll find it in the Authorised or King James translation of the Bible, where the long genealogies at the start of St Matthew's Gospel begin: 'Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren' (Matt. 1:2).

In the Creed, however, 'begotten' carries a specific meaning of profound theological significance. It distinguishes Christ's divine nature from that of created beings.

Christ was not Created

Christ's 'begetting' does not take place in time or space but is the 'eternal generation from the Father's divine essence.' He is not, therefore, a creature like us but is fully divine, sharing the

Father's uncreated, eternal nature ('not made'). Jesus exists 'co-eternally' with the Father. He has no beginning or end. He is not a subordinate creature but is God himself.

In his classic book *Mere Christianity*, the author C.S. Lewis put it like this: 'To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers [...] But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam [...] What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man.'

Why should such a statement be necessary? As with so much else in Christian doctrine, it was needed to confront a heresy or false teaching called Arianism, which emerged in the early 4th century. Arius, a church leader in Egypt, taught that Jesus was a created being and was subordinate to God. He claimed that 'there was a time when the Son was not.' His idea spread and caused confusion. It persists even today in the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the full deity of Jesus Christ.

The early church councils decided that God's revelation of Himself was not consistent with Arius' claims. Arianism challenged the fundamental understanding that Christ was, and is, divine, 'of one substance with the Father.' The Council of Nicaea affirmed that, if Christ were not fully divine, Christian teachings about our salvation, which rely on Christ's divine authority, would collapse. Not only this, but by reducing Jesus to the status of a demigod, Arius risked reintroducing polytheism and fracturing the concept of one God in three persons.

The Council of Nicaea therefore insisted on the co-equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to preserve this foundational doctrine. The Son of God was, and is, 'begotten, not made.'

Do The Little Things

On my desk there is a little card from St David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire with the words 'Be joyful, keep the faith and do the little things that you have heard and seen me do'. These are believed to be the last words of St David to his followers.

Many of us do lots of little things to help change and shape the world around us. We recycle (bin strikes permitting), we take reusable bags to the supermarket, we try to use public transport or walk instead of taking the car. There are loads of little things we all do to try and make a difference. Sometimes it can feel as if it is unlikely to make a difference but little things added together can have a big impact.

There are many situations in which we can feel that there is nothing we can do. The wars between Israel and its neighbours are one example. It has been suggested that we should boycott certain products and companies which invest in Israel. You may remember something similar many years ago when we were discouraged from buying produce from South Africa as part of the anti-apartheid campaign. But the companies involved in this boycott are major global brands: Coca-Cola, Amazon, Google, McDonalds, Pizza Hut and many, many more. I wonder how much my actions would matter to such companies. One less Big Mac here or there would have little impact on sales. There is little awareness of the boycott so few are taking part.

Campaigns such as these seem to attract little media coverage. There are issues with cost and availability of alternatives. Are we able to source them locally or are they going to be too expensive for our budget? And, of course,

► ST DAVID'S
CATHEDRAL IN
SOUTH WALES



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



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

remembering all of this when we go shopping, checking oranges to see where they have come from and which brands I'm not supposed to put in my basket can make a trip to the Co-op a little daunting.

There are other issues and questions to ponder. How effective is such a boycott and will it affect decision makers or just the ordinary people of Israel? How guilty will we feel if we don't participate? Am I participating just to make myself feel better or am I really hoping to make a difference?

It is a dilemma. I try to do the little things but wonder if it is enough, if it will make any difference. The answer is that it can be. Recently, the sports brand Puma announced that, following a global boycott campaign, they had ended their contract with the Israeli Football Association. As far as I'm aware, this has had very little media coverage, but if it has worked once it can work again.

Campaigns like this only work if people support them, if people do the little things. Perhaps, if everyone sympathetic to the Palestinian cause got involved, real change could happen and companies and governments would start to take notice.

Something little, when we all do it together, can turn into something big.

