KINGS NORTON TEAM PARISH

The Magazine

For church & community

January 2021 **£1.50**

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A Church of England Team Parish serving all in Kings Norton and Druids Heath through the Parish Church of St Nicolas and the District Churches of Hawkesley and Immanuel
parishoffice@kingsnorton.org.uk | www.kingsnorton.org.uk
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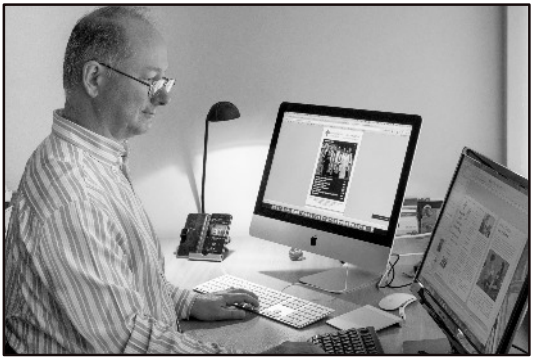


As I sit at my desk editing this magazine each month, I often find myself wondering what impression it will give of our times to readers of the future. Will historians of the 22nd century and beyond scour these pages in some digital format as yet unimagined looking for clues to how we lived, what we looked like, how we spoke? And if so, what conclusions will they draw? It's one of the reasons I like to include photos. The camera can be a kind of time machine. Its ability to bring the past to life is, for me, one of its fascinations.

Anyone seeking to understand how the pandemic of 2020-2021 affected daily life in Kings Norton cannot fail to be struck by the energy, creativity and determination with which the people of this parish sought to preserve a sense of normality despite repeated lockdowns and throughout long months of restrictions. There are stories to be told and, maybe, articles to be written about the vast amounts of time and effort that are being expended to keep the church open, to communicate with the isolated, to feed those without resources, to encourage the despondent and to cope with every kind of crisis. So much selfless service goes unnoticed and unrewarded. So much is taken for granted.

Here's an idea for a New Year's resolution. Thank someone who is keeping the show on the road.

The Editor

From The Rector

The Blame Game

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the 'blame game' as 'a situation in which one party blames others for something bad or unfortunate rather than attempting to seek a solution'.

This concept of blame for blame's sake has exercised me during most of the past year. (How about you?) Part of the pandemic's unseen impact upon our reasoning and emotions perhaps?

To blame, to accuse, to rail against institutions and individuals in anger and rage may be a basic human coping mechanism in the face of feelings of fear, anxiety and helplessness but, apart from providing temporary feelings of self-righteous indignation or bitter victimhood, what does it ultimately achieve?

The blame game is all too evident in what passes for political and public discourse in the mainstream and social media. Instead of

dialogue and informed debate we seem to be bombarded with instances of escalating verbal warfare.

Passionate, reasoned arguments and opinions must be part of private and public conversations and debates in any free and democratic society. Freedom of speech has been achieved through centuries of social progress. Governments which attempt to constrain or eradicate free speech are rightly condemned. However,

our freedom to speak or write is not an absolute right separate from those of others but a form of social contract which ensures a degree of fairness and moderation so that as many voices as possible can be heard without fear or condemnation.

Our freedom of opinion is protected by law, as is everyone else's; but there are also legal limits to how we express our opinions if, in doing so, we infringe the rights of others.

Jesus was a good debater and a great story teller. He was articulate, knew the cultural norms of his time. He was also well versed in the Jewish religious laws and the occupying Romans' legal code of his day. He was subtle and astute when challenged to account for his teachings and actions by those suspicious of his growing popularity and claims of divine authority (see Mark 12.13-17 or Matthew 21.23-27, for example).

> IT IS WE WHO HAVE TO CHANGE IF WE ARE TO FIND A WAY THROUGH A COMPLEX WORLD WHICH OFFERS SO MUCH YET WHICH IS ENDLESSLY FRUSTRATING.

Rarely do the Gospels portray Jesus as angry. He has strong words to say about religious hypocrisy, however. The one event where it is assumed that he acted with a degree of violence is when he upturned the traders' tables in the outer court of the Jerusalem Temple.

Apart from these incidents, Jesus' usual way of teaching and preaching was through storytelling, parables and informed debate with his critics. After his death and resurrection, his first followers continued his style of speaking with critics in debate and showed their authority by the example of their new way of life.

Justin Welby, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, has spent years quietly working for peace and reconciliation in trouble spots around the globe and in the UK. His experiences have led him to encourage ways of promoting what he calls 'disagreeing well'.

This refers to a process of dialogue between disagreeing parties which allows each to be heard and to be respected. If no agreement or reconciliation can be found then a means of living with difference is sought while still living well together.

Last year, he launched the *Difference Project*, a course aimed at exploring how people may work through the elements of disagreement to find a better, healthier, way of dealing with difference. Archbishop Welby describes reconciliation as 'not the ending of all difference, but the transformation of how we deal with difference.'

Anger is a form of violence and therefore to be managed with skill and caution. Parents teach their children how to cope with feelings of anger as they grow up. Teachers at school reinforce in their pupils the need to moderate feelings of anger. Ultimately, we have the law to protect us from anger unleashed in the form of actual physical violence; but low-level anger is all around us.

