

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine

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Remembering the dead, supporting the bereaved

Our Churchyard Carers

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Welcome

EDITORIAL

November is particularly rich in opportunities to remember. Since 835 AD in the West, the month has begun with All Saints Day, an invitation to celebrate exemplary Christian lives, known and unknown. On 2nd November, some also observe All Souls Day by remembering all "the faithful departed". Three days later, though waning in popularity, Guy Fawkes Night on the 5th marks a memory of a different kind, reminding the English of the dangers of treason. And since 1918, of course, the 11th has been observed as Remembrance Day, an opportunity for an exercise in shared memory which should need no explanation or justification.

Why are we drawn to acts of communal commemoration? The French 19th century writer Guy de Maupassant may have part of the answer. *"Our memory,"* he wrote *"is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist."* Leaving aside his questionable assumption that the dead have ceased to be, Maupassant's point about the power of memory to bring back to us those we have lost is a powerful one. As spiritual beings with an eternal destiny, we find hope, a sense of connection and of community (what the church calls "the communion of saints") through occasions which remind us of those who have gone before us and with whom we will one day be reunited.

This month's edition is full of memories, providing much to ponder during the long, dark evenings of what one contributor has dubbed "hot cuppa season". As we prepare ourselves for winter and for Christmas, may it give you a sense of connection to this rich and varied community which we share.



David Ash

These Silent Mansions

"*These Silent Mansions: A life in Graveyards*" is the title of Jean Sprackland's 2020 book of reflections and reminiscences of her lifelong interest in cemeteries and their memorials. As St Nicolas' has one of the largest churchyards (six acres) in Birmingham, in 2021 Ms Sprackland was invited to visit and speak about her book but, unfortunately, the pandemic intervened and her visit was cancelled.

The phrase Silent Mansions is apt. Many of the more substantial monuments in our churchyard include inscriptions which draw us into their sense of grief but also their messages, which touch our deeper human sensations and feelings about our own mortality: death equated with a great silence.

Late October and early November is a particular period in the church year when there is a focus upon remembering the dead. The feasts of All Saints and All Souls recall the Christian saints and the everyday faithful who have gone before us into eternity. In late October, we host our

annual memorial service for families whose loved ones' funerals were taken by ministers from St Nicolas' and, of course, there is Remembrance Sunday (*photo, right*), that solemn tribute to those who died as a result of war and conflict.

Physical memorials to the dead are a feature of most societies, but the days of large memorials in churchyards are over and modest are the headstones and plaques a visitor will see today. Of the larger public memorials dotted around the country, the most famous is the Cenotaph in London. During the 1920s, many villages and towns erected memorials to their own who died during the 1914-18 war. They were, sadly, added to after 1945. These have remained gathering places on Remembrance Sundays ever since. There are also those which are dedicated to the lives of others who died in the course of doing their duty in ways other than warfare: memorials to fishermen, lifeboat crews, police officers and other emergency staff. With the passing of time,



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

memorials may lose their significance, but they are part of our history and collective memory and will always stand for something more than their original purpose.

Because untimely death is less commonplace than in previous generations, our attitude to it has been changing. With continuous improvements in medical care, more people are cured of illnesses which a few generations ago would have killed them. Health and safety attitudes have changed and fatal accidents have been reduced accordingly. Death is seen now as something largely kept at bay and, when it does strike, especially if it is sudden and unexpected, it causes trauma and distress which

▲ REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY, KINGS NORTON IN 2019

families are ill-prepared for. Specialist services and groups now exist to support the bereaved. When a murder or tragic death is reported in the media we hear that “specially-trained police officers are supporting the family of the deceased.” Bereavement groups can become friendship groups and provide a long-term companionship with others through the shared experience of grief.

It may come as a surprise to hear that, a hundred years ago, the Church of England’s official teaching discouraged prayers for the dead. The belief was that they were in God’s keeping, freed from the sufferings of this world and should be left to rest in peace. This teaching was

common among most Protestant churches. Only the Roman Catholic church approved prayers to and for the dead.

For the relatives of the hundreds of thousands of those who died in the 1914-18 war, this lack of pastoral prayer and care for the bereaved challenged the teaching and it gradually changed. Meanwhile, the 1920s saw the emergence of spiritualism in Britain. The belief that certain people had the gift of "speaking" to the dead became widespread and seances featured in homes across all social classes. Evidence of this phenomenon exists in the literature of the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Who among us has not enjoyed the play or film of Noel Coward's "Blythe Spirit"? Or the 1990 film "Ghost" in which Whoopi Goldberg plays the medium through whom a murdered lover comes back to his partner?

Communing with the dead carries sinister overtones and there are people who have cruelly exploited the grief of others for financial gain. But the impulse to have some continuing, meaningful connection with the dead continues to be part of most cultures, breaking the silence of death.

As part of my research into the uses and abuses of artificial

intelligence (AI), I've discovered the emerging phenomenon of AI Immortality. This is a digitally-based concept according to which companies, for a price, will "harvest" all the digital presence of a dead person and create a talking, moving likeness or avatar of the deceased which will then be given to the relatives for their use on a screen at will. Because AI allows for further information to be added to any subject, the avatar can be updated to take account of events which take place after their death.

Underlying these efforts to remain connected with the dead is a deeply-held human impulse that our most intimate relationships should never be interrupted by the forces of nature, by personal failure or by unexpected events. Our grieving, with all its pain and turmoil, is a means of coming to terms with loss and estrangement and therefore needs to be embraced and endured.

Ultimately, we need to let the dead rest in peace until, as people of faith understand, all are reunited in eternity.

Our Churchyard Carers

Doing Good & Having Fun

The churchyard of St Nicolas' is one of the largest of any parish church in Birmingham. More than six acres, in excess of 3,000 graves, and those are the ones you can see!. And that's not to mention the natural environment: more than 100 trees, some wide, lawned areas, hawthorn and holly hedges, all linked by a network of paths of various shapes and sizes.

If St Nicolas' Church was a stately home, it would be employing a team of professional gardeners to maintain the space and, above all, to keep it tidy, respecting those who are buried there and those who come to visit them. But churches don't have the resources to employ such teams. They are heavily dependent on volunteers, people who have to carry out their responsibilities week after week after week because, if they didn't, the forces of nature might overwhelm the churchyard.

It sounds formidable, and it is. But, remarkably the team that cares for our churchyard shoulders those burdens not only with fortitude and without complaint, but with great humour. I shared one of their sessions with them as autumn began to take over, and the two things that struck me were the amount of work they got through, and the great fun they have doing



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY



▲ THE SAINT
NICOLAS'
CHURCHYARD
CARERS

it. "We get on so well," said one of them, and they all nodded vigorously.

The day was mild, in fact pleasant in the way only autumnal sunshine can achieve, although only the fiercest weather ever puts them off. It was a Thursday, the day established for some time as the Churchyard Carers' principal day, though some members of the team also come in most Mondays to clear up after the weekend.

