

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

Is The Government Doing God?

How Government engages with faith communities. A report.

2nd City Theatre

What do Birmingham's theatres have to offer this summer?

Gardening for Mental Health

Claire Lindow on the health benefits of immersion in nature.



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Welcome

EDITORIAL

I'm sorry, I haven't a clue. Such would probably be my answer if you were to ask me what connects the articles on the following pages. There are months when a theme emerges, and there are months when I have to leave it to you, the reader, to join the dots. This month's dots include death and theatre, mobile phones and climate change, plant pests and blindness. What a chocolate factory might call an "assortment".

"I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue" is also one of the nation's favourite radio comedy shows. You probably know the one. It bills itself as "the antidote to panel games". In a typical broadcast, four comedians are given "silly things to do" by the chairman. From its inception in 1972 until 2008, that chairman was jazz trumpeter Humphrey Lyttelton. Michael Kennedy, our resident historian, has unearthed a link between "Humph" and St Nicolas' Church, which you can read about on page 7.

Then again, "I'm sorry, I haven't a clue" might be your initial reaction if asked to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the Church's understanding of the nature of God, first formulated as the early Christians tried to fathom the relationship between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. One God, three persons: the ultimate mystery. Trinity Sunday has been a principal feast of the Anglican church since the 12th century. This year, we celebrate it on 4th June, a week after Pentecost or Whitsun (28 May), when we commemorate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church on what is, in one sense, the Church's birthday. We can't promise to answer all your questions about the



unfathomable nature of God on either occasion; but you'd be most welcome if you wished to join us.

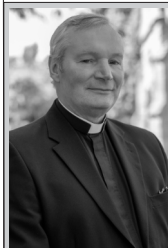
David Ash

Is The Government “Doing God”?

A response to the UK Government’s Bloom Review

In April the government’s independent advisor of Faith Engagement, Colin Bloom, published his long-awaited report on how government, at all levels, engages with faith issues and faith communities.

The report sets out to examine the positive impact the role of faith has in society while also noting the problems it causes. Interestingly, it begins by defining faith as something in the abstract, a set of beliefs and customs held by many, and then people of faith who practise their beliefs regularly. A third category are those who use faith as a cause for provocation, imposing their views and beliefs on others or stirring up division in the name of their faith. It’s clear from the outset that this report is willing to tackle difficult questions raised by religion which are detrimental to the good order and harmony of UK society.



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish

Overall, it provides an evidence-based set of recommendations to government – national and local – on the need to improve “faith literacy” in the major areas of public services, where government is the main provider, areas such as education, prisons and probation and the armed services. It also tackles extremism and forced marriages. The report has a Birmingham connection through the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion based at Birmingham University. They contributed to the research element of the report.

The Church of England has a unique position in terms of government relations as we are the established (i.e., official) national church and have bishops sitting in the House of



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Lords who are able to influence legislation. Though the bishops in parliament are unelected they are not government appointed and there are restrictions on their numbers. The Bloom report doesn't touch on this arrangement as its remit is the role of all faiths rather than one particular expression of faith. However, the special status of the C of E and the privileges it enjoys are something we should reflect upon from time to time, its advantages and disadvantages.

The report describes itself as “a review into how government engages with faith, people of faith and places of worship”. The review is much needed, and its timing, after what we hope is the end of the pandemic, could not be better.

▲ THE HOUSE OF LORDS IN SESSION

This is the first time that faith has been reviewed in this way, and the first time in living memory that an administration has bravely asked, “Are we properly engaging with people of faith?”

As a resource for government and government departments, it aims to provide a new, better-informed basis from which politicians and civil servants approach faith and its role in society. As I read the report, I wondered how the many politicians and civil servants who are people of faith will react to its findings? One assumes, in these secular times, that politicians are likely to be cautious about expressing their faith too openly, particularly if they are Christians, as recent examples in the media have

shown. Notwithstanding the secular nature of our society, religion will not go away. The report is clear about this. It contains the data showing the majority of people in the UK have some religious affiliation of sorts and, to a large degree, that Britain is a tolerant, multi-faith, harmonious society. The challenge to government, it notes, is its reluctance to accept, or even a tendency to deny, that faith matters in the UK or, an unwillingness to enter into religious questions for fear of causing offence or of showing its ignorance. I would go further and say that this is true of other institutions which shape and influence our day-to-day lives such as the media, trade unions and the NHS, for example.

The report also raises the question, "What can government do to actively promote inter-faith relations and between those of no faith?" This would be a major development in the role of the state to promote policies and put resources into how faith communities relate to each other. Could we be heading for a Department of Religious Affairs within the Home Office? No doubt the cynics will refer to it as the God Squad if we do! The idea of special advisors on faith matters has merit as, too often in the past, government has relied upon so called local "faith leaders" who turn out to be less representative of their

local communities than they claim.

Space doesn't allow for a detailed analysis of the 22 recommendations of the report but it does provide a list of its original aims from 2019:

- what the government can do to recognise and support the contribution of faith organisations within communities;
- how best to break down barriers and promote acceptance between faith groups, including those of no faith or belief, and creating opportunities for co-operation;
- the steps the government can take to promote shared values and tackle cultures and practices that are harmful;
- how the government can promote, in parallel to freedom of religion, the values of freedom of speech, democracy, the rule of law and equality;
- how the Civil Service can improve its faith literacy and the steps the government can take to ensure it fully carries out its role in relation to faith and belief under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Honourable aims indeed. One can only hope and pray that this review will make a difference.

Humph Seeks Out Humf

A National Treasure

Meets A Local Jewel

Regular readers will recall my article in April about poor Martha Lyttelton, abandoned in a tomb in St Nicolas' which was originally created by her husband Humfrie for them to share for eternity.

A number of readers contacted me to ask whether I could tell them whether Humfrie's most recent namesake, the great jazz trumpeter writer and broadcaster Humphrey, might be part of the same Lyttelton family, the historic clan whose ancestral home for centuries has been Hagley Hall, home of successive heads of the family, Lord Cobham.

Being a long-term fan of the great "Humph", I knew the answer. He was indeed part of the same family, because he used to mention it from time to time when he was chairman of the long-running BBC Radio Four comedy panel game "I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue". In fact, he was very close to the centre of the family and the title. I remember his suggesting, with tongue very much in cheek, that he was "only one tightly packed minibus crash away from wealth and prestige beyond my wildest dreams"!

Aficionados of that programme, which still continues, though Humph passed away in



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY



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▲ HUMPHREY
LYTTLETON
PLAYING THE
TRUMPET AT
THE LYRIC
THEATRE IN
2007

2008, are also fans in respect of his many other achievements. He had a genuinely unique life distinguished by an inimitable sense of humour. But what I didn't realise was that his whimsical approach to his illustrious family heritage once brought him to St Nicolas' itself!

More of that a little later. But for those of you who have only vaguely heard of the man

who became universally loved as 'Humph', let me tell you a little about his life. If you're like me, knowing more about him will make you even more delighted that his affable presence once graced our church.

He was born Humphrey Richard Adeane Lyttelton in 1921. Fittingly for someone from one of the country's foremost aristocratic families, he was born at Eton College. His father George, second son of the eighth Viscount Cobham, was a housemaster there, making Humph ultimately a first cousin of the tenth Viscount Cobham.

