

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

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Larry Wright on Lent,
repentance & reconciliation

Sir Rodger Winn

U-Boat hunter turned High
Court judge

Holding on to Hope

Wisdom to lift your spirits
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Welcome

EDITORIAL

The irrepressible, irreplaceable Archbishop of Cape Town knows a thing or two about hope. With his friend Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu led the exodus of the South African people from the slavery of apartheid to the freedom of democracy in the 1980s. No-one was surprised when he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his unwavering commitment to reconciliation and nonviolent resistance.

Tutu also knew a thing or two about the darkness. For him, apartheid was no less evil than Nazism and, as a black man in a white supremacist state, he experienced his own share of suffering. What was it that enabled him to keep going in the face of brutal opposition? The deeply-held belief that the shadows would not win. "Hope," he wrote, "is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."

For many people, the latest lockdown with the prospect of months of uncertainty to come feels like a dark place. That is why, in this edition, we focus on the light which continues to shine, even on the dreariest days. I challenge you to read these pages and not feel uplifted, challenged and encouraged. You may even be surprised: there have been some changes since last month, our first facelift in 7 years. If you like the new layout, please let us know.

Christian hope is rooted in the conviction that, however bleak things may feel, we are in Safe Hands. The prophet Jeremiah put it well: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."



David Ash

Why Ashes?

REPENTANCE, FORGIVENESS, JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION all lie at the heart of the ancient Christian ritual of Ashing. The Revd Larry Wright explores its origins and its implications.

Each year, the Christian season of Lent begins with one of our more unusual ceremonies. It involves the marking of a cross in cold ashes on the forehead, in some traditions also the palms, of believers. The ashes are traditionally the remains of burned palm crosses from the previous year. It's an unusual act because it only happens once a year on **Ash Wednesday** (17th February this year) and also because it

↓ Ashes on the forehead: an ancient symbol of repentance and of God's forgiveness

may be seen as not only a smudge on the skin but a stain on one's character. The ashes symbolise the Church's annual acknowledgement of our human capacities for wrongdoing and our need for mercy and forgiveness.

An outward sign of grief

The use of ashes is an ancient practice. Various references to it can be found in the Jewish scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament. We can read how people, from prophets to kings, used to pour ashes, usually mixed with dust, over their heads when humbling themselves after a serious offence against God or God's people. Dust and ashes were also poured over the head by those who were grieving the death of someone close and dear to them. These gestures were an outward sign of an acute, debilitating inner conflict: either the person was grieving because of their sins or grieving the loss of a life.

Hurt has consequences

The search for outlets for our strong feelings of grief or sorrow is seen in all human societies. We are naturally social beings. Our relationships with others help to define who we are and the quality of our lives. When we deliberately set out to hurt



PHOTO BY AHNA ZIEGLER



PHOTO BY KALEA MORGAN

others we expect to be called to account and to make amends. If our actions towards others are illegal or criminal the law will convict and punish us. Whatever hurt we cause, there are always consequences, even if we distance ourselves from those we harm.

Justice should heal

It's interesting to note that, in the British criminal justice system, there's been a shift away from dealing with offenders and victims separately. At the time of sentencing, victims can now provide statements to a court outlining the impact which a serious crime has had upon them and their families. Another major development in the criminal justice system relates to how criminals are punished by being confronted

↑ "There can be no justice without peace. And there can be no peace without justice." Dr Martin Luther King Jr, 1967



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

by their victims, a concept known as *restorative justice*. This approach to crime takes seriously the need for an offender to be challenged with the effect their crime has had upon the victim and to take full responsibility for it. This usually involves requiring the offender to meet with their victim and others to talk through the harm that has been caused. As one of the early exponents of restorative justice put it, "crime causes injury, justice should heal" This approach is now widely used for less serious offences as a means of bringing offender and victim together to reach a point of mutual understanding and a degree of "healing"

Owning up

Taking full responsibility for actions which deliberately or



← In some Christian denominations confessions are heard individually

Lent : a time for renewal

Lent is the season set aside to focus on our lifestyles and attitudes, our values and beliefs. These alter as we mature, or may be altered because of events in our lives, perhaps when new knowledge and understandings are gained. In the complexities of life, we need clear moral standards by which to live. People of faith look to their holy texts and the teachings of their faith to nurture and guide their life choices. People of faith also recognise that they are human and, as such, will, at times, fall short of the teachings of their religion. Lent provides a time for self-examination and renewal of

unintentionally cause harm or suffering to others is partly what Christians are doing when we use words of confession and repentance during services. The Roman Catholic church and some Anglo-Catholic churches still retain the practice of hearing individual confessions in a confessional 'box'. In whichever way we, as Christians, own up to our wrongdoings, we are urged to take full responsibility for them and to seek forgiveness. So, we return to the purpose of Lent.

*“Lent provides a time
for self-examination
and renewal of our
lives measured
against the life,
example and
teachings of Jesus.*

our lives measured against the life, example and teachings of Jesus.

Ashes to ashes

There is another aspect of the use of ashes at the beginning of Lent. They are a reminder of our mortality. At funerals, the prayer of committal, either at the grave or crematorium, includes the words, 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust...'

They poetically capture the realities of death when our 'frail bodies' are consigned to the earth or to fire. With cremation, all that will be left is ashes. On Ash Wednesday

↓ The pandemic has reminded us of how fragile life is, of how suddenly it can be taken away

the words which accompany the signing of the cross are, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return..."

A gift to be cherished

During this pandemic, we have been made only too aware of how fragile life is and how suddenly it can be taken from us. During Lent we have an opportunity to remind ourselves that life is a precious gift to be cherished, not squandered. How we live our lives in relation to God and our neighbour is the key for many millions to a life well lived.

Wishing you a fruitful Lent.



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

Christmas is over. Or is it?



PHOTO BY JANKO FERLIC

February sees us entering the next season in the Church's calendar. It's that in-between time before the beginning of Lent on **Ash Wednesday** which, this year, is **February 17th**. A time to draw breath, as it were, after pondering the events of Christmas and Epiphany. The Christmas tree, along with the decorations, has been put away and the Christmas cards have been taken down. I wonder what you do with these? Recycle in some way, keep until next year or simply dispose of them? As I take mine down, I read the greetings again, make a note of people I would like to phone, visit or write to. Those cards, put aside, I think, will make good labels for next year's gifts.

One card that particularly touched me this year came from an 'old' university friend and her husband. The picture on the front is not very Christmassy; in fact, I failed at first to see a connection, other than that it bore the words 'God with us'. Actually, it's more of a photograph than a picture and is comprised simply of two feet, those of a baby. On the inside there was a poem, by **Mark Greene**, entitled *Christmas Promise*, which explained the image:

*This baby, this God, my God, Mary's son,
Did not come as an artist's impression,
Oil on canvas, tempera on wood,
But from the womb, bone, brain, heart, blood.
Came to show that this life,
Come what may, come what came to him.*

I was struck again by the immensity of what had happened that first Christmas, over 2000 years ago. The photo of the baby's feet seemed somehow to encapsulate that here was God, in a human baby. A baby born, with all the mess and blood that a birth entails, a baby from the womb, made of flesh and bone, with a human heart and brain. Much to think about, to wonder at the mystery of how God could do this and to realise, yet again, that God chooses a way into His world that means He is not too 'godly' to enter the mess and muddle that is so often our life. And then, all too soon, the season of Christmas is over. Or is it?

I must admit that I'm not one for poetry. It never interested me at school – too obscure – and so to find that I have been struck by the words of two poems in the last few weeks is rather unique in my experience! The second poem, *Christmas Begins*, is one by **Howard Thurman** and addresses my earlier question "Is Christmas over?" Here are the words – a challenge for us all as we go about God's business in 2021.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*

So, may you continue to shine with the light of Christ and bring comfort and joy to others throughout 2021.



THE REVEREND
JAYNE CROOKS IS
THE HONORARY
ASSISTANT PRIEST
AT ST NICOLAS'
CHURCH



PHOTO BY MATT COLLAMER

Do something just for you

Pauline offers ways of building resilience during lockdown and considers a return to letter writing

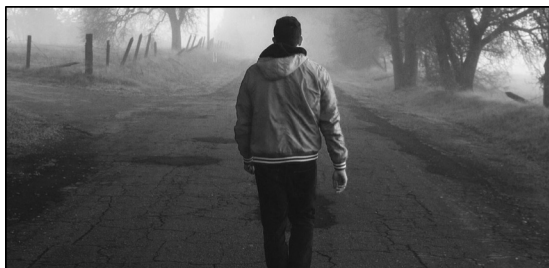


PAULINE IS
THE LAY
MINISTER AT
ST NICOLAS'
CHURCH,
KINGS
NORTON

As we enter February, we prepare for the start of the season of Lent. As you may already have read, Ash Wednesday this year is on the 17th February and as I write this we don't know what restrictions will still be in place by then. Wherever we are, the thought of giving things up this Lent feels harsh as many of us have already had to give up so much. The same is true of taking up something new. Many have had to learn new skills or find different ways of keeping themselves and others entertained.

▼ A WALK IN
THE FRESH AIR
HAS HUGE
BENEFITS

What matters most this year is our mental well-being



and our resilience after a year that has taken its toll on our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health. So, each day during Lent, I am suggesting that you do something that is just for you. There are suggestions opposite if you, like me, struggle to think of activities to occupy yourself. They are all simple things to do such as reading a book, having a bath or praying.

The other important thing we need to remember is to build our resilience, which I'm pleased to say is easier than you think. Luckily, the simplest thing you can do to build resilience is to go for a walk. Fresh air, movement and a change of scene will have huge benefits especially if you can fit it into your daily routine; even a walk around the garden or to the bottom of the road. Or you might consider keeping your mind active with crosswords, sudoku, puzzles and games. All help to keep the little grey cells active.

