

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

Summertime

Larry Wright considers how to use it well.

The Viscount Who Created Lifford

A historic Kings Norton building that few people know.

The Challenge of Retirement

Coping with retirement anxiety.



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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

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Welcome

EDITORIAL

“For everything there is a season,” wrote the author of Ecclesiastes. In this edition, we consider two seasons, the prospect of which fills some with delight and others with dread: summertime and retirement. If you are lucky enough to be able to relax into long stretches of time with relatively little to do, spare a thought for those who tremble at the idea of unfilled hours. And buy them a copy of this magazine, for it contains a wealth of good advice.

On p.28, Tania Wiseman reveals that retirement anxiety is a real issue for more than half of people over 40. Her article emphasises the importance of good relationships and interesting leisure pursuits as foundations for happiness in later life. Other contributors offer insights and opportunities which may help, not all of which have to be postponed until retirement! If the parish book group (p.14) or Birmingham’s art galleries (p.18) are not your cup of tea, had you considered exploring, or even volunteering at, our local nature reserve (p.32), a spot of bird watching (p.36), local history (p.7) or some gardening (p.16)?

While keeping busy may not be the secret of happiness for all of us, selfless generosity might be. Kathryn Buchanan’s article on the ability of kindness to neutralise some of the negative effects of living with a constant stream of bad news raises some interesting points. This is nothing new, of course. St Paul encourages us, in his Letter to the Ephesians, to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” A helpful reminder that our ability to love others is enhanced by the knowledge that we, ourselves, are loved unconditionally.



David Ash

Summertime

“Summertime and the livin’ is easy.” So begins Clara’s opening aria in George and Ira Gershwin’s opera “Porgy and Bess”. The song is one of the most performed of all times. A lullaby expressing a parent’s care of a new born set in the height of the summer months when nature is at its peak. The summer season is one which encourages us humans to sing its praises and enjoy its delights. The higher temperatures, long school holidays, the promise of travel, the lighter nights, nature abounding, all conspire to make us feel we are in a time of blessing and pleasure, of abundance and warmth.

Weather permitting, summertime runs from June to September, those pivotal months of the year when the harvest is plentiful and nature reaches the zenith of its productivity and richness. It’s not surprising that we invest so much energy in enjoying the summer season. Not everyone will enjoy its benefits, for the current cost of living crisis has

affected many. Holiday plans will be more modest than usual or non-existent.

Thank goodness we have an ample supply of green public spaces in our city region which families can access at no cost. For those in Kings Norton who will be around in July and August, there will be the Northfield and Kings Norton Beaches again this year (*photo right*).

For churches, the summer is usually a time of extra visitors and tourists, particularly to an ancient building such as St Nicolas’. Our church is open to visitors on Wednesday and Saturday mornings in addition to Sunday worship and weekday activities such as Tiny Tots, hand bell ringers, flower arranging, choir practice and our volunteer churchyard team.

Church tourism is becoming more popular, it seems. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that fewer people regularly attend churches and



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

are therefore curious as to what the inside looks like.

Curiosity about matters of religion and places of worship is a factor in most people's life at one time or another and people clearly value having a place they can visit or make use of at important times of their lives. St Nicolas' conducts many baptisms, weddings and funerals in a typical year and we are often welcoming back people whose family has been associated with St Nicolas' over two or three generations.

Because it is close to Cadbury College, St Nicolas' Church and churchyard regularly attract the 16-18 year-old students who

rarely see inside a church and who welcome the opportunity to do so.

Our six-acre churchyard looks its best in spring and summer with wild flowers, blossom and our tall trees all in their full glory. It's a place which many come to visit to sit, relax, have a picnic or visit a grave, the living and the dead mingling in the midst of abundant nature. It's a reminder of our mortality and of the cycle of life. We know the summer will end and we know our lives must end too. But the summer will return next year and, Christians believe, we will live on in eternity when we die.



PHOTO BY ETHAN ROBERTSON

Death and resurrection are at the heart of our faith.

In John Keats' poem "The Seasons of Man" the seasons become a metaphor for the stages of life. Birth and childhood are our spring, summer is our adolescence and adulthood, autumn the beginning of our decline into older age and winter is the approach of death.

Is summer a time of living more easily, as the Gershwin brothers suggested? Certainly, holidays away from our usual routines and responsibilities are opportunities to relax and to do other things. It's intriguing to note that the language used to market holidays these days often evokes a sense of escape.

Escape from what? For some, it will be the drudgery of their daily lives; for others, their

usual surroundings or the guarantee of sun and fun elsewhere than in the unreliable British weather. Some may even wish to escape from their current lifestyle and live differently for a few weeks. It is worth asking whether our current lives feel, at times, like a prison without a way out or like a sentence without end.

For most people, the summer is a time of enjoyment and pleasure. It reminds us that we are people created to live alongside nature and its changing seasons. Our human spirit responds well to sunshine and good weather and we wish to make the most of its opportunities. Whatever your plans for the next few months, may you find time to be in nature, time to be with others and time to be with yourself.

The Viscount Who Created Lifford

I suspect it's true to say that one of Kings Norton's most significant historic buildings, even though it survives and is in continuous use after more than 400 years, is unknown to most local people. The reason? Because it's become the unfortunate victim of industrial development, which hides it and hems it in from most angles. It's called Lifford Hall.

You'll almost certainly know the name Lifford. The road that carries its name is a location many of us have visited, because it includes our local household recycling centre. The same road also includes the substantial industrial site that was once Sturge Chemicals, and is now Speciality Minerals.

Those are two of the most unlovely sites of the parish, somewhere nobody really visits unless it's essential. It's not the fault of those who created them but, unfortunately, they lie either side of Lifford Hall, dwarfing it and making access to it, particularly on foot, a slightly daunting experience.

Yet, if you do turn into the rather unprepossessing Tunnel Lane immediately on the left after the main entrance to the tip, and try to disregard the thunderous roar of refuse vehicles which use the same road, you will very soon come across this oasis of calm and a



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY



PHOTO BY MICHAEL KENNEDY

▲LIFFORD HALL

warm, historic atmosphere. It's certainly worth a look, though, be warned, the latest evolution of the Hall is privately owned, with plenty of warnings about trespassing! Though it is a Grade 2 listed building, visiting is not possible. Its owners, accountants and auditors Langard, respect its heritage, however, and have even made it part of their official name, Langard Lifford Hall.