In a recent sermon, I challenged us to consider when we last abused someone. I gave examples of everyday verbal abuse often directed at drivers whose driving we regard as careless, someone behaving in an antisocial manner in public, traffic wardens, politicians we disagree with, and so on. These all-too-common outbursts against 'them' may allow us to 'blow off steam' but they rarely change anything. This is because it is we who have to change if we are to find a way through a complex world which offers so much yet which is endlessly frustrating.

This year, I have committed myself (not as a New Year resolution) to follow the six principles of non-violence promoted by the *Martin Luther King Foundation* as a means of living better with my own feelings of anger and indignation. They are, of course, rooted in the Christian tradition of peace making and peace building.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.

2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.

3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people. Nonviolence recognises that evildoers are also victims.

4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. Nonviolence willingly accepts the consequences of its acts.

5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate. Nonviolence resists violence against the spirit as well as against the body. Nonviolent love is active, not passive. Nonviolent love does not sink to the level of the hater. Love restores community and resists injustice. Nonviolence recognises the fact that all life is interrelated.

6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

From The Martin Luther King, Jr. Centre for Nonviolent Social Change

Wishing you a Peaceful 2021.

The Reverend Larry Wright

Foodbank News

One of the political conversations which made the headlines for all the wrong reasons recently was the one about not providing free school meals as it might create dependency. It got us talking at the Foodbank as we sorted through donations and packed parcels, along the lines of 'Are we just fishing people out of the river, or are we also finding out why they are falling in in the first place?' (As the current government is not exactly brand new, perhaps they had best look at some of the ways in which their policies have increased need rather than decreased it and deal with the root causes themselves).

All foodbanks can regard themselves as aid agencies in many ways, there to provide 'first aid'. We are not there to solve all the problems behind the financial crisis which has led to the food poverty of the client who comes to us, but we can at least provide the food. That provision of food may, in many cases, be all that is required to tide them over a particularly difficult financial period. They may have the skills to prevent themselves from falling back into the proverbial river again. For others, it really is a rather a case of a sticking plaster. But, if we can refer the client to other agencies, some of the root causes of the financial crisis can be sorted out, be that chasing delayed benefit payments, arranging for the allocation of eligible benefits which were not previously being claimed, or the sorting out of debts and arrears with rent and utility providers.

The people who come to depend on the foodbanks are not the clients, but rather the government itself. It is almost expected that the foodbank network will pick up the pieces when statutory provision runs out or is absent. And yet, when we went into Lockdown 1, there was little dialogue between the established independent and Trussell Trust foodbanks. This meant that there was a great deal of reinventing of the wheel going on all over the country, and the response by so many was to set up small local foodbanks without trying to find out what was already available. The biggest problem

with so much extra provision is that the statistics gathered by the established networks are now not telling the full story of food crisis in this country and lobbying power is thus diminished.

There is a single action open to the government which would do away at a stroke with much of the need for foodbanks. Remove the five week wait for Universal Credit. When your pay stops with redundancy, you may well not have five weeks' worth of funds to fall back on, so you get into debt. The same is true for those who are furloughed on less than 100% of their salary.

One of our long-term volunteers made the comment that foodbanks seem to have become fashionable during 2020, which made us discuss why we thought that was. We felt there were two parts to the answer: a deep-seated wish to help others, but also a desire to do something useful. All of us said that we went home at the end of a shift feeling as if we had spent a useful hour, morning or afternoon. At a time when much of our usual activity had vanished, it gave a purpose to our day and a structure to our week, even helping us remember exactly which day of the week it was! I don't think that any of us does it purely for that reason, but it made us realise that it is probably part of the driving force behind the development of so many extra foodbanks and hot meal kitchens.

So, do we think that we will we stay 'in fashion'? The Trussell Trust is beginning to look at what comes next, which is basically a plan to put ourselves out of business eventually. That has always been our long-term ambition. However, I don't think we will be handing over our sorting gloves yet awhile. There is quite a long journey left before we reach the destination of No Longer Needed.

