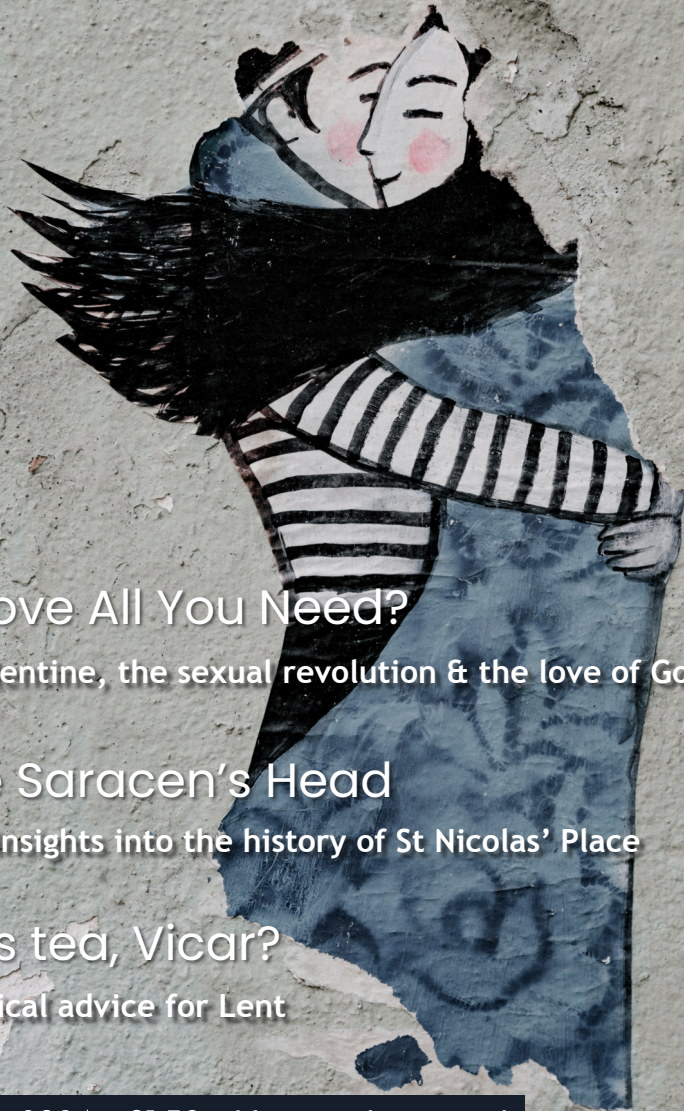


KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine



Is Love All You Need?

St Valentine, the sexual revolution & the love of God

The Saracen's Head

New insights into the history of St Nicolas' Place

Less tea, Vicar?

Practical advice for Lent

February 2024 • £1.50 • kingsnorton.org.uk



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Text & images for publication should be emailed as file attachments or entrusted to the Parish Office, sealed and marked for the attention of the Editor.

Submission Deadlines

Items for inclusion in the March 2024 edition must reach the Editor by midnight on **Friday 2nd February**.

Items for inclusion in the April 2024 edition must reach the Editor by midnight on **Friday 8th March**.

Welcome

EDITORIAL

The C.S.Lewis Foundation has a page on its website entitled "Quotes Misattributed to C.S.Lewis". (The quotation we use on page 6 is not one of them, by the way.) It is, I suppose, inevitable that such an influential writer should occasionally be given the credit for ideas which were not his. One such has become popular on sites like Goodreads: "You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body." It sounds Lewisian, doesn't it? But Lewis, a scholarly Christian, would probably not have written it. Why not? Because it distorts Biblical teaching by implying that the body is of secondary importance, something possessed by a soul. Whereas the foundational texts of Christianity and Judaism teach that the body is to be respected as an integral part of what it means to be human (Genesis 2:7). We are created from physical matter, into which God breathes spiritual life.