Don't forget the benefits of having a conversation or of

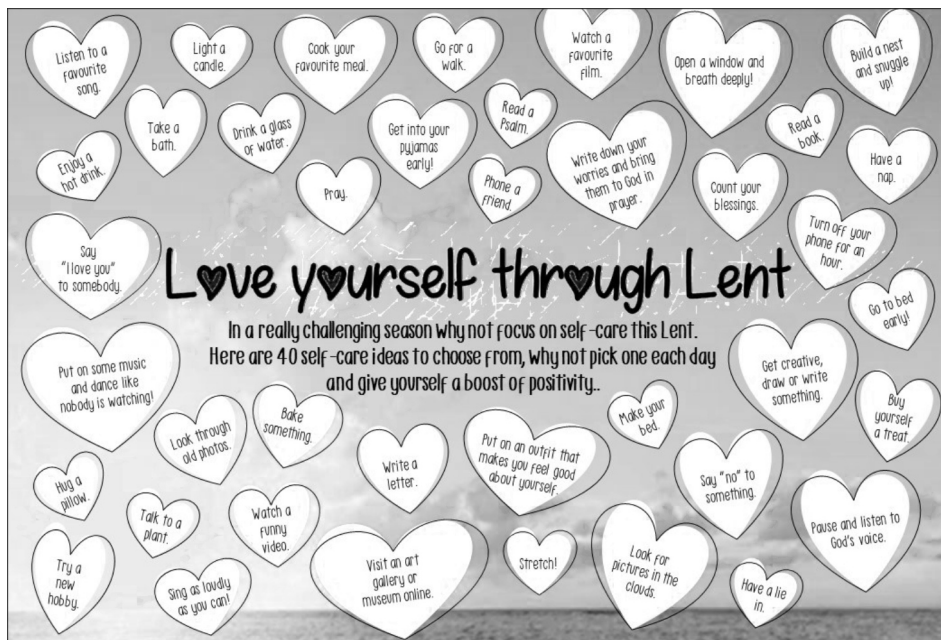


IMAGE FROM TOGETHER AT HOME: CHURCH RESOURCES

making social contact. Pick up the phone, send a text or write a letter but keep in touch with people.

I wonder if letter writing will come back into vogue. One of our older people wrote to me over Christmas and I thought that I would write back to her, which made me think. When was the last time I actually wrote a letter? I can't remember the last time I put pen to paper. When I first left home, many years ago now, I used to write to my parents every week but that was a long time ago before technology enabled us to stay in touch in other ways. I also used to write because they didn't have a telephone, but

that is another story! I wasn't very good at letter writing and would usually drone on about the weather when I couldn't think of anything else to say! I wonder if the art of writing a letter has died out. Do I actually have any writing paper and can you still buy 'Basildon Bond'? I feel a letter writing campaign coming on as I still love getting post and, as a child, always wanted to work in the Post Office. The excitement as a hand-written envelope drops through the letter box is still quite magical and makes a change from bills and marketing drivel.

I need to go and buy writing paper and stamps. And walk the dog!

▲ WE ALL NEED HELP TO FEEL MORE HOPEFUL. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHEER YOURSELF UP? HERE ARE SOME IDEAS.

KINDER, MORE PATIENT OR JUST GRUMPIER?

Have you taken down your Christmas decorations yet? The recent custom has been to remove them by Twelfth Night, 6th January, the Feast of the Epiphany. It was the tradition in times past, however, to take them down on 2nd February, Candlemas Day, when lighted candles are processed in some churches to celebrate the feast of the presentation of Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem. Robert Herrick, a 17th Century Anglican priest who is best known for his anthology of poetry, *Hesperides*, wrote a poem called *Candlemas*, which I love. It begins:

*Down with rosemary and bayes
Down with the mistletow,
Instead of holly, now up-raise
The greener box for show.
The holly hitherto did sway;
Let box now domineere,
Until the dancing Easter-day,
Or Easter's Eve appear.*

We had better raid the gardens for box and set to, decorating the house anew, if Adam the Gardener approves! The last lines of this poem seem particularly appropriate this year;

*Thus times do shift;
Each thing his turn does hold;
New things succeed
As former things grow old.*

As we approach the anniversary of the first lockdown I think we are all praying for certain former things to grow old and just go away. It is hard to believe that we are still living in the eternal winter of Covid isolation. We were promised, over-optimistically, that it would be gone by Easter, Summer, Christmas. And here we are in February 2021. It does not help that

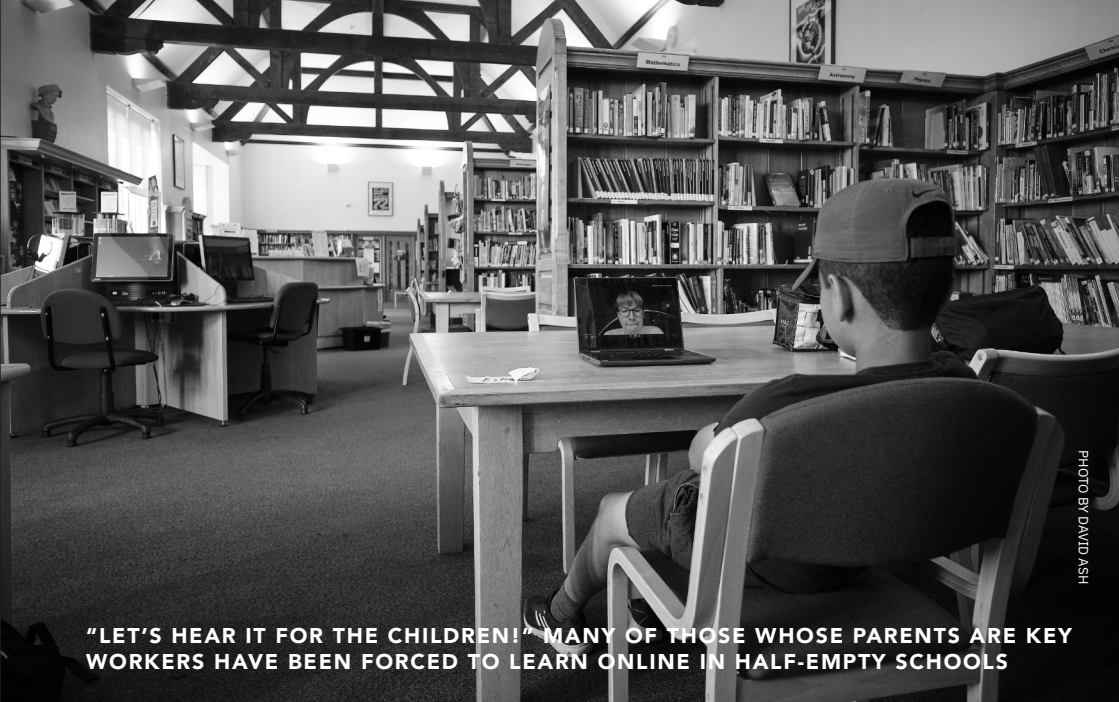


PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

"LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE CHILDREN!" MANY OF THOSE WHOSE PARENTS ARE KEY WORKERS HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LEARN ONLINE IN HALF-EMPTY SCHOOLS

the rules of engagement change frequently and at short notice. No wonder we are all so weary at the beginning of what feels destined to be another long year. The first wave of vaccinations, however, arrived with the new year, bringing injections of optimism and more rumours of hope.

Here's a Covid fun fact: the sales of house slippers have increased by 300%. And definitely two Covid unfunny facts: much more infectious variants of Covid- 19 are circulating and there are a higher number of Covid cases currently than in April last year. It is hard to stay optimistic but we must. As Christians we have a certain hope, as St. Paul reassures us in Ephesians 3: 16 -19.

Paul prays that *"... out of His glorious riches [God] may strengthen us with power through His spirit in our inner beings, so that Christ may dwell in our*

hearts through faith ... we, being rooted strengthened and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love which surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Amen to that!

What lockdown lifelines have saved you? Have you taken up new interests, maybe stargazing or learning to play an instrument or creating your own sourdough starter? Or are you too busy home-schooling and trying to work from home at the same time? Zoom meetings can be so tiring, even if you can wear slippers and pyjama bottoms for work, and don't have to find parking.

And while we're on the subject, let's hear it for the children. This appeared on the internet recently.

Everyone is applauding everyone except our children. These little heroes have stayed indoors more than they've ever known in their lives. Their whole worlds have literally been turned upside down. All these rules they've never known. A life they couldn't have imagined. All the things they love like sports, being with friends, going to school, or just being kids have all been taken away from them. Adults talking about others becoming unwell, news reporting death after death. Our poor children's minds must be racing. Every day they get up and carry on despite all that's going on. So here's to our little heroes: today, tomorrow, forever. (Mira Kapoor)

Do you remember that very enjoyable film of 1993, *Groundhog Day*? The drama is set in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania on 2nd February when a groundhog emerges from its burrow. If it retreats back into its den then winter will continue for another six weeks. If it does not retreat then spring will arrive early.

The plot of the film revolves round a sarcastic, egotistical weatherman, Phil, who arrives in Punxsutawney on Groundhog Day and is unable to leave due to a severe blizzard. He is forced to live the same day over and over again. As he struggles to escape he learns the key to life, that it is not what happens to us that matters, but how we react to events which we can't change and must learn to live with.