The young Humphrey looked destined for the life and career of a young aristocrat, particularly when he himself became a pupil at Eton. One of the duties of new intake boys at Eton was to "fag", in other words, to run errands for more established students, and at one time Humph did so for the boy who was to become Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary at the outset of the Falklands War.

It was all fairly conventional for a boy of Humph's upbringing, but during his time at Eton, Humph was to show signs of a determination not so much to deliberately break the mould that had predestined him for an aristocratic life, but simply to

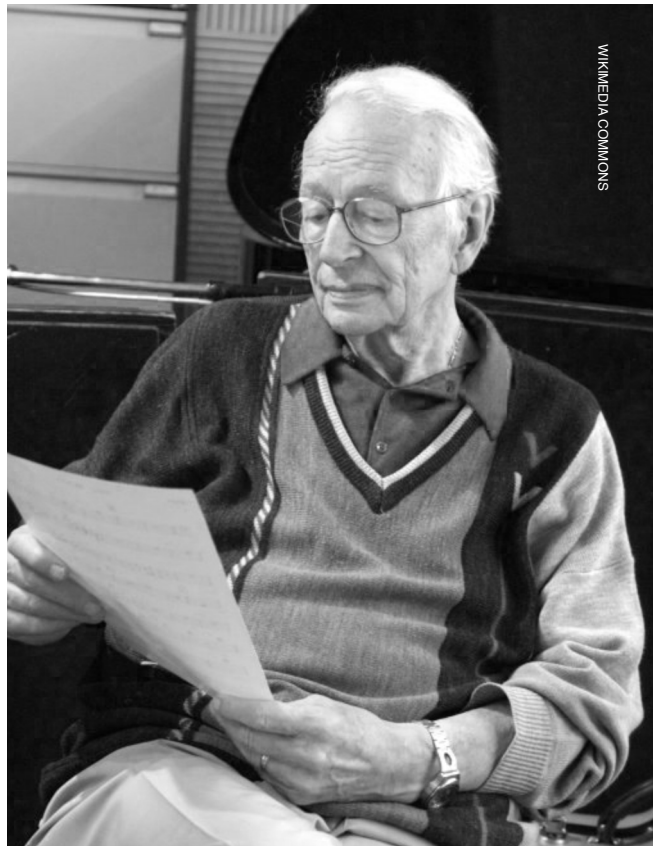
follow his own instincts as his life developed. Unusually for someone of his class, he not only developed an interest in jazz, but actually contributed to it by learning the trumpet. To his credit, his determination and flair for the instrument (it is not recorded how his family reacted!) was to make him the country's leading and best-known figure in jazz in the late 1940s and for much of the 1950s, securing the first ever jazz record to make the pop charts, "Bad Penny Blues", in 1957.

Before realising that music was to provide a career, Humph was called up for war service, joining the Grenadier Guards as a second lieutenant. He saw action at Salerno, when he gained notability for invading with his weapon in one hand and his trumpet in the other. On VE Day, 8 May 1945, he joined in the celebrations in Trafalgar Square by playing his trumpet from a wheelbarrow, inadvertently giving his first broadcast performance: the BBC recording still survives.

Following demobilisation, he attended Art College for two years, building on a natural flair as a caricaturist. He joined the Daily Mail, helping his friend Wally Fawkes, aka Trog, on his famous daily cartoon, Flook. Humph was also a professional-standard

calligrapher, in later life becoming President of The Society for Italic Handwriting. He continued his cartooning work as a safeguard, even as his professional career in music developed.

He was already a talented communicator, his jazz interests leading him to a long-term stint as presenter of BBC Radio 2's "The Best of Jazz" for some forty years from the mid-1960s, latterly from the BBC studios at Pebble Mill in Edgbaston. To his continuing amusement, his newspaper contacts also secured for him ongoing stints as a magazine



columnist, notably as an award-winning food reviewer, for which he felt that he had no specialist knowledge.

Most memorably, in early 1972, he was invited to be chairman on a trial version of an off-the-wall comedy panel game entitled "I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue", billed as "the antidote to panel games". Because it was so pioneering, the first efforts stumbled, but ultimately it was to start a run which amazingly still continues today. Though the show featured skilled comedians and humorous writers, notably Barry Cryer, Graeme Garden, Willie Rushton and Tim Brooke-Taylor, Chairman Humph was to many listeners an even greater star, affecting a rather bored, impatient demeanour and delivering in apparent innocence frequent near-the-knuckle double entendres. He continued as Chairman until weeks before he passed on in April 2008 at the age of 86, not long after his final jazz performance

As I said, this accomplished man, often nominated as one of Britain's national treasures, once found himself travelling to Kings Norton. Always fascinated by his family and its pedigree, he had resolved to find out more about other Humphreys from his pedigree through the centuries. Quite accidentally, and to my great

delight, shortly after writing the piece about the Lyttelton tomb, I came across the following revelation in Humph's 2006 book "It just occurred to me" from which this is a verbatim passage.

"Word reached me that yet another Humphrey was buried in a tomb in a church in Kings Norton, near Birmingham. As my long-running Radio 2 programme "The Best Of Jazz" has for the last decade been recorded in Birmingham, I took time off to see for myself. And there it was, a large marble sarcophagus bearing the name Humphrey Lyttelton, on the lid of which is a faded depiction of a rather dashing-looking man with what used to be known as a Van Dyke beard lying alongside his wife who, it was believed, shared the tomb with him. The belief was misguided. The discovery of another tomb bearing his name in a church in nearby Pershore revealed that, having had himself depicted alongside his wife in Kings Norton, he had high-tailed it to Pershore, as fit as a fiddle, to marry again and live for another twenty-odd years."

With a little poetic licence in calling his predecessor Humphrey rather than Humfrie, as it is written on the tomb, Humph encapsulates the story with his unique humour.

Correction

Coronation 1953

If the job of an Editor is to present articles written for publication as clearly as possible, then, in our May 2023 edition, I failed miserably. As readers will have spotted, Michael Kennedy's piece about the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was all over the place, and not through any fault of his. The text flowed from column to column, certainly, but those columns were not necessarily next to each other! By way of an apology, and to enable our readers to enjoy the article as it was meant to be seen, we are reprinting it this month, though without the photographs.

While I'm eating humble pie, can I also apologise for referring to the artist Grayson Perry on last month's front page as Perry Grayson. I shall endeavour to do better in future.

The Editor

As Kings Norton marks the coronation of a new king, we can take a look at similar celebrations last time around. The festivities that surrounded Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in June 1953 probably constituted an even more significant event for Kings Norton than our current celebrations, not only in terms of the sheer size of the main event, but also because it had a major impact on the parish's financial situation!

I've been helped in my understanding of the 1953 event

by the ever-reliable memory of local resident Philip Haycock, then a vigorous supporter of church activities, mainly through the Kings Norton Youth Fellowship. His written reminiscences provide a comprehensive description of life in Kings Norton from the 1930's onwards. In the case of the 1953 celebrations, his written records are complemented by the existence of a wonderfully evocative, if rather brief, cine film of the day's events, taken by a member of his family at a time

when very few people had the benefit of a personal cine camera.