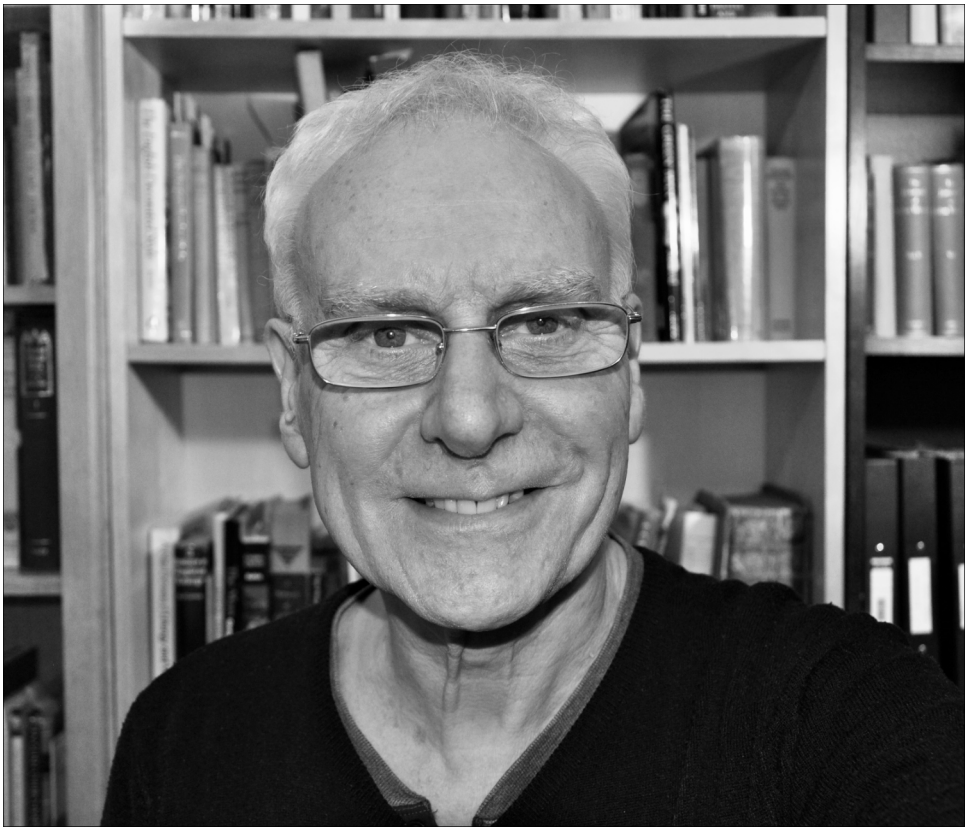
Historian Jim Melling

A Passion for Kings Norton

Many of our readers will remember local teacher and historian Jim Melling. His close association with our historic medieval buildings over many years culminated in his playing a vital role in their success in the *BBC2 Restoration* event in 2004. Those who wonder what became of him will be delighted to know that he has made a major contribution to the informative new booklet about our church (see p.34).

Born in Anglesey to English parents, Jim lived in Wales for his first twenty years. His memories of early childhood are dominated by walks in the woodlands of the island's Presaddfed Estate and watching with fascination his father's activities as a professional bee-keeper as he skilfully handled the thousands of bees in his apiaries. He was also fascinated by the rough stone buildings of the ancient Welsh farmyards that surrounded the family home.

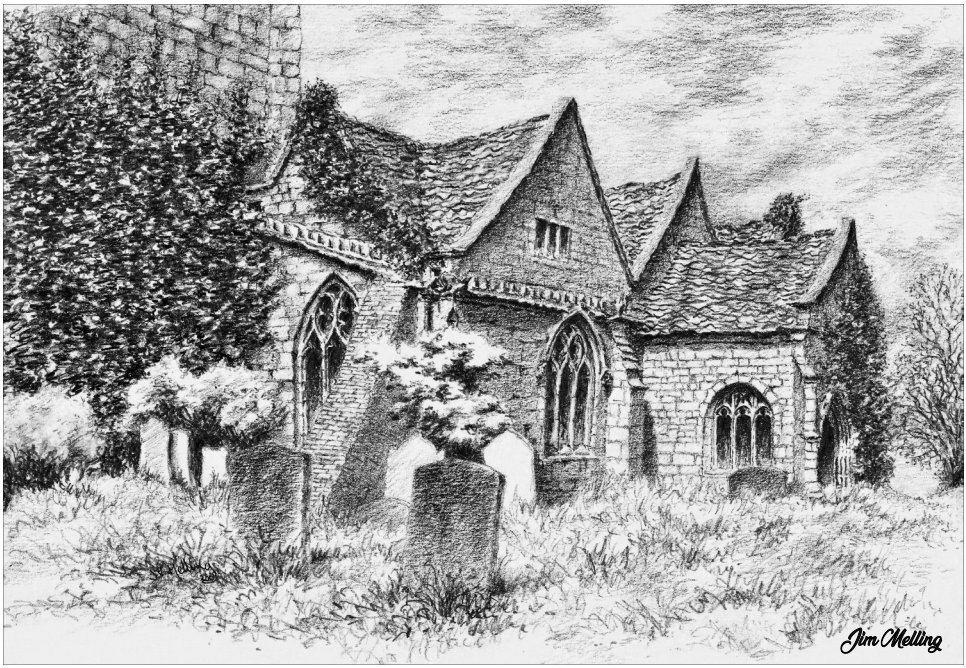
When he was eight, the family moved to the Gower Peninsula in South Wales, to Llangennith on Rosilly Bay. Having attended Gowerton Grammar School, he trained as a teacher in Swansea, moving to Birmingham in 1971 to take up his first teaching job at Raddlebarn Primary School in Selly Oak. His first acquaintanceship with Kings Norton, in a meaningful



sense, came when he moved to Kings Norton Primary School in 1975.

'When I came to the village for the first time, I was captured instantly by the alluring lines of the steeple and then enthralled by seductive medieval buildings gathered around an even older green. I have never fallen out of love; it stays very close to my heart.'

He lived in a flat at Lindsworth Court in the early 1970s, then moved to Ardath Road. He taught at Northfield Manor for five years from 1980 before moving to Hawkesley Junior School as Deputy Head in 1986. His job interview was held in Saint Nicolas' Place, then known as the Saracen's Head. At Hawkesley he became Acting Head for two terms. However, he became unhappy with the general direction of education and in 1992 he left to become a private tutor, concentrating on teaching children



with learning difficulties to read and write.

He designed, wrote and illustrated a series of early readers, workbooks and games for children aged 5 to 7 and for older children who were struggling with reading. 'A child's confidence quickly evaporates and learning becomes difficult when he or she falls behind with reading,' he explains: 'These books and materials stimulate the imagination and navigate a child through single and complex letter sounds, which are the building blocks of more than 70% of the English language.'