When the Hall was first built in 1604, in the time of King James I, it would have had much more appealing surroundings, with fields in every direction. Kings Norton was then a rural retreat. The only industry was a nearby watermill. The site of the new building was probably chosen because it was close the long-established ford over the river, dating back to Roman times. There had almost certainly

been settlements in and around the same area, including a religious building, possibly going as far back as the Saxon era.

The hall was originally built of red brick, with two striking and still extant mullioned windows, one of which can be seen from the front. It has been changed and enhanced many times during its life, including the addition of "embattled" gothic walls in the 18th century and an octagonal watchtower folly at the back. The latter cannot now be seen from the roadside, because the only door through to the rear garden allows no access to the public.

Nevertheless, studying the front aspect of the building does help one to follow its development from a prestigious rural residence

into a modern office facility. Extensive renovation and internal refitting was carried out in the 1950s with further office-related development much more recently, all with due regard to sustaining the heritage and external appearance of the Hall.

As readers will know, Kings Norton has been home over the centuries to a truly remarkable spectrum of significant characters, many of whom have been important not just locally but nationally and indeed internationally. Lifford Hall was the home of yet another of these major achievers, the man who in fact brought the Lifford name to the parish.



He began life in Coventry as James Hewitt, but by the time he bought the Hall in 1781 he was known and respected throughout the country as the first Viscount Lifford. He had become so successful as a diligent and ambitious lawyer that, by 1768, he had been made Lord Chancellor of Ireland, the pre-eminent legal position in Northern Ireland.

His title was actually associated with Lifford near

Londonderry, the peerage having been created for him in 1781. The title has lasted through as far as the ninth Viscount, who succeeded in 1987. The family home is now in Hampshire.

Apart from his notable achievements, and perhaps in the light of them, James Hewitt was an unusual character.

Born in 1712, for a nationally successful lawyer he had humble beginnings. His father

William was a Coventry draper without any

great social standing. In an age where the great majority of successful professional people had a classical education and had been to either Oxford or Cambridge, young

James found it a constant setback to

have such a mediocre background, and was accused of "small-town" manners throughout the whole of his life and career.

He first worked as an attorney's clerk and, by 1742, he had become a barrister. Rising quickly through the legal profession, he was elected MP for Coventry from 1761 to 1766 before becoming Lord

Chancellor of Ireland in 1767 until he died in 1789.

His background continued to bedevil him, both as an MP, where fellow MPs liked to bemoan that his speeches were sometimes impossible to hear, and throughout his early legal career, when he had a reputation as a "dull and heavy" lawyer and a man of moderate intelligence who, involuntarily no doubt, always tended to betray his mediocre origins. Even when the Government appointed him, there was lingering doubt that he had the necessary strength of character to be an effective Lord Chancellor, while the English legal Bench mocked the decision.

But, to James's enormous credit, the critics were quickly proved wrong. Within two years of his arrival in Ireland, Lord Lifford was earning high praise. One colleague said, "He does his business very ably and expeditiously in this country, where he is much respected and a very popular character."

The Viscount had a successful family life. His first wife, Mary, gave him four sons, after which his second wife, a much-admired Irish beauty called Ambrosia, gave him

one more son and two daughters.

There's no firm evidence for why the Viscount should have needed a place to live near Birmingham when he remained Lord Chancellor of Ireland for the rest of his life. Birmingham was becoming increasingly significant as the industrial revolution gathered pace, and perhaps he perceived it was a useful base (dare we call it a rural pied-à-terre?), near the city on his journeys back to England, but it is questionable whether it worked for him and his family. His heirs sold the Hall as soon as they could.

Lifford Hall did acquire another celebrated owner soon afterwards: Thomas Dobbs, the principal engineer in the construction of the Birmingham-Worcester and Birmingham-Stratford canals. And in the early 1880, Mr Dobbs' successor as owner created one of the country's' first rubber mills in the Lifford Hall grounds, the ruins of which might still be remembered by readers who do recall this fine-looking building when nobody had ever heard of recycling centres or speciality minerals. By that time, the estate had also acquired its own reservoir. But those stories will have to come later.

KINDNESS

"If it bleeds, it leads" has long been a saying used in the media to describe how news stories featuring violence, death and destruction grab readers' attention and so dominate the news agenda. And, while many of us are aware of the negative effect that these kinds of story can have on us, it can still be hard to look away. We're hardwired to sit up and take notice of them.

This "surveillance mode" is thought to be an evolutionary hangover from a time where survival odds were increased when we attended to the threats in our environment.

Research consistently shows bad news can have a negative effect on us. During the pandemic, multiple studies linked news consumption to poorer mental health, documenting symptoms of depression, anxiety, hopelessness and worry. In our research, we found that spending as little as 2-4 minutes on Twitter or YouTube reading about the pandemic affected people's moods adversely.

However, our latest study has found that looking at positive news stories, specifically videos and articles featuring acts of kindness, can actually counteract the ill-effects of seeing negative news stories.

To conduct our study, we showed 1,800 participants news stories. Some only saw negative news stories, including footage of the Manchester bombing, animal cruelty, or brutal acts of violence.

Others were shown a negative news story, followed immediately by a positive news story. The positive story featured kind acts such as acts of heroism, people providing free veterinary care for stray animals, or philanthropy towards unemployed and homeless people.

We then asked participants to report how they felt before and after viewing the news content. We also asked them how inclined they were to believe in the goodness of others.

The group that was shown negative news stories followed by positive ones fared far better than people who were only shown a negative news story. They reported less decline in mood instead feeling uplifted. They also held more positive views of humanity generally.

Curious to know whether there was something special about kindness specifically, we also tested how people exposed to a negative news story followed by an amusing one (such as swearing parrots, award-winning jokes or hapless American tourists) fared.