Most readers will know the facts. The nation had been shattered by the unexpected and premature passing of King George VI on 6 February 1952. In the period between Princess Elizabeth's accession on that date and her crowning some 16 months later, the nation threw off its grief and gradually began to anticipate the new Elizabethan age. Plans for galas, pageants and parties of all sizes and shapes began to develop across all communities throughout her realm. The date of Kings Norton's main Coronation celebration was fixed for Saturday 13 June, a week after the actual Coronation but while the country was still basking in the extended goodwill factor.

One of established features of Kings Norton life was the Vicar's annual garden party, which traditionally took place on the Vicarage lawns. The Vicar at the time was the much-loved and respected Reverend Edward G Ashford, who had been in the post since 1949 and had proved himself to be very active. The Vicarage (not the current Rectory but in the same location) had very extensive grounds, stretching up to the area now occupied by the St Nicolas' Gardens residential development.

The annual garden party became the Coronation Garden Party. With growing anticipation and major commitments from hundreds of local residents, after weeks and months of preparation by the appointed day the Vicarage Lawns were arrayed with display stands, sideshows, cake stalls, horse rides and numerous other activities. At the centre of all these,

occupying most of the lawns, a dramatic and massive pageant was set to take place.

The community took the event to its heart. Philip Haycock's film, though a little grainy, shows that the lawns were packed with local residents, either watching or actually participating.

Philip also has a programme for the event. It shows that the proceedings were officially opened at 2.30 pm, with the Reverend Ashford formally welcoming everyone. From 3 pm, special celebration teas were served at a number of tables set up for the occasion: 1/6d (about 7p) per person. People could also buy other items of food from a well-stocked buffet. At 3.05 the festivities really began, with children's fancy dress competitions for under 5s and for 5-to-12-year-olds.

The main feature of the event started at 3.50 with what was grandly described as "A Pageant of the British Saints and Emblems". It began with a display dedicated to Ireland and St Patrick, presented by the the St Nicolas' Wolf Cub pack. Scotland and St Andrew were then portrayed by the Junior Sunday School, with Scottish dances by members of the Kings Norton Youth Fellowship. Members of the church congregation then presented Wales and St David. England and St George had the largest element of the pageant, complete with St George clad in crusader-style tunic with a red cross and chain mail, in combat with the inevitable dragon, all presented by members of Bells Lane School. St George, on the back of a real horse, was played by Mr Morgan, a leading light in the Junior Sunday School. Phil Haycock's film shows that the dragon was a large and formidable presence, looking rather like a stegosaurus (remember,

dinosaurs were not as prominent a cultural presence as they are now!)

The England and St George display was followed by the crowning of the May Queen, presented by members of the Sunday School Kindergarten. The cine film shows that her traditional dress had been replaced by Royal robes, complete with a bejewelled crown and suitably dressed attendants. As the May Queen proceeded around the lawns, there was an enthusiastic series of dances around the maypole.

It took some two hours to complete the display part of the pageant, but it was still not over. There was then an open-air performance of a one act comedy entitled "Holiday Eve" presented by the St Nicolas' Amateur Dramatic Society. At 6.15 the event ended with the competitions results and the presentation of prizes by Mrs Ashford, the Vicar's wife.

The weather? Not particularly good: Philip remembers it as rather humid, with the ever-present possibility of thunder. Luckily, the storm did not break until the following day. Philip also remembers that his focus on the celebration was slightly deflected by his need to find out the score at the first Ashes Test at Trent Bridge, at a time when there were few televisions and no portable radios!

As I said earlier the event had a significant effect on church finances. To set the scene, by the early 1950s the Reverend Ashworth had prioritised the provision of a new Church Hall. For many years, parish activities had necessarily been focused on the Saracen's Head (now St Nicolas' Place), the Tudor Merchant's house which by the 1900s had become a public house and had

been closed and donated to the parish by the Midlands brewers M & B. The building was effectively the only place available for parish meetings, performances of various sorts, dances and other social events. But it had never been designed to accommodate so many different activities. It was cramped and was becoming increasingly run down. A new church hall was the only answer.

At the same time, there had evolved another, rather more pressing priority: the ever-present problem of restoring the church itself. Major external work was needed on various parts of the building, particularly the tower, with increasing urgency.

Fundraising activities in the early 1950s were directed largely at the sourcing of a new church hall and it was originally intended that the funds raised by the original 1953 Vicar's Garden party, would be devoted to that cause. However, so much money was raised at what had become the Coronation Garden Party that the Reverend Ashford, supported by the Parish Council, could not resist the temptation to use it for church repairs.

So the proposed Church Hall had to take a back seat for a while, but it was never far away. By 1959 it had become a reality, a Dutch barn style building which was created on the site of what was already becoming a residential development, occupying much of those old Vicarage lawns. The hall was to last some 50 years before being demolished and replaced, ironically, by its predecessor: a dramatically modernised and extended Saracen's Head, renamed St Nicolas' Place.

Philthy Phones

We carry them everywhere, take them to bed, to the bathroom and for many people they're the first thing they see in the morning. More than 90% of the world owns or uses a mobile phone and many of us couldn't manage without one.

But while health concerns about phones use usually focus on the distraction they can cause while driving, the possible effects of radio frequency exposure, or just how addictive they can be. The microbial infection risk of your phone is much less appreciated, but it's very real.

A 2019 survey found that most people in the UK use their phones on the toilet. So it's not surprising to discover studies have found our mobile phones to be dirtier than toilet seats.

We give our phones to children to play with (who aren't exactly well known for their hygiene). We also eat while using our phones and put them down on all sorts of (dirty) surfaces. All of which can transfer microbes onto your

phone along with food deposits for those microbes to eat.

It's been estimated that people touch their phone hundreds if not thousands of times a day. And while many of us wash our hands regularly after say, going to the bathroom, cooking, cleaning, or gardening, we are much less likely to consider washing our hands after touching our phones. But given how disgusting and germ-infested phones can be, maybe it's time to think more about mobile phone hygiene.

Germs, bacteria, viruses

Hands pick up bacteria and viruses all the time and are recognised as a route for acquiring infection. So too are the phones we touch. A number of studies conducted on the microbiological colonisation of mobile phones show that they can be contaminated with



PHOTO BY ROMAN ODINTSOV

many different kinds of potentially pathogenic bacteria.

These include the diarrhoea-inducing *E. coli* (which, by the way, comes from human excrement) and the skin-infecting *Staphylococcus*, as well as *Actinobacteria*, which can cause tuberculosis and diphtheria, *Citrobacter*, which can lead to painful urinary tract infections, and *Enterococcus*, which is known to cause meningitis. *Klebsiella*, *Micrococcus*, *Proteus*, *Pseudomonas* and *Streptococcus* have also been found on phones and all can

have equally nasty effects on humans.

Research has found that many pathogens on phones are often antibiotic resistant, meaning they can't be treated with conventional drugs. This is worrying as these bacteria can cause skin, gut and respiratory infections that can be life-threatening.

Research has also found that even if you clean your phone with antibacterial wipes or alcohol it can still be recolonised by microorganisms, indicating



PRIMROSE FREESTONE IS A SENIOR LECTURER IN CLINICAL MICROBIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

that sanitisation must be a regular process.