This edition manages to reflect that balance. We have food for the body (lots of it), but also for that mysterious part of us - call it soul, mind, spirit - which also needs to be fed to remain healthy. Though it was not planned this way, this month's magazine offers a cornucopia of advice for physical and spiritual health. Articles on diet, vision, weight loss, homegrown cooking and over-indulgence jostle for space with thoughts on love, fasting, contemplation, spirituality, joy, courage and hope. And gardening. The mind is not forgotten either. Let "MGM" introduce you to the theatrical delights of the Crescent Theatre and Thelma Mitchell to the brilliant intellect of G.K.Chesterton. Finally, don't forget that Lent and Easter come early this year. Ash Wednesday is also St Valentine's Day (14 Feb). You probably shouldn't read too much into that!



David Ash

Is Love All You Need?

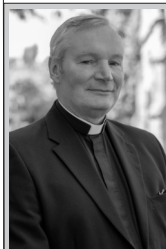
The 14th February chimes with most of us as St Valentine's Day. A saint we know virtually nothing about but who has become a symbol (like Eros or Cupid of more ancient tradition) of romantic love and starry-eyed longings for the object of one's love. As a young boy I recall seeing copies of exquisitely-made Valentine's cards sent to and saved by my great grandfather while he served with the Warwickshire Regiment in World War One. Such cards were highly prized and many examples are still available as antique collectors' items. They have an innocence and charm all of their own and of their own time. Things changed dramatically 50 years later.

Growing up in the 1960s and 70s, one imbibed the social and cultural revolution for which those decades were famous (or infamous). The change of fashions, the hippy movement, the relaxation of laws relating to sexual activity, marriage, divorce and so forth, all contributed to a sense of revitalisation and a funky one at that. The "pop" culture and

counter culture of those years was dominated by bands such as The Beatles and their relentlessly upbeat songs about love and romance. It was an era when the post-war gloom of the 1950s was replaced by a generation who were for partying, fun and freedom. It was similar to the Roaring Twenties, a decade of flappers, the Charleston dance fad and jazz following the trauma of the First World War.

Someone describing 1960s Britain said it had become "unbuttoned", and that love "ran riot". Who could be against that? More love, freely expressed and acted upon must be a good thing, surely?

Well, for the immediate beneficiaries of this new emphasis on love and freedom, it was indeed an exhilarating time, a time of experimentation in popular culture, in the media, dance, music and in the churches. The dominance of youth culture and of the views which went



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish



with it became a driving force which shaped society.

One of the most significant changes was the introduction of safe and freely-available contraception. When to get pregnant now became a personal choice rather than a decision left to nature alone. Similarly, the relaxation of abortion laws allowed for medical terminations almost on demand.

Despite this cultural revolution of the past 50-60 years, St Valentine's Day maintains its hold on the popular imagination. We may think of ourselves as more sophisticated now and cards may have to compete with social media memes, but the day itself as a celebration of

▲ HOW
VALENTINE'S
CARDS HAVE
CHANGED IN
THE PAST 100
YEARS!

love and romance has endured. It's also a multi-million-pound industry and, according to the latest statistics (2022), 79% of British people questioned said that they celebrated it in one way or another.

Love is one of the deepest of human emotions and therefore subject to all the emotional turmoil we undergo as human beings when experiencing profound feelings. Love, however, takes many forms. Personal affection towards others is not only about romantic love: friendship and family, neighbours and colleagues, those we admire for their talent or achievements, are all likely to

come into our orbit of affections.

Is it possible to love those we have never met? Of course, it is. We can hold in affection historical figures who have influenced our lives, though they are long dead. Great women and men of our, or previous, times will engender fondness because of their accomplishments. We are capable of loving animals, objects, ideas, artworks, music, buildings, food, sports teams and individual sports people. The list goes on.

One of the fascinating aspects of love for people of faith is how the love of God influences our ways and our choice of what to love. In the Christian tradition, God is the initiator of the loving impulse in creation. "We love because God first loved us", as the Bible puts it. Imagining an all-loving God who created the universe gives believers a starting point for ethical and moral living. To love one's neighbour is an instruction and an act of selfless generosity. All love is costly but human love has its rewards. Unconditional love as practised by many people of faith seeks no reward except the knowledge that they act in accordance with God's will.

