

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

Is Religion Good for Us?

Larry Wright weighs up the evidence for the health benefits of a life of faith

Save the Parish!

Church closures, parish amalgamations, fewer clergy, expanding bureaucracy. What is happening to the Church of England?

Living Stones

The latest information on what is planned for Kings Norton's unique historic buildings



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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 June 2022 edition must reach the Editor by midnight on **Friday 13th May**.

Items for inclusion in the July 2022 edition must reach the Editor by midnight on **Friday 10th June**.

Welcome

EDITORIAL

We've gone all high-tech this month. On various pages, you'll see a square pattern like the one at the foot of this page. It's a way of linking printed documents to websites and other online resources, of enriching your reading experience. If you point the camera of your mobile device at it, you'll be offered a link to an article, a set of photos, a video and so on. The one on this page will take you to our library of Parish Magazines going back to February 2014.

In this month's edition, we explore health, ours (p.4) and that of the Church of England (p.8). We prepare to say goodbye to our bishop (p.7) while bidding welcome to a new member of the Kings Norton clergy team (p.12). We catch up with the latest plans for our historic buildings (p.38) including the restoration of one of St Nicolas' Church's priceless stained glass windows (p.30). Lovers of animals, real (p.17) and stuffed (p.28), will find encouragement; and, with summer just around the corner, it's peak season for our gardeners (pp.14 & 34). Meanwhile, by pure coincidence, two of our contributors explore their separate family connections to India.

In the life of the church, May is the month of Sundays after Easter. There are seven of them in all before we reach Pentecost on 5th June. Our Bible readings during this season keep Jesus' resurrection, his divine nature ("The Father and I are one") and his offer of eternal life at the forefront of our minds. This is a season of hope and a reminder that, however challenging things may seem at times from a human perspective, we have been promised a glorious future.



*David
Ash*



Past Editions

Is Religion Good for Us?

Larry Wright explores the health benefits of shared religious experience

For those with access to the internet, an online search for “The Health Benefits of Religion” will provide millions of references to, among other things, academic, medical and mental health research reports examining the health-related benefits of religion and spirituality. The earliest reports are twenty years old. Since 2000, interest in health and well-being generally has gained momentum as we’ve been encouraged to take better care of our health and as healthier lifestyles have been promoted. As religion is a source of wisdom for choosing how we live our lives, it’s not surprising that the connection between religious belief and health is well established.



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

A recent study by an Oxford professor of anthropology goes further by speculating that religion endures because it is a necessary part of human evolution. This is true of religions which promote community gatherings, rituals and ceremonies, a sense of identity and belonging, social obligation, family life and positive approaches to dying. The study concludes that, by connecting with something bigger than just ourselves, we become part of a greater progression of created life (evolution) and that this knowledge is itself life-giving. Most of the major world religions will provide the above aspects in their practices and Christianity does so with emphasis.

Those who have an uncertain faith or none will understandably claim that religious practices can be replicated in their lives without a belief in God. A few years ago, a movement



emerged for Sunday morning gatherings for atheists. This became the “Sunday Assembly” and participants gathered to sing pop songs, listen to interesting speakers and have tea and cake afterwards. Sound familiar? There are four such groups still active in England and a few which have stopped meeting or trying to start up. Though practising Christians are understandably sceptical about such projects, they do reinforce the benefits, referred to above, of people having a special day to gather (Sunday), to sing and to be stimulated by a presentation which is followed by refreshments and a time of friendly togetherness.

↑ Good for body, mind and spirit. A full church laughs with Bishop Anne Hollinghurst on St Nicolas' Day in December 2016.

Zealous sports fans, especially fans of football teams, experience similar “religious” dimensions of their devotion to a team. Gathering in numbers on a special day and at a particular time, singing and then experiencing elation or despair depending upon the result, all stimulate similar feelings to those associated with religious or spiritual experiences. Crowds at music concerts similarly enjoy communal euphoria in response to the electrifying experience of the event.

Christians also attend sporting and cultural events and reflect upon them in terms of their faith. What’s different about these non-religious gatherings compared

to church going is they are essentially fleeting entertainments which make no more demands upon us than we are prepared to give. Neither do they provide an ultimate purpose for our lives. They do provide certain habits and rituals, generate loyalty and so on, which may take us out of ourselves but once the event is over, we return to the ordinary things of everyday life. Christianity is grounded in both the ordinary things of life and the ultimate purpose of life itself. Christians experience all creation and human behaviour as infused with the wonder of the creator God.

Whether people gather together at special events for entertainment, sport, culture or worship there is one proven biological change which takes place in our brains at such events. This is the release of endorphins, known as the “feel-good” chemicals. Endorphins are neurotransmitters released by the brain to alleviate pain and promote pleasure. This process is naturally occurring and therefore must have an evolutionary purpose. When we experience intense feelings of joy, bliss, ecstasy or euphoria, it is the endorphin system which is at work in our bodies.

Christianity has a lot to say about the human body and its

care, it also points us towards the reason we exist and the ultimate purpose of life. Caring for one’s body and well-being is not only about health benefits, important as these are. For believers, it is also about acknowledging that we are created with divine as well as physical attributes: we are body and spirit. Many believers may not enjoy the physical health they would prefer, but they develop their spiritual life to a high degree. Likewise, healthy believers who neglect their spiritual well-being will eventually experience the effects on their bodily health. In church we often pray for those who are suffering in either “body, mind or spirit” a further acknowledgment of the disease occurring when these vital aspects of our humanity are not in harmony.

As long as humanity exists and evolves, it seems that religion in one form or another is here to stay. The challenge for all of us is which religion, or religious experience, do we choose to guide and enrich our lives? And what part do we play in ensuring our choice of church or religion is one which nurtures our spirit, body and mind and that of others who may be drawn to it?

Bishop of Birmingham to Retire

As we went to press this month, the Anglican Diocese of Birmingham issued the following announcement.

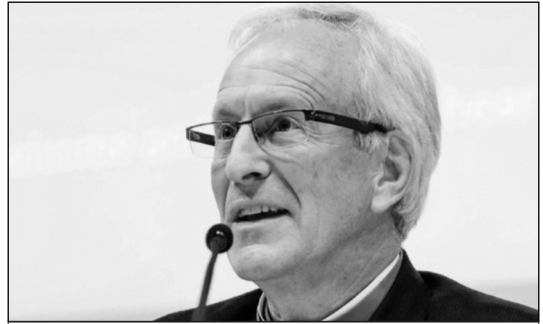
The Rt. Revd David Urquhart is stepping down as Bishop of Birmingham on 18th October 2022. Having reached the retirement age of 70 and after 16 fulfilling years in the diocese, he is preparing for new adventures in life and ministry.

Meanwhile, in addition to business as usual and making his farewells, Bishop David will be part of the welcome to the Commonwealth Games. After Easter, more details of opportunities to say farewell will become available.

During the Vacancy, episcopal oversight will be exercised by the Rt. Revd Anne Hollinghurst, Bishop of Aston.

Bishop David commented,

"I shall miss Birmingham very much and am most grateful for the many opportunities to experience faith and friendship across a wide diversity of communities. I have been privileged to serve such a generous and vibrant city region and am looking forward to making the most of the remaining sixth months together."