Amusing news stories certainly helped buffer the effects of bad news and reduce the mood disturbances they caused. But in comparison, participants who'd been shown acts of kindness reported a more positive mood on average, and a greater belief in the goodness of humanity.

This shows us there's something unique about kindness which may buffer the effects of negative news on our mental health. However, further research is needed to establish whether these are long-term benefits, as we only measured how people felt immediately afterwards.

There are many reasons why kindness may have this protective effect on our mood.

First off, it is valued universally. Seeing acts of kindness may remind us of our connection with others through shared values. It may also help us maintain the belief that the world and people in it are good, which is important for our wellbeing.

Third, seeing others being helped is the resolution to seeing them hurt. So-called "catastrophe compassion", whereby positive behaviour prevails despite negative circumstances, provides relief to the pain we experience when we see others suffering. Or, as one of our participants explained, "Knowing that there are a lot of people that are genuinely willing to help those affected by this attack somehow gives me a relief."

Similarly, other research has found that even when children had not caused or were not connected to the suffering of another person, they experienced a reduction in physiological stress simply by seeing the hurt person being helped.

Fourth, countless research has shown that witnessing others' acts of moral beauty, such as kindness or heroism, triggers "elevation", a positive and uplifting feeling which experts theorise acts as an emotional reset button, replacing feelings of cynicism with hope, love and optimism.



KATHRYN
BUCHANAN IS A
LECTURER IN
PSYCHOLOGY AT
THE UNIVERSITY
OF ESSEX



It will be important for future research to investigate which specific reasons explain why kindness has the protective effect that our research has demonstrated.

It's clear that kindness is a powerful tool for boosting wellbeing. In my research, I found that doing an act of kindness a day can increase life satisfaction. And more recently, researchers found that selflessness trumps selfishness when it comes to improving your happiness.

Less is known about whether making a conscious effort to notice kindness has the same wellbeing benefits, although one study found that observing others' kindness is as effective in boosting happiness as performing an act of kindness.

Our latest study shows that kindness-focused news stories can take the sting out of difficult, depressing coverage by replacing feelings of despair with hope. As another participant put it, "I still feel that we're fundamentally decent ... And that's worth clinging to."

Perhaps including more kindness-based content in news coverage could prevent "mean world syndrome", where people believe the world is more dangerous than it actually is, leading to heightened fear, anxiety and pessimism.

Other research has also found that positive news, such as bumble bees making a comeback or peace talks going well, make people feel better and want to do good things, such as voting or donating. This suggests there may be both personal and social benefits to showing positive news.

While it will be up to the media to make the change, our research makes the case for adding more balance to news coverage. Including more stories of kindness may help people feel better able to engage with these stories without perpetuating feelings of doom and hopelessness.

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Parish Book Group

We have had an interesting start to this year. First of all, we read "Giving Up The Ghost" by Hilary Mantel, which I included because I had never read any of her weighty tomes like "Wolf Hall". There is no doubt that she is an excellent writer, but this was a "warts and all" account of her life: her school days at a strict Catholic school, her father's mysterious disappearance and an adulthood blighted by incredible health problems were included in a relatively short book. She has come a long way along a very bumpy road to reach the dizzy heights of being a very accomplished and well-respected author and I have a copy if anyone would like to borrow it.

We followed this with a very popular book, "Lessons in Chemistry" by Bonnie Garmus. We are promised a dramatisation of the book on Netflix. I would encourage you to read the book before you watch it, as it is funny, challenges the concepts of working women in the 1960's and I loved hearing the dog's thoughts! Again, one or two people in the group

found it was not to their liking, but I loved it. I also have a copy if anyone would like to give it a go.

Our April-May book was not a favourite but has led to some interesting discussions, and after all isn't that what book groups are about? It was "The New Wilderness" by Diane Cook, reputed to be the environmental novel of our times. A group of people leave the smog and pollution of the overpopulated metropolis they called home and move out into the wilderness. It was fascinating to learn how young and old survived daily but there were a lot of questions left unanswered at the end. The group were moved around by Rangers and were told to "leave no trace". I think that sounds familiar to most. As in most novels, there are relationships at the centre of the story, but also details of how to survive, rules in the camp, and how to hunt animals for food.

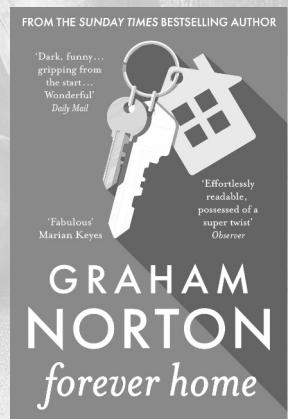
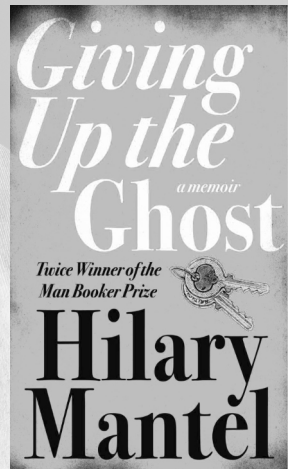
We are now reading "The Shadow of the Wind" by Carlos Ruiz Zafón. The

story is set in Barcelona and is the first of four books of a series entitled "The Cemetery of Forgotten Books". Ten-year-old Daniel is taken to the "cemetery" by his father in 1945 and asked to choose a book. It is said to be gripping and irresistibly readable. I am loving it so far!

I am sure you are wondering how these books are chosen? This year, I have tried to include modern best sellers, "interesting books", some lighthearted novels and a classic. At the end of the year, I will be asking for suggestions from members for 2024.

I do try to read some books in between and have just finished "Forever Home" by Graham Norton. I know he is a bit of a "marmite" person, but please believe me when I say that he is a superb author. His books are set in Ireland and, having been there, I am entirely immersed in the settings and I love the characters in the books.

We have two more on the list before the end of the year: "The Midnight Library" by Matt Haig and "Desperate Remedies" by Thomas Hardy. If you would like to find out more about the parish book group or make a suggestion, I am usually around at the end of the 10.30 a.m. service on a Sunday, or you can leave me a note in the Used Stamps box.