This past year has felt rather like Groundhog Day. We were closed in lockdown – reopened – then closed again – re-opened - and promptly closed again. We attempt to understand what is permitted and what isn't, if we



can meet anyone in the park. Exchanging Christmas presents became a nightmare when a degree in operative logistics would have been useful. Groundhog Day musings make me wonder what I have learned through this so unforgettable, unprecedented 12 months so far. Have I become more resilient, kinder, more patient, or just grumpier? Perhaps a bit of all of them.

As I write this, as if there wasn't enough horror in the world, shocking, shameful scenes of domestic terrorism and insurgency in Washington D.C. have been unfolding. Armed, angry rioters stormed and entered the Capitol, the symbol of American democracy, inspired and goaded on by the President. Why? Because he, and

they, cannot accept his democratic defeat. Wild, dangerous, conspiracy theories have abounded. Some of his supporters are certain groups of evangelical Christians who, frankly, hold bizarre, erroneous ideas. Some of them believe that the chaos and lawlessness caused by the outgoing president will hasten the second coming of Jesus. They dared to carry a cross. Many brandished Bibles. One woman allegedly shouted *'No woman as president. It says so in the Bible'*. Like to show me where, lady? Much will be written about this in the days and years to come. I doubt we will ever be able to wash away the image of 33-year-old Jacob Chansley from Arizona, dressed in a coyote tail headdress, face painted red, white and blue, horns on his head, screaming *'Save the steal!'* as he stormed the Capitol building. There has been no contrition from the former President, no apology for the six people dead or that the very foundations of the USA are threatened; just a continuation of the falsehoods and lies.

The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote in the immediate aftermath: *"There will be many lessons to be learned from the scenes in Washington. For the moment let us pray for the USA, the world's greatest defender of democracy until now, as it faces this huge shock. May God bless America with peace and reconciliation."*

We are reminded of the fragility of democracy. Winston Churchill is reputed to have said that democracy is *"the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried."* We need to protect and nourish

democracy until something better comes along.

It is the time of the turning of the year towards the light. The 2nd of February is also the feast of St. Brigid, another day of the celebration of light. Spring is on the horizon, bringing with it hope, renewal and the promise of resurrection in these dark, dark Covid days. Let's finish with some words of encouragement, as we face whatever is to come, from that great hymn, *The God of Abraham Praise*, often sung at Candlemas. It is scripture in song, adapted from a Jewish liturgical poem by Thomas Olivers, a Methodist minister, in 1763. The tune was written especially for Olivers' Christian version by a Jewish composer. It lends itself to a rousing organ accompaniment which gladdens the heart;

The God of Abraham praise, Who reigns enthroned above

Ancient of Everlasting Days, and God of Love;

Jehovah, great I AM! By earth and heaven confessed;

I bow and bless the sacred Name forever blest.

The God who reigns on high the great archangels sing,

And 'Holy, holy, holy!' cry 'Almighty King!

Who was, and is, the same, and evermore shall be;

Jehovah, Lord, the great I AM, we worship Thee!

May comfort, patience and our sure hope in our great God who reigns on high sustain and keep all of us in 2021.

Looking Ahead to 2021

This month I am going to attempt an edition of *Old Adam's Almanac* by looking ahead to find plants which will be a super success with minimal fuss.

If you have a greenhouse then now is the time to start off your hardier seeds (don't forget sweet peas) including, of course, vegetable seeds for the self-sufficient. Planting outside if you are without a greenhouse will be fine in a



sheltered spot; growth will just be a little delayed. I do wonder if it would be very satisfying to grow vegetables not on sale in the supermarkets and to grow more uncommon varieties

▲ **PHOTO TOP :**
AGASTACHE HYBRIDA
"KUDOS GOLD" (HYSSOP)

◀ **PHOTO LEFT :** ALCEA
ROSEA "SPRING CELEBRITY
APRICOT" (HOLLYHOCK)

▶ **PHOTO RIGHT :**
CALENDULA OFFICINALIS
"CANTALOUPE"
(MARIGOLD)

which, even if on sale there, are very expensive. One sought-after vegetable is samphire. My grandchildren have had samphire with fish and really liked it. Some attention to detail may be required to grow this delicacy. See it as a challenge!

There was a time when seed catalogues would land on your doormat with a thump and be full of a vast range of varieties which, sadly, would often show poor germination. Now, many catalogues are online, the packets are smaller but germination

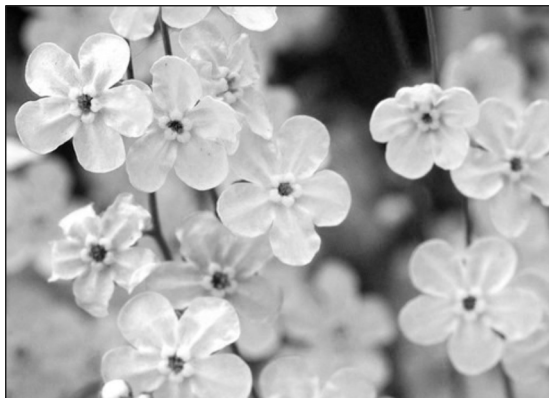
is far better. I can recommend Chiltern Seeds but there are many others available (Chiltern Seeds will send you a printed catalogue on request).

Looking into my crystal ball, here are some seeds new to the market but which stand a chance of becoming favourites.

Killing two birds with one stone we have the first of our new plants and our plant of the month as **Agastache hybrida “Kudos Gold”**. An alternative name could be a hyssop. Bible students will know that a branch of hyssop would be dipped in water and the threshold sprinkled as a means of purifying the household.

The agastaches are hardy, scented, perennial and clump-forming: ideal





OMPHALODES LINIFOLIA

for the perennial border and the bees love them. There are many more of them and most can be grown from seed.

Alcea rosea “Spring Celebrity Apricot” is a new hollyhock and they do seem to do well hereabouts. I have not noticed any suffering from rust, which can be a problem.

Calendula officinalis is the good old favourite pot marigold and this new variety is rather oddly called **Cantaloupe**, but it is very pretty and really easy to grow from seed.

Delphinium consolida is not one of those gigantic blue spired plants from Chelsea but is more compact and described as being fairy pink with a white bee. Growing it from seed is not difficult but watch out for slugs and snails on your new plants. Personally, I find that the blue pellets work very

well when small numbers are scattered under the lower leaves and they also work with Hostas.

The true geranium **Geranium pratense “Spish-splash”** is a tough plant, bearing flowers in variegated blue and white all summer long if the dead flower stems are removed.

The sweet peas are great to cover a fence and **Lathyrus odoratus “Modern Grandiflora Cathy”** is a free-flowering white with an RHS award of merit. There are other colours in this series and please don't forget to dead-head for months of bloom.

Lastly **Omphalodes linifolia** bears forget-me-not looking flowers but in white, springing from a mound of grey-green eaves all through the summer. This little beauty has an award of

merit from the RHS and should be easy to grow from seed. Botanical gardens are fond of using its cousin

Omphalodes verna as a filler between other perennials. This one is a beautiful, a clear blue.

There are some new annual asters but you will look in vain under “aster” as they have been renamed

Callistephus chinensis. I recommend that you try the **Duchesse** series. Its large, double flowers in bright blues will brighten the end of summer. It is strange how some memories survive and others disappear. I can remember that our parents were urged to grow annual asters for the coronation of 1953 because they could be had in red, white or blue!

Adam is not afraid to put his crystal ball to one side so here is a list of plants from a French gardener which is bomb-

proof. It consists of hardy perennials and they are drought resistant to boot!

Geranium “ Rozanne”.

Gaura lindheimeri “Siskiyou Pink”.

Verbena bonariensis (easy from seed).

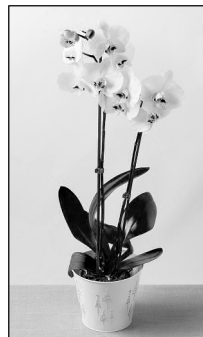
Erigeron karvinskianus (as above). Plant it between stones, steps etc. It’s also known as Mexican Fleabane. It must be very efficient as I have never seen a Mexican flea in its presence!

Nepeta faassenii “Six Hills Giant”. A super tough, blue perennial. Cut it back in the Autumn.

I confidently predict that you will not be able to kill any of the above and I also predict that next month I will tell you how you can grow orchids for years in perfect health and not just for months, as one gardening pundit has just proclaimed. In the meantime water your Christmas orchid sparingly.

I am afraid that astrology is tosh, so I cannot predict what 2021 will bring; but I do hope that you and your family will have a better year than 2020.

Happy gardening!



What if the world were one country?

A psychologist explains why we need to think beyond borders

There are countless different species on the surface of this planet. One of these is the human race, which has over seven billion members. In one sense, there are no nations, just groups of humans inhabiting different areas of the planet. In some cases, there are natural borders formed by sea or mountains, but often borders between nations are simply abstractions, imaginary boundaries established by agreement or conflict.

↓ **The docked Apollo 9 Command and Service Modules (CSM) and Lunar Module (LM), with Earth in the background**

Rusty Schweikhart, a member of the 1969 Apollo 9 space mission, explained how when he looked at the Earth from space, he experienced a profound shift in perspective. Like most of us, he was brought up to think in terms of countries with borders and different nationalities, but seeing the world from this new angle changed his view. He felt “part of everyone and everything”. As he described it:

“You look down there and you can’t imagine how many borders and boundaries you cross, again and again and again, and you don’t even see them.”

Schweikhart’s perspective reminds us that we belong to the Earth rather than to a nation, and to a species rather than a nationality. And although we might feel distinct and different, we all have a common source. Our species originally developed in eastern Africa around 200,000 years ago and migrated out into the rest of the world in a series of waves. If there was an ancestry




website that could trace our lineage back to the very beginning, we would find that we all have the same great-great (followed by many other “greats”) grandparents.