When Jesus spoke of divine love, he was asserting both an ultimate ideal and a down-to-earth pragmatism. Love of God

and love of others are intimately connected. The way we treat others reflects our own depth of love as an ideal greater than ourselves but by which we feel constantly moved.

Jesus also knew what most of us know to be true: we must love ourselves first if we are adequately to love others. Loving oneself is not the extreme of self-love (narcissism) but knowing oneself and one's strengths and weaknesses, one's needs and desires and seeing them in perspective. St Paul put it more succinctly when he wrote that we need a "sober assessment of ourselves." Maturing in love is part of maturing as a human being, gaining wisdom and understanding regarding the limits and horizons of love.

The Beatles sang, "All you need is love". Maybe we should add "and wisdom".

"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

C.S.Lewis

The Saracen's Head

From God's Gift to Gift Horse



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY

In September 1930, it looked like the Kings Norton community was poised for an exciting new future. The giant Mitchells & Butlers brewery had presented St Nicolas' Church with the Saracen's Head, the public house that had provided hospitality on The Green for nearly 150 years.

Though M&B unnecessarily took out a restrictive covenant preventing alcohol sales on the premises, the church's intentions were, of course, entirely honourable. In its role as the focus of community activity, it must have seemed like divine intervention. Severely limited community space had dogged the efforts of the Church Council for decades. Now it had all the space it needed, with one of the parish's best loved buildings. But it was soon to become a curse, a financial drain on the church which persists to this day, nearly 100 years later.

This article focuses on the story of the pub, why and how the St Nicolas' Church Council acquired the property and what it did with it. My information is almost completely derived from the research done by the former St Nicolas' minister Revd Heather Flack some twenty years ago, together with a colleague Barbara Hedgeland. It is an outstanding piece of work, tracing the 500-year history of Kings



Norton's most celebrated building from its creation as a house for the well-to-do wool merchant Humphrey Rotsey in the 1490s to impress his neighbours.

The building remained in private use for nearly 300 years, but around 1771 became licensed as a public house called the Saracen's Head. It continued as a popular drinking place right though until the late 1920's, with numerous owners, some of whom enhanced and extended the place, others who simply imbibed any profits. In 1918, it was acquired by Mitchells & Butlers, which also rather greedily owned the

adjacent Bulls Head, another long-standing pub which was demolished and entirely rebuilt in the Edwardian era.

The area of the building that became the Saracen's Head was actually the East Range of the original house, the part of it that looks out over the Green. The main house was actually the North Range, which looks out over the church and churchyard.

It was a local yeoman and farmer called Richard Lea who, having bought the house in 1771, decided to turn part of it into a hostelry. It made good business sense: King's Norton was becoming an

increasingly significant location, close to the canal network and increasingly easy to reach by road, with the Pershore Road soon to benefit from the nationwide drive for high quality, toll-bearing 'turnpike' roads.

Though there were several changes of ownership during the 19th century, the pub continued to prosper well into the 20th century. The memoirs of Nancy, a young girl living in the North Range in the 1920s, recall the relatively high social standing of many of its clientele. While working people, mainly agricultural labourers, would come in farmers' carts, the farming gentry would arrive in relatively smart landaus, pulled by teams of horses, throwing pennies to local children to emphasise their status.

By then, in 1918, M&B had bought the pub. As they were already owners of the Bull's Head, it may have been that the writing was on the wall. The Bull's Head was a spanking new venue, while the Saracen's Head seemed, and indeed was, old-fashioned: in those days, the beams and old timbers, that were the hallmarks of its 450-year history were not seen by landlords as selling points!

Sure enough, as the 1920s proceeded, business at the Saracen's Head was falling well behind that of its neighbour,

and M&B decided that it had to close. It was unlikely that a buyer could be found for the pub as a going concern, so the brewery opened up discussions with the St Nicolas' Church Council to see whether it could find a use for the building.