Adam the Gardener Ponders The Future

On a recent trip to a National Trust property I browsed amongst the plants on a stand outside the shop. Amongst the quality perennials I spotted a semi-double Dahlia looking slightly bedraggled in quite a nice pot. I think the plant had been brought into flower by being kept at high temperatures under glass. I was startled by the price tag of £8 for one small dahlia!

I have had a good year with dwarf Dahlias with good germination followed by pricking out into trays of 24 cells. The variety is Coltness



Hybrid, a single with large flowers in bright colours. I did so well that I ended up with four trays of sturdy plants ready for planting out now that there are no night frosts.

A swift calculation revealed that that my 96 plants might retail at £768! I suppose that may be a little optimistic, but you get my drift. Ready-to-plant specimens from the garden centre will continue to be of good quality but will be very expensive. All the more reason to become a propagator!

I will tell you how to go about achieving this goal next month but, in the meantime, let me tell you that you will be in for an interesting time. This year has as always been a year of surprises:

Lavender – Germination nil

Coleus for the conservatory – Good germination but they are all the same colour combination. You should see the variations portrayed on the seed packet!

Cobaea scandens – a vigorous climber with bell-shaped flowers in purple or white. Nil germination until, that is, the seedlings suddenly

sprang up after two months.

Biennials for next year's flowering – **Bellis** and **Love in a Mist** came up in five days but some nice pansies took three weeks to perform the same trick. Watch this space.

Mesembryanthemum – (photo left) starry multicoloured flowers with succulent leaves alleged to be drought resistant. Germination was prompt and profuse and I have just planted them out. I must remember to dead-head them for continued flushes of flowers.

And, talking about dead-heading, this time of year is the time to get out into your garden and to snip off any flower heads going to seed. Your plants, relieved of the task of seed production, will concentrate on producing more blooms and, in the case of roses, can still be in flower at the end of November.

A good present for your gardening friends is "The Gardener's Companion" published by Think Publishing, a fascinating read with a sprinkling of humour.

There are times when weedkiller is very useful and I have come across one with much better eco-credentials than glyphosate. It's recommended

for those difficult places like cracks in pavements and gravel paths because it will kill anything green. The results will begin to be evident in just one hour! Manufactured by Doff and sold in a ready-to-use spray bottle, the active ingredient is Pelargonic acid 3% and this naturally occurs in Geranium leaves.

Doff also manufacture a pesticide for amateur use and, though it is eco-friendly, my aphids seem to laugh in its face. A tip given to me some time ago was to use ordinary household fly spray at about 40 cm from the infestation in short bursts and to use the minimum. Usually containing permethrins, these sprays become inactive when exposed to the elements in quite a short time.

And now a little quotation:

"We sow with all the art we know and not a plant appears / A single seed from any weed a thousand children rears".

Happy gardening!



A Trip To The Barber

This article has nothing to do with haircuts but has a lot to do with style. We're off to The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Located in the University of Birmingham on Edgbaston Park Road, just off the Bristol Road, this is truly a South Birmingham gem. An art deco gallery and performance space in the midst of the bustling university campus providing a haven of calm and contemplation. It's open from Tuesday to Sunday between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. With free admission and no booking required, it offers so much for the whole family.

"The Barber" is named after its founder Lady Martha Barber (1869–1933) who married Birmingham solicitor and property developer, (William) Henry Barber. Henry died in 1924 but, by then, the couple had already drawn up plans for a permanent art collection in Henry's home city of Birmingham. Lady Barber brought these plans to fruition in 1932, then sadly died four months after the opening. It is their generous legacy which had enabled the Barber to offer high-quality art exhibitions since then.

However, it is not only an art gallery. It hosts live music concerts, Friday recitals, art workshops, family workshops, therapeutic programmes and special talks and events centred upon their most popular exhibits. They also work with the



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

university students and academics to provide art and curating courses for those seeking a career in galleries and exhibitions.

One of the advantages of the Barber is its modest size. I frequently feel overwhelmed in larger art galleries because I wish to see everything, but can only take so much in before my brain and body tire and my appreciation falters. It's been estimated that, to fully appreciate a work of art, one needs to spend at least 5 minutes with it. In galleries with hundreds of exhibits that could take days! Though the Barber possesses a good number of exhibits, they can easily be viewed within a slow hour; and it never seems busy or rushed. In fact, there is an atmosphere of hushed calm similar to that you might experience when visiting our larger church buildings or cathedrals as a tourist or pilgrim. Could this have something to do with the number of paintings which have Christian religious themes?

The paintings on show cover the 14th-20th century, all well displayed in the three main galleries which lead into each other as one circulates. There are smaller side galleries, each of which has its own distinctive display. These change, but there is normally a coin and medals display in one and a drawings theme in another. The current drawing theme is a set of 15th century drawings of Christ from the Italian school. The latest

▼THE BARBER
INSTITUTE OF FINE
ARTS, EDGBASTON





coin exhibition celebrates how history memorialises prominent leaders in coins.

They also have a small collection of sculptures, busts and artefacts dotted around the galleries and (most importantly) centrally positioned seating for the visitor who wishes to sit and contemplate an art work for longer or simply rest between viewings. There is a small gift shop, too, and a modest self-service refreshment area. If you need to visit the toilets you will be surprised (maybe even impressed) to see that they have kept their original 1930s art deco features. They don't make them like that anymore.

For families, there are regular school holiday programmes and art classes. The Barber also provides child-friendly tours of the gallery. From 17th June until late September, the gallery has partnered with Woburn Abbey for an exhibition of the Abbey's Dutch and Flemish paintings: one to appreciate this summer.

The Barber Institute is easy to reach by public transport as it is part of the University of Birmingham's campus. If you prefer to use a car, it might be best to go at weekends as there is a small car park next to the building which usually has plenty of spaces.

▲ THE INTERIOR OF THE BARBER INSTITUTE



Eliakim Ikechukwu



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Bishop Anne, as Acting Bishop of Birmingham, is delighted to announce the appointment of the Revd Eliakim Ikechukwu as Vicar of the United Benefice of St Paul & St Silas, Lozells, and St George's, Newtown following a process of discernment led by the St Martin's Trustees, as Patron. Eliakim is currently the Assistant Rector in the parish of Kings Norton. Arrangements for Eliakim's institution will be shared as soon as possible.