Every week, apart from the period around Christmas and the New Year, Kings Norton is fortunate indeed to have the willing support of John, Sandra, Fred, Nick, Peter, Clifford, Phil and his wife Jane, with the gentle involvement of Verger

and Groundskeeper Shane Williams. None of the volunteers are under 60, the oldest is in his 80's. Some have had significant, even life-threatening illness, but all of them derive real fulfilment and pleasure from what they do to support the parish and its church.

The work is described as "light to medium" It includes trimming bushes and trees, mowing, keeping the paths as clear as possible, tidying neglected graves, removing brambles, ivy and "self-set" trees, and any other tasks which nature might create, such as fallen branches and, perhaps most demanding of all, clearing up the dead leaves that begin to fall almost before summer ends and

which could easily smother the churchyard if not kept under control during October and November.

I asked them who was in charge, given that, in the limited time that they dedicate to the cause, there needs to be some organisation of tasks. Smiles are exchanged as it emerges that one member has become accepted as the decision maker. It's Fred Smith, whose strong personality is undimmed by the fact that he's now an ebullient 84 years of age. Fred feels a particular affinity for the churchyard because, one day, he found a grave containing his namesake, another Fred Smith whose stone records that he died at the age of 68 many, many years ago. "He'd have lived a lot longer if he'd been helping in the churchyard!" comments the current Fred.

Why do they do it? Is it simply because someone has to do it, or is there something more? It's not just camaraderie, it's the fact that it's something practical to do. For example, as Covid restrictions eased, "gardening, including caring for churchyards was one of the earliest opportunities for retired people to get back to a normal existence," explains Jane. "There were still restrictions on direct contact, and councils were not allowed to help, but it allowed people to get back outside and achieve something

together." A few valiant members had tried to keep the challenge under control during the lockdown itself but, even with new recruits, the backlog of clearing up and tidying had become so substantial that some members found themselves coming in three or more days a week.

Some were persuaded to join by other members of the group, including Sandra, who is the only one to live outside Kings Norton. Nick was watching Birmingham City with his friend Fred and, having been nagged constantly, came out at the end of the match as a new Churchyard Carer!

When I was there, it wasn't a mad rush to get things done, just as one might expect from such a mature team. Some were clipping back hedges, some were collecting the leaves and branches and wheeling them down to the storage bays along the lowest part of the churchyard, next to Kings Norton Park. Others were in that area, carefully tending the leaf-mould that that had developed in those bays. (As many readers will know, stored leaves will eventually decompose to create leaf-mould, a valuable source of nutrients for newly-seeded grass, which can also protect soil which is at risk from drying out when there is minimal rainfall). Another team member was removing a box tree that

had sprung up in an inconvenient place. Others were sweeping paths and removing debris.

It all looked like good, healthy fun. Sometimes it can take on a robust dimension, like the time when foreman Fred "accidentally" fell into one of the massive bags of dead leaves. That might have been something to do with the fact that there are two confirmed groups of football supporters in the team, Birmingham City and West Bromwich Albion. This also leads to some spicy exchanges when the group relaxes after its efforts in the lounge bar of the Bulls Head.

There have always been some churchyard tasks that required specialist skills and, for many years, churches such as St Nicolas' hired the local council to do jobs such as felling or trimming large trees, mowing large areas of grass and strimming. Things have changed now. Because St Nicolas' no longer has the capacity to accept new burials, it has been allowed to hand over responsibility for churchyard maintenance to Birmingham City Council. That will help our heroes, but no council is going to be able to afford the weekly support and detailed work that they provide.

While the team soldiers on patiently in the spring and the

summer, they could always do with extra help. But the autumn months are the time when they need it most of all. A hundred plus trees and hedges drop a formidable amount of foliage. There seem to be literally tons of the stuff to gather in, creating great builders' sacks full of debris. It never stops: a churchyard that might be clear one week will be full of leaves again the next week.

Sometimes, there are sources of additional support, for example the MacDonalds restaurant on Parsons Hill has sent down teams of staff to help as part of its community involvement scheme. But, to a person, the team would like to see more local people helping out not just during the autumn, but on a continuing basis. You don't have to be a churchgoer, just someone who'd like to help.

"For people who need it, working in our churchyard is a great opportunity to find companionship, to have some fun with like-minded people, and to do some worthwhile work that helps the community," says Fred. "We'd be delighted to welcome new people who want to give it a try. We're sure that if they do, they'll want to stay."

Some Things Are Disappearing

Yes, and it's a pity. Big sales mean big profits and there is a concentration on best sellers at our garden centres. Some varieties of bedding plant are difficult to get hold of, which is a shame as some of them have special features which will suit your garden, particularly for the later part of the garden year. I will be introducing you to one of these at the end of this article.

It's November! Plant winter-flowering shrubs. Yes, there are more of these than you think and the flowers, although smaller than most, are nicely scented and provide nectar for the bees, which will come out foraging on milder days. They can be planted at any time when there is no frost in the ground.

Winter Honeysuckle *Lonicera x purpusii* is a shrub flowering throughout the winter. *Viburnum farreri* "candidissimum" is a vigorous shrub and can benefit from a bit of trimming once a year, but you will be rewarded with clusters of scented pink flowers. Witch Hazel is an old favourite and, for the smaller garden, I would recommend *Hamamelis vernalis* "Quasimodo".

As you might expect from the name, it only reaches four feet in height!

Mimosa has always been at risk in our climate but, if you can find a sheltered spot with plenty of sun, then it will grow rapidly and the yellow powder puff flowers are scented. In Italy, the women are presented with mimosa and the churches will be decorated with great bunches on Women's Day, La Festa della Donna, on the second Friday in March. Increasingly warm days will definitely be of benefit to this small tree.

Mahonia is good for a shady position. If it gets a bit leggy then cut it back in the Spring after flowering has finished. It will not mind one little a bit.

Daphnes can be grown in the open or in containers of a generous size. Use standard peat-free compost with the addition of perlite and/or potting sand to improve drainage. A plastic saucer with three small holes in the bottom will provide drainage.

Sarcococca, an evergreen shrub with small, white, vanilla-scented flowers,

is not spectacular but is very hardy and will prove another friend to the foraging honey bees.

November seems to be a strange month to be sowing seeds but, if you have a conservatory or even a greenhouse with a little background heat, then there are some plants which will give you a head start for the following year. I must confess that a start in February will be almost as good and will need less fuel.

Here is a little list for you to try:

Sweet Peas : the Spencer varieties still take some beating.

Wildflowers, including cowslips, can be sown now.

Gaura : The Bride with its spires of pink flowers has some resistance to drought.

Coleus : the Wizard series is self-branching and quite compact, making it ideal for the smaller greenhouse or conservatory.

Nemesia : Masquerade mixed.

Aquilegia in bewildering variety will flower in the first year.

Phacelia Lacy will germinate between 16 and 21 degrees centigrade, as will most of these seeds. Sow all the seeds in a half tray and prick out 28 into a full tray of 4x7, making 28, which, I find, is an easily-measured number. Not germinating? Be patient and keep the compost just moist and you will usually be successful. I tried some

seeds of *Cobea Scandens* last year and they took three months to germinate!