BISHOP DAVID URQUHART

Concert at St Nicolas' Church

A concert poster for Sinfonia Scintille. The background is black with white musical notes and staff lines. At the top, it says "SINFONIA SCINTILLE PRESENTS". Below this are two portraits: on the left, Ludwig van Beethoven with his characteristic wild hair, and on the right, Franz Joseph Haydn with a powdered wig. Below the portraits, the text reads: "First and Last", "Beethoven - Symphony No.1 in C Major", and "Haydn - Symphony No.104 in D Major". Further down, it lists the conductor as Keith Slade and the leader as Charlotte Moseley. At the bottom, the date and time are "21st May 2022 | 7pm", the venue is "St Nicolas Church, Kings Norton", and the ticket prices are "Adult :£10 | Students : £5 | Children : Free".

SINFONIA SCINTILLE PRESENTS

Beethoven - Symphony No.1 in C Major
Haydn - Symphony No.104 in D Major

Conductor : Keith Slade
Leader : Charlotte Moseley

21st May 2022 | 7pm
St Nicolas Church, Kings Norton
Adult :£10 | Students : £5 | Children : Free

Save the Parish!

On Tuesday 3 August 2021, a gathering was held in St Bartholomew the Great, London's oldest parish church, to launch a campaign to "Save the Parish". Over 100 people signed up online to attend, and thousands have since watched the broadcast on the campaign's website at www.savetheparish.com.

The event was hosted by the Revd Marcus Walker, Rector of St Bartholomew the Great, who issued a rallying cry in the pages of the *Spectator* magazine on 6 Feb 2021. His title was "The misguided priorities of church authorities" and the key section read as follows:

"This is your church. This is not the Archbishop of Canterbury's, nor the House of Bishops', nor the clergy's, not even the General Synod's. It belongs, in a broad sense, to the people of England, regardless of your faith or lack of it, which is why parliament is still its ultimate decision-making body, and very specifically to the laity of the Church of

England. You have a say."
(Read the full article at bit.ly/3KzUiA5)

The text which follows is taken from a document published by "Save the Parish" in February 2022. It brings together the views of a number of the campaign's most vocal supporters. It is reprinted here in the hope that it will stimulate discussion in Kings Norton and further afield.



The parish is at the heart of the Church of England. Your deanery synod is a collection of your beloved, individual local parishes. The idea of the parish informs every aspect of our mission and our vision of ourselves as a church. It is prized well beyond those who attend church on a Sunday, and is spoken of passionately by both bishops and archbishops. And yet, over many decades our parishes have increasingly been



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

starved of priests and money, their assets used to make good the mistakes of others.

“The C of E is ignoring the evidence (including its own official growth policy, ‘From Anecdote to Evidence’, which makes it clear that amalgamating parishes drives decline) that growth comes from paying parish priests to serve real people in real places. Instead, it is trying to impose a top-heavy bureaucratic structure that saps talent and money away from the local to the centre. This must be resisted before it is too late.”

(Angela Tilby, Canon Emeritus Christ Church Oxford, Honorary Canon

Portsmouth Cathedral, Church Times columnist)

“There can be no excuse for the increase in bishops from 26 to 112 over the last 200 years, while the number of parish priests has been falling from 25,000 to fewer than 7,000.”

(Donald Clarke, retired Finance Director of 3i and Kent parish treasurer)

“The 42 dioceses employ over 3,000 people in their head offices. Many are paid more (some much more) than clergy in the front line. Several dioceses actually employ MORE people in their head office than there are stipendiary priests in their parishes (which they claim to oversee; in reality, they interfere, with endless paperwork, and, year on year, they gradually plunder parish assets to fund the bloated diocese). This has to stop. A major rebalancing is needed between the

beleaguered parishes and the dioceses which are sucking the life out of them."

(Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent KCB CBE, former Second Sea Lord and Commander of the Fleet, Devon churchwarden, STP Steering Committee member)

What is Save The Parish (STP)?

"STP's task is to liberate the Parish clergy from the shackles of bureaucracy and bad governance, to enable them to carry out their pastoral and missional work (not to give them advice on how to do it). We are not tied to a particular theological outlook.

Our most urgent task is to try to slow down the currently accelerating process of church closures, parish amalgamations, clergy reductions, increasing parish shares, expanding bureaucracy, mindless central initiatives and general bad governance that are strangling mission at the grassroots level. We want parishes to be allowed to get on with their job.

The hierarchy of the CofE has been messing up for 40+ years, and we – at last – are holding them to account. In terms of a more positive message, we are working on a proposal for how the CofE could and should be deploying its resources better and investing in clergy (while still making the sums add up). We are researching the policies of the few dioceses which are sensibly adopting the positive approach of investing in clergy in parishes, in order to

promote increased giving and growth."

(Prudence Dailey, former chair of the Prayer Book Society and STP Steering Committee member)

"Join us if you want to Save The Parish, because these are your parishes and this is the only important question for the next few years. Over the last 40+ years, money and authority have ebbed away from our parishes and coagulated in centralised pots. This started in 1976, when the parishes' glebe land and endowments were transferred to the dioceses, in return for the promise to use the income always to provide a priest in each parish. It continues today. Join Save The Parish because this might really be the last chance to save the church we love."

(Revd Marcus Walker, Rector of St Bartholomew the Great)

"It puzzles me that the Archbishops and some of the Bishops are so defensive. The Church's problems started long ago and no one is blaming them for what happened in 1976. Yet they personally attack those who criticise their policy, although these are people who love the Church and want it to endure. When I wrote a *Spectator* article, the Archbishops called me 'a rascally voice seeking to destroy the Church'; my children found this hilarious, knowing how hard I have worked for our village church over 26 years. CofE volunteers are an amazing, free resource, and are the donors in a privately-funded charity. Yet there

seems such determined deafness to the views of volunteers and donors that people are voting with their feet and their wallets. I want this to stop. I love the CofE; or rather I love my local church and don't want it to close."

(Emma Thompson, rural parish volunteer and journalist)

"Our parishes are slowly suffocating under increasing managerial feudalism. For example, millions in new funding so that Dioceses can create Racial Justice Officers is merely emblematic of good intentions that do not result in effective solutions. Meanwhile, it calls into question the priorities of our leaders; where are the millions in funding to train and deploy new clergy - clergy who could be racial justice champions - in our struggling parishes?"

(Robert Zampetti, Associate Partner, Ernst & Young LLP, General Synod representative for London Diocese)

"Dioceses are taking more and more money from parishes and their generous donors to fund their ever-growing bureaucracies. Some are even raiding the Diocesan Stipends Fund to pay for initiatives of dubious value; these are funds that legally can only be used to pay clergy

stipends. This malfeasance has to be stopped."

(Stephen Billyeald, former Managing Director of Ryman)



The Vital Work of Our Parishes

"The parish and its priest speak powerfully of a God who is stable, trustworthy and dwells among us. In all the crises that now face us as a nation, local parishes are key assets, but I fear we will wake up to their value too late."

(The Rev'd Canon Professor Alison Grant Milbank, Professor of Theology and Literature, University of Nottingham)

"The Church's surveys all show the same results – spread vicars over too many parishes and the congregations decline, as they do with long interregnum, team ministry, 'super parishes' and, I might add, duff priests. So what is the answer? Stop hurling cash at Transformation churches and instead fund parishes in each diocese. Give them the cash to support a top-notch priest living in the community with no more than two parishes to cover. Sit back and watch the results for maybe three years. Frankly, dammit, this would work. And, at the same time, get rid of the '70s style management-speak of the bishops and replace them with humble, holy, pastoral priests. St. Francis would do nicely."

(Churchwarden, Cornwall)

	<p>What's This? It's a QR code. Point the camera of your mobile phone at it to visit a linked website</p>	
Save the Parish		Spectator

Kings Norton Welcomes

The Revd David Booker



I initially trained with Church Army and worked in a number of roles working with young people and advising on youth work before returning to full time education and then training as an English teacher.