Funerals May 2023

4th May	Janet Elenor Green	75	SN.Cr.RD
19th May	Carl Hamilton	50	SN.Bu.KN
19th May	James Edgar Lavercombe	89	In.CY
22nd May	Betty Doreen Ludlow	92	Cr.LH
23rd May	Margaret Veronica Callaghan	70	In.CY
23rd May	Richard Ian Henbury	67	In.CY
25th May	Luke Andrew Rose	35	SN.Bu.KN

Bu : Burial, Cr : Cremation, CY : Churchyard, In : Interment of Ashes,
 SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church

Cemeteries & Crematoria

KN : Kings Norton, LH : Lodge Hill, RD : Redditch

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
Assistant Rector	The Revd Eliakim Ikechukwu
Parish Lay Minister	Pauline Weaver
Curate	The Revd David Booker
Honorary Assistant Priest	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Lay Readers	David Ash, Fay Fearon, Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki Cate Bennett, Chisom Ikechukwu
Lay Preacher	Steve Wright
Music Minister.....	Sylvia Fox
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Pastoral Care Advisor	Susan Farrell
Learning & Discipleship Coordinator	The Revd Mark Bennett

THE CHURCH WARDENS

St. Nicolas' Church.....	Peter Hay & Julie Hill, Mark Sandilands
Hawkesley Church	Jim Clarke

OTHER CONTACTS

Parish Administrator.....	Susan Farrell
Acting Finance Officer	Simon Hill
Verger and Groundskeeper	Shane Williams
Safeguarding Coordinator	Annette Dickers
Regular Giving	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Flower Arranging (0121 486 2837).....	Alison Blumer

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)
10.30 am	Holy Communion (Children's activity : Muddy Church)
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 for All Ages (Child-friendly)
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)
10.30 am	Holy Communion (Children's activity : Godly Play)
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	Outdoor Service in St Nicolas' Churchyard (Child-friendly)
6.00 pm	Compline (Night Prayer)

5 th Sunday of the Month	
9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	United Service

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

A Fond Farewell To Bournville College



"Who's your favourite Beatle?" This was the very first thing I was asked on my first morning as lead lay chaplain at the new Bournville College of Further Education. Bournville College had risen like a phoenix from the flames of the old Austin car works site at Longbridge in 2011, a brand new, wonderfully conceived building and an exciting new opportunity in the middle of a building site which is now Longbridge shopping centre and residential area. Its long, sweeping, soaring shape reflects the former bridge which took materials used in car production across the vast area which was once British Leyland. The last car was assembled there in 2016, in a remnant of the former site.

The euphoria was not to last long. Within a few years, government funding was cut, resulting in massive redundancies of 60% and low morale amongst the remaining staff. Bournville College was subsumed subsequently into Birmingham South and City College and became the Longbridge campus.

The Principal of Bournville College was encouraging when he realised that we were not proselytising and were chaplains for everyone, of any faith and no faith. He made a point of being there when we marked Holocaust Memorial Day in January and Remembrance Day in November. We even had an honourable mention in dispatches from Ofsted for our role at the college. However, the new management had no

experience of chaplaincy, very little interest in it and at times were openly hostile about what they perceived it to be.

We continued to minister faithfully, despite the knock-backs, until we met, like so many others, our nemesis: Covid 19 and lockdown. During this time, all the staff we had contact with moved on. We had also lost our immunity, built up over the years, to the various viruses which float around those incubators which are schools, making us vulnerable to new developing infections. I had moved to live further away as well, adding to the difficulties. The time had come to hang up my chaplain's lanyard.

Bournville College will always be in my heart and prayers, and I have so many fond, positive memories. I am going to share some of them with you.

One of my colleagues, from the beginning, liked walking the entire college, from the information hub (aka the library) to the building skills and car mechanics' training department. Another enjoyed the art department and hair and beauty, as well as catering. The college then offered cut price hair and beauty treatments, MOT's and other repairs, as well as various catering opportunities, all offered by the

students under the supervision of staff.

I always enjoyed being in the social area, known as The Street, a long, long, narrow space which climbs to the top of the sweeping bridge-like structure, then flanked by food outlets and offices, and entered from reception. Over the years, I got to know catering staff, cleaners, security, reception and other office staff on a deeper level, as well as students. It was such a joy when any of them asked for prayer.

Gradually, most of the staff were persuaded that we were not there to convert them but to support them.



Some would bring classes down to join us on Holocaust Memorial or Remembrance Day.

Back to that first day. I arrived in The Street as the early lunch queue had just started. I spotted a solitary young

man with a plate of chips and some learning and social difficulties. That's when he opened with "So, who's your favourite Beatle?" then launched into an infinitely detailed account of the Beatles' films and music! His life consisted of college, where he studied life skills, and home, where he lived with his mum and spent his time in his room with his cat and his computer, watching films and listening to music. As he rose to go to his class, his parting question to me was "So, who's your favourite Womble?".

I saw this young man from time to time, always on his own, and encouraged him to tell me about his favourite films. There was a significant cohort of students with degrees of physical and learning disability. Being at college was the best part of their lives for some of them, and they often dreaded the holidays. Some came back year after year. A large number lived in sheltered accommodation and the days there could be very long. Because we chaplains were a constant presence, many got to know us and welcomed chatting to us. Some made considerable progress. K attended with her mother, J, both of whom were learning life skills. K did a work placement at the only charity shop permitted to open on the Longbridge site. She was offered voluntary work two days a week on a regular basis and was trained and allowed to work the till, a huge boost to her confidence and skill levels. A, who had been at the college for 5 years, did a work placement in a primary school, really as a gofer, an assistant whose job was to

photocopy, run and fetch, take children to the toilet and play with them in the playground. She was offered a paid, part-time job there, which we were all thrilled about. She would come back into the college to tell other students not to give up hope. These particular students were very aware of their limitations and often felt hopeless and outcast.