I promised to tell you about some half-hardy plants which have been real favourites in the past but which are disappearing, perhaps because they may not be suitable for current marketing methods. You will have to sow seed as advised on the packet, but it will be worth it and you will have a great sense of achievement! Bedding Asters (not to be confused with the Michaelmas types) can fill a late summer bed with colour after you have turfed out the now leggy and a bit bedraggled early annuals.

Sow the seeds in April or May. You can even sow them in open ground if you can keep an eye open for slugs. You can safely use the new pellets based on an iron compound. Good varieties of annual Asters can still be found in the seed catalogues including the supplier, Kings Seeds, which is new to me. They supply a good range at reasonable prices.

There will be another forgotten gem next month but, in the meantime, keep warm and dream of next year being the best yet in the garden.



Changing Brum



THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE AND SYMPHONY HALL UNDER CONSTRUCTION

What are your memories of Birmingham city? Your answer will undoubtedly depend on how long you've lived there. My wife and I have only known it since 1981, when we moved here.

In a fascinating and thought-provoking talk, entitled *"Changing Brum: The transformation of the city centre in the 80s and 90s"*, David Badger took those attending the

September meeting of the Men's Group back to that evolutionary period in the city's history. David was involved as an engineer, so was able to give us a unique insight.

He began with an overview of the economic situation in the 1980s from both a national and civic viewpoint. We learnt that the Council wanted to inject new life into Birmingham city centre by, amongst other things,



Steve Wright is a retired teacher and a Lay Preacher at St Nicolas' Church

redeveloping the Broad Street zone in an effort to boost jobs, tourism and nightlife. There was to be a convention centre, incorporating a concert hall, a multi-use arena and a "festival marketplace" anchored on the canal at Brindleyplace. The whole venture was to be completed by 1991.

As plans developed, it became clear that city icons Bingley Hall and the Crescent Theatre would go. Expressions of interest came in, a developer was chosen, a contract was signed ... and then the property market collapsed! All was not lost, however, as Brindleyplace

plc was created to be the site owner and the work continued.

The ICC and the Arena opened on schedule. What would become Waterside, with its bars and restaurants, would be behind schedule, but were nevertheless completed. The Council's aims were fulfilled and continued to be so as the zone was developed further in the following years.

David concluded with a brief overview of the Council's plans for the relatively near future. If you want to know more about those, I'm sure he'll oblige!

THE CONSTRUCTION OF BRINDLEYPLACE IN 1994





BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE IN 1933



BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE IN 1938

Solar Power in 1905

If the first solar entrepreneur hadn't been kidnapped, would fossil fuels have dominated the 20th century?

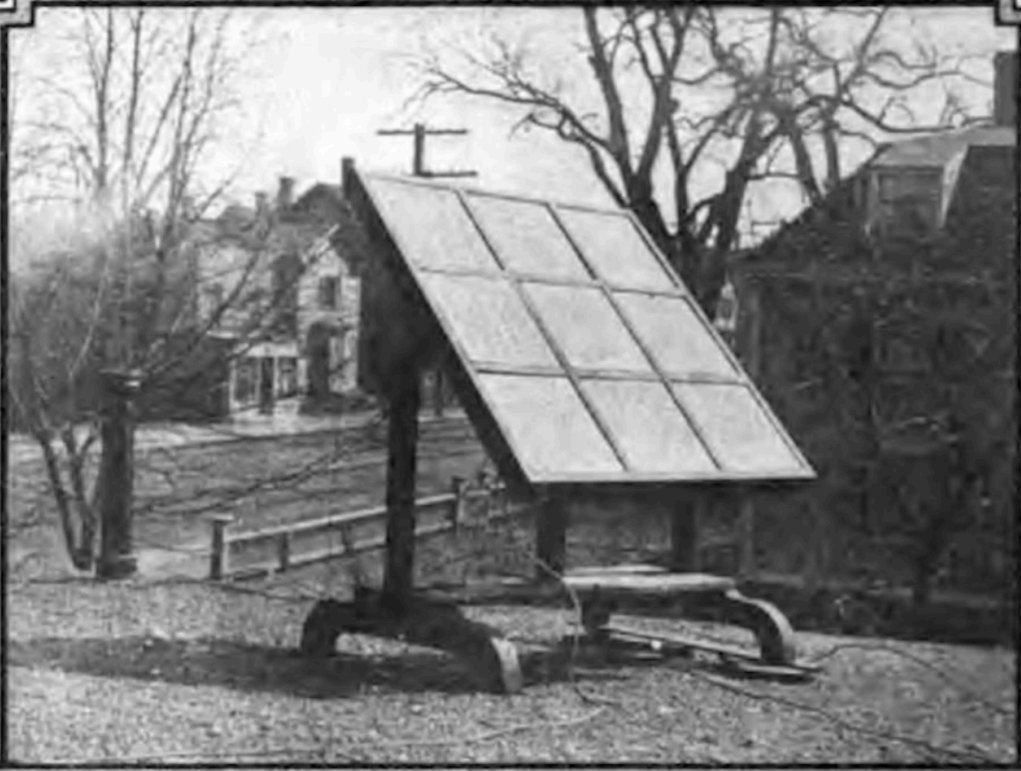
One argument put forward in defence of fossil fuels is that they were a historical necessity, because there was no other viable substitute for much of the 20th century. We owe fossil fuels a debt of gratitude, the argument goes, because they supercharged our development. But what if I told you there was a viable alternative, and that it may have been sabotaged by fossil fuel interests from its very inception?

While researching the economics of clean energy innovation, I came across a little-known story: that of Canadian inventor George Cove, one of the world's first renewable energy entrepreneurs. Cove invented household solar panels that looked uncannily similar to the ones being installed in homes today – they even had a rudimentary battery to keep power running when the sun wasn't shining. Except this wasn't in the 1970s. Or even the 1950s. This was in 1905.

Cove's company, Sun Electric Generator Corporation, based in New York, was capitalised at US\$5 million (around US\$160 million in today's money). By 1909, the idea had gained widespread media attention. Modern Electric magazine highlighted how "given two days'



SUGANDHA SRIVASTAV IS A BRITISH ACADEMY POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW OF ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



THE SMALLER MACHINE FIRST USED,
Two sunny days suffice to store enough electricity for a week's use.

sun... [the device] will store sufficient electrical energy to light an ordinary house for a week”.

It noted how cheap solar energy could liberate people from poverty, “bringing them cheap light, heat and power, and freeing the multitude from the constant struggle for bread”. The piece went on to speculate how even aeroplanes could be powered by batteries charged by the sun. A clean

energy future seemed to be there for the taking.

Vested interests?

Then, according to a report in The New York Herald on 19 October 1909, Cove was kidnapped. The condition for his release required forgoing his solar patent and shutting down the company. Cove refused and was later released near Bronx Zoo.

But after this incident, his solar business fizzled out. Which

seems odd. In the years before the kidnapping, he had developed several iterations of the solar device, improving it each time.

I can't say with certainty if vested interests were behind it. Some at the time accused Cove of staging the kidnapping for publicity, although this would seem out of character, especially since there was no shortage of media attention. Other sources suggest that a former investor may have been behind it.