I remain a member of the Church Army Mission Community and am part of the Archbishops' College of Evangelists. Outside of work I enjoy the cinema and theatre and hope you will be able to forgive my support of Leicester City as for the last 20 years we have lived in Leicestershire.

I am married to Alison, who recently took up a new role in the Peterborough Diocese, and we have three adult children, two of whom are currently at university.

I am delighted to have been invited to continue my curacy training with the Kings Norton team and look forward to beginning getting to know the parish in the coming months. I was ordained in London Diocese, where I was a school chaplain and curate in a local parish.

In September 2021 I took up a new role as an assistant head teacher at the new Christ Church Secondary Academy in Yardley Wood (QR code left), a rare opportunity to be part of the team opening a new Church of England school.



SYLVIA FOX

On the official side of things, the progress towards becoming our own charity is going well. At the time of writing (Lent 2022), we have our new charity number and are working through the list of “address changes” that need to accompany this before we can use the new number as an entity. This list includes things like the bank accounts, the landlords of Kings Norton Business Park where the warehouse is, our utility supplies at the warehouse, and so on. What began as a small church-sponsored charity back in 2013 (sponsored, in fact, by Churches Together in B30) has grown into something resembling a mid-sized business, but one still run completely by volunteers and still with the support of Trussell Trust as an umbrella organisation.

Something I am still asked about is our food recipients. “Do they deserve the food?” is a not-uncommon question. The polite version of my reply to that is “Yes, everyone deserves to have sufficient to food to each each day”. Those referring the clients will have done the professional decision-making as to whether the client requires the food and our role is to provide it, with no judgement or strings attached. A good half of our clients only come once in a six month



period. We are there to tide them through a financial crisis (redundancy, decrease in income, benefit delay meaning budgeting is impossible, a sudden and unexpected household bill). A few clients come much more regularly and we work with their referrers to understand the root cause of their problem, why they are still in need of food. They are not turned away.

I once heard someone make the derogatory comment, “Oh, if you provide the food, they can spend the money on something else”. My reply surprised them. “Yes, they can, on rent, heating, school uniform, repairing or replacing the boiler or washing machine, bus or train fares...”. I think they got the point! For the 2% who swing any system, the other 98% are utterly genuine, and do not come to a foodbank lightly. It is embarrassing to ask for basic help. It is embarrassing to own that you cannot feed your family. If we can help them across that most difficult patch of life then we should do so without question.

B30 Foodbank News

Adam the Gardener thinks about potting compost

I read with interest Claire Lindow's article on peat-free composts (*Parish Magazine, April 2022*) and wholeheartedly agree with her advice. We should say "no" to peat based composts. Our wetlands are wondrous places which support unique plant life. By acting as a sink for carbon dioxide, they may also help to reverse climate change. The peat beds soak up rainfall and release it gradually, thus preventing flash flooding and erosion downstream.

I was brought up on the University of California's peat-based compost formulas. You bought sphagnum peat and coarse sand separately and added a general fertiliser, mixing

thoroughly. These composts worked rather well but those were the days of peat-fired power stations and no one seemed to know about the dangers of using up this precious commodity.

The peat-like base now used can be recycled garden waste or other materials like coir fibre. Bio-char left over after the production of organic origin liquid fuels may be added.

The quality of peat-free composts can vary. I am using up some compost which is honestly only fit for use as a soil-improver.

A few years back I planted some nice geraniums in compost bought locally but they soon looked sickly: yellow leaves with green veins and no flowers. A bit of research pointed to a lack of iron and, after a few waterings with dilute ferrous sulphate solution, the plants were transformed.

If you suspect this kind of problem, I recommend watering with a can of water plus one capfull of NPK liquid fertiliser containing micro-nutrients. Big-name products can be rather expensive but I notice that own-name brands are now being offered at about a third of the price.





CRAB APPLES

Buying composts from suppliers with a brand name to protect might be helpful. I found the compost sold and used by the people at Kings Heath gardens very good, but you will have to check if it is peat-free.

Lastly, from an experienced propagator we have two tips. Sieve your compost before adding it to the seed trays. The fluffy and twiggy residue can be thrown onto your flower beds. Cheap plastic 1 cm sieves can be had readily from your garden shop. First watering is best done by standing the seed tray in about 2.5 cm (1") of lukewarm water for a few minutes.

There you are! The gospel of compost according to Adam.

Tree of the month for May is the crab apple or *Malus*. Tons of blossom in late spring are followed by multi-coloured small fruits in the autumn. *Malus tschonoskii* is an upright tree perfect for the smaller garden. More illustrated information can be had from www.ornamentaltrees.com No computer? Get one. They are unequalled as a source of garden advice.

I am writing this in the first week in April. On my daily exercise walk I spotted a clump of yellow daisy-like 4 cm flowers in a neighbour's garden. This was our **plant of the month**, the very hardy and weatherproof *Doronicum* or *Leopardsbane*. I did see two varieties potted up for sale at a National Trust property nearby for £7 or £10 per plant! Breathing a sigh of relief, I remembered that Chiltern



DORONICUM "FINESSE"

Seeds sold a packet of seeds of *Doronicum caucasicum* "Finesse" at £2.. Assuming 100% germination, I can fill my garden with Doronicums with some left over for the neighbours. No flowers this year of course but plenty next year to brighten the borders after the daffodils have withered. Which reminds us to dead-head the daffodils as soon as the flowers wither and to leave the foliage to die down and turn brown before tidying up to ensure a bumper crop next year. I know this looks a bit untidy but you will be rewarded for your patience.

May is the month to start seeds of hardy perennials for the back garden flower beds or, of course, you can buy ready-grown plants at the garden centre.

Your front garden has very likely been laid out for the benefit of your cars, but nice containers

filled with things like Surfinia Petunias will help a lot. If you are contemplating surfacing your front garden then cement blocks laid by professionals look good and, if they are laid properly, water can drain into the subsoil and be slowly released in to the environment. This may help to prevent the water companies from dumping untreated sewage into our waterways because of "sudden rainstorms". I suspect some stern letters to your local MP might help even more.



PET THERAPY

We've all heard of the psychotherapy couch, and the dynamic between a client and their human therapist. But perhaps less well known is the increasingly popular pet therapy. And no, that's not therapy for your pet. It's the relatively new phenomenon of therapy for humans, which involves animals.

These animal assisted interventions (AAls), which also include a trained human professional, are proving beneficial to people of all ages, leading to significant reductions in physiological responses to stress, such as heart rate, and associated emotions, such as anxiety.

It's a long standing and widely-accepted fact that people of all

ages can benefit from partnerships with animals as pets. From the joy of the human-animal bond, to companionship and improved mental health, there is no doubt that cats, dogs and other pets enhance our lives immeasurably.

But over the last ten years or so, animals have started to help humans in settings away from the home such as hospitals and care homes for the elderly, as well as schools, universities, prisons and rehabilitation services.

The Royal University Hospital Emergency Department in Saskatchewan, Canada, for example, has been welcoming therapy dogs and their handlers since 2016. A recent study based at the hospital set out to investigate whether canine therapy had any impact on the wellbeing of patients, the majority (around 70%) of whom had been admitted and were waiting for a hospital bed, and all of whom were experiencing pain.