Phones contain plastic which can harbour and transmit viruses some of which (the common cold virus) can live on hard plastic surfaces for up to a week. Other viruses such as COVID-19, rotavirus (a highly infectious stomach bug that typically affects babies and young children), influenza and norovirus, which can cause serious respiratory and gut infections, can persist in an infectious form for several days.

Indeed, since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has introduced guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting mobile phones, which, along with door handles, cash machines and lift buttons, are considered reservoirs of infection.

In particular, concern has been raised about the role mobile phones can play in the spread of infectious microbes in hospital and healthcare settings, as well as in schools.

So it's clear that you need to start cleaning your phone regularly. The US Federal Communications Commission actually recommends daily sanitation of your phone and other devices, not least because we are still within an active COVID-19 pandemic and the virus can survive for several days on hard plastic surfaces.

Use alcohol-based wipes or sprays. They need to contain at least 70% alcohol to disinfect phone casings and touch screens, and it needs to be done

every day if possible. Do not spray sanitisers directly onto the phone and keep liquids away from connection points or other phone openings. Absolutely avoid using bleach or abrasive cleaners. And wash your hands thoroughly after you've finished cleaning.

Thinking about how you handle your phone will also help to avoid it becoming colonised with germs. When not at home, keep your phone in your pocket, or bag and use a disposable paper list of to-do items, rather than constantly consulting your phone. Touch your phone with clean hands, washed with soap and water or disinfected with alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

There are other things you can do to avoid your phone becoming a source of viruses. Do not share your phone with others if you have any infection, or have not first sanitised it. If children are allowed to play with your phone, sanitise it as soon as possible afterwards. And get in the habit of putting your phone away when not in use, then sanitising or washing your hands. You might also want to occasionally sanitise your phone charger when you are cleaning your phone.

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Adam the Gardener Considers Plant Plagues

We all know the Busy Lizzie with its cheerful flowers produced in abundance, often in a shady part of the garden where it thrives.

However, you may have noticed that the Busy Lizzie has virtually disappeared from the shelves of your garden centre with the possible exception of the New Guinea Impatiens, a rather aristocratic looking Impatiens, great for containers. Sadly, the Busy Lizzie has become infected by a grey mould and it's everywhere. The New Guinea variety is immune.

All is not lost because the plant breeders have been at work and have produced at least one variety, "Sunpatiens", now available as plug plants or even as seed in various colours. Curiously, the new variety prefers full sun to shade as the name might suggest but it is immune to the dreaded grey mould.

Minor plagues do appear every year, like black spot on roses, aphids in various colours and the slugs, of course. The severity of these various minor plagues is often linked to the weather. There are treatments for the black spot and for aphids but do try to get a preparation which is bee friendly. Slugs can be a pest but can still be treated with pellets now

based on ferric phosphate, which is less harmful to small animals and birds than metaldehyde.

Now is the time sow biennials like the showy *Bellis perennis*, Forget-me-nots and Foxgloves. There are other vigorous and reliable biennials but keep an eye open for the RHS recommendation as a guide to reliability. There is, of course, the British Wallflower. I prefer them in blocks of a single colour. Consult the seed packet for propagation tips and advice.

Some biennials can seed themselves around after flowering and others can take on the perennial mantle with mixed success. It's best to treat them as true biennials and lift them out and consign to the compost heap just before the seeds set.

I have noticed that drought-resistant shrubs are appearing in the garden centres. One of the give-aways can be silvery or hairy leaves but it is nice if this is combined with attractive flowers.

Enjoy your search for the perfect plant and I wish you a great summer.

2nd City Theatre

As promised in last month's edition, we are venturing into the realms of local theatre productions. Birmingham claims to be "the second city" after London in the UK. A proud boast, or a naïve assumption? If Birmingham has any claim to be a major venue for art, culture and innovation our theatres will be an essential bit of the mix.

How many of us have been to the theatre in the last six months? Why not? Is it the cost of tickets or an aversion to being in large public crowds? Or is it just that nothing we fancy is being put on? The pandemic era took its toll. Yet theatres have reopened and have full programmes to enjoy.

Is theatre for everyone? As a child of the 60s and 70s, I recall that theatre was a realm of art and culture providing comforting classics and hit musicals; but, as the decades went on, more daring and controversial productions emerged. Theatres still offer comforting entertainment but also provide innovative and unsettling performances of new works aimed at newer (younger?) audiences. Birmingham theatres know this and choose their programmes accordingly.

"Blockbuster" is a term we've got used to in cinemas but contemporary theatres are aiming to market their bigger, more expensive productions in similar terms. Going to the theatre in 2023, one is likely to see special effects galore in the larger productions such as *The Lion King*, *Les Misérables* or *The Phantom of the Opera*. All are still making the rounds and are,



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

eventually, arriving again in Birmingham. If you want to see The Lion King at the Hippodrome, book now. It's coming up in July and will be a sell-out.

The crossover between cinema and theatre is similar to the crossover between theatre and "cover pop stars", also known as impersonators. These individuals and bands present on stage the next best thing to being at a concert with the real stars. The Alexandra Theatre on Suffolk Queensway provides a programme of these popular crossovers. In June alone you can see tribute bands to The Everly Brothers and George Michael. There is also a night of Nashville Country & Western on offer. The film crossover they are hosting is the stage version of "9 'til 5", for those who recall this 90s saga of office politics, when the secretaries (all women of course) stand up to the misogyny and sexism of their male boss. Funny and with some catchy tunes, it provides both a glimpse into the greedy 90s and a lesson in solidarity among those who stand up for their dignity at work.

The Hippodrome Theatre in Hurst Street is another major venue in the city centre and, as home to the Birmingham Royal Ballet, understandably has a focus on ballet and dance. Not exclusively,

▼THE
AUDITORIUM AT
THE BIRMINGHAM
HIPPODROME



PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

though. They also have comedy nights and opera. In June, they are offering an eclectic mix of ballet, hip-hop, break dancing, a musical and a weekend of Winnie the Pooh. How's that for variety! The ballet is a contemporary dance production entitled "Still Life in the Penguin Café". Think "Alice in Wonderland" meets "Swan Lake". A vibrant mix of "animals" dance through routines of joyful movement and exciting interactions.

As a fan of Pooh, I'm very tempted to borrow a couple of children and take them to one of the performances of this enduring story of the "bear with little brain" and his friends. This new musical adaptation has all the hallmarks of a classic. The puppeteers are wonderful in their ability to let the larger-than-life characters "live" on stage. The young actors playing Christopher Robin deserve a medal for their endearing performances. One for the whole family.

Lack of space prevents me from writing about the Birmingham Rep, though I'm not sure what is going on there since the pandemic ended. The productions seem to be aimed at an audience I don't recognise. That's probably my problem, but I wonder if, to attract the subsidies they need, their programme

▲ THE
BIRMINGHAM
REP

is required to be “in your face”, relevant and edgy. Take a look at their programme for June and see what you think.