Ned in a Tub, Chit-Chat on the Bus, Crunch at Lunch and *Honk in a Huff* are the first four titles of a series of funny books. Details can be found on his website, www.volutepublishing.co.uk.

From childhood, Jim always had an affinity for the arts, stimulated by his father's skills as a professional cabinet maker and, later in his life, as a woodcarver for local churches on the Gower. Supporting this commitment, he undertook training in fine art conservation, drawing and watercolour painting, which equipped him with skills necessary to illustrate his books.

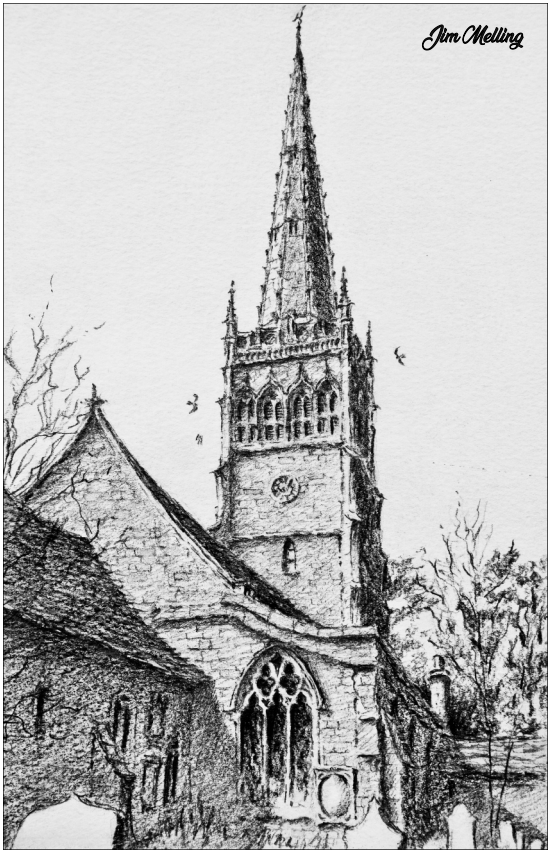
As his teaching career flourished, Jim also developed a general interest in the history and buildings of Birmingham. 'Birmingham boasts an impressive history and enjoys a rich heritage of artefacts, buildings, transport systems, art collections, written works and an array of so much more,' he explains. He has a particular commitment to promoting the city's historical architecture. 'People of the past often erected functional buildings with imagination and creativity; time and again they did so with admirable skill.'

His specific passion is the study of Birmingham's ancient churches. 'It's a study that has long been ignored. Our churches were the most significant buildings at the heart of medieval and later life in the many rural villages now swallowed up by the city.' He is currently developing a pioneering book, provisionally titled Medieval Birmingham Churches 1086 – 1850. In it, he is looking at the evolution and role of ten Birmingham churches. 'Collectively and individually they are a treasury of our heritage, of our culture and of the creativity of the people, which is expressed in historical architecture, craftsmanship and art. They speak of the relationship between the people and their faith. These are the most significant and unique buildings in Birmingham.' Nothing, however, has changed his opinion that St Nicolas' Church out of all of them, is 'the jewel'.

His continuing, deep affection for Kings Norton and its medieval centre since the 1970s saw him develop an increasingly significant role in sustaining the history of its buildings. He was very active in the Kings Norton History Society, and several of those volunteers who became local tour guides remember with gratitude his patient and comprehensive briefings. He produced detailed publications on the history and architecture of St Nicolas', Church, Saint Nicolas' Place (The Saracen's Head) and the Old Grammar School, all lovingly illustrated in his distinctive style.

The culmination of all this dedication came in 2004. He became the consultant architectural historian to *Endemol*, the programme makers for the *BBC 2 Restoration* series, following his surveys of The Old Grammar School and the Saracen's Head. There are some who say that his contribution was the critical factor which enabled the buildings to win the award.

For some years since then, Jim's other activities have inevitably detracted from his commitment to Kings Norton. He was a Visiting Lecturer on Birmingham's medieval churches at the University of Birmingham; he has written and lectured on medieval church architecture and local history for the last 40 years; and he has served on the Blue Plaque Committee of the Birmingham Civic Society.



He was naturally delighted when he was invited to become involved in the development of the new booklet *St Nicolas' Church, Kings Norton: An Illustrated Tour,* in which his unparalleled knowledge has been essential in ensuring historical and architectural accuracy, while his drawings grace a number of the pages. 'I share Rector Larry Wright's view that St Nicolas' has never received the recognition it deserves. Apart from bringing great joy to all those who love and treasure the building, the booklet will help redress the situation, as, I hope, in due course will my own book.'

To those many people who have sent their best wishes, Jim says: 'There are many delightful people with whom I have not been able to stay in touch in the way I would have liked. I hope to see them again very soon.'

Michael Kennedy

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Back to Nature

The Natural Health Service

One of the things that the pandemic has brought to the attention of many people is the benefit to our physical and mental health of enjoying fresh air and exercise and being close to the natural world. Going for a walk in the country has been shown to reduce your pulse rate, relax muscle tension and lower blood pressure. For these reasons a visit to the doctor may result in a prescription for an outdoor walk instead of tablets to treat anxiety and depression.

We are fortunate living in Kings Norton in having large areas of open space to visit, the park and the playing fields. We also have the River Rea and the canal where many kinds of wildlife can be found. We even have our own local Nature reserve off Wychall Lane. The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve holds regular session for individuals and families to help to take care of wildlife. If you would like to find out more or volunteer to take part in one of the work parties you can join the group by ringing 01121 458 4712 or visiting www.fknnr.org.