They each received a ten minute visit from a St John Ambulance therapy dog in addition to the usual hospital care. Using a detailed psychometric survey, the researchers assessed patients immediately before the visit, immediately afterwards and twenty minutes afterwards. They were encouraged to find that the patients reported a significant reduction in pain, anxiety



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and depression following the visit by the therapy dog and an increase in general well-being.

Cats and horses also help

Over the last ten years, cats have also joined the AAI movement and have been used in settings such as schools and care homes to improve well-being. Just being in the presence of a cat has been shown to improve mood and reduce feelings of loneliness. Playing with a cat, and physical contact through stroking and hugging, can induce a sense of calm, especially for children and frail elderly patients in long term care. In fact, even a cat's purr can bring emotional relief, especially when we're feeling stressed.

One study, conducted among patients living with chronic age-related disabilities in a nursing home, found that those who were assigned a cat therapy session three times a week, for six weeks, had improved depressive symptoms and a significant

decrease in blood pressure.

Horse-assisted therapy is particularly useful for young people experiencing mental health and behavioural issues. In many cases, those who have not benefited from traditional, talk-based therapy, may experience benefits, particularly an increased feeling of calm and emotional control when participating in horse therapy, during which they learn how to communicate with and care for the horses.

Similarly, therapeutic horse riding therapy provides physical and emotional benefits to children with disabilities, helping to improve their

balance, posture and hand-to-eye coordination. It can also help children to learn to trust and become more socially aware.

Therapeutic horse riding has been shown to improve symptoms of PTSD in adults, too. And equine therapy, where there is no riding, but instead feeding, grooming and leading the horse, can help people to process and change negative behaviours, such as those associated with addiction.

Why pets are good therapists

Building relationships and social connections through socialising and human interaction is a key part of maintaining and improving our mental health. Animals, when left to their own devices, also make and work to maintain and enhance emotional relationships and connections with others. We are extremely lucky that, when it comes to dogs, cats and horses, this tendency also extends to humans, as long as we behave in a way that is comfortable for the animal. And science has shown that they can understand what is happening in our interactions with them, too. Horses can read our emotions and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Horses can read and tune in to human emotions. They can even learn about a person from watching them interact with another

horse, and adjust their behaviour accordingly, such as approaching and touching the person more if they appear to display discomfort around the other horse.

Research with dogs and cats has found that they too can read and respond to our body language, facial expressions and voices.

Part of the joy of building a connection with an animal is discovering who they are and what they enjoy and it goes without saying that their welfare must always be a top priority. But if think you have a superstar therapy pet in the making, then do consider contacting a pet therapy organisation in your area, such as Pets As Therapy in the UK. They'd be glad to meet you and your animal companion.

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More Reflections On WOLE REFLECTIONS ON Triplex Glass

My recent article (*Parish Magazine, April 2022*) on the impending demolition of the Triplex Tower off Eckersall Road and the final disappearance of one of Kings Norton's most significant industries, attracted many comments, most of them fond memories of the company's heyday.

One reader, Annette Dickers, pointed out that the article was not correct in stating that the national Triplex company had two manufacturing sites, our own site and one on Merseyside. There was another one, based in deepest Ireland! Annette knows this from personal experience, because it was her uncle, Steve Woods, who was selected and sent over by Triplex to run that company. Steve was one of two brothers who had successful career with Triplex, he and brother Joe living initially with their parents on Knighton Road, off Bunbury Road.

It happened in 1957 when Triplex, keen to expand capacity but to avoid the costs of doing so in mainland Britain, chose Ireland as a potential base where costs were likely to be relatively small. The company identified Lancegaye, a relatively small glassmaker in Templemore, in County Tipperary, which had been set up in 1956. Triplex's takeover bid was welcomed by its owner and, naturally, by the local community for the additional employment opportunities that it would bring. Templemore was a very small, rural community and jobs were scarce.

According to Annette, Steve and his wife Mable, popularly know as Mab, were welcomed with open arms, and Steve was always venerated as one of the most significant members of the local community. They took with them their three-year-old son Ian, who progressed to Dublin University.



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY

Steve ran the Templemore company as Works Manager successfully for several years, initially having to overcome small practical issues like limited supplies of water and the problem of cattle blocking up the local roads! Triplex Ireland produced a range of glass components for British Leyland and other vehicle manufacturers. Steve retired around 1970 and came back with Mab to the Midlands.

Young Ian, meanwhile, decided to build his career in Dublin, where he lives now. According to Annette, he doesn't have a trace of an Irish accent!

Photo: the Triplex Tower undergoing demolition in April 2022.



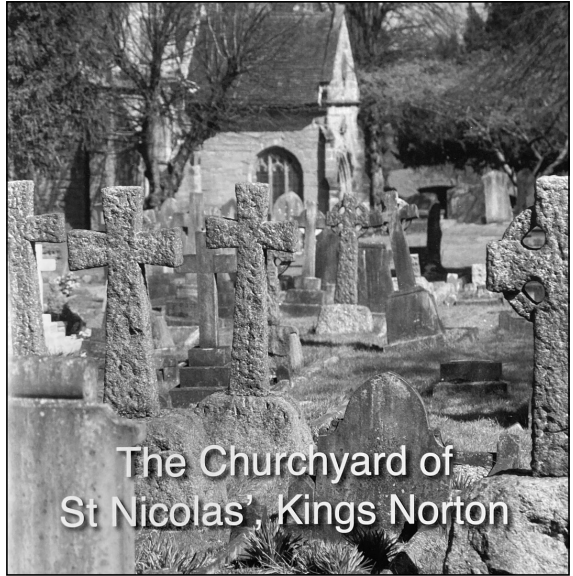
The Churchyard Booklet

As previewed in a recent issue of this magazine, a new booklet entitled "*The Churchyard of St Nicolas', Kings Norton*" was launched early in April.

It is a companion publication to "*St Nicolas' Kings Norton: An Illustrated Tour*", which was published two years ago. The new booklet covers the history and development of the site into one of the largest parish churchyards in Birmingham, with some 6,000 visible graves. It describes the evolution of different methods of burial used over the 800 years of its existence and the various styles of memorial that can be seen; its role as part of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and some of the soldiers buried there; and some of the notable people who lie there. It also explains how, along with churchyards generally, it is a remarkably biodiverse location, a sanctuary for a wide range of wildlife and a remarkable range of trees. It contains many evocative photographs provided by David Ash, whose collection of photos of Kings Norton's historic buildings is now available for all to enjoy and use at kingsnorton.org.uk/buildings.

“Our churchyard is truly a remarkable location, not only a resting place for centuries of Kings Norton people, but also a place with many other fascinating dimensions,” said The Reverend Larry Wright, the Rector of Kings Norton.

The booklet can be purchased for £5 when the church is open, or by contacting the Parish Office on **0121 458 3289**, email **parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk**. If you were unable to buy the first booklet about the church itself, copies can be bought from the same sources, also at the price of £5.



New Signage for St Nicolas'

A new set of attractive signs has been developed to support activities at St Nicolas' Church. They began to appear in March of this year and include a robust frame, attached to the original sign at the front of the church alongside the Lych Gate (see right). The frame allows the insertion of interchangeable signboards announcing services at particular periods of the church's calendar, including Easter, Remembrance Day and Christmas. There is another sign that is used whenever the Church is open for visiting. Each sign has been carefully designed to optimise appeal and readability.

Inside the church, two large roller banner stands have been developed to

welcome visitors as they arrive. Each one features reproductions of two of the church's stained glass windows, the Angel of Kings Norton, the original of which is to be found in the sanctuary to the left of the high altar, and the Baptism of Christ.