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). 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
0121 458 3289 • www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam**

THE MINISTRY TEAM

Rector The Revd Larry Wright
Parish Lay* Minister Pauline Weaver
Curate The Revd Christine McAteer
Honorary Assistant Priest The Revd Jayne Crooks
Lay* Readers (Licensed Lay Ministers) David Ash, Cate Bennett, Fay Fearon,
..... Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki
Lay* Preacher Steve Wright
Music Minister..... Sylvia Fox
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator The Revd Jayne Crooks
Pastoral Care Advisor Susan Farrell

THE CHURCH WARDENS

St. Nicolas' Church..... Annette Dickens, Mark Sandilands
Hawkesley Church Jim Clarke

OTHER CONTACTS

Parish Administrator..... Cate Bennett
Treasurer David Badger
Finance Officer Amanda Kaye-Wright
Verger and Groundskeeper Shane Williams
Safeguarding Coordinator Annette Dickens
Regular Giving The Revd Jayne Crooks
Flower Arranging (0121 486 2837)..... Alison Blumer

(*Lay = not ordained as a priest)

We are a Church of England Parish serving all in Kings Norton through St Nicolas' Parish Church, and, in partnership with the Methodist Church, through Hawkesley Church, meeting in the Primary Academy.



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

1 st Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer) - Said
10.30 am	Holy Communion with Choir
12.30 pm	Baptisms
6.00 pm	Taizé Prayer

2 nd Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Sung Matins (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Morning Praise
6.00 pm	Holy Communion with Anointing & Prayer for Healing

3 rd Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer) - Said
10.30 am	Holy Communion with Music Group & Choir
12.30 pm	Baptisms
6.00 pm	Evening Worship

4 th Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Holy Communion with Choir (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Morning Praise for All Ages
6.00 pm	Compline (Night Prayer)

5 th Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer) - Said
10.30 am	Holy Communion with Hawkesley Church & Choir
6.00 pm	Celtic Worship

All services are held at St Nicolas' Church. For further details, see the weekly newsletter on the Parish Website at www.kingsnorton.org.uk

ROMAN HOLIDAY

PART II

In last month's Parish Magazine, I wrote about spending Easter near Rome and sharing in the Easter morning worship at All Saints' Anglican chaplaincy, just off Piazza di Spagna. The day we left we heard the news that Pope Francis had died.

With great speed, a new Pope, Robert Francis Prevost, who has taken the regnal name of Pope Leo XIV, was elected and inaugurated into office. The speed of his election probably reflects the increasing ill-health of his predecessor. And it is rumoured that the cardinals had met in advance and had already made their decision, for various reasons, including a blessing from Pope Francis on Robert Prevost as his successor, in advance of the Conclave.

Robert Prevost was born in Chicago in September 1955, so he is a relatively young papal appointment. He is the first North American pope and also the first one who holds Peruvian citizenship. He joined the Augustinian monastic order as a novice in 1977. He became a full member of the order in 1981 and was ordained priest in 1982. He spent part of that time studying in Rome. In 1984 he was sent to do missionary work in Peru.

Elected prior general of the Augustinian Order, he became Bishop of Chiclayo from 2015 until 2023. Pope Francis recalled him to the Vatican in 2023, appointing him prefect of the Dicastery of Bishops, which is the administrative department of the Curia, the central governing body of the Catholic church. He was also president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.



**THELMA MITCHELL
WAS FORMERLY LEAD
CHAPLAIN AT
BOURNVILLE
COLLEGE.**

PHOTO BY DAVID ASH



▲ MADONNA
AND CHILD, THE
BASILICA OF
GENAZZANO,
ITALY

from the Vatican was to the basilica in Genazzano where there is a shrine to Our Lady of Good Counsel! There is a picture there, a fresco of a Madonna and Child, the baby Jesus with sparse blond hair, identifying it as coming from Albania.

Even the story behind this icon is, to say the least, curious. In the thirteenth century the church, later designated a basilica, was built in the centre of the village, high on the ridge. By the mid-fourteenth century the building was only half complete when the money ran out to finish it. Pilgrims stopped coming with their ready and often generous income.

The picture of the Madonna and Child was said to have been flown in by angels one night and dropped into the half built church. The local townsfolk claimed to have heard heavenly music, and a mysterious cloud descended. When this cleared,

He was inspired to take the papal name of Leo from Pope Leo XIII who developed modern Catholic social teaching during the second industrial revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century

And why do I find this particularly of interest? Well, Pope Leo XIV is an Augustinian. The village where we lived in Italy from 2003 to 2018, Genazzano, is an Italian Augustinian parish. San Pio, the semi-ruined villa we used to take groups to in the early days, from the late nineteen eighties, belonged to the Irish Augustinians in Rome. Pope Leo will know this place well.