Closer to home, if you have a garden, even a small one, it can be developed to make it attractive to wildlife by feeding the birds, putting up nesting boxes, leaving areas of grass to grow long to provide shelter for small mammals and planting wild flower seeds. If you have a larger garden and are more ambitious, you could add a water feature or create a pond both of which are very attractive to wildlife.

If you have time and are able, it is possible to volunteer to help on one of the 50 nature reserves managed by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (01905 754919 www. worcswildlifetrust.org.uk) or by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust which manages reserves in the West Midlands (0121 523 0094 www.bbcwildlife.org.uk). Its nearest reserve, which you may know, is Moseley Bog near Sarehole Mill in Hall

Green. Visitors and volunteers are always welcome on the reserves.

Another way to help wildlife is to take part in regular sessions of caring for our churchyard. There are many interesting plants, birds and small mammals living in the churchyard and looking after this open space will help to provide a habitat for them to thrive. A group meets every Thursday morning from 10.0-12.00 and would love to have your help.

One of the most important things we can do is to care for and protect our wildlife. God's wonderful creation needs your help to survive and by investing in nature we can help plants and animals as well as restoring our own health.

Finally, looking ahead, we can come together as a church to celebrate the National Climate Sunday event to be held on 5 September 2021 (climatesunday.org) as part of the Climate Conference to be held in Glasgow later this year. Let us stop, look and think and enjoy God's creation of the natural world.

Mary Watson

Harry L Marks

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CONTACTS

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 remains open between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm.

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

THE MINISTRY TEAM

Team Rector	The Revd Larry Wright
Assistant Rector	The Revd Eliakim Ikechukwu
Parish Lay Minister	Pauline Weaver
Curate (Pioneer)	The Revd Catherine Matlock
Hon Assistant Priest	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Methodist Minister	The Revd Nick Jones
Readers	David Ash, Fay Fearon, Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki
Lay Preacher	Steve Wright
Music Minister	Sylvia Fox
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator	Chris Gadd

THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

Parish Administrator & P.C.C. Secretary	Judy Ash
Acting Finance Officer	Simon Hill
Safeguarding Coordinator	Annette Dickers
Regular Giving	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Flower Arranging (0121 486 2837)	Alison Blumer
Oasis (Sunday School) Tiny Tots & GPS	Pauline Weaver
Oasis (Sunday School) Immanuel	Nicky Moorcroft

The Church in the Parish

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

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

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

There is a regular 10.00 am service on Sundays at St Nicolas' Church at which 30 places are available. These have to be booked before noon on Friday by calling the Parish Office on 0121 458 3289.

If you wish to watch a service at home, you can do so every Sunday on the Church of England's website:
www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online

Sunday morning worship from Immanuel Church is streamed live on Facebook or Zoom at 10.30 am (facebook.com/Immanuel123Church).

A Family Service is broadcast live on Facebook at 9.30 am on Sunday morning (bit.ly/2K8KzTS). You can find stories and crafts for children on the same page.

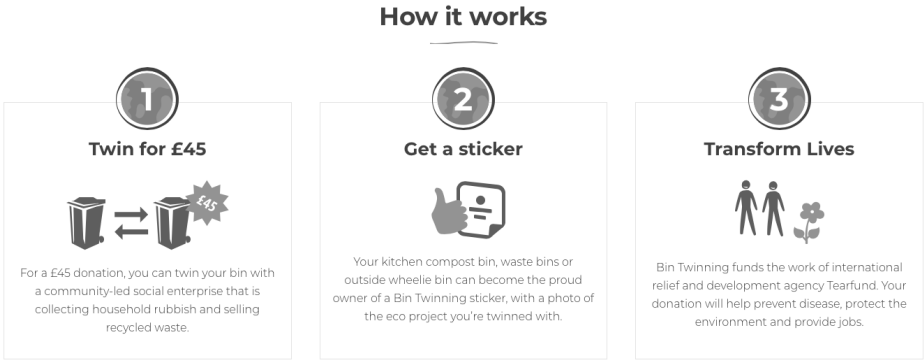
Prayers for Druids Heath and other occasional recordings appear as podcasts on the parish website (www.kingsnorton.org.uk/audio).

You can join members of the Ministry Team for occasional morning and evening prayer on the parish Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam).

For more detail and any last-minute updates, see the weekly newsletter, which is available on the Parish Website.

WHAT IS BIN TWINNING?

Bin Twinning is helping to fund sustainable projects that are being set up to collect people's rubbish, dispose of it safely, recycle as much as possible and promote waste reduction. You can help save lives and protect the planet by twinning a bin.



In the world's poorest countries, a person dies every 30 seconds from diseases caused by plastic pollution and rubbish. This New Year, St. Nicolas' Church, Kings Norton will support Tear Fund's Twin-a-Bin Appeal.

£45 will pay for a Wheelie Bin
£95 will pay for 3 bins in Haiti, Uganda and Pakistan.

There are mini-wheelie bins in church for your spare cash, or you can leave a donation with Judy at the Parish Office until 2nd February 2nd 2021. Donations should be sealed in an envelope marked 'Twin-a-Bin'.

AN APPEAL FOR NEW VOICES

Help us to bring more variety to our pages

Write for us!