Nationalism

How then do we explain nationalism? Why do humans separate themselves into groups and take on different national identities? Maybe different groups are helpful in terms of organisation, but that doesn't explain why we feel different. Or why different nations compete and fight with one another.

The psychological theory of “terror management” offers one clue. This theory, which has been validated by many studies, shows that when people are made to feel insecure and anxious, they tend to become more concerned with nationalism, status and success. We seem to have an impulse to cling to labels of identity to defend ourselves against insecurity. There has, however, been criticism of the theory by some psychologists who believe it overlooks wider factors that contribute to human behaviour.

That said, the theory could go some way to help explain why nationalism grows in times of crisis and uncertainty. Poverty and economic instability often lead to increased nationalism



“We belong to the Earth rather than to a nation, and to a species rather than a nationality.”

and to ethnic conflict. An increased sense of insecurity brings a stronger need for conceptual labels to strengthen our sense of identity. We also feel the impulse to gain security through the feeling of belonging to a group with shared beliefs and conventions.

On this basis then it's likely that people who feel the strongest sense of separation and the highest levels of insecurity and anxiety, are the most prone to nationalism, racism and to fundamentalist religion.

Shifters

One pertinent finding from my own research as a psychologist is that people who experience high levels of wellbeing (together with a strong sense of connection to others, or to the world in general) don't tend to have a sense of group identity.

I have studied many people who have undergone profound



personal transformation following intense psychological turmoil, such as bereavement or a diagnosis of cancer. I sometimes refer to these people as “shifters”, since they appear to shift up to a higher level of human development. They undergo a dramatic form of “post-traumatic growth”. Their lives become richer, more fulfilling and meaningful. They have a new sense of appreciation, a heightened awareness of their surroundings, a wider sense of perspective and more intimate and authentic relationships.

Global citizens

As I report in my book, *The Leap*, one of the common traits of “shifters” is that they no longer define themselves in terms of nationality, religion or ideology. They no longer feel

↑ Shifters report feeling more connected to the world and less focused on their individual identity.

they are American or British, or a Muslim or a Jew. They feel the same kinship with all human beings. If they have any sense of identity at all, it’s as global citizens, members of the human race and inhabitants of the planet Earth, beyond nationality or border. Shifters lose the need for group identity because they no longer feel separate and so have no sense of fragility and insecurity.

Why we need trans-nationalism

In my view, then, all nationalistic enterprises – such as “America First” or Brexit – are highly problematic, as they are based on anxiety and insecurity, so inevitably create discord and division. And since nationalism contravenes the essential reality of human nature and human origins, such

enterprises always turn out to be temporary. It's impossible to override the fundamental interconnectedness of the human race. At some point, it always reasserts itself.

Like the world itself, our most serious problems have no borders. Problems like the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change affect us collectively and so can only be solved collectively, from a trans-nationalist approach. Such issues can only be properly solved by viewing humans as one species, without borders or boundaries.

Ultimately, nationalism is a psychological aberration. We owe it our ancestors and to our descendants – and to the Earth itself – to move beyond it.

Dr Steve Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Leeds Beckett University.

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“It’s impossible to override the fundamental interconnectedness of the human race. At some point, it always reasserts itself.”

Steve Taylor PhD is the author of several best-selling books on psychology and spirituality. He is the current chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society. His books include *The Fall*, *Waking from Sleep*, *Out of the Darkness*, *Back to Sanity*, *The Calm Center* and *The Leap*. His latest book is *‘Spiritual Science: Why Science Needs Spirituality to Make Sense of the World.’* His books have been published in 20 languages and his articles have been published in over 40 academic journals, magazines and newspapers, including *Philosophy Now*, *The Psychologist*, *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*.



Biased? Me?

One of the major features of 2020 was the rise of the *Black Lives Matter* campaign. Whilst the title is seen by some as problematic ("Don't **all** lives matter?" they ask) the sentiment behind it is, of course, crucial to good, harmonious community living. It has made me look deeper into the whole world of bias and prejudice, and of judgments made in ignorance with no basis in fact.

I thought back to my eleven happy years working at Dudley Road Hospital (DRH), now City Hospital, where the staff and patients represented much of the globe and, in the main, co-existed well. If there were racist comments made to staff by patients or relatives, the other staff supported their colleagues and challenged the source. Very often, we would start from common ground (recipes, church membership, school days) and encourage the patient to ask questions of their nurse or therapist to really discover the



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

person behind the uniform. When knowledge replaced the rumours and myths, there was gradually greater respect all round. There were times when it went wrong, of course, and sometimes in the funniest and nicest of ways. A patient had some hymns playing on their walkman (we are talking the mid 80's here). First one voice joined in the harmony, and then another. The first turned around to find out who the second was, and was very surprised to find it was a white person. We got chatting and shared our church stories. Ours was only one story among many similar ones. In our department we asked each other about our religious festivals and worked out our annual leave so that we each covered for one another. When I moved to what was then a very white hospital, I realised that the knowledge I had gathered at DRH (and during childhood too, of course, growing up with a mixed race family) was not common knowledge; but it was shared with some care and respect and it began to seep into the general culture.

Racial bias is, of course, usually pretty obvious. But there are many other biases about which we have no idea until they are challenged. Some are simple assumptions. I mislaid my keys at the Foodbank a few months ago and a colleague found them. As the store card key fobs included one for Screwfix, they assumed that they belonged to one of the

men. It made for a great conversation as we all realised how easy it is to make such mistakes. The binman, the postman, the nurse always being a woman. You get the idea.

Some are much less obvious until you begin to delve deeper. Many classical orchestras and ensembles now do at least some of their auditioning behind a screen. The player is not seen by the listener, only heard, and may be referred to as Player A, so even the name cannot lead to bias. The initial decision is made purely on the basis of their playing and is not coloured by dress code, physical appearance or ability, gender, ethnicity, and the like.

Some of my friends in the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra have been recording online recitals and concerts and putting them on the CBSO website, as have scores of other musicians around the world. I have been interested to see how I have responded to those dressed in concert dress compared with those in “mufti”. I have tested myself out by just listening and not watching and have surprised myself several times.

Another area in which I find that I have stupid and completely unfounded biases is that of regional accents in broadcasts. Why do I assume that someone with an Edinburgh accent is more academic than someone with an

accent from a more industrial region of the UK? It is ridiculous, considering that I am Birmingham born and bred. Why does a 1950’s BBC accent send me climbing up the wall? I need to learn to hear the words and not let the speaker’s delivery cloud my listening.

We each have our own biases. It is worth exploring them and, although it is possibly quite challenging, it is also enlightening, as you discover so much more about others and about yourself in the process. Some will still pop up to surprise you when least expected; but treat it as a learning opportunity!

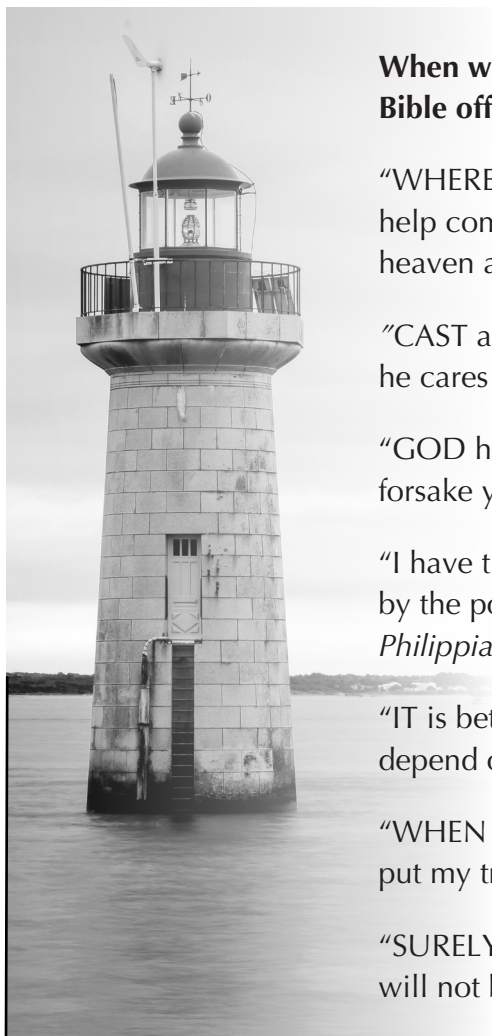
↓ Take time to get to know the person behind the uniform.



PHOTO BY HUSH NAIDOO

HOPE

ANCIENT
WISDOM
FOR
TURBULENT
TIMES



When we are tempted to despair, the Bible offers hope and encouragement.

"WHERE does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." *Psalms 121:1-2*

"CAST all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." *1 Peter 5:7*

"GOD has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'" *Hebrews 13:5*

"I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me."
Philippians 4:13

"IT is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on people." *Psalms 118:8*

"WHEN I am afraid, O Lord Almighty, I put my trust in you." *Psalms 56:3*

"SURELY there is a future and your hope will not be cut off." *Proverbs 23:18*

The Lent Conversations 2021

In the Eye of the Storm *God and Faith in a Time of Pandemic*

Weds 24th February at 7.30 pm

Natural disasters and plagues in the Bible

Punishment or warning?

Weds 3rd March at 7.30 pm

Suffering and survival

Attitudes to affliction, dying and healing in the Gospels

Weds 10th March at 7.30 pm

Worship in the storm

How does widespread suffering influence our worship?

Weds 17th March at 7.30 pm

Face masks and masquerades

Christian attitudes to worldly authority in the New Testament

Weds 24th March at 7.30 pm

A new Heaven and a new Earth?