What is well-known though, is that fledgling fossil fuel companies commonly deployed unscrupulous practices towards their competitors. And solar was a threat as it is an inherently democratic technology (everyone has access to the sun) which can empower citizens and communities, unlike fossil fuels which necessitate empire-building.

Standard Oil, led by the world's first billionaire John D Rockefeller, squashed competition so thoroughly that it compelled the government to introduce antitrust laws to combat monopolies.

Similarly, legendary inventor Thomas Edison electrocuted horses, farm animals and even a human on death row using his rival Nikola Tesla's alternating current to show how dangerous it was, so that Edison's own technology, the direct current, would be favoured. Cove's Sun Electric, with its off-grid solar, would have harmed Edison's business case for building out the electric power grid using coal-fired power.

While some scattered efforts in solar development occurred after Cove's kidnapping, there were no major commercial activities for the next four decades until the concept was revived by Bell Labs, the research branch of Bell Telephone Company in the US. In the meantime, coal and oil grew at an unprecedented pace and were supported through taxpayer dollars and



government policy. The climate crisis was arguably underway.

Four lost decades

When I discovered Cove's story, I wanted to know what the world lost in those 40 years, and ran a thought experiment. I used a concept called Wright's law, which has applied to most renewables. It's the idea that, as production increases, costs decline due to process improvements and learning.

I applied this to calculate the year in which solar would have become cheaper than coal. To do this, I assumed that solar power grew modestly between 1910 and 1950, and worked out how this

additional “experience” would have translated into cost declines sooner.

In a world in which Cove succeeded and solar competed with fossil fuels from the get go, it would have trumped coal by as early as 1997, when Bill Clinton was president and the Spice Girls were in their heyday. In reality, this event occurred in 2017.

An alternate century

Of course, this still assumes that the energy system would have been the same. It is possible that, if solar were around from 1910 and never disappeared, the entire trajectory of energy innovation could have been very different. For example, maybe more research money

would have been directed towards batteries to support decentralised solar. The electric grid and railways that were used to support the coal economy would have received far less investment.

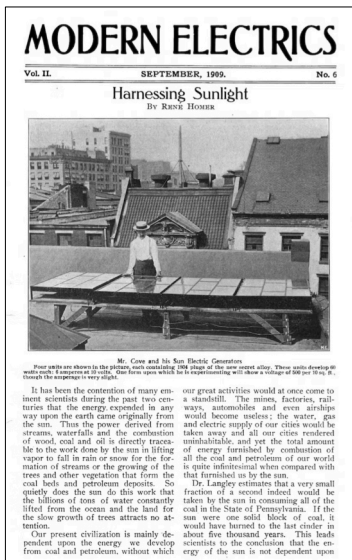
Alternatively, more recent advances in manufacturing may have been essential for solar’s take-off and Cove’s continued work would not have resulted in a major change. Ultimately, it is impossible to know exactly what path humanity would have taken, but I wager that avoiding a 40 year break in solar power’s development could have spared the world huge amounts of carbon emissions.

While it might feel painful to ponder this great “what if” as the climate breaks down in front of our eyes, it can arm us with something useful: the knowledge that drawing energy from the sun is nothing radical or even new. It’s an idea as old as fossil fuel companies themselves.

The continued dominance of fossil fuels into the 21st century was not inevitable. It was a choice, just not one many of us had a say in. Fossil fuels were supported initially because we did not understand their deadly environmental impacts and later because the lobby had grown so powerful that it resisted change.

But there is hope: solar energy now provides some of the cheapest electricity humanity has ever seen, and the costs are continuing to plummet with deployment. The faster we go, the more we save. If we embrace the spirit of optimism seen during Cove’s time and make the right technology choices, we can still reach the sun-powered world he envisioned all those years ago.

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An Entertaining Christmas

Those of us who regularly lament how quickly time passes will know that, despite our best efforts to stave off thoughts of Christmas planning, the rest of the world is merrily getting on with bombarding us with seasonal temptations. Christmas, that profound, religious time when thoughts should be turned to higher things, is the busiest time of the year in the entertainment industries and is meticulously planned for a year or more in advance.

However your household plans for Christmas, let's hope that it will include a trip or two to a place of entertainment which will lighten the darkness of the winter days and bring cheer to one and all.

December is, of course, pantomime season. Did you know that the word "pantomime" has its roots in the Greek word for imitating all? It's been a few years since your correspondent has attended one of these garish interpretations of well-known fairy tales but, maybe this year, I'll see if there is any fee-fi-fo-FUN to be had at the **Birmingham Hippodrome's** spectacular production of "*Jack and the Beanstalk*". The full cast were announced in September

and, as usual at the Hippodrome, the production standards will be as high as a beanstalk. You could even take the children.

Another Christmas classic is at The **Birmingham Rep**. "*The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*" begins its run on 14th November. This Christian fable strikes the right note at a time of religious observance while also providing all the elements of a magical tale of the power of love and the good which triumphs over evil.

If you're looking for something unseasonal and prefer rock'n'roll to Yule roll, the musical version of "*The Bodyguard*" is at the **Alexandra Theatre** during December. With classic songs such as "*I will always love you*" and "*I wanna dance with somebody*" (somebody not too bothered about spelling, it would seem) will get your feet tapping and vocal cords straining. I predict there will be at least one song to which the audience is asked to clap along and even sway in their seats. It makes a change from serial shoutings of "Oh No It Isn't!" or "He's Behind You!" at a pantomime.

The **Crescent Theatre** offers a three-in-one Christmas menu to delight those wanting a selection



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

of entertainments all in the same building, though fortunately not all at the same time. Their main house production is the seasonal favourite "*A Christmas Carol*" by a certain Mr C. Dickens. This author has a special connection with Birmingham in that he gave public readings of this particular novel in our fair city. The event was to raise money for what became The Birmingham and Midland Institute in Margaret Street. Apparently, there was an audience of hundreds and, of course, there were no microphones in Victorian Birmingham. Well done, Charles!

This tale of a friendless, cynical old codger who, through the visitation of spirits, gets a chance to review his life and change his heart still moves and touches millions. And it's actually set on Christmas Eve. But this is not all The Crescent are offering. They also have a popular Christmas Wassailing performance where the audience can begin their Christmas celebrations in the best way possible with the Crescent's ever-popular Wassail show. A festival of choral music, solo songs, spoken word and comedy brought together to warm your spirits. Mince pies and a glass of mulled wine are available.

On 23rd December, The Crescent is showing the film "*White Christmas*" but with a difference. It will be accompanied by a wine tasting with expert Tony Elvin. A

glass of fizz before the film starts and then the film is paused at intervals for another glass to taste. What would Bing (Crosby) and Danny (Kaye) make of this?

For those who would like a quirky Christmas comedy, why not try the **Old Joint Stock** theatre upstairs in the pub of the same name opposite Birmingham Cathedral? This intimate, cabaret style theatre specialises in off-beat comedy performances. Between the 6th and 24th December their Christmas show is "*Our Christmas Carol – A Musical*". It's a study of a family coming to terms with loss through amateur dramatics and their own version of Dickens' famous story. Expect audience participation, as you will be only a few feet from the actors. It will be a cracker!