There is also a set of four perspex display stands placed around the interior of the church to help visitors to understand key aspects of the church's history and architecture. They highlight items and locations of particular interest, including the new plaque commemorating the Reverend Wilbert Awdry, the creator of *Thomas the Tank Engine*, who devised his first stories while a curate at St Nicolas' during the Second World War.



Parish Church of St Nicolas Kings Norton



Sunday Worship

9am - Traditional service of Holy Communion (BCP)
10.30am - Holy Communion or Morning Worship
with activities for children
6pm - various styles of worship

District Church Sunday Congregations

10.30am at IHawkesley Church Centre: B38 8TR
10.30am Immanuel Church: Meeting at Saint Nicolas Place

Weekday Worship

Candlelit Church - Wednesday 6.30pm-8pm
Tiny Tots for 0-5's Thursday 9-11am
Open Church Wednesday and Saturday 10.00am-12noon
Other services, activities and open times as advertised

Wedding and Baptism enquiries:

Thursday evening 6.30-8pm in St Nicolas

0121 458 3289 : 81 The Green, B38 8RU
www.kingsnorton.org.uk; parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk



Easter at St Nicolas' Church

Easter Sunday Services at 9am and 10:30am



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

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

Team Rector..... The Revd Larry Wright
Assistant Rector..... The Revd Eliakim Ikechukwu
Parish Lay Minister Pauline Weaver
Honorary Assistant Priest The Revd Jayne Crooks
Methodist Minister..... The Revd Nick Jones
Lay Readers David Ash, Fay Fearon, Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki
Lay Preacher Steve Wright
Music Minister..... Sylvia Fox
Pastoral Care Advisor Susan Farrell
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator..... The Revd Jayne Crooks

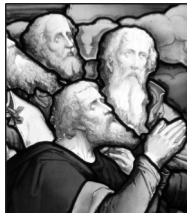
THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

Parish Administrator & P.C.C. Secretary.....Judy Ash
Acting Finance OfficerSimon 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

1st 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

2nd 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

3rd 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

4th 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)

5th 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

Genteel Racism

Ever since my wonderful trip to India in 2019, and the genealogy results which arrived whilst I was in the air *en route* to Mumbai, I have pondered hard about my mixed heritage, and why it has taken until my own generation for it to be happily shared and discussed.

My grandmother came to England in 1913, when she was 18, with her parents and younger siblings. My great-grandfather had decided that a mixed-race family was probably safer in England than in an India which was then seeking independence. He and his father before him had worked in the world of the telegraph, laying communication lines all across India, including what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh, as this was well before the disaster of Partition.

A couple of years before my trip, I had chanced on a fabulous museum in Cornwall dedicated to the history of the telegraph system. It explained how England had exported it to all of its colonies around the globe. The prime reason for the export was to further the colonial system and not for the specific good of the individual countries, although it did bring about good for them or, at least, for the more affluent in each country. One section that leapt out of the wall at me was the bit about the Englishmen who were sent out to work and who were enjoined to have nothing to do with the native women. Indian women were clearly regarded as “lesser”, from a racial point of view, rather than a gender perspective.

Well, that didn't work in our family. My great-great-grandfather met and married a native girl, about whom I know very little. There is one tantalising early photograph. It is clear that this wasn't what the English family were expecting and, when the first surviving son was ready to marry, he was sent an English wife by boat. I have always admired the pluck of that young woman, but am also wryly amused. Arranged marriage in Indian



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



culture is well known and was looked at askance by many, including by my own family, but that is exactly what was happening here, in order to “make it more acceptable” once more. It felt as if they were trying to right a perceived wrong, when the only thing that was “wrong” was the ethnicity (not even faith, as she was Christian) of my

great-great grandmother. There was no overt racism, which can be often challenged quite straightforwardly. This more covert form of racism is often much harder to question, move away from and eradicate.

A generation later, the son had all his children educated at English-run convent schools in India and had native Indians as household servants. They clearly thought of themselves as white Europeans. The colonial life was regarded as an accepted way of life, not as something which needed serious investigation or challenge. The children were not encouraged to learn Hindi, though the boys did by various means. As Indian independence came closer, returning to Britain was really the only safe option, but it brought to England a family who did not truly fit in there either. The colonial world was falling apart around them and they had to learn a new way of life. The children were encouraged to marry English partners, the fairer the better, and their children the same.

My own grandmother (*pictured above, right*) was, I gather, ecstatic at how fair-skinned my father was. Perhaps it is just as well that she and I never met (she died before I was born), though I would dearly have loved to have met the lady with whom I share a

birthday. She told my mother about her life in India, but it was always spoken of as if it were something not to be celebrated, completely unlike the Welsh heritage of her father which was openly shared.

My own mother (*on the left in the photo*) was more honest and open, taught me that I had heritage in all three countries, and we began to discuss the wrong attitudes of the colonial way. Work life for both me and my dad took us into wonderful multi-cultural settings, and that helped to pave the way for more conversations. It had taken four generations to rid ourselves of the sense that one race was greater or lesser in standing than another.

If my story is similar to yours, find ways to explore your whole heritage and to question and challenge previously-held ideas. I cannot put right what was done in the past, but I can make sure I don't repeat the same mistakes. Covert racism is harder to identify than the overt kind, but it is even more important to break it down.

Danny the Dog

Do you have a special companion? Something that is precious to you? Something that you've been close to for many years, maybe even most of your life? No, I'm not talking about a person or animal but a treasured possession that you have feelings and affection for, whose company you treasure and that sometimes gives you a sense of comfort and support.

For me, that special something is Danny. Let me introduce him. Danny is about twelve inches from the tip of his nose to his tail. He is six inches high and has a white woolly coat. He has little legs and a stubby upright tail. His button nose and eyes are black. When he performed on the stage we gave him black woolly ears, but more of that later. Danny is what you call a soft toy. He was a birthday present (literally) from my great aunt Gladys. Aunt Gladys lived in Stockport. She bought and posted him to me as soon as she heard of my birth. Sadly it took two years for Danny and me to meet, but we've been inseparable ever since.

I was born in India, in what was known as the Central Provinces (Madhya Pradesh). My father had a wartime commission in the Indian Army and, now that the war was over, my mother was allowed to join him. Dad had come out to India in 1940



KIM DUCE IS A RETIRED HEADMASTER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE ARTS SOCIETY, BIRMINGHAM

and Mum was a nurse, working in Scotland. When the British left India in 1947 we, along with other service families, returned to Britain and to one of our coldest winters on record! Of course, I have no memories of these early months of my life. I believe my mother was a very poor sailor, being chronically seasick, and spent many hours in our cabin. Meanwhile, Dad walked the deck with me in his arms. We disembarked at Liverpool and went to live with my grandparents in Edinburgh.

"But what happened to Danny?" I hear you ask. Parcelled up, he was put on a mail ship and made his way out to us in India. The trouble was that, when he arrived at our barracks in Sauger, we had left and were now at sea bound for Britain and a homecoming. That might have been the end of it. However, military efficiency prevailed and Danny was returned to sender. He

shortly found himself on another mail ship making a return journey. Imagine Aunt Gladys' surprise and dismay when Danny arrived on her doorstep several months later. She now made another trip to her local post office in Stockport and again dispatched Danny, this time to Edinburgh. I'm pleased to say he arrived safely at my grandparents' house. Again, I have no memory of our first meeting nor of how he acquired his name. But Danny he is and always will be.