My final offering takes us to the edge of the city centre off Brindley Place to The Crescent Theatre. Never heard of it? You're not alone. If you haven't discovered this little gem, you're in for a treat. This is a theatre run by a mixture of professional and voluntary staff offering a mix of high low and medium brow productions. One wonders how they do it on a very limited budget, but they do. Their success is due partly to the quality of the touring drama companies who take over the theatre for a week and then move on. It consists of a main house and the Ron Barber studio theatre. The Ron Barber studio puts you within touching distance of the actors, an intimacy which is hard to find anywhere else in Birmingham theatres. During June, they have a new production of the lives of the Brontes and Mary Shelley, who is famous for writing, “We cannot let our lives be small. There is no life but loving”. Both are performed by Birmingham Conservatoire Theatre company. They also have no less than three live streamed National Theatre productions and

a musical. However, my main recommendation is their summer performance of "The Taming of the Shrew" by William Shakespeare. This modern dress, upbeat production is not only available in the theatre but goes on tour around outdoor venues in the Birmingham area.

Happy summer!

◀ THE
CRESCENT
THEATRE

PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



YOUR PARISH CHURCH

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

**81 The Green, Kings Norton, Birmingham, B38 8RU • parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk
0121 458 3289 • www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam**

THE MINISTRY TEAM

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

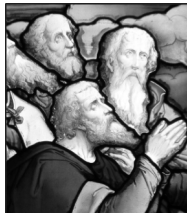
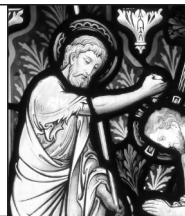
THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

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

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



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

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

Talking About

DEATH



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

My father used to say on a regular basis that you could be certain of only two things in this world, death and taxes. We can talk endlessly about taxes, but how often are we comfortable talking about death?

Those of us who are Christians rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, Lord and Saviour, and the sure and certain hope of eternal life in the heavenly realms after we die. Yet I still find the subject of death difficult to discuss and almost changed my mind about writing about it.

Many, or perhaps all of us, have lived through a number of wars including The Falklands, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Syria and, currently, Ukraine and Sudan. Some will remember the Korean war and a few the Second World War. Death is reported in the news on a daily basis. Conflicts rage round the world and death is all around us. Yet it is remarkable that only 35% of adults in the UK have made a will. In some parts of the country it is only 28%. Only 10% of younger people, even those with small children, have made a will. The general reason given seems to be that "I just haven't got around to it." Some think they are too young and some think they have no assets to leave. We should talk about and plan our funeral with our loved ones, so that it will be

appreciated by our grieving families; and we should pray they honour our wishes when the time comes.

I suppose that death is uppermost in my mind right now as we prepare for a memorial service for our son, who died very suddenly and unexpectedly shortly before Christmas. Life literally changed in a heartbeat. We all deal with grief in our own ways and it will overwhelm me occasionally. Those whose relationships have ended suddenly - the broken hearted, the lost - only we know our own grief and pain, but we share in a communality of sorrow. We feel the weight of existing and feel the weight of our own fragility.

Recently, I joined in the ever-popular hymn in church, "I will sing the wondrous story". I was struck particularly by some words in the second verse:

*Days of darkness still may meet me,
Sorrow's path I oft may tread;
But His presence still is with me,
By His guiding hand I'm led.*

I found myself overwhelmed by a brief, stabbing, emotional response, a reminder that God is ever with us, in the good times and the not-so-good. We're never alone or left abandoned.

The hymn was written in 1886 by Francis Harold Rowley, who was minister of the First Baptist church of North Adams, Massachusetts. The music was written by one of the church singers, Peter Bilhorn, during a time of an increased interest in the

Christian faith in the town. He asked Rowley to write some words which he could set to music, and the hymn and its rousing tune came to life. It was published by Sankey and became universally popular.

Rowley was 75 when he died in 1936. His father had been killed in the American Civil War. He had lived through 16 American presidents and 5 British Monarchs. He had become a Christian while listening to the preaching of D. L. Moody and went on to be musically trained and subsequently an evangelical preacher.

Other talents included the invention of a portable, folding organ, weighing just over 7 kilos. These instruments became a vital tool of evangelism, as they could be set up easily and quickly wherever preaching and worship were taking place, including battleships, army camps and on the mission field. The Bilhorn Brothers' Organ Company was formed in 1887 and is still producing organs today. Many of the earlier ones fetch a high price at auction. (As the proud owner of a beautiful, 19th century, working French oak harmonium with its organ works created and fitted at Wilkinsons of Kendal, who were specialists in the creation and maintenance of organs, I found this story of the portable organ particularly fascinating. Ours was restored in the 1980's by James Hall who worked at Wilkinsons all his life and was the last member of the workforce).

Do you ever wonder if a card or call or message was not wanted or needed

by a recently bereaved person? I have a dear friend, much younger than me, whose husband died very suddenly a few years ago when she was in her late forties. She wrote later, "To the loads of people who sent me cards and letters. I am really sorry that I never properly thanked you. To be honest, I've not really felt up to it, but it did mean the world to me. It's weird – I never thought a single card or message would make any difference to something so colossal. For years I've sent sympathy cards, feeling it completely futile. But – turns out, it isn't. I've never felt so loved, and every message, card, thought sent my way was a little rope to hang on to in the worst of times."

This has been our experience, and I return to read all those which have been sent to us from time to time, for their love and encouragement. Just knowing that people are thinking about you and praying for you is a great comfort.

The Dean of Chester Cathedral said on Easter Day, "Is death the end of the story, or the beginning of a new story? The Resurrection of Jesus was the end of His story on earth, a tremendous message which opened up a whole new story. We move from the darkness of Good Friday and Holy Saturday into the light of the Resurrection on Easter Day."

We are reminded of the end of our life here in this world and, for Christians, a future rising in glory, in so many hymns, too many to mention. For now, I am finding consolation and joy in Rowley's uplifting words:

*I will sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
how He left the realms of glory
for the cross on Calvary.*

*Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

*I was lost but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Raised me up and gently led me
Back into the narrow way.
Days of darkness still may meet me,
Sorrow's path I oft may tread;
But His presence still is with me,
By His guiding hand I'm led.*

*He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet:
Then he'll bear me safely over,
Made by grace for glory meet.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me –
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.*



Exploring Millennium Green

On 27th April, eight intrepid explorers braved the inclement weather and had an enjoyable evening as guests of Clive and Maggie Sweet at the Millennium Green. The weather, which, after a reasonably dry day, suddenly decided to turn nasty, did not put us off. What a treat we had!

Having never been there, I was astounded at the size of it and the variety of trees and plants which had been encouraged to grow and blossom. There were good gravel paths around the whole of the reserve which made walking easy and plenty of evidence of the volunteer work of Clive and Maggie in caring for this legacy.

The Millennium Green was set up at the turn of the century some 23 years ago. Clive and Maggie have been volunteering for 22 years since. Although they do have some help, it is a very small band of devoted helpers. It is Clive and Maggie who organise and carry the burden of keeping the Green viable. Since the Millennium, many such Greens, after initial enthusiasm, have fallen into disrepair. For Clive and Maggie, it is a constant battle with the elements, nature and vandals to maintain this community space opposite Kings Norton Cemetery on Longdales Road.