Next month, your correspondent will be looking at the films due for release over the Christmas holidays.

Happy bookings!





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

Revisiting memories of... Cambridge

In July, I enjoyed an outing to Cambridge. The day was organised by the Arts Society Birmingham . The highlights of our day were the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Wren Chapel in Pembroke College and a tour of Trinity College centering on the Wren Library. A very fulfilling and tiring day it was too. I won't bore you with descriptions. You too can visit Cambridge to savour its architectural and other delights.

I want to share with you the memories that were stirred by a place, a location. I know this sounds a bit Proustian, but bear with me. Cambridge in July is very, very busy. The university term is over and the students have largely left to be replaced by language students, who come to Cambridge from all over the world to learn English. The main streets, especially Kings Parade, though traffic free, are thronged by teenage European youngsters in marching, phone-toting groups, many identified by bright, uniformed tee shirts or scarves. I paused on the bridge in Silver Street to watch the antics on the river, mainly of the people in punts. I gazed at the Mathematical Bridge and the grounds of Queens' College (*photo, right*) and my mind took me back many, many years. I had surreptitiously climbed in here half a century ago!

In 1966, I was a student at Magee College in (London)derry, Northern Ireland. I was the Captain of the rugby fifteen. By chance, it was it

was the rugby club's turn to have a tour paid for by college funds, men's football and women's hockey being the other recipients. Why not, I thought, a tour to Cambridge? A good friend from school was a student at Queens' College. I was sure he could help to arrange some matches for us; and so he did. We played Queens' and St Catharine's.

The journey from Londonderry to Cambridge is tortuous to say the least. Belfast, overnight boat, Liverpool, Euston, Kings Cross, Cambridge. We had a few hours' wait in London and several of the Northern Irish lads had not been to London before. I volunteered to show them the sights. First off, a visit to Downing Street. "I'll try to get the Prime Minister to put in an appearance", I joked. No gates in those days. Soon we were outside Number 10. And, right on cue, the door opened and out strode Harold Wilson, pipe in hand waving to

us. “There you are,” I quipped. (Wilson was on his way to HMS Tiger for talks about the future of Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe).

In Cambridge, we stayed at a small hotel in Trumpington Street but, to save money, I stayed in my friend’s rooms in Queens’. This was strictly not allowed, hence the climbing in over the gates which enforced an early curfew. Yes, the things we do in our youth.

Ten years later, I found myself again sleeping in a Cambridge college. Trinity this time, and all above board! As a newly-appointed headmaster I was attending my first I.A.P.S conference (the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, a sort of prep school heads’ trades union). We had taken over Trinity College for two days. In those days, the annual conference alternated between Trinity, Cambridge and Christchurch, Oxford. Then we got too big for the colleges and had to move to Nottingham and various other places, which was not the same!

No climbing in anymore, but memories of dining in Hall (“Pass the port old boy”). We had some interesting speakers, I recall: leaders of industry and Tory politicians. Though, as an after-dinner speaker, Joyce Grenfell stands out vividly to this day.

Prior to last month, my last visit had been five years ago on a day trip, this time with the South Birmingham Ramblers. That day, too, was action packed with activities. We began by punting on the River Cam: the operators were also guides. Then we walked to the nearby village of Grantchester for lunch (it was a

ramblers’ outing, after all!). Next, we were lucky enough to get tickets to visit Kings College Chapel. In the college quad we came across several people in 1950s period costume. Were these eccentric dons stuck in a time warp? No. More prosaically, they were filming an episode of “Grantchester”, a TV drama series with a Cambridge backdrop. Still, interesting to watch. There was still time to repair to the pub for some well-deserved refreshment before the return to Brum. We chose The Eagle and Child, a pub famous for its wall graffiti done by WWII airmen, and also because it was where Crick and Watson discovered the structure of DNA (there are wall plaques).

Places can hold so many evocative images and memories for us if we pause for a moment. And I thought I was just visiting a museum and a couple of colleges.

QUEENS’ COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



PHOTO BY ANNA GY

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**

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

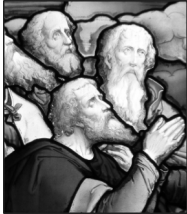
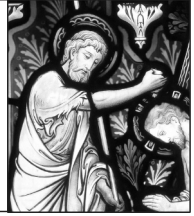
THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

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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

Southwell Minster & Sycamore Gap



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

Suthell? South-well? Apparently, both pronunciations are correct. Most people call it *Suthell*, but some locals prefer *South-well*, because the area has a number of wells, and Southwell is the location of the south well. You takes your choice!

I was very blessed last month to take a group of pilgrims from St. Nicolas', Kings Norton and St. Nicholas and St. Barnabas, Kenilworth, to Southwell Minster. Pilgrimages are beneficial in building up both the spiritual and fellowship of a church, a shared spiritual experience on a journey to a holy place, a deepening of personal faith and of our relationships with our accompanying pilgrims.

Southwell Minster, also known as the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary near Newark-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire, is not too far away. The site of Southwell Minster has been a place of pilgrimage for 900 years, welcoming visitors, pilgrims and worshippers. A minster, by the way, is a church built during Anglo-Saxon times in Britain as part of a monastic and teaching tradition. A cathedral is the seat of a bishop and, specifically, a place of worship. Like York Minster, Southwell is both a minster and a cathedral. It became a cathedral in 1884 for the newly-created diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. It should be called Southwell Cathedral, but the old name of Southwell Minster still sticks.

It is known as the "hidden gem" of English Cathedrals, a building of stunning architecture, both inside and out, set in beautiful gardens. In 956, King Eadwig gave land in Southwell

to Oskytel, Archbishop of York. The Minster was established on this land.

It was a super day! The weather was glorious, warm and dry, the autumn colours and turning leaves reminding us that it was October. We had a great driver, a warm welcome, gifted guides, super company and good food in the refectory. Friendships were made, existing friendships were strengthened and faith was deepened. The culmination was a sublime Evensong from the Book of Common Prayer, sung antiphonally in the monastic tradition. An inspirational day.

What's the connection with Sycamore Gap? Pilgrimages, secular and religious, have also been made for 150 years to what is known as Sycamore Gap, which was a solitary sycamore tree on Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland. Proposals of marriage were received and the ashes of loved ones scattered beneath it. It was a special place visited by folk from all over the world.

The tree was the survivor of a number of sycamores along the wall at this point and, in part, grew within the wall. Although a sycamore tree is not usually considered imposing, like an oak, this one had a solitary beauty. It is also very unusual for a tree to stand on its own like that.

It was located in a dramatic dip in the landscape and was a popular subject of photography, in every weather and occasionally against the background of the Aurora Borealis. It was planted in the 19th century, won the England Tree of the Year award in 2016 and was needlessly felled with a chainsaw by someone with considerable skill on 28th September 2023, an act of monumental spite.