When, as a teenager, I went to boarding school, Danny came too. Funny, no one made fun of this. Most boys in my dorm had a special companion, favourite toy, teddy or whatever. Danny's one public appearance

was as Moonshine's dog in the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream". This was a school performance and I was playing Moonshine, so Danny got the dog's part. And what a star performer he was. He nearly stole the show!

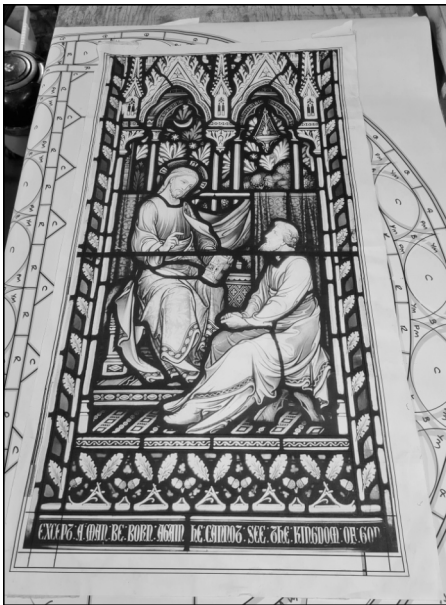
Today, as ever, he lives quietly in my bedroom. We've both been around for over 75 years and I would say he's aged well. A few years ago he nearly lost his tail but we were able to sew it back on. Excitement for Danny came early in his life. Not just "A Passage to India" but a round trip by sea. There cannot be many such well-travelled little woolly dogs! No wonder I hold him in such affection.



Seeing the Kingdom

Stained glass has been used for thousands of years, beginning with the Ancient Romans and Egyptians, who produced small objects made from coloured glass. Stained glass windows in Britain can be traced back to the 7th century, with some early examples found in churches and monasteries.

Stained glass exploded in popularity during the middle ages, and by the 12th century, the practice had become much more sophisticated. Chartres in France became the leading stained glass manufacturer, and the materials they produced were of extremely high quality. Chartres Cathedral contains one of the oldest examples of a stained glass rose, a circular type of window featuring intricate coloured glass designs.



Stained glass continued to be very popular throughout Europe, and the style moved away from the Gothic of the Middle Ages into something more classical. During the Reformation, however, many stained glass windows were smashed by Puritans who saw them as idolatrous. They were often replaced with plain glass. This destruction meant that many traditional stained glass methods were forgotten, and were not rediscovered until the 19th century.

The 1800s saw a renewed interest in medieval churches and more were built in the Gothic style. Many churches were fitted with elaborate stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible and other religious images at this time. →

Funerals March 2022

1st Mar	Sheila Kathleen Venum	95	SN.Bu.KN
8th Mar	Veronica Ethel Smith	93	SN.Bu.CY
9th Mar	Ronald Edward Knight	86	In.CY
11th Mar	Paul John Clacher	68	In.CY
15th Mar	Jean Rosemary Gates	75	In.CY
15th Mar	Madeline Mary Green	98	SN.Bu.CY
18th Mar	Michael John Allen	74	In.CY
18th Mar	John Henry Hines	69	SN.Bu.CY
21st Mar	Gordon Frederick Colin Lovegrove	59	SN.Bu.KN
28th Mar	Garvin Wilfred Burnside	70	In.CY
29th Mar	Eileen Joan Toland	73	SN.Bu.KN
30th Mar	Susan Margaret Ogom	55	Cr.LH

Bu : Burial, Cr : Cremation, CY : Churchyard, In : Interment of Ashes,
 SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church
 Cemeteries & Crematoria
 KN : Kings Norton, LH : Lodge Hill

St Nicolas' Church is the custodian of some beautiful examples of 19th century stained glass, including work by Hardman, Swain Bourne and Kempe. One of them, which depicts the conversation recorded in St John's Gospel between Jesus and Nicodemus, was smashed during a burglary in October 2021. This act of vandalism, like those which occurred during the English Reformation, might have led to its being replaced by plain glass if it weren't for the fact that St Nicolas' has a detailed photographic record of all its windows. We were equally fortunate that there are still firms which maintain the skills needed to repair them.



As you can see on the opposite page, this meant that the restorers, Ark Stained Glass & Leaded Lights Ltd of Callow, near Hereford, were able to create an accurate template for the repair, losing almost none of the detail of the original. This includes the inscription which records Jesus' words to Nicodemus, *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God"*.

In one sense, all our church windows enable us to see the Kingdom of God. That, after all, was the intention of their creators, that they should be a visual aid to understanding some of the central truths of the Christian faith. By the time you read this, our "Nicodemus Window" will have been "born again", reassembled and returned to its home in the chancel, as good as new. *The Editor.*

Puzzles

My mum hated jigsaws. Even when I was a child she would rarely join in with even simple ones. In fact, later in life, when I found her in hospital with a jigsaw in front of her, I thought, "This is bad." And it was.

Jigsaws she left to me and my dad. We would spend hours together engrossed. He would always put away the lid of the box so we couldn't see the picture, something I still do today. It just adds to the challenge not having the picture to refer to.

Jigsaws can aid concentration, patience and problem solving but only if you enjoy them, otherwise they are time wasting, frustrating and liable to get thrown up in the air.

Did you know that some of the benefits of puzzles include lowering blood pressure, releasing dopamine, which helps us feel good, providing a feeling of accomplishment and helping us feel calm?

Today, of course, you can complete jigsaw puzzles on your tablet or phone. Some apps offer a daily puzzle to complete. Problem solving is a life skill. Puzzles teach us to be methodical: sorting, arranging, doing things in order (edges first?). They also teach us to look at things differently: turning pieces round a different way to see if they fit, trying pieces in different places. We learn to look at colour, size, shape and pattern and we develop an eye for detail.

We all use problem solving in daily life, so being able to develop and maintain these skills is essential, and not just when we are young.

Keeping the brain active is important as we get older too, when we are encouraged to find something we enjoy that helps us to exercise the grey cells. You may prefer crosswords, sudoku (not my thing, never was good with number puzzles) quizzes,



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

board games and card games. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it helps keep our mind sharp and helps us to relax.

Sometimes, we can "up the ante" by changing things around. Playing solitaire on your computer using the mouse in your non-dominant hand is a good example and it's harder than you would think.

There is also an additional benefit to these activities if we can make them into a social event: whist drives, scrabble games, card tournaments and board games evenings are all great ways of having fun and

keeping the brain working. It doesn't have to be a huge gathering, just meeting with a friend and having a game or doing a puzzle together over a cuppa, or doing a crossword together at the end of the day are all great ways to make puzzles and games more fun.

Games and puzzles are also great for bringing together young and old, for teaching children old games, getting children to teach adults new ones, or sharing a favourite. All are great ways of spending time together.

I wonder what your favourite game or puzzle is ? Do tell us!

PHOTO BY KAROLINA GRABOWSKA



THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Attracting Biodiversity



Claire is a keen kitchen gardener, ably assisted by her 6-year-old son Charles.

I wonder if you turned your compost pile last month? Did your children have a look for worms in the compost? The more worms the better!

It's **No Mow May** this month. Last year, in our back garden, we tried No Mow May for the first time and it was amazing to see what wild flowers popped up just by leaving things go for a month. When the month was over, we kept a square metre section under the magnolia tree free from mowing completely for the rest of the year.

We are blessed with aqueligia which spreads widely throughout the garden and this looks lovely in the long grass along with the other unexpected wild flowers. We are also blessed with a clump of native bluebells that pop up every year in that spot. It will be exciting to see what appears in that section this year. You may find that there are beauties that self-seed through your garden too.