Longings and visions for when the storm subsides

Weds 31st March at 7.30 pm

Lamentation and celebration

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

Information about how to participate on Zoom will appear on the Parish Website, on Facebook and in the In Touch weekly newsletter.

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

THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

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

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



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

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



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

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

For the latest changes and updates, see the weekly newsletter, which is available on the Parish Website at www.kingsnorton.org.uk

Sir Rodger Winn : From U-Boat Hunter to Lord Justice of Appeal

In what you might call another Winn for Kings Norton, Michael Kennedy, with input from American naval historian Dr David Kohnen, explores the life of a talented wartime intelligence officer, High Court judge and Privy Councillor with local roots.

In two recent issues, we covered the life and career of the 50s and 60s TV personality Godfrey Winn, born in Kings Norton in 1906. By coincidence, another of the great men that the parish has given to the world is also called Winn, and was born in 1903. However, though there can't have been many Winn families in the vicinity around that time, it seems they were not related.

Sir Rodger Winn reached remarkable heights during his life, achieving great distinction in two distinctly different areas of excellence. He not only became a prominent judge, a Lord Justice of Appeal and a Privy Counsellor but also played a vital role in helping to secure victory for Britain and its allies in World War Two, in a sphere of action which had little to do with his legal capabilities. He was a prominent intelligence officer in the Royal Navy who, with his American counterpart,



**MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY &
KINGS
NORTON'S
FAMOUS
NAMES**

led the Allies' tracking of German U-boat operations, a crucial part of the war.

Charles Rodger Noel Winn was born in Kings Norton on 22 December 1903, and soon had to overcome major challenges. He suffered from polio as a child, leaving him with crippled legs and a severely stooped posture. Yet despite these adversities, he was so successful at Oundle School that he won a place to study law at Trinity College, Cambridge. He then went to Harvard University in the United States. He was called to the bar by the Inner Temple in 1928.

He practised successfully for several years, but then his life developed another significant dimension. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Winn volunteered for service, initially offering his legal skills as an interrogator of German prisoners.

But he was soon assigned to the Admiralty's Submarine Tracking Room; a surprising move, given that he was a civilian with no naval experience and had no relevant experience.

Once the airborne bombing raids on Britain had been resisted, and the threat of the Luftwaffe subsided, the German U-boat fleet represented perhaps the greatest threat to the survival of Britain during the remaining years of the war. In military terms it was a constant menace to naval warships, reinforcing the investment that the Nazis had made in formidable vessels such as the battleships Bismarck and Tirpitz. But perhaps even more significant was the threat the U-boats posed to merchant shipping, particularly those delivering armaments, food and other critical supplies to a country with ever-dwindling resources. Reducing and ultimately eliminating the U-boat threat was a major priority for those directing the war.

Though Rodger Winn probably never envisaged becoming involved in this highly specialised area, it seems he had a natural instinct. Completely new to the naval environment, he quickly came to understand U-boat tactics, and could frequently predict their actions. As a result, he was promoted to command the Tracking Room, as a temporary Commander in the



Sir Charles Rodger Noel Winn, RNVR, CB, OBE (22 December 1903 – 4 June 1972), as he later became, is pictured here during his service as the Royal Navy intelligence officer who led the tracking of German U-boat operations during World War II. This photo, together with those on the following pages, has been generously provided by American historian David Kohnen, author of 'Commanders Winn and Knowles: Winning the U-boat War with Intelligence 1939-1943'. Professor Kohnen is the Captain Tracy Barrett Kittredge Scholar of War Studies and Maritime History at the US Naval War College, Rhode Island. He earned his Ph.D. in the War Studies Department at King's College London and subsequently served as the founding director of the John B. Hattendorf Center for Maritime Historical Research and as executive director of the Naval War College Museum. The Editor would like to acknowledge his expert help in preparing this story for publication.

Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR). It is a measure of his ability that he received this rank and position without formal naval officer training, which was unprecedented at the time.

Winn had been considered medically unfit to serve in the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR). This proved to be an issue later when his superiors wanted to promote him to a higher rank than his American counterparts, Commander Kenneth A. Knowles and Dr John D. McDiarmid, to whom he taught the methods used at the Operational Intelligence Centre in London in 1942. It is interesting to note in passing that Commander Knowles (Officer in Charge, Atlantic Section) received promotion to Captain as a member of the Central

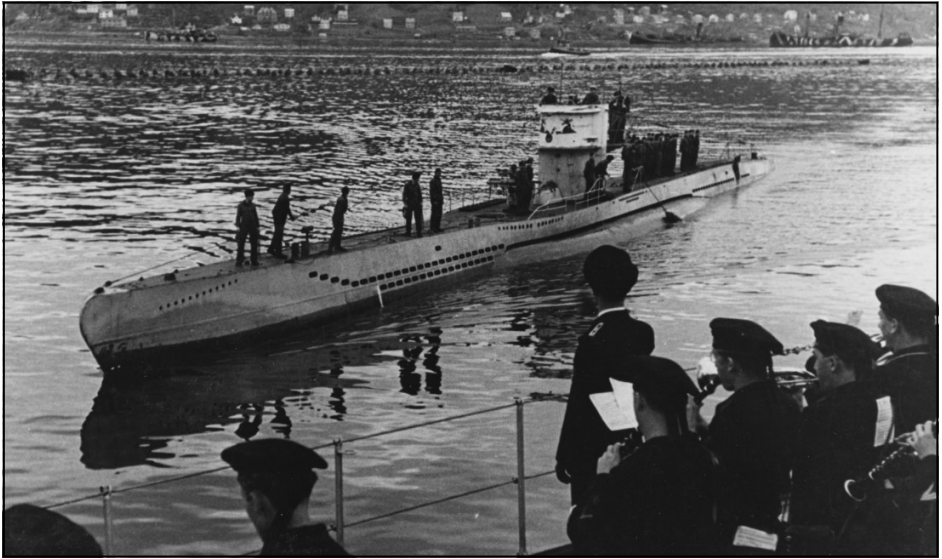
▼ WINN'S
TEAM AT
WORK IN THE
PLOT ROOM
AT THE
ADMIRALTY
(OPERATIONAL
INTELLIGENCE
CENTRE,
LONDON)

Intelligence Group in Europe in 1946 and then helped to form the CIA, advising President Kennedy as the senior naval analyst during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

During WW2, most of the German attacks were on shipping in the Atlantic, particularly close to the US coast. Winn was therefore sent to America to support the effort to counteract them and to represent the British interest, though his spheres of action also included other theatres of naval warfare around the world. His arguments and expertise proved effective; for example, he managed to persuade Admiral Ernest King, the formidable US Navy commander in chief, to implement a specific sort of



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM © IWM A 13204



convoy system which would help minimise losses.

Winn was a keen student of the Allies' Ultra and Magic intelligence processes, which attempted to break German military and naval coded message systems and to assess how far the Germans themselves were being successful in breaking Allied code systems. From Ultra and his observations of U-boat movements, he deduced that German codebreakers had cracked the BAMS (Broadcast to Allied Merchant Ships) code used by the Admiralty for convoy operations. In 1943 he eventually convinced the Admiralty to make the necessary revisions to BAMS. After the war, captured records showed that the German Navy's Beobachtungsdienst (Signals Intelligence Service) had been reading BAMS since the start of the conflict, so Rodger Winn's

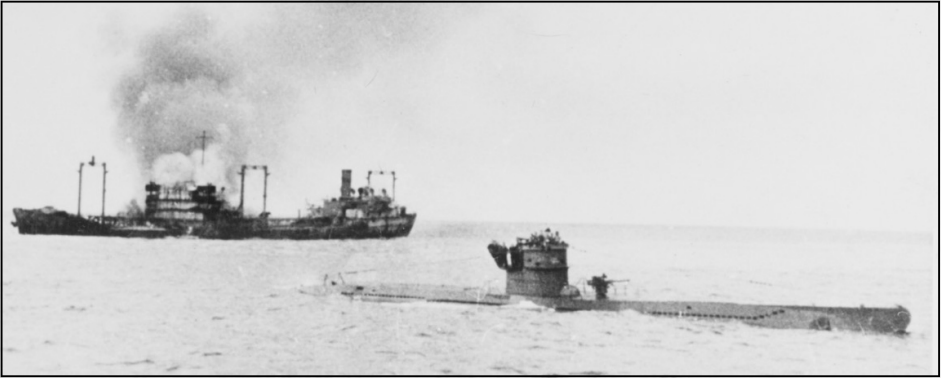
▲ U-251
RETURNING TO
NARVIK,
NORWAY,
AFTER THE
SUCCESSFUL
DESTRUCTION
OF CONVOY
PQ-17 IN JUNE
1942



PROFESSOR
DAVID
KOHNNEN,
CMDR, US
NAVY
(RETIRED)

recommendations were both accurate and vital.

Subsequently, he made another major intervention. In 1944, the Germans equipped the U-boats with snorkels, so that they could operate without surfacing. Though it was still extremely difficult for a U-boat to navigate without surfacing, those operating in the dangerous waters south of Ireland their crews managed it effectively and continued to threaten shipping in that vital area. Winn guessed that they were using their depth sounders to locate and fix on a particular location. He arranged for a double agent to send a bogus message, warning the Germans of a new British minefield "where they (the U-boats) go to fix their position." The Germans soon declared a 60-square mile zone within which they prohibited U-boats from



travelling, which severely reduced their scope to operate.

There is no doubt that Rodger Winn's war-time work was crucial to the Allied success in the Battle of the Atlantic. Without this success, Britain might have been forced out of the war. His collaboration with Commander Kenneth Knowles created an atmosphere of Anglo-American cooperation that Winn's wartime assistant, Patrick Beesly, once described as "probably closer than between any other British and American organizations in any service and in any theatre."