And the first visit which the new Pope made away

a small fresco, eighteen inches square and on a thin card-like background, had appeared, apparently mysteriously transported from a church in Scutari in Albania, just before the Ottoman invasion.

In truth, it was probably stolen and later dropped off in Genazzano by soldiers returning from the Italian Albanian skirmishes of the time, as too hot to handle. But it worked! The pilgrims returned, financing the repairs bountifully, especially the rich ones buying their way into heaven! It is a truly magnificent church, with a marble altar rail attributed to scholars of Bernini. The image is still revered amongst Catholics, with pilgrimage made to it by earlier popes from the seventeenth century onwards, including Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict, and also in the nineteen eighties, by Mother Theresa, who was born in Albania.

Friends of ours who know Genazzano well, whether they believe the story or not, are very excited that the new Pope made this his first choice to visit 'our' village, as are we! It is a tribute to the most recent popes that we work much more together at grass roots level. As we pray for the appointment of our new Archbishop of Canterbury, may we also pray that relationships between the different Christian denominations will continue to flourish.

And now, as we pass the point of mid-summer, in a complete change of direction, I am going with praise of dandelions! As a child, living in an industrial urban environment, I thought that the swathes of the yellows and greens of the dandelions in full bloom on grass verges were cheerful and so beautiful when I visited my aunt and uncle who lived in the countryside. (Mind you, I also loved the convolvulus and dog roses which grew in the hedges.)

So, do you remember when dandelions were a big pest, public plant enemy Number 1? We had to pull them out with their very deep, tough roots so that they didn't spring up again. It turns out, we could not have been more wrong. They are a vital resource for wildlife, which in turn is vital for our health and wellbeing.

Dandelions are central to garden ecosystems, including bees, moths, flies and wasps. Some of these insects are pollinators and some are eaten by birds. Thus, they all play a vital role in food chains that wildlife relies on.

Dandelions also act as a nutrient pump. They actually bring up nutrients, especially calcium, from the deep, lower levels of the soil to the surface. The soil around a dandelion plant becomes very fertile. It is usually on the alkaline PH side and earthworms love dandelions. A great excuse not to mow the lawn and to let them blossom!

And so, to finish, as we rejoice in the abundance and beauty of God's creation all around us, in gardens, parks, fields, highways, byways and out deep into the countryside, a poem to close in praise of this once much-maligned plant. The American author, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879 – 1931), was a poet who enjoyed reciting his poetry as he travelled round the United States.

*O dandelion, rich and haughty,
King of village flowers!
Each day is coronation time,
You have no humble hours.
I like to see you bring a troop
To beat the blue-grass spears,
To scorn the lawn-mower that would be
Like fate's triumphant shears.
Your yellow heads are cut away
It seems your reign is o'er.
By noon you raise a sea of stars
More golden than before.*



I like that! And I pray that you will enjoy some time this summer out and about, able to appreciate God's creation.

Looking Back 4

August 1950



▲ ALF
ROGERS.
FROM A
CHOIR PHOTO
TAKEN IN
1944.

In our April 2025 edition we printed the first in a series of articles entitled 'Looking Back : By An Old Chorister', originally published in these pages in the 1950s.

In the fourth of these monthly reminiscences, C.A.P.Rogers explains the origin of the name 'Parson's Hill' together with the challenges and delights which the parish's steepest slope provided for Kings Nortonians of the past.

Parson's Hill presented a far different picture in those days in comparison with its present-day appearance. There was just a single carriageway with tall trees, pleasant banks, and hedgerows on either side, and I can remember the field, with a delightful dell, situated at the rear of Laburnum Cottages before the clay pit was extended to the roadside. The hill often proved a severe test to the horse traffic and, later, to the early motor car, and breakdowns were very frequent, especially at the steep bend towards the top.

Some cars would refuse to climb this part in forward gear, and the driver would perhaps run backwards to the foot of the hill, turn the car around, and make the ascent in reverse gear, while other drivers would perhaps beg a tow from a passing carter, and the car would proceed very slowly up the hill with the horse pulling in front and the passengers pushing at the rear.