The Revd Flack's research has made me realise a flaw in my own understanding of this situation. I had long thought that the church only agreed to take on the building to preserve a local historic asset that M&B might otherwise have been forced to demolish. This is only partly true. The church, on behalf of the community, desperately wanted the space.

The opportunity was embraced enthusiastically. Those first few years were euphoric. Having officially taken over on 2nd September 1930, the Church Council lost no time in developing plans for the building. These involved demolishing interior walls, extensive redecoration and a new staircase. Within two months, the new building was ready and was declared open by the Archdeacon of Birmingham on Saturday 25th October at a grand opening ceremony.

The first year of activity in the new space confirmed all that optimism. There was now space for a new Parish Office, for Church Council meetings, gatherings of local Youth Clubs,

►THE
SARACEN'S
HEAD IN
THE 1940'S



the local Scouts, the Men's Society and the Girls' Friendly Society, the Birmingham League of Friends, fund-raising events, various entertainments including the local drama group, local history exhibitions, and even a wedding reception!

All seemed fine, but as the next few years unfolded, the real nature of the gift emerged. It became clear that the church had taken over a very old building which fairly quickly started to demand expensive work in terms of modernisation and, indeed, preservation. It was a gift horse, which was ultimately to cost the church millions of pounds and is, to this day, a major diversion of church funds which should really be directed elsewhere.

By 1935, dampness in various areas of the venerable building was proving hard to rectify with any permanence. Roof repairs had to be carried out to prevent water ingress. The entrance area needed extensive remedial work and the floor of the main meeting room, the South Hall on the upper storey, needed repair and reinforcement. Maintenance of the

building was already putting unanticipated pressure on the church's resources.

A few years after the Second World War, the unpalatable truth became clear. In 1950, the new Vicar, The Revd Edward Ashford, warned his parishioners that the old building would always be a drain on resources and was at that stage neither of the size nor in the condition to meet the future needs of the parish. The only answer was yet another potential challenge to resources: a brand-new parish hall.

After a commendable fundraising effort, in 1960 the new St Nicolas' Hall was opened. The Saracen's Head continued to be used fairly extensively, but no money was spent on it. By 1970, the whole building, the Saracen's Head and the North Range, was in a desperate state and in need of restoration. An appeal for £60,000 was launched and proved successful. But the remedial work dragged on, ultimately costing double the original figure and taking more than fifteen years to complete.

While the building had become serviceable again, the financial well was dry in terms of the continuous demands that preserving a 500-year-old building created. As its owner, the church was continually compelled to pay for basic

conservation, deflecting funds from its central activities, most notably essential work to preserve and protect St Nicolas' Church itself.

Then, in 2004, another apparent miracle occurred. The parish's success in winning BBC2's Restoration competition brought in the financial resources that promised to provide a permanent solution. They didn't, but that's another story.

My thanks go to Kings Norton library for facilitating access to the The Revd Flack's research, and for help with the illustrations.

▼ PART OF AN ARTICLE FROM THE SUNDAY MERCURY IN JULY 1972 REPORTING ON THE APPEAL FOR £60,000 TO RESTORE THE SARACEN'S HEAD.

DOWN YOUR STREET

Gift from the brewery to the Church... Saracen's Head

A PUB WITH A BAWDY PAST

by VIVIAN BIRD

Knightly

The earliest part of the building, which spreads its magpie length along the south of the churchyard, dates back to 1480, though the name, the Saracen's Head, could have been that of an inn 200 or more years older, for it originates with the Crusades. Saracen's Heads and Turke Heads are sometimes found near headquarters of ancient knightly orders which fought against the Infidel — as in the Saracen's Head, Balsall Common, Warwickshire, a mile distant from Temple Balsall, where the Knights Templars had a base.

King's Norton was a royal manor, and for many years the Saracen's Head was the home of the bailiff who was the King's representative. Late in the 18th Century the building was converted into an inn, and as such it flourished until, in 1900, Mitchells and Butlers Brewery built the Bull's Head almost adjacent

A BIRMINGHAM building with 500 years of history where a queen once slept could fall down within the next 100 years unless a project to raise £60,000 to save it is successful.