Local stories
Local causes
Local history
Local people

Contact the Editor for more information

Gardening for a New Year

Seasonal tips from a green-fingered reader

I am writing this article in early December and I have been pleased this year with the number of plants still in bloom. One or two have been unexpected and one or two are a bit rare but perhaps deserve to be better known. Bedding dahlias outside my window still have some flowers and this has been helped by keeping them dead-headed as with some larger-flowered Hebes which are still flowering after snipping back older flowering shoots.

Camellia Rainbow

We are all familiar with the magnificent Japanese Camellias flowering in the spring but which are very sensitive to an overnight frost turning their elegant flowers into a brown tangle. I have discovered that there are a group of camellias in full bloom in November and they do seem to be free from damage from minor frosts if grown against a south facing wall. Preferring an acid soil the 'sasanquas' are not quite as hardy as their spring-flowering cousins and two RHS Award varieties are Hugh Evans and Narumigata. They are not very cheap to buy but will live for years if happy.

I was a bit startled to find an old favourite, easy to grow from seed, and with very pretty pink bracts Salvia Horminum or Clary flowering away in a perennial border in November. The secret is to snip out any brown bracts. A new variety to look out for is Pink Sundae (the

white varieties had long since given up flowering).

Hydrangea enthusiasts may have discovered that semi-double varieties will still look good long after their single-flowered cousins have turned brown and dry. A good one to try is Hydrangea Love but there are others.

All this leads us naturally to our plant of the month. Yes, it's the wonderful Chrysanthemums (mine are still in flower). I am excluding the show varieties and the modern cultivars forming cushions of hundreds of flowers because some of the older, hardy, varieties, either single or double, are much hardier than the modern beauties. Just a word of warning. Pick a variety that is shorter (45 to 75cm) in preference to the taller ones as they will need staking, which can be a bit of a pain in the neck (and the back). If you are experiencing difficulty in finding some, consult *farmyardnurseries.co.uk/hardy-chrysanthemums* for a huge range which are beautifully illustrated and, to my mind, modestly priced. Tick the hardy box for a quicker search.

There are many weather sites on the internet and one of interest to us gardeners is netweather.tv. Here you will find a face from the past as

Chrysanthemum Martin Bell

Michael Fish presents the gardening weather for the week ahead in forthright and colourful terms (he described this week's weather as 'pants'!) . Also on this site is a blog listing the 'Gardening jobs to be done' for the month on the 24th between 7.30 and 8.30. pm. I suspect it is archived for consumption at our leisure at a more convenient time.

Incidentally, I find the internet a source of information about gardening without equal and wouldn't be without my laptop. If you would like to join the happy throng in safety and confidence then seek the advice of a local computer group or, of course, your grandchildren. You can consult them via Skype or Zoom, eyeball to eyeball during lockdown events.

If you are finding gardening too much hard work, take the cottage-garden-meets-Bournville approach, about which, more next month. I will be telling you how to make that Christmas gift of a Phalaenopsis orchid last for years as one of our most beautiful and prolific house plants. Never again will you need to say 'Oh, it died'. In addition, I will introduce you to some of those irresistible plants that will appear in the seedsman's catalogues which used to thump as they dropped through your letterbox but are now more likely to appear in your computer's inbox.

Adam the Gardener

Kings Norton Farmers' Market

The Green, Kings Norton, Birmingham B38

2nd Saturday Each Month

Get FRESH

Next Market
Sat 9th Jan 2021
9.00 - 2.00

Founded in 1616. Re-established in 2005. The first Community Interest Farmers' Market in Britain

JANUARY EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

All events may be subject to change or cancellation. Please consult the Parish website & Facebook page for last minute announcements.

6 Jan	5.00 pm	The Search for the Crown in the Churchyard
10 Jan	10.00 am	Morning Praise for Plough Sunday : Bring Your Garden Tools
16 Jan	10.30 am	Wassail in the Churchyard
24 Jan	11.00 am	Outdoor worship in the Churchyard

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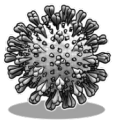
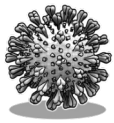
Love in a Time of



Coronavirus



A recent conversation with our younger grandson focused on the random contents of the pockets of small boys. He was often surprised by what he found in his! It occurs to me that small boys have always carried round a selection of arbitrary items in their pockets: a couple of marbles, a mini-car or two, a piece of Lego, a Snap card, a furry sweet, a grubby hankie and, of course, a stone! For some reason, small boys, and some grown-up boys too, are fascinated by stones, which they feel compelled to pick up, examine and keep.

My pockets today and, I suspect, those of many of us, are full of protective masks (aka face nappies!). Indeed, back in January 2020 BC (Before Covid), who would have thought that our main topic of conversation would revolve around face coverings? Discussions occur between families, friends and even total strangers, about which types are better to use, which the most comfortable, the problem of steamed-up glasses, not being able to recognise people behind them, unable to hear them speaking. Then there is the agonising over one found in a bag. Has it been used, is it safe to use if it has, has it been washed, how often can a mask be washed? And what about matching masks to outfits? A tartan one for Hogmanay? Green for St. Patrick's day? Maybe the clergy should colour code their masks liturgically …

The Germans have a great word for panic buying: *Hamsterkauf!* It refers to the stuffing of the bulging cheeks of hamsters. As we try not to *hamsterkauf machen* (panic buy), there are a number of words, like 'face

masks', which we have somewhat unwillingly used in abundance in 2020: pandemic, lockdown, self-isolating, furlough, regulations, restrictions, protocols amongst many. For me though, the word of 2020 was surely 'unprecedented'. How many times we have used it, and will continue to use it for years to come. Not in a good way either.