In wintertime, the hill would sometimes be snowed up for some considerable time and, although inconvenient to some

of the villagers, it gave untold pleasure to others as a first-class toboggan run from the top to the bottom and over the canal bridge. The only disadvantage to this fine sport was the long trudge back to the top again.

People have often asked me why the hill is called Parson's Hill. At the top, on the right-hand side, situated where the block of shops and a few houses are built, stood an old ivy-covered house, named 'Hill Top.' This house, many years ago, was the 'Parsonage' where the early Vicars of Kings Norton resided before our present Vicarage was built in 1861, and I understand that the Rev. J. M. L. Aston was the last Vicar to live there.

'Hill Top' was pleasantly situated amongst a fine setting of horse chestnut trees and shrubs, also with a delightful small paddock at the side of the house and fronting the corner of Parson's Hill and extending a short distance along Walkers Heath Road.

The house was occupied for many years and, just prior to its demolition, by the late Alderman J. S. Pritchett and family. Mr. Pritchett, besides being a great scholar, linguist, magistrate, etc., was an expert in bellringing and, over a long period of years, was a regular ringer in our church

▼THE
JUNCTION OF
PARSON'S
HILL AND
BALDWIN
ROAD IN THE
EARLY 20TH
CENTURY



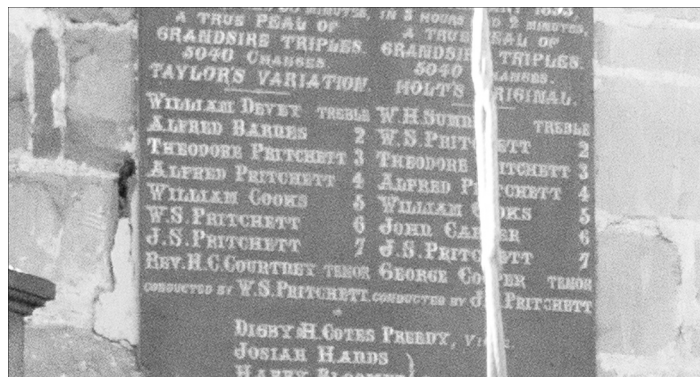


PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

▲ THE BELL CHAMBER IN THE TOWER OF ST NICOLAS' CHURCH AS IT APPEARED IN 2012. THE NAME J.S. PRITCHETT APPEARS ON THREE OF THE TABLETS VISIBLE IN THIS PHOTO.

belfry. His name, together with those of his brothers and other noted ringers in our village, can be seen inscribed on the various tablets hanging in the tower commemorating famous peals rung on special occasions during the past years.

I can remember Mr. Pritchett giving a most interesting outline of the history of Kings Norton before a large audience in the Saracen's Head not many years ago.



► DETAIL OF THE PHOTO ABOVE.

A Tour of Millennium Green



On the afternoon of Tuesday 2nd June, the ladies of the **St Nicolas' Church Women's Group** enjoyed a guided walk around the Millennium Green led by Maggie Sweet from Hawkesley Church and the Secretary of the Trust. Together they look after the site and have done since 2001. Millennium Green was created, as the name suggests, in the year 2000 from what was three fields owned by Lilycroft Farm. The site had been left derelict after being bought by the City Council and a group of local residents decided to turn it into an amenity. It was partly landscaped. Paths and seats were put in and various habitats were created.

On their walk around the site, the ladies saw most of the following: the orchard, the hazel plantations, the event

field, the wildflower meadow, the bog area and the woodland. Maggie pointed out the work which the volunteers have done over the last 25 years, putting in Nature Trail panels about the habitats, planting more native trees, creating a willow tunnel, coppicing some of the hazel, planting wildflowers and repairing paths.

Unfortunately many of the wildflowers such as the native bluebells, cowslips, and fruit blossom had finished flowering, but the meadow cranesbill, birds foot trefoil and bramble flowers were starting to come out. It looked as if it is going to be a good year for blackberries, and there were lots of apples on the orchard trees. Sloes were also developing on the blackthorn. As the site is always open, any local people can come and pick fruit in the autumn.

Maggie told the group about some of the problems of the site, such as fires set by vandals, graffiti on some of the benches, and fly-tipped rubbish. At present, it is looked after by only six volunteers. More would be very welcome. They meet on Thursday mornings at 10.30 am at the car park opposite the cemetery on Longdales Rd.