There was the young Afghani, H. He was studying to be a mechanic. His background had been one of helping on the family smallholding, then walking two hours to school, where the teacher may or may not have been able to be there, perhaps because of roadblocks or being arrested or simply turned back. If schooling was available that day, he had a two hour walk home in the afternoon, then back to work on the land. On his journey, H saw countless broken, rusting Russian planes everywhere. His ambition was to return and, using his newfound skills, to mend and sell them. I wonder where he is now and what has happened to this family, especially since the Taliban retook control of the country.

Then there was an Iranian girl of 15 who, with her mother and two sisters, had just been reunited with her father in Birmingham after 9 years. It was very tough for her and her family, beginning life again with a man she could hardly remember. Yet she derived joy from the college where she was studying to improve her English, and to negotiate and

prepare for the UK examination system.

One Christmas, we had a favourite Christmas song and Christmas Carol competition. Many of the Muslim students attended local schools, some of them church schools, where they enjoyed singing hymns, especially carols. In fact, the ones I spoke to shared that they had loved the schools they attended in inner-city Birmingham, where they were treated with respect and dignity. And they always celebrated Christmas at home, with turkey, often carried to bring their own cultural twist to it! I approached a group of four Muslim lads in The Street and asked if they liked Christmas songs. One replied, while the others giggled, "I don't do this ****! Mind, that Maria Carey is well fit! Yeah, put me down for 'All I want for Christmas'!"

Then there was J, who had considerable disabilities, including profound hearing loss. At the Christmas concert, which we could fill with as much Christian content as we wanted, we gave out Christmas cards. I bought an ink stamp online with "Christmas blessings from the Bournville College chaplains". We stamped the message on the cards supplied by the CIGB (Churches and Industry Group Birmingham), who had supported us and many other chaplains in the workplace throughout. Three times, J found me to thank me, finally telling me, "I've never had a Christmas card before."

We developed our range of engagement and encounter activities over the years, to include Holocaust

Memorial, Remembrance, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day, Pancake Tuesday, Mothering Sunday and Easter. In June, we had a Thanksgiving for the year and supported a Muslim member of staff celebrating the Prophet's birthday, always with engagement and encounter activities, something to hand round like bookmarks and always chocolate! (Did you know that Cadbury's chocolate and Haribo's Starburst are halal, as they do not use pig gelatine?)

The grandmother of Charles and John Wesley, the founders of Methodism, was baptised in the South Warwickshire village of Haseley early in the 17th century. She probably never knew what would become of her grandchildren, but she maintained that "We don't know what God will do with what we pray for." My colleagues and I commit our prayers into God's hand for Bournville College, and for all we have had the privilege to meet, all who have shared with us their lives, their hopes and their fears. We pray, too, that a Chaplaincy presence might be restored there in the near future.

And my favourite Beatle? Not being a huge fan of the Beatles individually, I chose John Lennon! The Wombles question was much easier: Madame Cholet, of course!

The Challenge of Retirement

Retirement can feel like a strange time for many people. Gone is the routine of work, your time is your own, in theory. How to stop chores from taking over can become a tricky balance. Some people retreat and return to work. Often, those that persevere find they are as busy as ever, but not always with the fun leisurely activities they were looking forward to.

It's strange that this is so often the case because retirement is something many of us look forward to for most of our working lives. Indeed, it's the one time in life when you can really devote yourself to hobbies and interests, leisure and pleasure. This uncertain picture means that approaching retirement can be a time of fear. Retirement anxiety is a real thing. So too are the retirement blues.

When you add in potential health concerns and financial worries, it's maybe not surprising that a recent survey found that more than half of over-40s feel anxious about retiring.

One retirement challenge is how to replace the friendships you make through work. Indeed, it seems the people who fare best in retirement find ways to cultivate connections.

The longest-running study on human happiness found the thing that makes us most happy in life is our relationships and positive social connections. They also help us to live longer too. Indeed, an 85-year-old Harvard study shows that



DR TANIA
WISEMAN IS
ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR OF
OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY AT
SWANSEA
UNIVERSITY



PHOTO BY KINDEL MEDIA

maintaining quality relationships has a huge benefit for our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Similarly, the charity The Centre for Better Ageing has found that social connections are just as important as money and health to a good later life.

When it comes to retirement anxiety, my research with retirees shows that most people who have been retired for several years learn to manage their concerns and develop satisfying and interesting lives. As with a lot of us, most of their time was taken up with home-based chores, self-care, looking after friends and relatives and serving the community, along with working really hard to keep fit, so as to "age well".

But my research also found that negative notions of ageing can become internalised and prevent people from having fun and making new connections. In my study, people said they were conscious that others might judge the suitability of their leisure choices. While some rebels could only really



PHOTO BY ANNA SHVETS

enjoy a pastime if they knew their children would disapprove (think daytime drinking, gambling, watching TV, cycling on busy roads in a rainstorm and flirting with strangers), most were limited in their leisure choices by this concern.

Several did not have any pastimes they enjoyed. Those who found a balance had rich and varied leisure lives, but they preferred people from their own age group and a similar background, where they were less likely to be told how amazing they are for their age.

While mixing with people from similar backgrounds and age groups can feel safe and comfortable. It can also mean you miss out on new and interesting experiences or having your worldviews challenged or expanded by spending time with different people. Retirement is the ideal opportunity to mix things up and gently expand your leisure repertoire. It's a time to embrace the convivial in the presence of others, not just the usual people you see.

If you are happy with your leisure life, great. But if there is a little something missing, a little fun that could enhance it, consider adding in something new. Think outside the box of what's "suitable for your age group", (what does that even mean?). Indeed, age should not be a barrier to anything. Age

discrimination is illegal. So if you're interested, then it's suitable.

If you have limited resources, learn a language with Duolingo in five minutes a day. Then, when you're ready, find a language conversation group and join them for a social event. Learn a song. You can do it yourself using YouTube tutorials. If you enjoy that, you could join a community choir, or drag your friends and family to a karaoke night. You could even pick up an instrument and see how it feels to add percussion. Alternatively, perfect a dance at home and if you like it try a dance class. Pole dancing has become very popular!