Other precious trees and woodlands destroyed recently, often overnight and in secret by developers, leave us outraged, with a sense of loss, the loss of a place of sanctuary. In 1897, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote "Binsey Poplars", lamenting the felling of the beautiful trees that grew along the Thames, just outside Oxford.



Binsey Poplars

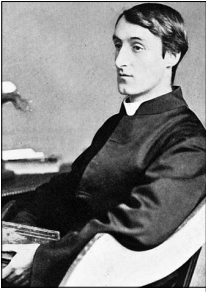
My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled are all felled;
Of a fresh and following folded rank
Not spared, not one
That dandled a sandled
Shadow that swam or sank
On meadow, and river and wind-wandering and winding bank.
To mend her we end her,
When we hew or delve:
After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.
Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve
Strokes of havoc unselfe
The sweet especial scene,
Rural scene, a rural scene,
Sweet especial rural scene.

Hopkins uses esoteric language to convey his profound sense of loss, his anger, reflecting ours for Sycamore Gap.

Absences felt in particular places matter to us. The cavity left will be felt by anyone who has visited this remarkable tree. Like the open, gaping wound left where the Twin Towers in New York had been, or the spire of Notre Dame in Paris, destroyed by fire, a space was left where something valued had stood, perhaps like the gap left when someone dies.

Anthony Gormley, the sculptor, perhaps most famous for the Angel of the North, has refused to create a sculpture of the tree. He has suggested instead that there should be a countrywide planting of native trees to replace this icon.

This destruction feels like a sacrilegious loss, an act of vandalism of the worse kind. But why has this attracted worldwide interest and grief, rather than, say the war in



▲ GERARD
MANLEY
HOPKINS SJ
(1844-1889)

Ukraine or starvation in parts of Africa, or abuse, or the pollution of our waterways? Perhaps it is easier to focus all of our grief on a single icon, which becomes the symbol of all we grieve for.

Returning to our pilgrimage, the poet John Betjeman said of Southwell Cathedral that there was no church more beautiful. After our tour, we wandered the rediscovered and recently re-opened Palace gardens, an absolute haven of peace, prayer and beauty. They flank the ruins of the Archbishop's Palace, with its connection to Cardinal Wolsey.

Thomas Wolsey came from very humble origins in East Anglia, rising to become the controlling figure of state, until King Henry VIII rejected him for failing to secure the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. From the court, Wolsey fled to Southwell Minster in 1530 and spent the last few months of his life there.





PHOTO BY THELMA MITCHELL

Thinking back over our day, I was reminded again of the hymn "Crown Him with Many Crowns", which I wrote about in the parish magazine not very long ago. I leave you with the closing words, a summary for me of what was so inspiring and revealing and spiritually uplifting about Southwell Minster.

▲ THE
PILGRIMS
INSIDE
SOUTHALL
MINSTER

*Crown Him the Lord of years,
the Potentate of time.
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me:
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.*



PHOTO BY THELMA MITCHELL

THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Hot Cuppa Season



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

As I write this, we have just passed the equinox. There are such mixed emotions at this time of year. A fear of missing out. Did we make the most of the summer season? Both with our family and with planting in the garden? It's getting darker, the leaves are revealing their true colours as the chlorophyll leaves them and they put on the autumn show.

I am looking forward to cosying up in the warm house with hot cuppas and wearing my winter poncho which is a multi-coloured, oversized, woollen poncho that I grab whenever it's a cold day. The hens are slowing down their laying and, last year, stopped laying eggs altogether by 15th October until the following spring. One hen is completely shedding all her old feathers and growing a new set for the winter. I think she feels quite untidy! The cats are spending more time in the house, especially when it is windy and rainy. Maybe these are hints for us humans. If humans are also solar powered, should we be slowing down a little as well? The ground is readying itself for its cold rest and reset, the herbaceous perennials will be receding into the earth. It's as if nature is readying itself for a slumber and a nurture before all the energy of spring.

If we are to take our cue from nature, we should try to get a bit more sleep and slow down a bit more when our lives allow. You may find yourself reflecting lightly while gardening, crocheting, darning socks, baking or preserving. We should be kind and nourish ourselves and our families.

I'm looking forward to autumn walks in the nature reserve to make the most of the gorgeous autumn tree display with its many colours; and mushroom spotting. I try to identify the mushrooms but never take any as I am not confident at

mushroom picking. I am trying to grow two mushroom logs in the garden, which will hopefully give me some shitake and oyster mushrooms in the future. My favourite autumn spot in the nature reserve is Merecroft Pool. The light levels on the water, the huge tall trees, the mushrooms... it's such a magical place. On my walks, I forage rosehips, which are the last thing I forage before winter sets in. I will have to wait patiently until early March for the wild garlic. Autumn and winter walks are excellent ways to keep the Vitamin D up. The equinox is my cue to add Vitamin D to Charles' mummy cookies (chocolate chip cookies that I fortify with vitamins and protein to help him build his weight).

Already this year there have been a lot of colds and Covid, so I have started making kimchi and rosehip syrup. Rosehips are said to be bursting with Vitamin C. I'm not sure if it works, but it tastes delicious and is lovely for sore throats.

When it's not the right weather to be outside, I like to preserve the summer harvests while Charles plays indoors. From my autumn harvests, in happy contrast, the medlar on the allotment looks amazing with plenty of the fattest, biggest fruits I have ever seen. The quince looks very bountiful again with lots of fruit and I love the way its heavy fruit make the trees branches bend like cathedral arches. I am looking forward to a quince crumble and to making a batch of quince jam, which makes excellent presents. Mum makes jelly, but I love the texture of quince jam. With the medlars, I will either make jelly or a toffee cake. The tomatoes have been so abundant that

I just have to make my favourite tomato ketchup. I don't think we'll have many green ones this year but ketchup is excellent with ripe or green tomatoes. I've also made some oven-dried tomatoes - delicious! They are the British version of sundried tomatoes, using the food dehydrator setting on the air fryer. The apple harvest wasn't great for me this year. The apples dropped prematurely on the ground. This autumn and winter I have less time due to work and mothering commitments, so I am focussing on the things that create the most wintery delight. I will be making a quince, pear or apple chutney lightly spiced with szechuan pepper. I am trying to grow a szechuan pepper in the back garden as they are completely winter hardy.

Something really comforting I like to make, especially at this time of year, is sourdough. There's something so lovely about bringing a freshly made warm loaf from the oven. I also love the fact that all the yeasts are naturally made from the air in my kitchen. It takes me a day and a half to make but with relatively minimal effort. All sorts of baking is lovely at this time of year. Scones, for example. During the holidays, instead of mummy cookies, I make Charles chocolate cupcakes fortified with his supplements, Vitamin D and extra protein to keep his weight up. It's so lovely to eat things warm from the oven with a little butter melting on top. Bliss!

At this time of year, our electrical habits change. We have solar panels and are coming up to the anniversary when we had them fitted. In the

summer, I can do the clothes washing and run the dishwasher whenever the sun shines and make the most of all the solar energy. In the winter, we run the washing machine and dishwasher overnight when we have a cheaper tariff with our energy provider, so it just takes a little more planning. The heated air dryer comes back into use, particularly in the period between November to the end of February when washing doesn't dry on the washing line.