THE BELLS



Regular readers will recall articles in previous editions of this magazine about the bells of St Nicolas' Church, which have been silent for over five years because it is not safe to ring them. A great deal of expensive work has to be done on the church tower before they can be brought back into service. We would like to let you know about two fundraising events designed to get them ringing again.

You will know how much the bells mean to the local community. St Nicolas' Church bells are also well regarded among ringers as a very good light ring of ten bells, bright inside and mellow on the ear outside. The tenor bell in particular has a fine tone outside the tower, with a very distinctive hum.

We used to hear the bells regularly, not only on Sundays but also during Tuesday evening practices. They would also be rung on Saturdays for weddings or because we had visiting ringers. Kings Norton's church bells have a classic sound, as opposed to the rural sound of many installations, and a glorious external echo when rung to changes. There is a

OUR
GOFUNDME
PAGE



strange silence without them. They have not been rung full circle since November 2019.

To get them ringing again requires remedial work on the tower and the bell frame. To help us raise the money for this, we have set up a GoFundMe page through which you can donate at any time. You'll find it here:

www.gofundme.com/f/tower-and-bell-appeal

We are also holding a homemade cake sale in support of the bells and the tower on **Saturday 12th July**, the same day as the Farmers' Market. We'll be in St Nicolas' Churchyard from 10 am until 12 noon on that day. Cakes and drinks will be served in church. Please come along and help support our efforts to get St Nicolas' bells ringing once again.

We can apply for grants from a number of church and heritage organisations but we need to start the fundraising ourselves before we do so. Thank you for your support.

▼A
DEMONSTRATION
OF HOW OUR
BELLS WORK AT
THE KINGS
NORTON
FESTIVAL IN 2012



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Summer at the RBSA

Summer at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists means only one thing: their much-anticipated Summer Show. It's a time for the newly graduated and the old timers to display their creative endeavours and to vie for attention and prizes for the (modest) cash prizes. Billed as a Celebration of Art and Talent, it's also a place to have one of those occasional 'What Am I Looking At?' moments.

So welcome, dear art enthusiasts, casual observers, and those who wandered in thinking this was the queue for a particularly fancy café. You've arrived at an event so full of creative brilliance that even the statues might give you a knowing nod of approval.

A Brief History

The RBSA has been championing artists for over 200 years, which means it has survived wars, revolutions, and the questionable fashion choices of every decade since 1821. Every summer, the gallery opens its doors to a dazzling display of talent, featuring works from

established names, emerging artists, and the occasional masterpiece that makes you squint and say, 'Ah yes, I totally get it.'

What You'll Find

The exhibition offers a wide range of artistic expressions: paintings that transport you, sculptures that defy physics, and installations that may or may not be part of the building's actual plumbing system.

Whether you're drawn to bold contemporary statements, classic landscapes, or portraits where the subject's eyes seem to follow you (in a friendly, non-haunting way), there's something here for everyone.

This isn't just a showcase, it's a competition. Artists have submitted their best work in the hope of winning the £600 First Prize or the £300 Second Prize, which, in artistic currency, is roughly equivalent to three months of coffee-fuelled inspiration. There are also highly commended certificates, which function as both a mark of distinction and a polite British



**"MGM" writes
on cinema,
theatre and
the arts.**

way of saying, 'You were really, really close.'

Beyond the visual spectacle, the Private View on Thursday 3 July from 6.00 to 8.00 pm offers guests the chance to mingle with artists, ask deep questions like 'What was your inspiration?' and more pressing ones like 'Where is the bar?' There will also be workshops, talks, and guided tours, ensuring that even those who claim to know nothing about art will leave feeling like sophisticated connoisseurs.

The RBSA Summer Show is not just an event, it's an experience. Whether you're here to admire genuine talent, expand your horizons, or perfect your 'art gallery nod', it's a celebration of creativity that you won't want to miss.

So step inside, marvel at the masterpieces, and, if all else fails, find the painting of a cat. There's always one.

For more details, visit the RBSA website at rbsa.org.uk.

Private View: Thursday 3 July
6.00pm – 8.00pm

Artists' Talks: Saturdays 12 and
26 July 2.00pm – 3.00pm

Show closes: Saturday 2 August
5.00pm



THE HUNGRY GARDENER

School Gardening Club Starts



Claire is a keen kitchen gardener, ably assisted by her son Charles.