If you have a bit more time to spare, explore taking an interest to the next level. There are local groups for many activities, including rowing, climbing, circus skills, martial arts and horse riding. What takes your fancy?

Not an "organised group" person? Try Frisbee, a boomerang, kite flying, bike rides, skateboarding or roller skating. You don't have to be with people, just being around them is interesting.

For more sedate options consider a cinema club, jazz club, poetry group, or start a quiz team. If you like the TV show "The Great Pottery Throw Down" join a ceramic studio and unlock your inner creativity. If you have a free afternoon or evening, look at Eventbright and try something random, because we don't really know what we love until we find it.

Nothing has to be a lifelong commitment. If you like it, carry on; if not, then move on to something else. Anything you try will make a good story to tell the younger people in your life. They need to know that later life is an adventure worth working towards.

So defy expectations, knock down those mental barriers and try something different. Start today and see where it takes you.

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THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Kings Norton Nature Reserve

I'm rather fond of our local nature reserve. Parts of it are right at the bottom of my road. Yes, we are lucky. This seemingly wild space of land gives me much through the year. In spring, when I am cooking in the kitchen and realise I need something oniony, I nip down to the woods for a handful of wild garlic. I've made elderflower cordial from the beautiful blossoms of the elder to help us through the cold season later in the year. Those are just two examples of the ways in which the reserve feeds my family! When working from home, if work gets stressful or I need a screen break, I take a walk in the reserve. It clears my head and is a wonderful diversion to freshen my point of view.

I have just had a period of time where I was not working. I was deciding upon my next employment step. This gave me the wonderful opportunity to join the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve and to contribute to their Tuesday workouts. They are a lovely bunch of people and have been so welcoming. I've made some fantastic friends.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve have answered my curiosity when I stop by a plant I don't recognise and I've discovered parts of the nature reserve I didn't know existed.

I've had some lovely jobs to do protecting our local environment. I've planted primroses on the bank next to Wychall Reservoir, cleared a lot of brambles, learnt to make brush pile hedges and had a go at helping make a woven willow fence behind the benches by the reservoir. My son Charles accompanied me for the litter pick in March armed with his very professional-looking litter picking stick. He is so



Claire is a keen kitchen gardener, ably assisted by her 7-year-old son Charles.



passionate about the environment and finding litter upsets him.

It has been a lovely experience and, now that I am starting my new job, I thought I would only be able to join during the odd half term. However, I was really pleased to learn that the Friends are trialling Saturday sessions on the first Saturday of the month, which means that I am still able to join in as a volunteer. We had the first such gathering at the beginning of June and it would be lovely to welcome more volunteers.

Why don't you come along to the next volunteer session? You will have a warm welcome, you can choose which jobs you would like to do and which tools you would like to use. If you can't spare the time, but would like to give back to this wonderful group which keeps the nature reserve paths clear amongst many

other things, the memberships are only £7.

We are so lucky to have a nature reserve on our doorstep to discover through the seasons.



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH



REFUGEE CAMPS

When someone says "refugee camps" what do you picture in your mind's eye? Until recently, I imagined something rather like a giant campsite, with lots of tents and some facilities blocks dotted about the field with a headquarters somewhere on the site. I never really gave it much further thought.

More recently, I have become involved with the work of Shelter Box, having used them initially as a platform for a donation to support Bangladeshis displaced by flooding. Receiving the regular newsletter from Shelter Box called "Beyond the Box", I rapidly realised that my mental picture of a refugee camp was seriously limited.

A recent edition of "Beyond the Box" explained much about one particular project, a camp in northern Cameroon. The camp is the size of a small town with a population of around 75,000 people. That is nearly three times the size of our large parish, which includes, Druid's Heath, Walker's Heath, Pool Farm, Primrose/Woodbury Hill, Hawkesley, Fairway, Chaddesley and Longfellow, as well as the central area around The Green and the farms beyond Kings Norton Cemetery.

The "camp" includes 6 nursery schools, 6 primary schools, 2 football

stadiums, a secondary school, many mosques and churches, 2 health centres, several green spaces, some ad hoc sports facilities, a whole network of roads and a busy weekly market. It is a thriving community, where people are supported to rebuild their lives, including setting up small businesses and accessing health care, education and support systems. The homes they are given may, initially, be tents, but much more robust ones than my very naive idea of a campsite or music festival field. For those who have been displaced for longer periods, donations of construction materials and support are given, to help provide a more robust home. The homes provide basic shelter from the elements, but are also a place of privacy and, equally, a place into which you can, once more, invite a visitor.

My view of a refugee camp is now very different, thanks to Shelter Box. There are many other charities which also work internationally, either within camps or in the creation of new ones. There are millions of displaced people, seeking refuge within their own countries or in neighbouring countries. If you are able to do a bit of reading, I recommend learning more about what life is like in such places.



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Bird Identification

One of the very few benefits of living with insomnia, and believe me there aren't many, is being awake early enough at this time of year to hear the dawn chorus in full swing. It is a wonderful sound, often begun by a solitary bird then increasing as other birds wake and join in. But can you tell what species they are just by listening?

Most of us know a few common bird songs: crow, seagull, pigeon, duck and owl perhaps. But do you know your mistle thrush from your blackbird? I'm working on learning them and, of course, today there are numerable apps to help identify them for you. I'm not sure how accurate they are as mine has just picked up a duck and I'm pretty sure there are none nearby.

If you are of a certain age, you might have had a copy of the Observer's Book of Birds or remember Percy Edwards on the telly (I still get him muddled up with Percy Thrower but that's another story) or might even have had a record of bird sounds. If you are of a slightly different age then it might be the I-Spy books (nothing to do with iPhones, iPads and the like).

Identifying birds by appearance is one thing, but by sound is far harder. I'm trying with the aid of a book and an app to work on my skills. Currently I'm sitting in a camping meadow trying to do just that. The dog, of course, is trying to help but her barking isn't really conducive to hearing birds. I think I've worked out the blackbirds' chatter and the robins' melodic "tic" but that's as far as it goes.