By the war's end, Winn had attained the rank of Captain. His reputation and influence extended to the United States, where his Tracking Room became the model for a similar facility. He

▲ U-447 NEXT TO A BURNING TANKER IN 1942

received an OBE in 1943, and the American Legion of Merit in 1945.

Once that chapter of his life closed, Winn never ventured there again. He returned to the Bar after the war, to develop a truly distinguished career. From 1954 to 1959, he served as Junior Counsel to the Treasury (Common Law). He was appointed as a Judge of the High Court in 1959, assigned to the Queen's Bench Division, and received the customary knighthood. In 1965, he became a Lord Justice of Appeal, and was made a Privy Councillor. He also served on several important official and legal committees.

Rodger Winn died on 4 June 1972.

▼ A CONVOY SAILING TO SOVIET WATERS AS SEEN FROM HMS ASHANTI IN 1942.



Funerals December 2020

2 Dec	David Leslie Falconer	83	SN.Bu.CY
2 Dec	David John Cumberworth	72	Cr.RD
4 Dec	Leonard Henry Johnson	90	SN.Bu.KN
4 Dec	Molly Patricia Barron	88	Cr.LH
7 Dec	Mark Stephen Griffiths	59	SN.Bu.KN
11 Dec	Jo Anne Thomas	40	SN.Bu.KN

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

LAZARICA PILGRIMAGE UPDATE

Our local pilgrimage to the Serbian church of the Holy Prince Lazar in Bournville, known as the Lazarica, had to be postponed from June last year after the outbreak of Covid-19. This is still postponed, not cancelled. A new date, which we pray will be later this year, will be announced as soon as it is possible to do so. The deposits are being safely held in the parish account. If you have paid your deposit and would prefer it to be returned to you please leave a message with your telephone number and/or email address at the Parish Office. As soon as there is further news I will let everyone know. Thank you for your patience. Stay safe and well. **Thelma Mitchell.**

Time to Pray *A Booklet, An App*



I hope that some readers will have received a copy of this booklet through the post. Others may wish to acquire a copy. It is a beautiful colour A5 publication containing a short service of Morning and Night prayer suitable for use at home. Each service takes about 10 minutes to pray through and can be enhanced by your own Bible readings, although passages are included. There is even an app that can be downloaded to your phone or iPad, that gives the alternative of listening to these services. **The Revd Jayne Crooks.**

Holding on to Hope in Druid's Heath



THE REVD
CATHERINE
MATLOCK IS
A PIONEER
CURATE
WHOSE
MINISTRY IS
FOCUSED
ON DRUIDS
HEATH

IN THESE VERY CHALLENGING TIMES, it can sometimes be hard to hold onto hope. The media excitedly announce the arrival of a Covid vaccine, but the news of a virulent variant follows closely on its heels.

Many residents of Druids Heath face some of the toughest circumstances presented by the pandemic. Yet, as well as witnessing the most concerning challenges of life in this neighbourhood, I continue to discover the deepest hope in its people. Resilient, generous community connectedness interwoven with the powerful tenderness and hospitable grace of the Holy Spirit.

I asked some residents of Druids Heath what hopes they have for the Estate as 2021 begins. Kath, the owner of Kath's Café, dreams of peace and of returning to some sort of normality. One of her regular customers told me how he looks forward to the return of a dear friend to the café, one who is currently



in hospital and struggling with his mental health. This man said he understands the struggle, having “faced his own demons” over Christmas. He longs to walk with his pal and have a proper catch up, sharing pain and humour.

The Druids Heath prayer group envisions combining a tree-planting and garden-growing venture with an arts project, inviting local people to express their dreams for the estate in 2021 in words or pictures. Seeds of Hope? I invited some of our friends to share their hopes with you. Here is a sample of their amazing creativity.



PHOTO BY AARON FERNANDO

DRUIDS HEATH DREAM

As I walk the footpaths walked for many a year,
my mind wanders through the layers of history that built here.
The land has, for man and woman, defined how we be,
Using what nature provided, from farming to industry.
For centuries the land provided and we have worked it,
wood for fuel, animals for food and clay from the pit.
We lined the canals that serviced industry but times did change.
The unforgiving earth proved more valuable for houses to arrange.
Upon the hillside in an awkward fashion, from small to tall,
Our homes were now layered atop what is now historical.
No longer working the land but servicing and labouring for the city
Returning via the 50 after long hard hours but there was no pity!
What were homes and a community born from years of sharing
became boxes damp and cold, raised high and cut off from caring.
Little by little, pride was chipped at and the holes left unfilled.
The glue that held the community tight became brittle and failed.
Then a darkness took hold that spread a negative fervour,
Aimed firstly at those in power and then at each other.
But those from the Heath that is Druid's are strong and full of hope,
We acknowledge our challenges and thrive on the ability to cope.
I believe that, from young to old, from east to west we all need love,
we can reach that goal with help from each other and maybe from above.
My dream is that, by working together, a brighter, better life we'll bring
helped by the nature that surrounds and the commune within.

Jane Cope

Esther Brown

My story of hope is a journey.
I hope you will travel with me.
We will dare to look backwards to move
forward
and give hope the richness of its meaning.
It may not seem that appealing
but I am inviting you on board
Cuz I've experienced hope like I have never done before.

I will begin at the end...2020.
As if it wasn't already a dark year,
loaded with uncertainty, panic and fear,
we declared war on a virus we cannot even see.
Being taught to be armed against an invisible enemy,
creating a landmark in the whole of history,
leaving multiple casualties of his story, her story, our story
and here lies my story...remember with me.

I felt the symptoms shortly after the Prime Minister gave his
speech.
It presented as fear, anxiety, worry and disbelief.
And this spread like wildfire,
bundles of burning bushes blazing through hope – it was dire.
Leaving ashes of despair, when substance was left bare.
And we masked ourselves with judgment replacing love,
adhering to keep away rather than our natural instincts sent
from above.
Lone rangers instead of unified soldiers.
All that was apparent was the smell of smouldering hope.
We were walking on a tight rope,
which made it impossible for others to cross our path,
which leads me to the second symptom.

Alone.

That place we called home which was once safe is now a prison
base.
We are prisoners of war in our once safe space.
The idea of closeness had been replaced with a bubbling pot of
anxiety.

To fight this virus told to keep our distance and keep everything clean.

But this is a sterile environment, sterile of love,
a dark place that we've never known before.

There was a power cut that spread across my neighbourhood,
the darkest dark I have ever known, pitch black.

But in that darkness my daughter ran to find me,
to rediscover embrace, an embrace that provided
soothing light in the midst of painful night.

I felt her and she felt me

and though we didn't know when the darkness would end,
we'd found each other and comfort in that embrace.

That's when I first started thinking about the light.

I started to think about what may be 'light' for others,
such as going to a gym or socialising in pubs,
or visiting the local café.

There's been a type of power cut for almost a year,
but if we look outside ourself, above 'I' level,
we see a gleaming light that breaks through the night sky.
The light shines brightest in the darkest times.

The Bible tells us that when we come to the end of ourselves,
that is when God's inner peace steps in.

We often put a full stop where God has placed a comma,
because we've come to rely on ourselves,
and we've exhausted our resources
And that is when we look up, above 'I' level.

Abraham had a family, Joseph became second in command.

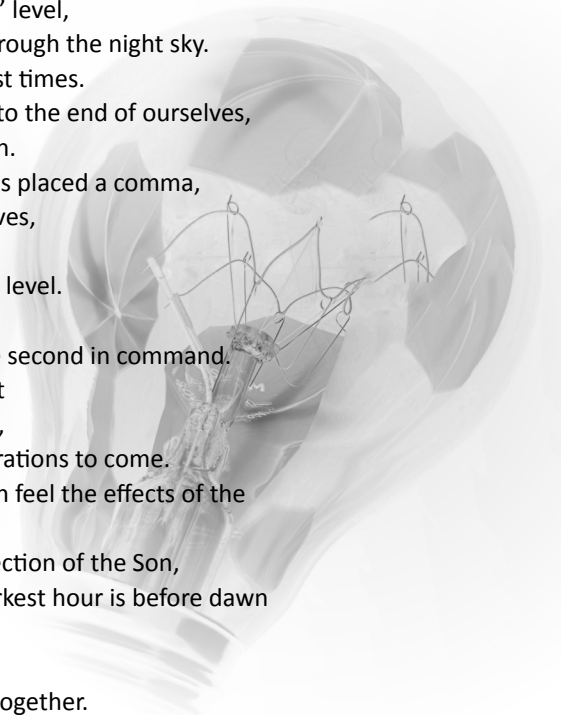
The Red Sea parted, David slew a giant
and Jesus, although pronounced dead,
was resurrected, giving hope for generations to come.

When we see dark times, when we can feel the effects of the
power cut,

we look up in the night sky at the reflection of the Son,
beaming down on us, knowing the darkest hour is before dawn
breaks.

And this isn't the end of the chapter.

Let us all be hope and shine our light together.



RISING RATES & SPIRALLING COSTS

Even for our Victorian ancestors, St Nicolas' Church was a very old building. From time to time, they too had to find large amounts of money to keep it safe and serviceable. But 19th century parishioners were not dependent on donations to prevent the spire from falling down. They could rely on what was known as the rate, a personal charge imposed on any occupier of land or of a house in the parish. Payment of the rate could be enforced by law. It was often unpopular, particularly in the early 19th century. And that, of course, led to problems.