Now we are in July, we are starting to harvest some of our summer vegetables. I wonder how your gardens are growing and if you tried to make any blossom syrups. I picked a bunch of elderflowers on my walk back from church at the start of June for my fruit syrup. This is now beautifully flavouring my kombucha drinks, which is delightful.

In our garden, I was able to plant out tender plants

a few weeks earlier this year. The plants in the garden have been healthier than those on the allotment with the dry weather, simply because it was easier to care for them. The onions, in particular, struggled. However, with the recent rain they are really starting to thrive. I am looking forward to making onion soup later this year.

Once we had the alternating sunshine and rain towards the end of May and into early June everything started thriving enthusiastically and our garden is looking a bit like a flowery jungle. We really have been blessed with good weather this year, rain included!

At the start of May, my son Charles and I embarked on starting a school gardening club at his school. I shared the gardening club four-week plan in my article in the May edition. As is often the case, plans are great but, when mixed with children, weather conditions and the amazing caretaker finding time to fill beds with soil - we improvised. I have so much respect for teachers who manage all of these conflicting challenges on a daily basis.

As we kicked off, I brought chitted potatoes, onions started off in pots and root seeds (radishes, carrots, beetroot). We had one bed filled with top soil. The rest were yet to be filled. We planted potatoes in potato bags. The children loved holding the potatoes and placing them in the soil and burying them. We made sure that the children had a potato each. Then we planted up the roots bed. We were planting alternate

rows: row one onions, row two roots, row three onions, etc. This should trick the carrot fly by masking the smell of the carrots. Roots and onions usually crop at a similar time too. I explained the system to the children but they enjoyed planting the onions so much they wanted to plant them everywhere! At first, I tried to explain to them how we wanted to plant them in rows, but they were so enthusiastic that in the end I just followed them and corrected any onions that had deviated into a roots row!

When we had the next raised bed filled with soil, I brought some courgette and pumpkin seedlings that I'd grown at home to plant out. They really enjoyed planting them and then we found some strawberry plants to plant around the edges of the raised bed. The children were so gentle with these fragile, young plants. Their green fingers are developing wonderfully. This bed is really thriving now, which is lovely to see.

The following week, all the beds had been filled with soil and we planted cabbages, chard and chop suey greens that develop lovely yellow chrysanthemum flowers. I planted some nasturtiums in

this bed. One boy spotted that I'd brought them in a recycled jar and was very confused as to why there were flower seeds in a jar with a toothpaste label! Charles is passionate about recycling, nature, litter collecting and respecting the environment.

In our final week, a parent gave us three tomato plants, which was so generous. I took it as a positive sign that parents want to engage and support our developing garden. The teacher who supports the session and I both grow our tomatoes with different techniques. She grows hers in the plant pot but with the bottom cut out so the tomato sits higher in the soil. I do the opposite, taking the tomato out of the pot altogether and dig a deep hole as the tomato's stem, if buried, will grow more roots. So, as a science experiment, we've planted some with my method and some with hers to see which grows best.

We planted up the climbing beans bed and I planted some more nasturtiums and companion flower seeds of calendula and borage. The children really enjoyed burying the bean seeds in the soil. But do you know what they loved best? Watering! They all loved watering the plants in. One kind boy was so patient, helping everyone to fill their watering cans from the hose

It has been an absolute privilege and a wonderful experience helping the school start off the school garden. The school and I are planning to run some more sessions and to open them up to Key Stage 1 children as well. I know that they will really love the watering!

The Anatomy of A Smile

You've probably heard the claim that it takes more muscles to frown than to smile. It's usually framed as a feel-good reason to turn your frown upside down – less effort, more joy. But anatomically, the numbers don't quite add up.

We've all seen it, the smile that doesn't quite reach the eyes. From awkward family photos to strained workplace pleasantries, our brains often detect that something is off long before we consciously realise why.

But what is it about a smile that makes it feel sincere or fake? The answer lies in a surprising blend of facial anatomy, neurology and emotional authenticity.

Not all smiles are created equal, and anatomically speaking, there are at least two distinct kinds: the Duchenne smile, which reflects genuine

happiness, and the non-Duchenne smile, which tends to be more social or strategic.