Hopefully, as our parish plans for "growing greener" progress, we will be able to use your observation skills to learn more about the churchyard and its surrounds. So get



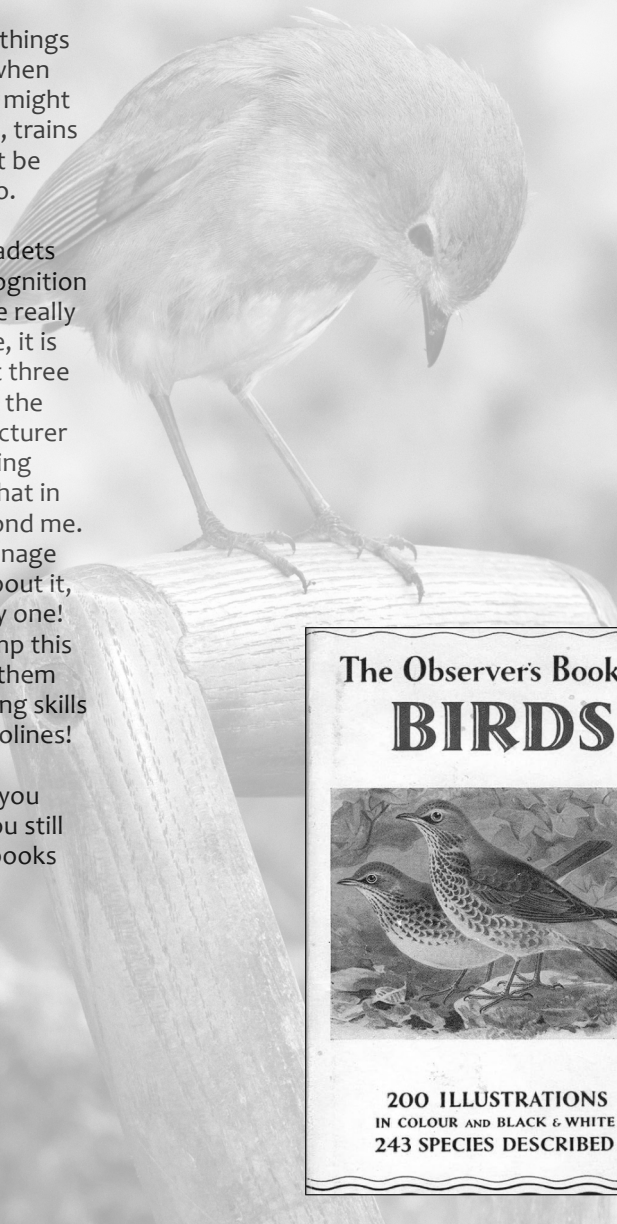
PAULINE IS THE
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practising in identifying bees, butterflies and bats and don't forget to get your children and grandchildren involved.

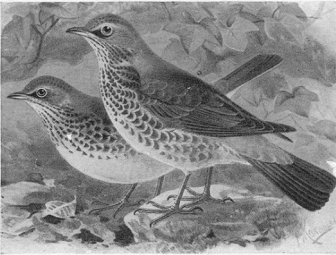
I wonder what other things you learned to spot when you were younger? It might have been butterflies, trains or planes and it might be something you still do.

Funnily enough, air cadets still learn aircraft recognition and some of them are really good at it. Believe me, it is tough. They have just three seconds to recognise the aircraft type, manufacturer and the NATO reporting name. How they do that in three seconds is beyond me. I might just about manage the type but that's about it, and only if it's an easy one! Perhaps, at cadet camp this year, I'll try teaching them some different spotting skills while avoiding trampolines!

Do let us know what you used to spot and if you still have your Observer books too.



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The Football Match

I am going to relate a tale of a football match between ships which was rather shambolic but good fun. The location was in Sydney, Australia, a rather tatty park in the new suburbs of the city. The P&O Canberra was berthed at the smart berth at Circular Quay, but my ship at the time was the SS Orcades, the one I wrote about in last month's magazine. We were moored in the inner harbour at Pyrmont, in between the "silver dollar" cruises.

A challenge to a football match was sent out by the Canberra ship's company. I was looking forward to it, as I knew it would be fun and that I would be able to meet up with some old shipmates at the same time.

There was a pub of rather poor repute close to our berth. It was called The Montgomery. The atmosphere inside was brash, to say the least, and there was always something going on. The odd scrap would occur while the juke box blared out and hectic voices were raised by the "ladies of ill repute" who frequented the place.

The crew of my ship met the crew of the Canberra the day before the match. There was some good-natured banter, a lot of laughs and, I must confess, a large amount of beer, which contributed to the ambiance. We learned that the Canberra's fiery staff captain was interested in the match. Jock Lefèvre was his



Eddie tells a tale of football rivalry Down Under

name. I have mentioned him in previous stories. He was quite a character.

Customs agreed that we could take a few cases of beer off the ship for refreshments at the match. The big day arrived. The local Missions to Seamen representatives had kindly hired a bus to take the team and its retinue to the ground. So had the Canberra's team. A flat-back lorry arrived with one of Canberra's bands on board. This had been arranged by Jock Lefèvre who strutted around giving advice to "his" team. At least he was not in uniform!

The match kicked off and the score reached one-all by half time. It was a hot day, so we all collapsed on the turf. There was no sign of oranges or lemons, but there were lots of cold beers. The band played on and seemed to get louder as they consumed the half-time refreshments.

By the end, the score was two all, a draw. I think Jock was a bit peeved at the result. Some wag called out "Push off, Jock!". "Who said that?" he shouted. There was a roar of laughter and he strutted off, not at all pleased.

The teams had apparently decided beforehand that the match would be a draw. It was a great day and well worth a small hangover the next morning. Happy days!





PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Open-air worship in St Nicolas' Churchyard on Pentecost Sunday, 28th May 2023. Outdoor services have remained popular in Kings Norton since they were introduced during the pandemic.



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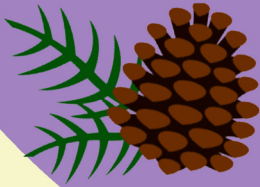


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