One of our members contacted me later to say what an inspirational couple Clive and Maggie were, and I have to agree. All I can add is to say that, obviously, any help which anyone feels able to provide would be appreciated. Above all, make sure that you visit this wonderful community space right on our doorstep. I'll be back in the better weather!

John Adams

Drought

*recedes in Britain after a wet
Spring...*

Be careful what you wish for. Britain's seesaw rainfall patterns that began last winter have continued, with an on-off pattern of dry and then wet months for many areas.

In the south of England, last year's drought was still affecting parts of the UK in early December, with stores of water in reservoirs and groundwater lower than usual. Seemingly endless rain followed over Christmas and January, before one of the driest Februaries on record led to renewed warnings of drought.

Hydrologists like me were pointing to low stocks of water in aquifers and rivers, raising our eyebrows and sucking our teeth like car mechanics faced with a blown gasket. We need rain, we said, or reservoirs will dry up, crops will fail, and restrictions on how much water people can use, like hosepipe bans, may be necessary.


Well, we got it. England and Wales had their wettest March in 40 years and April continued the wet trend, although rainfall was more patchy. The reason was that the jet stream, the fast-flowing and meandering air current high up in the atmosphere which governs a lot of weather in Britain and north-west Europe, shifted south. This pulled cold air down from the Arctic in early March.



HANNAH CLOKE
O.B.E. IS
PROFESSOR OF
HYDROLOGY AT
THE UNIVERSITY
OF READING



PHOTO BY MARCUS WOODBRIDGE



Much of Britain shivered under this blanket of cold, with snow and ice blocking roads and closing schools. Then westerly winds returned, pulling cyclonic weather systems off the ocean in a stream of wet weather.

In April, the jet stream shifted north, leading to unsettled weather and lots of the April showers that we tend to expect of a British spring.

The result is that the hydrology of England and Wales – the state of the water supply in rocks, soils, rivers and reservoirs – has bounced back. In some areas, it has bounced back so quickly that there have been floods. The heavy thunderstorms of recent days in parts of south-west England caused flash flooding of the kind that scientists expect to see more of as a result of the warmer atmosphere created by climate change.


Parts of southern England now have higher levels of water in rivers and aquifers than we would expect at this time of year. Kent had almost twice the expected rainfall for April. Of course, this raises the risk of flooding, and almost any part of the country can flood, especially from such sudden, intense downpours falling onto concreted urban areas or saturated ground.

Scotland offers an interesting counterpoint. With only average rainfall over the past couple of months, parts of the country remain dry, with low river flows in the north heading into summer. Other regions look more normal for this time of year.

The European drought continues

The drought has been broken in much of the UK. But other parts of western Europe, which the British Isles had been sharing dry conditions with, remain parched. Spain and Portugal are seriously water-stressed, as is southern France and northern Africa. As supermarket shoppers in the UK can attest, this has hit supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables in recent months. Spain's grain harvest, one of its key crops for many farmers, now appears threatened, with soils unable to sustain growth.

The long-running drought across Europe means that some major rivers continue to have low flows. The Po in north Italy



and the Rhine, the arteries of western European industry, are both still down on where they should be.

When they are disrupted by flood or drought, big rivers that flow across international borders can heighten political and economic tensions. Low water levels in Europe have disrupted electricity supplies from normally reliable hydroelectric plants and some transport of materials and goods along the Rhine has had to shift to road and rail.

As in Britain, the risk of sudden heavy rain can easily cause dangerous flooding, even while drought continues. Two people recently died in northern Italy when floods caused by exceptional downpours saw rivers swell dangerously. Yet, after months of dry conditions beforehand, the same region may still be in drought.

El Niño returns

The climate of the British isles has always been variable. Perhaps the last year indicates that it is now extremely variable. When we think of variable British weather, this usually means rain when you don't want it, such as when you're trying to crown a king. But variable weather increasingly implies temperature.

The summer of 2022 broke records for heat (temperatures in England topped 40°C for the first time). And we are now facing a situation in which El Niño – the major pattern of ocean currents and temperatures in the equatorial Pacific – is shifting into a positive, warming phase. This will likely mean that background global heating, which has continued to build up in the atmosphere and oceans, will return with gusto in the next year or two. The extremes are here to stay.

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THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Gardening for Mental Health

Have you ever gardened in warm, gentle sunshine and found that you feel relaxed when you come back into the house to carry on with your chores? Or taken a walk in Kings Norton nature reserve and had some brilliant ideas pop into your head?

I have been suffering from seriously strong headaches over the course of the last year. As a family, we have been through some tough times and work life has also been challenging. So my head kept telling me something was wrong and I ended up with a headache cycle which would start on Friday and last through the weekend. I interpreted this to be my head telling me “Houston we have a problem”.

Whilst I have been on this journey of trying to shake off the headaches, I have tried to listen to what my headaches were telling me, to relieve my stress. I removed the key cause of the stress last November, but the headaches didn't magically go away. Over time, I noticed that, when I was gardening or took a walk in the Kings Norton Nature Reserve, the headaches were alleviated.

Gardening or just being in nature is known to have immense benefits and I have used gardening in the past when reviewing and proofreading documents. I would read the document and then go to the allotment immediately afterwards. As my mind drifts, all the great ideas for improvements just seem to pop into my head without my even thinking about the document in question. Not thinking about it but being in nature, nurturing plants, the solutions just pop into my head. It is like the "eureka" moment when you jump into the shower, stop thinking about a problem you are trying to solve or when you remember where you actually left something. I am clearly not alone with this use



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

of gardening as Wordsworth wrote his poems in his cherished garden.

I believe we belong in nature for our health, not just mental health but physical health as well. We spend so much of our lives surrounded by bricks and mortar. When I moved to London straight from university, the first thing I noticed was that it was barren because it was all concrete and I couldn't see or feel any green. This is what gave me the gardening bug. As I didn't have any green around me, I started my own container garden and have always sought to have green space ever since. My husband grew tomato seeds which I sent to him in a container when he was in a desert in Afghanistan and it helped him there.

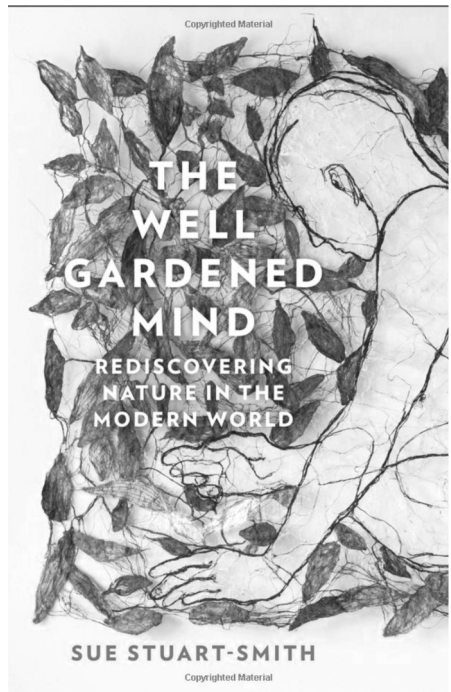
RSPB Scotland and Edinburgh & Lothian Health Foundation delivered a Nature Prescriptions project. Following the completion of the project patients reported benefits from participating in nature and continued to engage with nature once the project was over. 91% of prescribers said they would continue to prescribe nature. Visit: tinyurl.com/35zwsue5.