Named after 19th-century French neurologist Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, the Duchenne smile activates two key muscle groups. The first group is associated with the corners of the mouth, where, for example, the risorius (from the Latin to smile) draws the corners outward and the zygomaticus major muscle lifts them.

The second, and most telling, muscle is the orbicularis oculi, which tightens the muscles around the eyes, producing the familiar 'crow's feet' and the gentle narrowing we associate with warmth and delight.

Fake or polite smiles, on the other hand, usually involve only the mouth muscles. The eyes remain wide or indifferent, and the smile appears more



MICHELLE SPEAR IS
PROFESSOR OF
ANATOMY AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF
BRISTOL

mechanical than meaningful, a kind of emotional camouflage.

Both real and fake smiles depend on cranial nerve VII, also known as the facial nerve, which sends signals from the brain to the muscles of facial expression. However, there's a key neurological difference: Duchenne smiles tend to be generated by the limbic system, the brain's emotional core, particularly the amygdala, an almond-shaped group of neurons that processes emotional salience.

Non-Duchenne smiles, by contrast, are often under more conscious cortical control, originating in the motor cortex. This divide means that authentic, emotionally driven smiles are involuntary.

You can't easily will your orbicularis oculi to contract convincingly unless you're genuinely feeling the emotion behind the expression. Even professional actors must tap into real memories or method techniques to produce them convincingly.

Why our brains notice the difference

Humans are remarkably good at detecting emotional authenticity. Studies show that even infants as young as ten months can distinguish between real and fake smiles.

Evolutionarily, this ability may have helped us assess trustworthiness, recognise true allies and avoid deception. The fusiform gyrus, a part of the

PHOTO BY EYE FOR EBONY



brain involved in facial recognition, works closely with the superior temporal sulcus to decode expressions, helping us gauge intention as much as emotion.

In modern life, our sensitivity to facial nuance continues to matter. Politicians, customer service workers and public figures frequently rely on the social smile to navigate complex interpersonal expectations. But observers, consciously or not, often pick up on these micro-discrepancies.

Fake smiles aren't necessarily malicious. In fact, they serve important social functions: smoothing awkward interactions, signalling politeness, defusing conflict and showing deference. They are a vital part of what sociologists call 'emotional labour', managing one's expressions to meet societal or professional expectations.

But this kind of smiling, when sustained for long periods, can be emotionally exhausting. Studies of emotional labour suggest that being required to smile without genuine feeling, especially in service roles, is associated with increased stress, burnout and even cardiovascular strain.

As we move further into the age of AI, synthetic faces, from chatbots to virtual assistants, are being programmed to replicate human expressions. Yet the challenge remains: how do you fake authenticity? Engineers can program a smile, but without the micro-contractions around the eyes, many of these expressions still seem disingenuous. Our own anatomy sets the gold standard.

So next time you're trying to decode someone's expression, don't just look at the mouth. Watch the eyes. The orbicularis oculi rarely lies.

This article was republished under a Creative Commons license from The Conversation.

Michelle Spear is Professor of Anatomy at the University of Bristol.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

The contents of this magazine are copyright © Kings Norton Parish 2025 and may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Editor. The views, opinions and comments expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the editorial team of the Kings Norton Parish Magazine, the Kings Norton Parish Ministry Team or its staff. Material submitted for publication must be accompanied by the name and contact details of the provider including an email address if available. When possible, submissions will be produced in full, but the Editor reserves the right to make changes. If content submitted for publication contains quotations from other sources, the written permission of the copyright holder to reprint it must be supplied.

Funerals May 2025

2 May	John Joseph Gerald	93	SN.Bu.KN
6 May	Marilyn Mansell	87	In.CY
12 May	James Robert Crook	73	Cr.LH
23 May	Sheila Bridgett Nevin	63	In.CY
29 May	David Bernard Nutt	80	SN.Bu.BE
30 May	Barbara Jean Manver	87	In.CY

SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church, Bu : Burial, In : Interment of Ashes
 KN : Kings Norton Cemetery, CY : St Nicolas' Churchyard, LH : Lodge Hill
 BE : Brandwood End

Celebrating Nine Years of Ministry Revd Larry Wright, Rector, 2016-2025