Many readers will be aware of the famous story about the "spinning spire" of St Nicolas' Church. In the 1840s, the spire was considered unstable, and some major work had been proposed to stabilise it by anchoring a large vertical iron rod that hung inside the spire to give it strength. As this work proceeded, a parishioner came running into the church saying that the work was causing the golden weathercock at the top of the tower to spin round "like a ballerina on a musical box", so the attempt had to stop. (*Parish Magazine* October 2016. Ed.)



SOME HISTORY

◆ Church rates were used to meet the costs of conducting services, repairing the fabric of the church and paying the salaries of officials.

◆ The compulsory levying of the church rate was abolished by statute in 1868; however, it remains on a voluntary basis in many parishes.

◆ The church rates were set by the churchwardens together with the parishioners, who were duly assembled after proper notice had been posted in the church vestry or the church.

◆ In 1836 at a public meeting in London, the Church Rate Abolition Society, was formed to co-ordinate the efforts of abolitionist Societies.

◆ The Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Act was passed in 1868, at which point the payment of church rates became voluntary.

That was only part of a story that had lingered on for years. In fact, the spire had been unstable for a prolonged period and the issue of repair costs became an extremely controversial subject, setting local people against each other in ways that these days are almost unimaginable. Catherine Taylor, the captain of the St Nicolas' Church bellringing team, has unearthed some interesting newspaper articles from the period, showing just how bitter the debate became.

The articles are from the Worcestershire Chronicle, dated 23 May 1838 (a month before Queen Victoria's coronation) and 15 July 1840. Before we look into the spire issue, it's worth thinking about how things have changed since then. First, the articles underline just how significant church matters were in the life of the community at that time. These days, issues such as the building costs of parish churches attract no media interest, but in those days, journals reported on such issues in extensive detail.

Second, in case you're wondering why a Worcester paper was so interested in the affairs of a Birmingham suburb, remember that at that time Kings Norton was a long-established and important area of North Worcestershire. It didn't become part of Birmingham for another seventy years.

Another interesting point highlighted by the articles was that the central figure in the controversy was the St Nicolas' Churchwarden. These days our Churchwardens do outstanding work in co-ordinating and managing the running of the church services and related facilities, especially during the Covid nightmare; but at the beginning of the Victorian era the role carried even greater responsibility.

Churchwardens generally played the key role in reviewing, recommending and implementing expenditure on their respective churches in terms of repairs and refurbishment. It was often a challenging role: on the one hand were the many local tradesmen - architects, builders, carpenters, painters and so on - who had a vested interest in trying to encourage their local warden to keep spending at a high level to enhance their earnings. On the other hand were many of the better off parishioners who wanted to keep expenditure low, largely to protect their own pockets. Church expenses at this time in history were normally financed by a 'rate' to

which all local parishioners of a certain financial status had to contribute, so there was always strong opposition to any proposal for a significant increase in the rate.

The articles that Catherine has found take the form of two 'Letters to the Editor' from an unnamed member of the St Nicolas' church committee, who was one of those who, on principle, opposed any significant increase in the rate. He has clearly been inflamed by what he considers to be unacceptable behaviour by the Churchwarden in deliberately encouraging spire repair costs to escalate, by implication for his own financial benefit in the form of what would today be called 'backhanders'. In a very personal attack, the writer claims that the officer has also been further abusing his position by making unapproved decisions for unnecessary work to be carried out.

The 1838 letter describes an angry 'vestry meeting' that had recently taken place at St Nicolas' to discuss the Churchwarden's latest recommendations. The writer says bitterly "Attendance included all tradesmen who had the opportunity of getting their hands in the pockets of parishioners."

The issue centred on repairs to the spire, which was so unstable that on occasions bell-ringing had actually caused it to move. Some work had been carried out over previous years to anchor the central iron rod at a reasonable cost of some £30-£40 (£1 then was today's equivalent of approximately £100). It's not quite clear whether these works included the spinning spire episode or whether that was still to come.

That early work appeared to be successful. The spire had become satisfactorily stable, so that bellringing had been resumed without any apparent movement. The writer says "Now one would have thought that this was sufficient, but no!" The churchwarden had apparently taken his own decision that one member of the

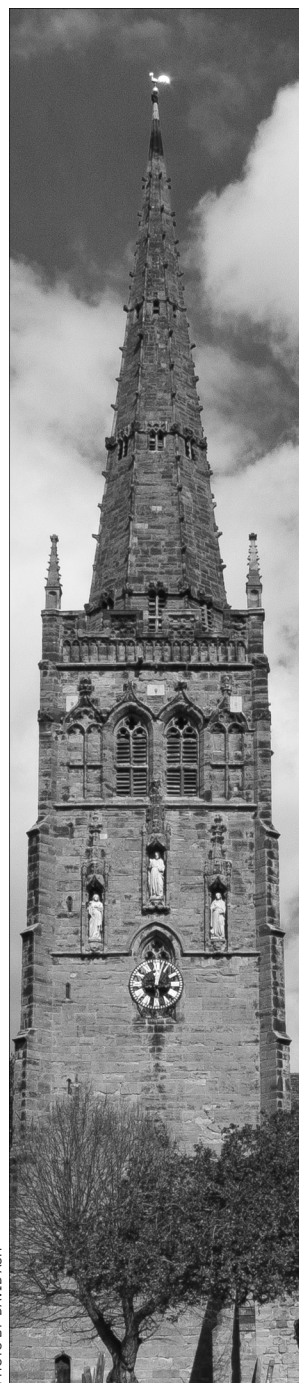


PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

MORE HISTORY

◆Except for a brief period during the Commonwealth of England in the 17th century, the raising of Church Rates has never been confirmed by statute. It was always a matter of Common Law.

◆Rates were recoverable in the ecclesiastical court or, under certain conditions, before two Justices of the Peace.

◆In 1856, The Times called the Government's attention to what the editor believed to be a civil war raging throughout the country on the church rate question.

◆Nonconformists (non-Anglican Christians such as Methodists, Baptists or Quakers) objected to the rates for understandable reasons. The Church of England used to receive financial support from Parliament, while non-conformist congregations were entirely dependent on voluntary contributions.

committee, whom he considered to be a "skilled architect", should be in effect retained as a consultant on spire issues on a continuing basis at the seemingly rather excessive cost of ten shillings (£50) a day.

This so-called architect, naturally keen to carry on a lucrative consultancy and by implication incentivised by local traders, had perhaps predictably continued to find fault with the spire and the church tower that supported it. With what seemed to be the minimal justification that some mortar had fallen out of some of the joints in the tower, this individual invested at the church's expense in a support system of iron bars and cast-iron plates, which actually had the effect of creating greater instability. In the end, this so-called expert had declared that, possibly as a result of the work he had carried out, the tower was officially "dangerous", and should be pulled down! He estimated the cost of rectifying the problem as a massive £850 (these days £85,000).

The Churchwarden, presumably slightly red-faced, had taken a second opinion, but even that process confirmed that the work was necessary, albeit at a slightly lower cost. So, at the Vestry meeting, he was seeking approval for a significant new 'rate' that would cover that expenditure.

According to the Worcestershire Chronicle letter, there was a vigorous and bitter debate, with accusations flying in all directions and the integrity of the churchwarden being questioned. One "respectable ratepayer" with some "genuine architectural experience" said that effective remedial work could be accomplished for less than a quarter of the cost requested. The meeting came to an angry standstill and was adjourned without any decision, apart from that fact that the Churchwarden was instructed to obtain the opinion of yet another architect.

The letter concludes with the following comment. "I hope that the ratepayers will attend the next meeting in numbers, for the purpose of protecting their pockets from such Churchwardens as have no mercy on the ratepayers of the parish."

It all clearly dragged on, because the second newspaper article, published some two and a half years later, shows that the controversy was still raging. The meeting it describes again deferred any decision!

A Star to Steer By

“Young hearts often see more clearly; they are also more easily shaped.”

David Ash reflects on the influences which mould our children’s values and the part we play in guiding them.



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

Once they start school and begin to explore the world outside the home, our children’s choice of rôle models is an aspect of their lives over which we have little control. The young will admire and emulate the influencers of their choosing, including those chosen for them by their peers.

That can be quite a frightening thought when you consider what they are exposed to these days, particularly online. If they are to survive the storms of adolescence and emerge into adulthood with robust self-esteem and a strong moral compass, they need adults to look up to who embody those values which, history has taught us, have the potential to shape healthy, successful lives.

Like it or not, whether or not we spend much time with children and young people, all of us are those rôle models. It is salutary to be reminded that everything

we say or do has the potential to influence a young life for good or ill, for we are rarely aware of when we are being observed, admired or copied. But this should also encourage us; for, although we may not be able to do much about our children’s choice of heroes, we do have some control over who they might become if they were to decide that they wanted to be like **us** when they grew up. We should never underestimate the power of our words and actions to nudge the lives of others into new trajectories.

The job of a rôle model differs from, say, that of a policeman, a hairdresser or a brain surgeon in that the position is open to you even when you’re dead. In fact, some of the best rôle models have been dead for a very long time. That is why, of course, we want our children to discover a love of reading. If they don’t, they are unlikely to meet some remarkable people, whose influence could turn out to be the difference between a life well lived or an old age tinged with regret. It’s also why an education worthy of the name will put before each child not just catalogues of facts but

constellations of inspiring lives.
Stars to steer by, if you like.

Though I didn't know it at the time, one of the most significant influences on my young life when I was at primary school in the 1960s was someone who, when a teenager, had been addicted to fame and fighting about 450 years previously. According to his contemporaries, he used to strut about about "with his cape open to reveal his close-fitting tights and boots, a sword and dagger at his waist". One source described him as "a fancy dresser, an expert dancer, a womaniser, sensitive to insult, and a rough, punkish swordsman who used his privileged status to escape prosecution for violent crimes." "Robin Hood?" I hear you ask. Not exactly, though, when I was seven, I loved his stories too.