The building is the black and white timbered Saracen's Head which adds so much to the charm of The Green at King's Norton, a picturesque backwater where the parish church of St. Nicholas raises its splendid spire above much-photographed March crocuses and shady lime trees.

It is a place of character, unique in Birmingham.

The queen was Charles II's wife, Henrietta Maria, Lady of the Manor of King's Norton, who spent the night of July 10, 1649, at the Saracen's Head while leading 3,000 reinforcements to join the King's army at Oxford.

Weight Loss

why listening to your circadian rhythm may be important



PROFESSOR ALEX JOHNSTONE HOLDS THE PERSONAL CHAIR IN NUTRITION AT THE ROWETT INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

When it comes to losing weight, many people want to know what the best diet is. But increasing research shows that when you eat may just as important for your health and weight as what you eat.


The importance of when we eat is tied to our internal 24-hour biological timing system, called the circadian system. This is controlled by a master clock in the brain which helps regulate many metabolic processes in the body – including digestion, the release of hormones, and blood sugar levels, as well as when we sleep, wake up and eat. Regular circadian rhythms (our eating and sleeping times) help to maintain normal body functions.

From a physiological perspective – for humans and many other mammals, at least – the body is used to our eating when it's light and sleeping when it's dark. This is in sync with our circadian rhythm.

Emerging evidence from the field of chrono-nutrition shows that eating more in line with this natural biological rhythm may help boost your health and wellbeing, and potentially help with weight loss.

Timing your meals

If you prefer to skip breakfast in favour of eating later in the day, you're not alone. The majority of people in the UK

A background image showing a plate of food, a clock, and a basket of fruit. The plate in the foreground contains a piece of meat, possibly a steak, and some vegetables. The clock is a round, analog clock with a white face and black numbers. The basket of fruit is filled with various fruits, including apples and oranges, and is decorated with greenery.

consume most of their day's calories in the evening. But given our body's preference for daylight, there may be some advantage to eating breakfast, or at least, getting more of our day's calories into our diets earlier on.

Most evidence from the field of chrono-nutrition suggests that eating breakfast regularly may protect against gaining body fat. Research also shows that eating most of your calories a couple of hours before bedtime may increase hunger and reduce your metabolism to favour fat storage in the body's fat tissue. Habitually skipping breakfast and eating mostly in the evening is associated with a greater risk of weight gain as well.

Having irregular mealtimes can also affect your body weight. Shift workers, for example, are predisposed to weight gain and metabolic disorders such as Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It's been suggested that the reason for this, in part, is circadian misalignment, which is when your sleep and wake cycle is misaligned with your mealtimes. Jet lag can affect digestion and sleep patterns too.

Sleep loss has also been shown to alter food desire, with studies showing that people crave high-calorie foods after a night of poor sleep. This may further result in weight gain.

However, if you're someone who finds it hard to eat breakfast in the morning, don't despair. Research by my colleagues and I shows that, when it comes to weight loss, the timing of your meals doesn't affect your ability to lose weight, though early eating may have some advantages.

Our study compared the effect of eating calories predominantly in the morning versus in the evening. In one group, participants ate 45% of their day's calories at breakfast, 35% at lunch and 20% at dinner. The other group had the opposite eating pattern, with 45% of their day's calories consumed at dinner.

We found that adults in both groups had similar weight loss regardless of when they ate the bulk of their day's calories.

This result might be particularly reassuring for people who work shifts.

One thing we did find, though, was that eating a big breakfast was most beneficial for appetite control. This may be useful when sticking to a strict calorie limit in order to lose weight.

The type of breakfast you eat is also important. Another study we conducted shows that appetite and satiety (feeling full) are influenced by the macronutrients (fat, protein and carbohydrates) in your meal. For example, high-protein meals were shown to make participants feel fuller for longer. And because these meals were satisfying, it also made participants less likely to give into cravings later on.