There are also crops to look forward to. I have become a real fan of Jerusalem artichokes, which will start to be ready by early December. I planted oca in the greenhouse and they will be ready ten weeks from the equinox, also in about early December. They are from South America, a root vegetable that has a lovely lemony flavour (*photo, below*). They don't do well if there's a frost, which is why I planted some in the greenhouse this year to see if they do better in a more gentle environment. Hopefully, I will get a bigger crop. It is the best time of the year to enjoy all the brassicas, which are bursting with

goodness and nutrition. The perennial kale is looking very vibrant and I've planted Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli on the allotment. There are so many lovely dishes to anticipate. Broccoli is one of Charles' favourite vegetables. We've had amazing harvests of garlic and onions this year, so I'm looking forward to adding these to the dishes. I've planted salsify and scorzenera, root crops that grow similarly to carrot or parsnip, which are happy in the ground throughout the winter until you are ready to pull them up. I haven't cooked much with these crops yet, so I'm eagerly awaiting my experiments with them. I have plenty of recipes ready to try and they've certainly been growing well through the summer.

So, there will be plenty of comforting activities and food adventures to replenish us through the winter period. I know Charles will be doing lots of Lego building, and November is his birthday month! Thankfully, he has started to build it himself instead of "employing" mummy or daddy to do his building.



Tornadoes in the UK are surprisingly common...

...and no-one knows why

A small tornado recently passed through the town of Littlehampton on England's south coast. Strong winds smashed windows, moved cars and left one person injured.

You might associate tornadoes with the plains of the central US, but they're surprisingly common in the UK too, albeit smaller and weaker. In fact, my former PhD student Kelsey Mulder found that the UK has about 2.3 tornadoes per year per 10,000 square kilometres. That's a higher density than the US, which as a whole has just 1.3 per 10,000 square km.

The numbers are higher for American states in "Tornado Alley" such as Oklahoma (3.6) or Kansas (11.2). Nonetheless, a random location in the UK is more likely to experience a

tornado than a random location in the US.

The data isn't perfect, however. Tornadoes cannot be observed by satellites and need to be close to weather radars, which can detect the rotation. Thus, most observations are made by humans who then have to report them to the relevant weather service. "Storm-chasers" follow most tornadoes on the American plains, but underreporting may be an issue elsewhere.

Most tornado research has focused on the US, where forecasting and early-warning systems are advanced. There is considerably less research on UK tornadoes. Over the past 12 years, my research group has tried to address this by shedding light on where and when UK tornadoes occur, what causes the storms that



DAVID SCHULZ IS PROFESSOR OF SYNOPTIC METEOROLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER



produce them and how we can better predict them.

England has three 'tornado alleys'

Whereas many tornadoes in the US plains occur within a few weeks during the spring, UK tornadoes can occur throughout the year. The UK's tornado alley is really three regions, most in southern England: an area south of a line between Reading and London with a maximum near Guildford, locations southwest of Ipswich and a line west and south of Birmingham.

These regions have probabilities of experiencing a tornado within a 100 square km area of somewhere between 3% and 6% per year, meaning

they could see one as often as every 15 to 30 years.

These tornadoes aren't as violent as the more extreme ones in the US, but the damage can still be substantial. In July 2005, a large tornado in Birmingham caused £40 million in damages and injured 39. Fortunately, no one was killed. People have died in the past though, for example a strong tornado in South Wales in 1913 killed three.

Although the Birmingham tornado was the most damaging tornado on that day, two others were recorded across the British Isles. Indeed, around 70% of UK tornado days

have at least two reports, and 13% produce three or more.

We refer to such days as tornado outbreaks, with the largest-ever UK tornado outbreak occurring on 23 November 1981, producing 104 tornado reports from Anglesey to Norwich.

What causes tornadoes

We still don't know exactly why the UK has so many weak tornadoes. We do know that "supercells" – rotating thunderstorms tens of kilometres across – form the largest tornadoes in the US but occur less frequently in the UK. Instead, tornadoes in the UK tend to be formed from lines of storms along cold fronts.

Although millions of dollars have been spent researching supercell thunderstorms in the US, there is an increasing awareness that these linear storms also require investigation on both sides of the Atlantic. Our group has been trying to understand what causes some of these parent storms to begin to rotate and eventually spawn tornadoes.

So far, my former PhD student Ty Buckingham and I have been able to identify certain conditions where the wind direction changes abruptly. In such cases, an instability may develop where small

perturbations grow into rotating vortices a kilometre or more across, regularly spaced along the front. Such vortices are thought to be the precursor for tornadoes.

Identifying the conditions for this so-called "horizontal shearing instability" should mean we can better predict when and where the parent storms that produce the tornadoes form. But understanding this instability is not the only answer. Other tornado-producing storms do not appear to be associated with this instability, so we still have more to learn.

The next step is understanding how the tornadoes themselves form. For that, we will need both fortuitous observations of such tornadoes forming close to Met Office radars and powerful computer programs that are able to model the atmosphere down to a scale of tens of meters.

Recent advances in computing and our collaborations with colleagues in engineering may yet reveal the secrets of UK tornadoes.

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DAVID ASH

Mucknell Abbey

An Anglican Benedictine Community near Worcester

Just half an hour by car from Kings Norton in a peaceful rural location south-east of Worcester stands a collection of buildings whose purpose may not be obvious at first glance. Originally a dairy farm with a documented history stretching back to at least the 11th century, since 2010 it has been a Christian monastery, the home of a small community of Anglican Benedictine monks and nuns founded in 1941. It is, in fact, the Church of England's first mixed abbey. But why

should it be of interest to readers of this magazine?

Throughout their long and chequered history, the monasteries of Europe have played a central role in the wider life of the church, not just as powerhouses of prayer (the *lungs of the church*, in the words of one French 20th century bishop), but as places of hospitality for anyone needing to “draw aside for a little while from all the noise and busy-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MUCKNELL ABBEY

ness of everyday life”, as the abbey’s website puts it.

Hospitality is fundamental to the monastic lifestyle. The Rule of St Benedict, the 6th century document which governs the life of all Benedictine houses, gives it the highest priority. “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ”. The community at Mucknell lives this out in exemplary fashion. The welcome is warm, the accommodation is modern and comfortable, the food is wholesome and delicious. Guests, whether they come for a day or longer, are free to spend their time as they wish, in reading or in silence, perhaps (by prior arrangement) in conversation with a member of the community, or exploring the surrounding countryside. It is an ideal place in which to step back from the world for a while, to “make a retreat”. And yes, for those who really need it, there is free wifi!

Life in a monastery follows a daily rhythm in which all guests are invited, but not obliged, to follow. Each community sets its own pattern. At Mucknell, in winter, the day begins with the Office at 6.00 am, followed by Lauds at 7.00. After breakfast, guests are welcome to return to the beautiful, modern chapel (*below, right*) for the next service, Terce, at 8.40. The community then goes about its business until the daily Eucharist at 12.00. Lunch brings everyone together in the refectory at 1.00. Meals are eaten in silence while one of the community reads aloud from a book, an ancient tradition. At 2.15, the service of None leads into the afternoon. Vespers starts at 5.00. After



supper at 6.30, the last service of the day, Compline, begins at 8.00 pm.