We are all, in our own way, grieving, mourning the enormous and unprecedented changes and losses in our lives. Life can be stressful even when it isn't a time of pandemic. We used to hug and kiss those we love, our parents, our grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews, friends. We shook hands with those we met as a sign of our respect for them. Now we stand back, two metres away, masked up to show how we value them. Yet this strange, past year, with its loss, anger and injustice, was also full of evidence of creativity and kindness. We have to hang on to the goodness, the humour, the resilience, layer by aching layer.

Love in a time of Corona virus is being shown daily, in big and small ways. Multi-billionaire Bill Gates, with his business partner, founded and built the world's largest software business, Microsoft, through technological innovation, a keen business strategy and aggressive business tactics. In the process, he became one of the richest men in the world. Rather than buy a fleet of private, luxury yachts he and his wife created The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates had ascertained that drug companies would put money, for example, into the search for cures for baldness but not into eradicating polio or defeating malaria, which kills millions of the poorest in the world. That is the point: the

raison d'etre of the drugs companies is profit. So his Foundation has been determinedly pursuing a cure and treatments for malaria and polio since 2000.

This year, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has donated 100 million dollars to help combat Coronavirus. This is small change for a billionaire and it seems shameful that we have to rely on philanthropic magnates with a social conscience to ginger up governments. It is, however, a wonderful example of love and care which other people with more money than all of us put together might follow. In smaller ways, there has been an abundance of good deeds and care poured out in communities at home and worldwide in the face of this shared crisis.

So how do we cope as one day merges into another? As a friend said, there are no days of the week now, no Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. It's all just 'day'. My own secret, guilty pleasure is to escape whenever I can into the world of detective stories and murder mysteries, a very British enjoyment. There is value in stories: their worth lies in helping us to explore the meaning of life and our place in it, as well as in escaping from it for a time. Crime fiction is seductive. It offers the assurance of resolution and of a better future. As we read into the account, we are mentally battling with the crime writer, engaging with the author to solve the mystery. My dear friend Anne who lives in Dorset, my wonderful sister-in-law in Worcester and I share a love of the same authors and circulate their books between us. Most recently we have developed a fondness for any of the mysteries of Elly Griffiths, but especially for stories about her forensic archaeologist-turned-detective which are set in North Norfolk; for Louise Penny and her Canadian version of Maigret, Chief Inspector Gamache, located between Montreal and a mythical village in rural Quebec; for Philip Wynne Jones' books in the heart of a more venal Venice; and for Anne Cleves' Inspector Perez, on the Shetland Islands. All are

cracking, page-turning reads. They tend to be claustrophobic locations and enclosed environments which resonate with the restrictions of lockdown living. Oh, for a resolution (in 350 pages, with all the loose ends tied up) to the year 2020!

As we embrace 2021, following that unprecedented year, Christmas was indeed not cancelled! We needed so much the incarnational message of the love, hope and peace of Jesus Christ, born as a baby in Bethlehem, to transform us. The manger birth calls us to love our neighbours from every background, and ourselves too, especially in this bleak, pandemic winter.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote recently about 'the exhaustion apparent in society and in the church at the moment.' However profound or mundane, we need to decide what we will take away into 2021, and what leave behind from what feels like the eternal winter of Covid-19. I would like to remember all the sacrificial love shown, great and small, by so many. I wish you a happy New Year and peace and safety in 2021. May the words from the book of Numbers chapter 6, part of the Hebrew Torah, be a blessing on all of us.

The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make His face to shine upon us and be gracious to us; the Lord lift up His face upon us and give us peace.

Amen to that!

Thelma Mitchell

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Back to Normal?

The Thoughts of a Lay Minister

It is very difficult to type when the dog decides to go to sleep half on your lap and half on your laptop. She is currently stretched out across my knees, sound asleep. I can't move one arm as she is resting on it and the laptop is at a strange angle, partially obscured by dog. I suppose it's one of the hazards, if you can call it that, of working from home.

In December last year, when I was writing for the January 2020 magazine, I couldn't have imagined how the year would pan out and that I would be spending most of it at home. It has been a year of huge change for us all alongside challenges and tragedies on a global, national, local and personal level. As I look back, I have much to be grateful for, but I know that not everyone has been so fortunate.

As we move forward into 2021, what will we take forward with us, what will we look forward to and what will be glad to leave behind? We've learnt a lot: new skills (including it would seem typing with one hand while a dog sleeps on the other. I taught myself to touch-type many years ago when I was unemployed under the Thatcher government back in the 80s, so typing with one hand is odd for me. It feels a bit like playing the piano with one hand.)

However, I digress. Stories for another time perhaps. As I was saying, we have learnt new skills, how to use new technology to keep in touch with each other and new ways of being church. I hope we have also come to realise what we value : a hug, time spent with friends and families, a job, a roof over our heads, food on our table. The dog has loved having us at home more. She won't like things returning to how they used to be. I won't say 'back to normal', because who knows

what normal will look like in 2021. We didn't know that, in 2020, 'normal' would include social distancing, using hand sanitiser and wearing a face covering.