Another aspect of nature and plants is their yearly cycle and their movement in the seasons. There always seems to be hope with a constant cycle of decay and return. Decay can become compost and give life to new plants. Even with this last cold winter, I had a perennial kale that perished but, just in the nick of time, I noticed it still had some green shoots so I transplanted them and these are now strong little plants. If

you play with nature there always seems to be a grain of hope.

Gardening is known to be very helpful during grief. I have planted plants in memory of people I've lost. It doesn't bring them back but it keeps their memory alive in your garden, particularly at certain times of the year when the plant has its season of interest.

In Sue Stuart-Smith's book "The Well Gardened Mind" she describes how "the level of background noise falls away when you are in a garden and it is possible to escape from other people's thoughts and judgements about you, so there is, perhaps, more freedom to feel good about yourself." She goes on to describe how, through the centuries, our



habitats have been in nature and it is only in the last few hundred years that we have been living in cities and surrounded by bricks and mortar. Is it any wonder that connecting with nature makes us feel well and nurtured?

Back to the headaches. I noticed that, when I was sowing seeds, repotting and totally immersed in caring for plants, my headache lessened. When I felt a headache developing, I would go to the greenhouse to tend my plants and it really worked, particularly if there was some warming spring sunshine. I have been using gardening time and allotment visits to shift the headaches and now I am pleased to say that the pattern has shifted. I still get headaches but they are more random. Life will always present stresses and my tendency is to have

headaches when this happens, but I much prefer medicating with nature.

In my family life I am trying to cultivate my son Charles' connection with nature. There is a bit of a wild green area on the approach to his school and, on the morning walk, I point out the bird song and anything seasonal I notice. He loves the dandelions and I point out the garlic mustard plants which are currently flowering and are edible. I really hope he develops a meaningful relationship with nature. He gets super angry about litter being left in nature, enjoys blowing dandelions and is fascinated by the catkins. This all suggests a good start. This is the first year for many in which he has been able to really enjoy being outside in the sunshine, because of his health challenges. Hopefully, it is the first of many more.

Funerals April 2023

5th April	Gwendoline Jessie Ullah	89	SN.Bu.CY
6th April	Anne Hussein	63	In.CY
13th April	Lacey Elizabeth Page	34	SN.Bu.KN
17th April	Jean Maureen Whittington	80	SN.Bu.WT
25th April	Tracey Jayne Hemming	56	SN.Cr.WH
26th April	James Brian O'Meara	81	SN.Bu.WY

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

Cemeteries & Crematoria

KN : Kings Norton, LH : Lodge Hill, WH : Waseley Hills, WT : Witton Cemetery,
WY : Wythall Cemetery

Bring It On!

Blind Dave's motto is 'Bring it on!'; or at least that's what I think it should be, if it's not already. Bring it on he did, on the evening of 16th May, to an audience of some forty folk at St Nicolas' Church, at our Men's Group Open Meeting. From the start, we knew we were in for a great time.

For just over an hour, Dave Heeley regaled us with stories of his life growing up with failing eyesight. He spoke about his guide dogs (he had Peter the Second with him) and the challenges in the service of others that he's taken on. To date, he's raised in excess of £3 million for charity. When he was ten, a doctor at the Birmingham Eye Hospital told him and his mother that he had Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). Dave lost his sight completely in his 20s. He's now 65. Denied his dream to join the Army, Dave made a decision. He would not let his disability disable him. "Bring it on!"

And so to the challenges. Dave had us, in turn, gasping at his audacity, "oohing" at his close shaves and laughing with him at the many times when the only reaction to a situation he found himself in was to laugh. He has run across the Sahara, completed seven marathons in seven days on seven continents, run and cycled from John O'Groats to Lands End and "escaped" from Alcatraz, the island prison in San Francisco Bay, by taking part in a triathlon.

Dave is about as inspirational as you can get. We will be inviting him back. I urge you to do everything you can to be there. You won't regret it.

The generosity of the audience raised £170 for The Albion Foundation (www.wba.co.uk/albion-foundation), an amazing charity that works with and for children and young people, both in the UK and abroad, to turn around their lives. There is a link on the page, under Events & Fundraising, if you would like to make your own donation.



This Or That?

One of the activities I often do with young people is a game of "This or That". They stand in a group in the middle of the room and you give them two options, one on the right of the room and the other on the left. They have to pick an option and move to that side. It's a lot of fun and very noisy as arguments often ensue as to which of the two choices is the best. Star Wars or Star Trek is usually a good one to get them arguing. I usually start with something simple like "Coke or Pepsi" or "Dogs or Cats". Often, you need to give them a middle option if they don't like either. But the more the game continues the more interesting it gets as you start to learn more about the people playing, what they like, what they don't and what has changed.

Sometimes, the things I choose have everyone staying in the middle because they don't like either! That happened recently when I said "Eastenders or Coronation Street", and they all stayed in the middle. None of them watched the soaps. Then I tried a couple of the reality TV shows. The same thing happened. It made me realise how important this game can be in discovering what matters to our young people today and how surprising that can prove (and also how television watching has changed). It was a timely reminder that we can't assume things about young people.

It's like asking people what their favourites are. I did this with some friends recently. We discussed favourite desserts and ice cream flavours. Since when did mint choc chip become so popular with children and young people? What happened to chocolate or good old Neapolitan? It could be, of course, that there is more choice now or that our tastes are changing. But I was still surprised by mint choc chip.



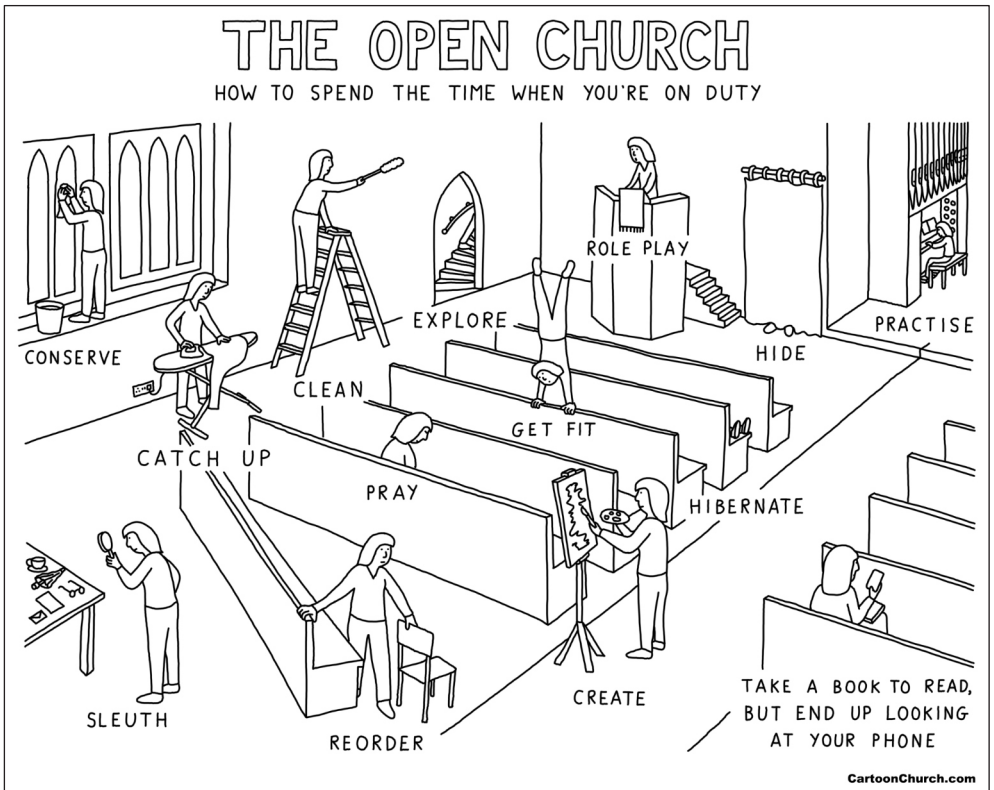
PAULINE IS THE
LAY MINISTER AT
ST NICOLAS'
CHURCH, KINGS
NORTON

Personally, I prefer cherry. Try it with your family and friends and you might be quite surprised at the answers.