So why leave the mower in the shed in May? "Plantlife" started the campaign last year as wild flowers had really suffered in the drought in May 2020 and far fewer dandelions and daisies were reported. Wild flowers in May can attract over 100 pollinators including bees and rare butterflies.

This year, why not put the lawnmower away for a month and join in with the *Every Flower Counts Survey* to find out what your very own nectar score. You will also be contributing to nationwide data on wild flowers and pollinators. If you don't have a lawn you could plant some wild flowers in a pot. This year I really hope we see No Mow May in our public green spaces. If you would like to encourage more biodiversity in your garden, Pennard Plants offer wild flower seed mixes suited to different soil types. This company provides seeds and plants, many of them heritage varieties, and for years they have been completely peat free.

As I live in Kings Norton, the clay soil mix is the one we tried and we saw scabious, plantain, vetch and yarrow to name just a few. They call them "throw and grow" wild flower seed blends. They do need some bare earth to get going and regular watering if it is very dry.

Last summer, my good friend Gemma gave me a wonderful challenge so that she could do the same. She wanted edible flowers only, so I saved seed from my garden from all the edible flowers. It was a very interesting project and the Gemma Seed Mix contained monarda (bee balm), calendula, borage, nigella, radish (the flowers are lovely and the seed pods are delicious), rocket (either eat the leaves or let them flower), chives, welsh onion, poppies and corn flowers.

In the vegetable garden this month it is time to sow the bean seeds and I like to get the Thomas the Tank Engine *Jack in the Bean Stalk* story into the

bedtime repertoire to fill Charles' imagination as he sees these germinate. (Other *Jack and the Bean Stalk* versions are available!). It's also a good month to sow the courgette, pumpkin, cucumbers, sweetcorn and achocha in case you didn't manage it last month or if some of your seedlings didn't quite make it.

These are all amazing things to plant with children and the young-at-heart as the seeds are big, the seedlings are stocky and changes can be fast in the early stages. For your companion planting it's a wonderful time to get the sunflowers going and some varieties nowadays can grow really tall. Another great one for kids and the young-at-heart. Everyone likes the sunflowers in our home, even the hens!

The *Plantlife* website can be found at plantlife.org.uk.

Pennard Plants are at pennardplants.com.



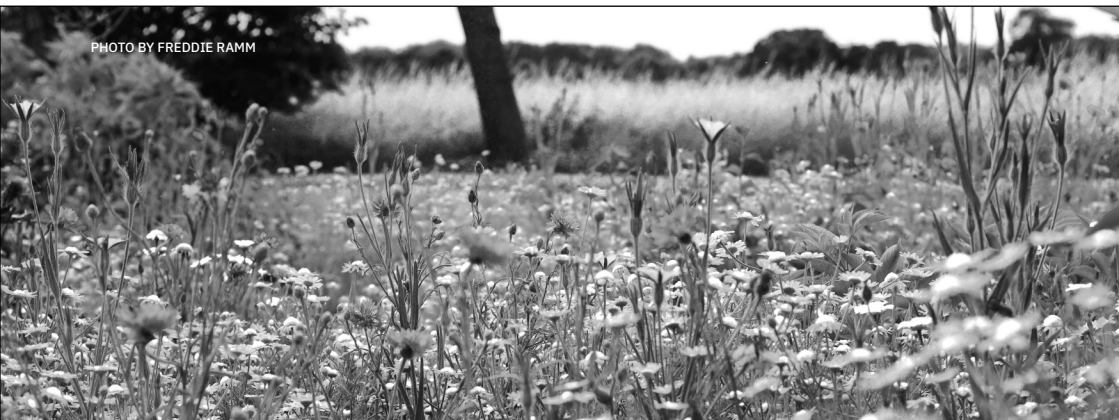
Plantlife

What's This?
It's a QR code.
Point the camera of your mobile phone or iPad at it to visit a linked website



Pennard

PHOTO BY FREDDIE RAMM



Spectacular Generosity

For some years St Nicolas' Church has recycled spectacles for World Vision through an independent opticians' in South Birmingham (not Mason's). They suddenly stopped collecting towards the end of the pandemic and it became very clear that sending directly and independently is not to be encouraged nor is it sensible, as the postage costs make it unviable. Not to be put off, I went in search of another charity and discovered one which is more or less on our doorstep.

Lions Clubs International has a very active recycling project for used pairs of glasses and they have their headquarters on the Alcester Road South in Kings Heath. They are open from Monday to Friday and even have their own car park. It really couldn't be easier for us.

Taking just the spectacles, not the cases nor the cloths, volunteers sort them at various bases, including the Kings Heath headquarters. Any that are broken or unusable are

recycled for their glass or plastic components. Most are shared with other countries and a few are traded. The funds thus generated support Sight Projects around the world. The list of countries supported is large: Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, Ethiopia, Nepal, Mongolia, Indonesia, Greece, Jordan, The Amazon Basin, Brazil, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, The Dominican Republic, Panama and Cuba.

For many of the recipients of the glasses, it is the first time they have experienced corrected sight. They are able to learn to read, to attend school and to find jobs.

As for the Lions, their whole ethos is to serve others, be that locally, nationally or internationally and we have been able to join in with that.

Do keep collecting old spectacles, and putting them in the box (*the receptacle for spectacles? Ed.*) on the very long table towards the back of St Nicolas' Church.



Open Air Worship

A legacy of the pandemic, the outdoor services at St Nicolas' Church remain popular. They are held on the 4th Sunday of the month at 10.30 am, moving inside the church building only if the weather allows no other option.

As you can see here, this year's Palm Sunday 10.30 service was an out-of-doors affair too.



New Ways to Give

If you have a mobile phone or tablet, you can now use it to give to the work of Kings Norton Team Parish. Just point your camera at the QR code below and follow the link which appears on the screen.

If you encounter any technical problems, please let the Parish Office know.

You'll find similar codes appearing in church soon.



What's This?
It's a QR code.
Point the camera of your mobile phone or iPad at it to visit a linked website

Give to KNTP

LIVING STONES

Work has started on presenting the *Living Stones* project to interested parties. This month, we share our approach with colleagues in the Property Team at the Diocese and with our architects. Both will be involved heavily in helping us to move our plans forward and in approaching funders, gaining the appropriate permissions, and putting more detail into our plans.

On a practical level, work is once again and at long last underway on our spire. We are working with a team of steeplejacks from Sally Strachey Historic Conservation to ensure that the most urgent pieces of work are undertaken to stabilise some of the structure. The first phase involved surveying the spire from top to bottom to work out the most critical items that needed to be addressed. The structure is in poor condition. Some items will have to be removed or secured to prevent them from further deterioration.

The work is very specialised and working on a spire is not for the faint-hearted, as you can see in the photo on the opposite page! Every care is taken to ensure the safety of our

steeplejacks as well as the public who use our churchyard and, of course, to protect the spire itself. If it seems slightly breezy on the ground, it can be much worse at over 100 feet up, so on some days you won't see anyone working.

St Nicolas' spire dates from the 15th century, between 1446 and 1475, to be precise. That means that its construction began at the end of the Hundred Years War in the reign of Henry VI. When Elizabeth I came to the throne, it had towered over Kings Norton for more than 80 years. When Sir Christopher Wren started work on St Paul's Cathedral our spire was already 200 years old. Not only has it stood for over five centuries, it is an important local

landmark. There aren't many places in Kings Norton where you can go and not see it. It is actually octagonal with decorative stone features called crockets ("knobbly bits" is the easiest translation). Sadly, those crockets are fragile and some have had to be removed to be repaired and refixed. Others have been reattached securely. Have a look next time you are passing and see if you can spot where they are missing from.