The style of the worship differs from that of Anglican services you may have experienced in a parish church although, if you attend Compline at St Nicolas’, it will sound familiar. The psalms and other elements of the liturgy are chanted in plainsong, which monasteries have been using since they first came into existence.

There is much more to tell about this remarkable place and you can find most of it on the abbey’s website at mucknellabbey.org.uk. If you have been looking for somewhere not too far away in which to spend some time in quiet and contemplation, you may find what you are looking for here.



We Remember

As I write this on a wet October day, thinking ahead to November and the season of Remembrance, I am surrounded by the news coming from the Middle East of the conflict there between Israel and Palestine.

Because of my work with young people through both the air and sea cadets it worries me even more. My hope is that the young people I know never have to go to war. My hope is that they will know the importance of tolerance, compassion and understanding and work for peace and justice. Not all of our young cadets will go on to join the forces but, for those who do, I hope that, along with all the practical and life skills we teach, they will know how to treat people, understand something of human rights and military ethics and appreciate the consequences of conflict. I hope they remember the message of love and acceptance that we preach. That is part of the huge responsibility of working with young people. Knowing the influence we may have on their lives and making sure that it is a positive and formative one. Being good role models.

Membership of the armed forces doesn't mean you want to fight. War is, and always should be, a last resort.

As we approach Remembrance Sunday and we reflect on the lives lost, we do not glorify war. Far from it. We remember the consequences of war, its impact on ordinary people as well as on members of the armed forces, the loss of life and limbs, the scars that do not show. We remember veterans, especially those who are homeless or struggling with PTSD and other mental health issues. We remember the young people who went to war and never returned, some of them the same age as our cadets. We remember so that we never



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

forget the impact of war and so that we do all in our power to avert it.

My hope is that the young people in our youth organisations will remember the things they have learnt and the values we stand for : respect, integrity, service, commitment, loyalty, discipline. So that they go on to be good citizens and stand up for what they believe in. I hope that they never see active service but, if they do, that they are as prepared as they possibly can be for what that entails

I wear my poppy with pride and I pray for peace. I have faith not only in God but in

these young people, that they will go out and make the world a better place.



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

The Falklands War

Time seems to pass so swiftly and the months become years. My pleasure is rather limited these days, but coming to church is important. However, I am pleased to relate my experiences at sea for our magazine each month and to share tales for our readers. I am also happy that I seem able to retain many memories of years gone by. I do say a few silent prayers for chums still alive and for the scant few left who can keep in touch. This month, I am going to feature the Falklands War in 1982, during which the P&O liner Canberra was involved in our country's conflict with Argentina.

I was not on the Canberra at the time, having left for the SS Orcades in 1970 and then on to the P&O cargo division. Life on the cargo ships was really enjoyable, as I visited many ports all over the world, bringing back fruit from Israel, sailing down to South America to bring bananas back to Europe, transporting dates from Iraq to the USA, from New York down to the East Coast, including Alabama and Texas and not forgetting New Orleans.

Meanwhile, the Canberra, on which I used to serve, had become a one-class ship and remained quite popular. But the day came when I heard on the grapevine that she was on the books to be scrapped as she was no longer economical to run and the engine room was in a poor state. Well, the Falklands War, when it happened, was a godsend for her. She was chartered by the Government for six months minimum, at a cost of 3 million pounds, I



Eddie reflects on the Canberra's role in the Falklands War

believe. The European crew were asked if they wanted to volunteer on the understanding that they would have to sign Articles of War if they did. A quite large pay increase was offered and nearly all signed up to remain on board.

As news of the war began to spread around the world, I had mixed feelings. Having served on the Canberra for more than seven years, I prayed that she would be safe and would be able to return to the UK. At times, I felt that I would have liked to be part of the crew and I experienced a sense of loss.

Later on, when it was all over, I had some feedback from former shipmates. It had been traumatic for many on board. The worst time, apparently, was when the ship was anchored in San Carlos Bay on the opposite side of the main island from Port Stanley, which was occupied. The Argentine air force tried, unsuccessfully, to bomb the Canberra, but they managed to sink two other ships, including the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel Sir Galahad. On June 8th, the ship was waiting to deploy soldiers in Port Pleasant near Fitzroy when it was attacked by Argentine Skyhawks. Forty-eight British crewmen and soldiers were killed; others were evacuated with life rafts and helicopters; some were badly burnt. The other ship was the SS Atlantic Conveyor owned by Cunard. On May 25th, she was struck by two Exocet missiles launched by a Super Etendard fighter. A fire broke out, causing ammunition to explode and killing twelve crewmen. She was a container ship carrying important

items including helicopters. Her sinking meant that landed troops had to move on foot across the island.

Luckily, the Canberra was not hit and the Mirage jets which attacked her were either shot down or fled from the British aircraft in the battle. All on board the Canberra had to lie flat on the decks as the alarm sounded. It was very traumatic. I heard quite a few tales from my friends, some of which are not printable here. One of them, who came to see me from London for a weekend, was a changed person. He seemed to be smoking a lot of cannabis and his behaviour had become very erratic.

The Canberra took 400 young conscript soldiers back to Argentina after the surrender. They had to be deloused and were in a sorry state. Many were malnourished. Some had not much idea about the location of the Malvinas (as the Argentinians call the Falkland Islands) and came from poor, rural areas. The lads on board felt sorry for these poor men.

All in all, I was glad I was not on the ship during what was a very dangerous situation. If the Canberra had been damaged and sunk, the 2,000 troops who were about to disembark would have suffered tremendous losses. And if the Argentine cruiser the General Belgrano had not been sunk on 2nd May by the submarine HMS Conqueror, the large number of Exocet missiles she carried would have caused a lot of damage to our ships. I know that many prayers were said at the time. I like to think that they were answered.

Christmas 2023 - Dates for Your Diary

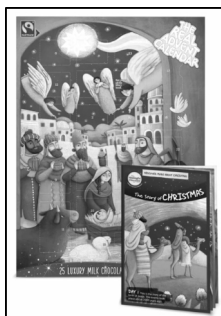
- 9 December 10 am -1 pm : Jingle All The Way
- 10 December 10.30 : St Nicolas' Day Service
- 16 December 2 pm : Come and Join in Nativity & Party
- 17 December 4 pm : Carols By Candlelight
- 23 December 4 pm : Blue Christmas Service
- 24 December 9 am and 10.30 am Advent 4 Services
- 24 December 5 pm : Crib Service
- 24 December 11.30 pm : Midnight Service



Funerals September 2023

7th September	Elizabeth Lynch	87	Bu.CY
20th September	Lily Dawes	94	In.CY

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



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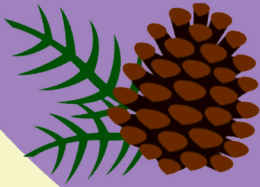


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