I hope that in this new year we remember what we have learned to value during 2020, especially how we care for others, how we care for our planet, the importance of our NHS and of our key workers, the importance of family and friends and the place of God and church in our lives. And, of course, we look forward to a world where the Coronavirus is under control.

But, no matter what, we have come through 2020. Slightly battered and bruised but more or less in one piece and ready to pick ourselves up and start again. And if you aren't, then I hope you will reach out and ask for the help you need because we need to support each other as we get back to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual good health.

I wish you all a peaceful end to 2020 and a happy, different and healthy 2021.

Pauline Weaver

(aided & abetted by Ginny)

***Photo**: Pauline, wearing a reindeer 'onesie', welcomes another family to the popular 'Born in Bethlehem' treasure hunt around the Churchyard on Saturday 12th December 2020.*

No Tulips from Amsterdam

Eddie goes looking for culture and tulips during a mini-cruise to the Netherlands, taking in Amsterdam's red light district on the way.

A friend and I decided to take a mini-cruise to Amsterdam. We had to travel to Newcastle to board the *DFS* ferry from South Shields. The trip was quite an adventure but very enjoyable.

My travelling companion seemed to be quite excited about taking an night-time trip on a ferry. I told her that the overnight crossing could be rough on the North Sea and was tersely informed that she had gained her sea legs while boating as a child in Devon. Ah well.

Our ship was clean and comfortable and the food was good too. It was quite a rough night but I enjoyed a hearty breakfast. It was thinly attended for some reason.

On our arrival in the Netherlands, coaches were available to drive us to into the heart of Amsterdam. We decided to take a short trip with a guide to see the canals and the other points of interest of this historic city. We also managed a visit to the Anne Frank house, which is always a moving experience. This we followed with coffee in the main square, which gave us a chance to photograph the 'living statues'.

A tram then took us to the Rijksmuseum, where we enjoyed a collection of paintings by Rembrandt including the wonderful 'Night Watch'. On leaving the

museum, my friend expressed curiosity about the red light district (ladies often do!). So we climbed aboard a tram to Centraal Station. A short walk from there took us into a district which is not at all historic but yet seems to attract a lot of attention. My poor friend was quite taken aback; but then, it's not a suitable area for window shopping as we know it!

So then, it was back to the main street and a visit to the department store *C&A*, a Dutch firm whose Birmingham branch closed some years ago. We made purchases in both the ladies' and men's departments. After a late lunch, we moved on to the large flower market where I intended to buy some tulip bulbs.

Well, I was quite disappointed. Bulbs were readily available, of course, but they were quite expensive. I concluded that they were cheaper back home; so there were no tulips from Amsterdam on that trip!

The Dutch people are friendly, perhaps a little reserved at times. Despite some very liberal attitudes, they are quite pious too and churches are well attended in general.

Let us all hope and pray that, in early 2021, when the tulip fields in Holland are a riot of colour and our own tulips are in bloom, Covid will seem like a bad dream and such visits will become possible again.

Eddie Matthews

November 2020 Funerals

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." *(John ch.3 v.16)*

2nd November	Harry Alfred Locke	81	SN.Bu.KN
16th November	Ruby Ross	88	Bu.CY
25th November	Lulah Davis	2 mths	SN.Bu.KN

SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church, **Bu** : Burial,
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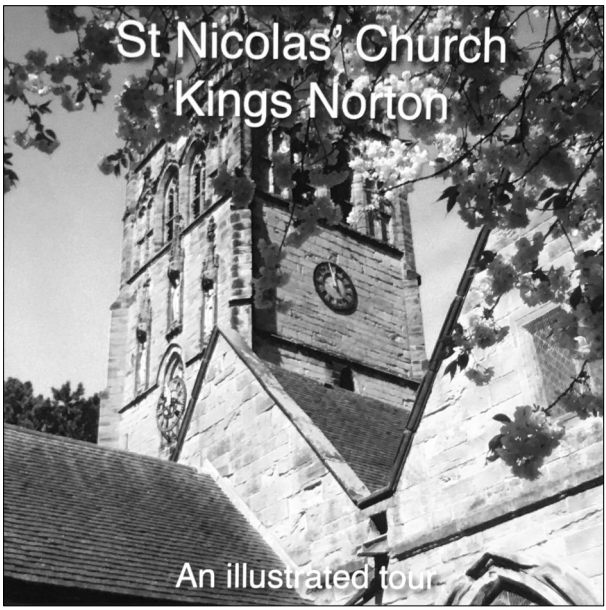

St Nicolas' Church, Kings Norton: An Illustrated Tour tells the history of the church from its very earliest days when a building of the size of the current chancel was constructed in the 12th century.

Purchase your copy by contacting the Parish Office on 0121 458 3289, by email (parishoffice @kingsnorton.org.uk) or by contacting Michael Kennedy on 07932 644627, (michaelkennedy @talk21.com).

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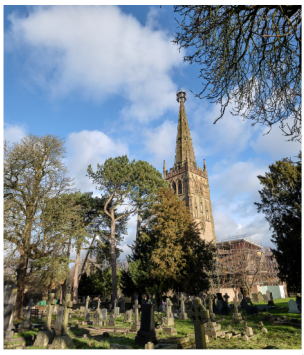
Around The Green on Saturday 12th December 2020

Carol singing & Leaf clearing



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