Storm Eunice, back in February, has also caused some damage to the roof of the nave, the central aisle of the church. From above, it looks as if a giant has taken a bite out of the roof! We are working with our insurers to get the tiles replaced but, again, these are not in the easiest of places to reach so we have to be careful in our approach to the repair.

All of this also means that there will be some disruption when you visit. You may have to use different entrances to the church or find a different route around the churchyard. Please do bear with us. We will keep disruption to a minimum, but the work is essential to the future survival of St Nicolas'.



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Not Casting Clouts

*An ancient axiom exhorts us to "Ne'er cast a clout till May be out!" This expression has been in use nationwide since at least 1855. F.K. Robertson wrote in the *Whitby Gazette*, "The wind at the North and East was never good for man nor beast, so never think to cast a clout until the month of May be out."*




**THELMA MITCHELL IS
LEAD CHAPLAIN AT
BOURNVILLE COLLEGE**

However, there were earlier versions. In 1732 Thomas Fuller, a physician and preacher, published a snappily-titled version of the rhyme in his *"Gnomologia, a book of adages, proverbs, wise sentences and witty sayings, foreign and British."*

Which set me a-wondering. Does "when May be out" refer to the end of the month or the arrival of the May blossom and warmer weather? The word *clout* is sometimes found as *clowt*, *clowte*, *cloot* or *clute*. It is derived from the fifteenth century English for cloth or clothing. To *cast a clout* is to take off your clothes.

Life was definitely somewhat malodorous in previous centuries, which is why richer people carried aromatic pomanders to ward off smells and diseases as they passed amongst the peasants! Winter layers were left on until the weather warmed and only faces and hands were washed. These extra items of clothing were often too much for some workers, such as farm workers, who were known to collapse of heat exhaustion. Thus the flowering of the May hawthorn became the more reliable indicator of clout casting. For some, though, no clouts were cast until June. This was the month of bathing and putting on clean clothes in preparation for the June season of weddings. According to another old saying, generally speaking, marrying in May was discouraged. "Marry in May and you'll rue the day". (Don't say you weren't warned!) Washing was also discouraged in that month. "Wash a blanket in May, wash a dear one away".



It used to be forbidden to bring hawthorn blossom into the house, except on the day of the May celebrations at the beginning of May, not least because of the smell. As it decays it carries the "smell of death" caused by the chemical compound trimethylamine which the flowers give off as they deteriorate. Though, if you hadn't washed or changed your clothes since the late autumn, would you notice?

Shakespeare often referred to the month of May. For example, in "Love's Labour's Lost", Biron says, "Love, whose month is ever May, spied a blossom passing fair, playing in the wanton air". In Sonnet 18 we find some of the Bard's best-known lines. "Shall I compare Thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May and summer's lease has all too short a date." There is subtext here but, as this is a Parish Magazine, I shall leave that for you to uncover!

Speaking of which, the most famous of the English *balletts*, a light, dancelike song not unlike a madrigal, includes the words, "Now is the month of Maying". It was written by Thomas Morley in 1595 and is deliberately full of double-entendres, a practice which grew during the Renaissance. This *ballett* is sung by the college choir from the roof of Magdalen College's Great Tower in Oxford on May Day morning at 6.00 am. It is followed by a hymn, the *Hymnus Eucharisticus*, and a prayer led by the Dean, who is surrounded by large groups of students, staff and Oxford residents. In 2017, gathering in the college cloisters, and on the top of the other college towers, a record 27,000 attended! The whole day has a party atmosphere, including Morris dancing and music. In some years, there is an all-night ball the night before, with many turning up in ball gowns and formal attire. Poems have been written about it, notably Vera Britten's "May Morning", published in 1916. It is referred to in "Shadowlands", a wonderful film about the unlikely, deep love which developed between the writer C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman. Elizabeth Goudge, in "Towers in the Mist", which is set in Oxford in Elizabethan England, includes a colourful description of the Tudor May morning.

The month of May is named after the Greek goddess Maia. She was identified with the Roman goddess of fertility, Bona Dea, whose festival was held in May. In the Catholic tradition, from the 13th century, it became the month of Mary, a month



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

for honouring the mother of Jesus. Across the United Kingdom a young woman would be nominated as the "Queen of the May". The tradition of the May Queen, garlanded and dressed in white, persisted in many towns and villages until recently. She would be crowned by the previous Queen, sitting high on a throne under an arch of flowers, with her "maidens", other young women in pretty dresses and bedecked with flowers beside her, accompanied by a decorated procession. It was the duty of the May Queen to open the May Day festivities and the dancing round the Maypole. There would be a May Fair and rather a lot of drinking and revelling!

The May Queen became the personification of spring and summer, the celebration of youth. Some speculate that this custom was linked to ancient tree worship. The tradition is still celebrated fulsomely in parts of the United Kingdom today, such as in

Hayfield, Derbyshire, Hayes Common in Bromley and Aldborough, North Yorkshire. My mother was from a somewhat puritanical background and did not approve of these customs! I was forbidden to be considered as May Queen, though I longed for the frock and the flowers. In retrospect, I agree with her now, not least because of the overtones of child sacrifice.

The "merry month of May" this year has been overshadowed by the horrors of war in Ukraine. April became another month of sorrow, pain, cruelty and death. Pope Francis reflected on the brutal, illegal war there on a visit to Malta recently. The UN is powerless in the Ukraine war, where the logic of the powerful prevails. "The dominant logic are [sic] the strategies of the most powerful countries to affirm their own interest."

We see the marks of dangerous dictators. They imprison and torture their opponents and brutally quell any

opposition. Tacitus, a Roman historian and senator (56 BC – 120 AD), said: "If you would know who controls you, see whom you may not criticize." We see these marks in Kim Jong Un of North Korea, Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, Victor Orbán of Hungary, who has been re-elected by a landslide, and of course, in Vladimir Putin, to name sadly but a few. Our hearts break for Ukraine and Ukrainians, trapped in a pitiless and vicious war which is not of their choice or creation.

Other ongoing, equally horrific conflicts have slid off the news cycles, for instance, in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria. How do we cope? What can we do? We are reminded in Matthew chapter 5, verse 44, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount, to "Love [our] enemies, bless those who curse [us], do good to those that hate [us], and pray for those who mistreat [us] and persecute [us]." This feels like the hardest thing in the world at the moment. However, pray we must, for a swift justice, for a lasting peace, and for the re-building of shattered lives and wrecked communities. We need to remember the past, pay close attention to the present, and imagine a better future.

I close with a **Christian Aid prayer for Ukraine** by Sally Foster-Fulton:

Borders, barricades, bewilderment ...

when the bargaining begins, God please protect peace.

Sanctions, security measured in minutes and it's scary ...

when safety scatters, God please protect peace.

War dresses up in peacekeeper's clothes,

Troops amass, the ground trembles and so do people ...

when the future feels fragile, God please protect peace.

The littlest, the least likely to have a say,

Those whose lives are sanctioned and bargained over –

violence always finds them first.

And the 'oh-so-important' political manoeuvres mean nothing to them,

they just want to live.

When the winners want to wipe them out of the way, God please protect peace.

We will not turn away. We will stand together – God give us the strength to protect peace.

Amen.



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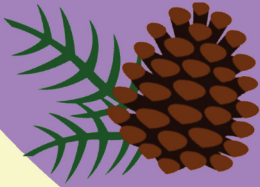
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