At the age of 18, Iñigo López de Oñaz y Loyola, for that was his name, took up arms for the Duke of Nájera. His leadership qualities made him very useful and, under the Duke's command, Iñigo participated in many battles without injury. At Pamplona in 1521, however, he was gravely injured when a cannonball shattered his right leg. He was returned to his father's castle in Loyola, where, in an era that knew nothing of anaesthetics, he underwent several surgical operations. He would limp for the rest of his life and his military career, which had begun at the age of just 17, was over.



While recovering from surgery, Iñigo underwent a spiritual conversion. His sister-in-law, Magdalena, selected two texts for him to read while he was recuperating, one about the life of Jesus, the other about the lives of the saints. Magdalena, in her wisdom, ensured that the tales of knights in shining armour which he usually loved to read were temporarily unavailable and chose, instead, to bring him other books which she hoped would help him encounter the living God. Her small, apparently insignificant act of service was to have unimaginable

↑ Iñigo López de Oñaz y Loyola in battle armour

TEACH US, GOOD LORD, TO SERVE THEE ...

consequences for the world. There are times when simply lending a book to a friend can change the course of history.

The text which struck Íñigo most forcibly was “De Vita Christi” (“About the Life of Christ”) by Ludolph of Saxony. It would come to influence his whole life and would lead, eventually, to his decision to devote himself to God by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who had died about 300 years earlier.

The years that followed were filled with travel, adventure, study, prayer and some remarkable spiritual experiences. In the 1530s, when he was in his early forties, Íñigo moved to Paris to pursue his academic work. There, he gathered around him a close group of friends, all of them fellow students. On the morning of 15th August 1534, he and his six companions committed themselves to a life of work for God. Within five years they had founded the Society of Jesus, later to become known as the Jesuits, a missionary teaching order which stressed self-denial and obedience. Today, they are active in 112 countries, working in education, research, hospitals and parishes and promoting dialogue between Christian denominations. Their reputation for strict discipline survives. Jesuits are expected to go anywhere, to live in extreme conditions, and they consider themselves as “soldiers of God” like their founder. When I was a student, a friend who had been educated by the monks at Ampleforth in Yorkshire, memorably described the Jesuits as the “S.A.S. of the Roman Catholic Church”!

↓ A primary
school assembly
in the 1960s,

So how did Íñigo, now St Ignatius of Loyola, officially a Roman Catholic saint since 1622, come to influence me, a small boy brought up in an Anglican family in the leafy Kentish village of Loose? Quite simply because, before the secularisation of education which has taken place in Britain over the past half century, the Christian faith and Christian rôle models were confidently offered to all children by the national education

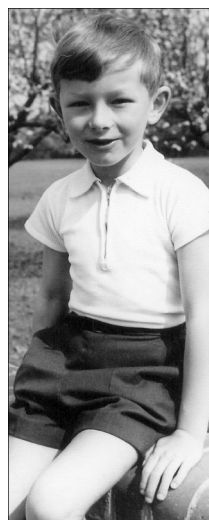
PHOTO COURTESY OF JILL BURT



system. The assembly with which each day began was an act of Christian worship and so it naturally included hymns and prayers.

I can still remember the little blue service book which we used each morning. One of the prayers it contained, which we must have said together as a school at least once a week, was written by St Ignatius, whose name meant little to me at the time. Maybe you used the same prayer at school. It went like this, with all its thees and thous:

*Teach us, good Lord,
To serve thee as thou deservest;
To give and not to count the cost;
To fight and not to heed the wounds;
To toil and not to seek for rest;
To labour and not to ask for any reward
Save that of knowing that we do thy will.*



↑ The author
aged 7

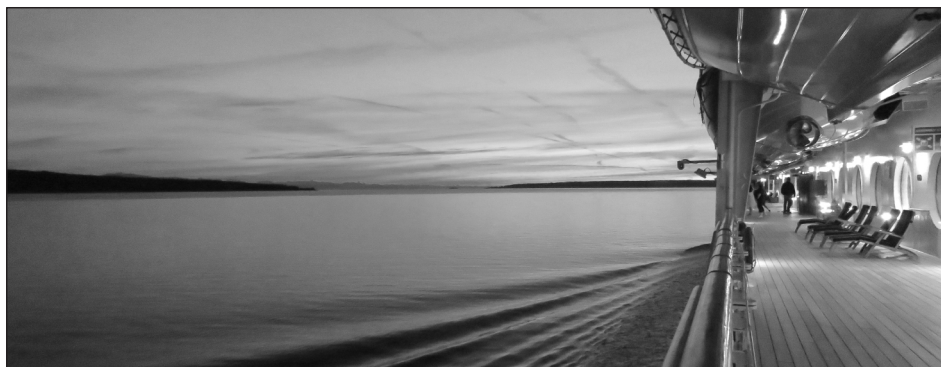
That prayer lodged itself deep in my mind and became part of the bedrock on which my adult faith came to be built. It helped to shape my understanding at a very young age of one aspect of what it means to be a Christian, someone who gives, fights and labours simply because it is the right thing to do, unconcerned about any personal satisfaction “except that of knowing that we do [God’s] will”. It provided encouragement for a little boy’s natural idealism, altruism and compassion, qualities which I have since seen in so many of the children and teenagers with whom I have worked. Our instinct to help those in need and to protest against injustice can be strong in early years. Young hearts often see more clearly; they are also more easily shaped than those of adults. Which is perhaps why St Ignatius is also alleged to have said “Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man”.

How, I wonder, can we better shape today’s world so that children continue to encounter ideas like those encapsulated by the prayer of St Ignatius, ideas with the power to inspire a life built on giving not getting, service not status, generosity not gratification, solidarity not selfishness? If not from us, then from whom will they hear that a life lived for God and for others may sometimes be tough, but will always be worth it?

TO GIVE AND NOT TO
COUNT THE COST...

Cruising at Christmas

PHOTO BY SHEILA JELLISON



The P&O liner *Canberra* undertook many cruises in its time, mostly in the summer months; but there was also a Christmas cruise each year. All the catering staff hated this particular excursion. The weather was often inclement. It was rough on some days and quite cool, even in the Mediterranean. Anyway, there I was on the Christmas cruise as a first-class Cabin Steward. It was 7:30 am on Christmas Day and time to start taking trays of tea and biscuits to the cabins in my section. Of course, I also had to wish each passenger a Happy Christmas.

There was one particular couple to whom I had taken an instant dislike from Day One. On boarding in Southampton they had lost no time in namedropping other P&O ships on which they had sailed. They then handed me a list of their requirements such as fresh fruit each day, shoe cleaning and so forth. I took tea for two to their cabin and wished them a Merry Christmas. "Good morning, Steward," says the husband. "My Wifey is a bit off colour and will have some breakfast in

bed.” “Would Madam enjoy a continental breakfast?” I enquired. “I will keep company with Wifey,” he replied, “and perhaps we could see the breakfast menu.” I brought them what they had asked for and they ordered a four-course meal, from fruit juice through to waffles. It involved a lot of extra work and additional trips to the galley. Madam wished me a Merry Christmas and gave me, for my pains, a *Canberra* biro and a handkerchief from the ship’s shop. I knew immediately that she would be a bad tipper at the end of the cruise. I was correct.

Later on, I found out that the Steward in the restaurant had watched them at breakfast on the morning when we docked at Southampton. On that occasion they had chosen a table at a distance, perhaps to avoid contact with the staff, which would have obliged them to provide a gratuity. Not all were quite so unpleasant, I’m glad to say.

I well remember a young couple who occupied one of my cabins on a Summer cruise. One morning, towards the end of the voyage, they approached me and said that they were very sorry that they could not give me a tip after what had happened ashore in Naples. The man had been pickpocketed and had lost his wallet, cash and traveller’s cheques. I had, in fact, warned them that Naples had a lot of

street crime. I had also advised them not to carry too much cash and to be very aware of thieves around the city. On that occasion, he had thanked me for my concern and there were smiles all round, though he had clearly not heeded my advice.

Now, back to my Christmas story. At about 11.30 am on Christmas Day I was regaling my chums with the story about the Twits’ performance over breakfast. It was then that the telephone rang. It was Thelma, our telephone operator, calling to pass on some natter from the ship’s grapevine. The previous night, a lady passenger had telephoned to say that she was most concerned. She was in one of the cabins overlooking the forward deck. She said that, in the moonlight, she thought she could see two figures who seemed to be fighting. A call was put through to the bridge and the Officer on Watch shone a spotlight onto the scene. There, for all to see and now brilliantly illuminated, was a stewardess having a bit of fun with the Bosun’s mate. We were convulsed with laughter and, suddenly, it became a Merry Christmas.

No doubt we all have experienced some mood swings these past few months but, with help from above, let’s hope that the year ahead will improve for us all.



↑ Eddie Matthews’ tales of life at sea are among the most awaited highlights of each edition. This month, he’s back on the SS *Canberra*.

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Erratum

In our January 2021 edition (p.16) we mistakenly gave the phone number of the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve as 01121 458 4712.

This should, of course, have been 0121 458 4712. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

The FKNNR have also asked us to publicise the phone number of their membership secretary, Stephanie Hyde who can be contacted on 07578 669 252.

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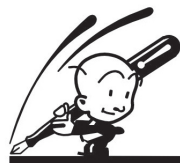
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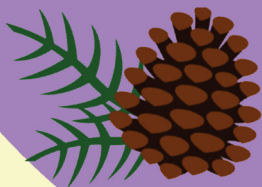
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