There is another game called "Never have I ever". This started as a drinking game but you can play it with counters instead. Someone starts with a statement such as "Never have I ever changed a car wheel". If you have, you take a counter. Depending on the statement, there can be

some very interesting conversations and stories shared and some surprises too, depending on the statements you use.

Sometimes, though, there is a time when conversations need to be had without games, when serious topics need to be discussed. Topics that need open and honest conversation. We need to do that with young people too. We need to talk about county lines, knife crime, and many more topics that are important today. Conversations that need good open questions but that need us to be able to listen well, because our young people need to be heard and listened to.



The SS Orcades

Sometime in 1970, the P&O liner Canberra arrived at Southampton after some three months at sea. I signed off and left the ship. I had to attend the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich for a small hernia operation. Afterwards, I spent three days there. It was not a large hospital but there was a good atmosphere among fellow seafarers. The staff were very good and cheerful; the food and the care were excellent. Alas, the hospital is no longer in use as a special unit for seamen.

After a spot of leave at home, I received a joining letter for the P&O liner the SS Orcades, an old ship with six-berth crew cabins, tin lockers, stone floors and metal bunks which could accommodate 1,635 passengers. Her features reminded me of the liner SS Stratheden, which had taken me on my first trip to sea in 1957. When the crew returned after two days' leave to this one-class ship, I found myself with a good bunch of shipmates. The Orcades seemed to run like clockwork. I was a cabin steward in those days. One just did one's job. It was less complicated and easier than on the Canberra.



Eddie remembers a much-loved ship

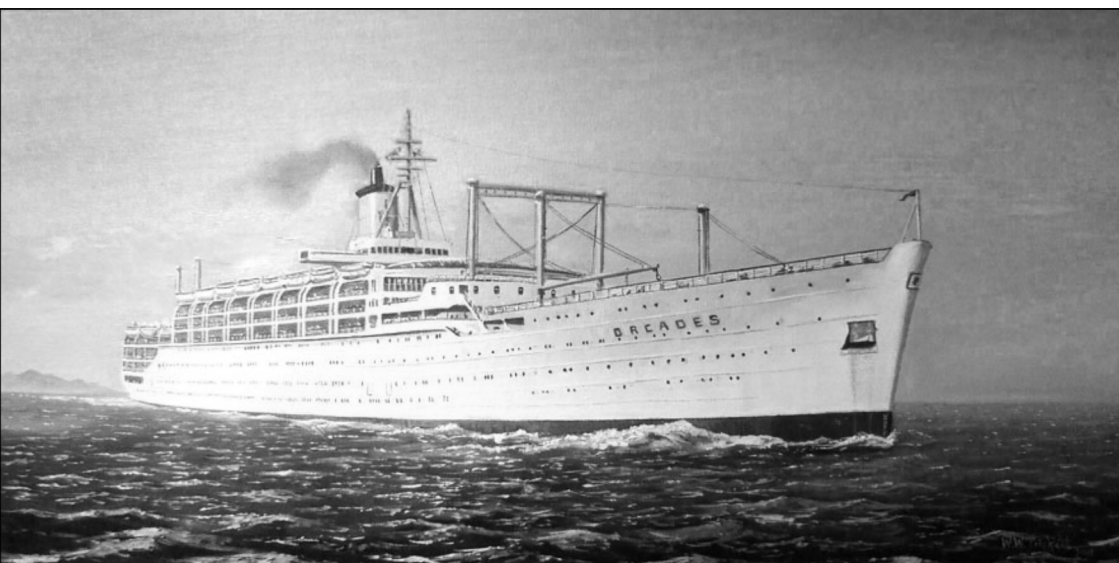
When we were down in Australia, I did several cruises in the Pacific and also to the Orient. We called them the "Silver Dollar" cruises, because gratuities were quite low, but I don't think we were too worried. The cruises were quite inexpensive and attracted young and old alike. Some of the Aussies who signed up for them were from a different world. Some worked as farmers in the Outback on ranches which

covered more than 2,000 acres. There were young stockmen whose job involved riding quad bikes across huge properties with a dog up front to check on livestock and fences. You could tell that the hard conditions had taken their toll on some of the older stockholders. Heat and dry weather had aged both men and women quite a lot; but all were very friendly and down-to-earth.

On one cruise from Sydney, we called in at New Zealand, Tahiti and Fiji. We spent a day and a night in Fiji. Entertainment was offered to all at a show ground. The police band wore their white kilts and traditional Polynesian dances were performed. The locals were quite scantily dressed, to say the least, but the girls did have their tops covered for the crowd! Some of the passengers were left quite open-mouthed at the rather graphic dances. Others had also paid to enjoy a traditional feast in the open air. They sat on the ground and food parcels of cooked pork were served, wrapped in large

green leaves. The coconut wine was very strong. I think a few of the oldies had a job getting back on their feet afterwards! Whilst there, I took a peek at the main church. Over the years, missionaries had worked tirelessly to convert the "natives" to Christianity, apparently with some success.

On one cruise, I became good friends with an elderly couple who lived in Melbourne, even though they were berthed in a suite which was not in my section. When I transferred to container fleets, I visited Jack and Ada at their home for some years. On one occasion, they came to the UK on holiday. I was so pleased when they came to Birmingham and stayed at my flat for two nights. A year or so later, the ship I was on called at Melbourne. Jack was in hospital with cancer and I went with Ada to visit him one afternoon. He was very ill and I knew I was saying goodbye.





Ada passed away a year later. It was all a bit sad.

I had to leave the SS Orcades after a year as she was to be scrapped. She was not a floating hotel, more of a stately liner. Though she was a bit dated, she was comfortable, the food was good, the drinks were cheap and the ship was air conditioned throughout. The

passengers seemed to enjoy themselves, were content to be at sea and to have an enjoyable routine each day. At 29,000 tons, she was very different from the modern, mammoth ships that are now cruising the seas. In comparison, the Canberra weighed in at 45,000 tons. The latest cruise ships can reach 180,000 or more.

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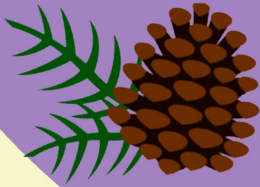


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