Some good examples of high-protein breakfasts include yoghurts, eggs, baked beans and toast, kedgeree (smoked fish, boiled egg and rice) or a fruit and vegetable smoothie with added quark or tofu.

So, based on the available evidence, it appears that eating most of your meals during the earlier daylight hours may be beneficial for your health and body weight.

Timing your workouts

Exercise is also important when it comes to our health. However, it's not yet clear whether exercising at a certain time of day is more beneficial.

One study, which compared the effect of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) on blood sugar levels in men with Type 2 diabetes, found that

exercising in the afternoon was better than exercising in the morning when it came to improving blood sugar levels. This may be important in managing the condition in the long term.

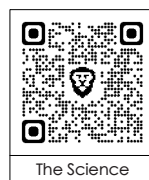
However, a separate study conducted in people who did not have any health conditions found the timing of your workout was less important than when you ate.

The researchers found that participants who consumed around 700 calories before 11 am were more physically active and had more stable blood sugar throughout the day, compared with participants who fasted until noon. Both of these factors may help to prevent weight gain in the long run.

So, while the timing of your workout may be personal preference, when you have your pre-workout meal does matter when it comes to health.

In general, by taking lessons from chrono-nutrition and tuning back into our body clocks, it may be possible to better look after our health in a way that's more aligned with our biology.

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Adam Has News

from the National Trust

The National Trust has 220 gardens and 28,000 buildings in its care plus 780 miles of coastline and goodness knows how many acres of parkland. It has produced a landmark report, 'A Climate for Change', acknowledging the reality of climate change and examining what adjustments to land management will be necessary now and in the future. The question is how to best meet the challenge with slowly-rising global temperatures, coupled with extremes of storms and torrential rain in the winter, as well periods of drought in the summer.

Action has already been taken to re-site some shrubs and trees. When choice trees come to the end of their lives, which can be brought about by drought or exceptional winds, then more resilient species from Chile and South Africa are to be planted as replacements.

What does this all mean for us? Well, nothing much at this moment. However, if you are starting to lose plants which are shrivelling up, if you are having to water more

frequently in some areas at times usually accompanied by a hosepipe ban, then this can make the use of a watering can very hard work indeed. We need to make plans for the future. Part of this can be a review of the type of plants you are going to grow in your garden.

This brings us to my promise to reveal my methods for raising beautiful plants from seed. It is usually fairly successful but, as a propagator of plants, you do need to review your methods. You do not want to produce a tray of sickly plants or even none at all. If you do, you may need, as the song says, to pick yourself up and start all over again. (If all else fails read the instructions on the packet!) If you have a greenhouse or a conservatory with some gentle heating, then you can start at the end of February. However, if you do not have heating it can be expensive these days. I suggest in this case that you wait until March or April before sowing. At this time of the year glasshouses can get very hot if they are exposed to direct sunlight for more than an



hour or two daily. Ventilate when needed otherwise your seedlings will get very leggy and will not be happy. I suspect that commercial growers use plant growth hormones to deliver compact plants in flower so, if your plants are taller without premature flowers and your temperatures are controlled, don't worry. That's how they are intended to grow.

You will need the following:

Vinyl disposable rubber gloves. I have had a couple of nail infections after handling multi-purpose compost, but your hands are your best tool to use for the job.

A big bag of multipurpose compost, some half-sized seed trays and some full-sized trays for pricking out. Both

must have holes. You might like to get one large tray with no holes for watering from the bottom or, if you are like me, buy a one-pint, house plant watering can, complete with a little rose, which works very well for watering seedlings.

A little bag of white labels. You may want to buy some small transparent lids to cover your seeds before they germinate but **always** allow some ventilation by propping open one end of the lid, otherwise you will get damping off.

Now the method according to Adam, which works well for perennials and half-hardy annuals.

Transfer your compost to a bucket and thoroughly loosen any lumps with your hands. Check that the

bucket is full of fluffy compost, by now well oxygenated. Fill the tray starting in the corners. Smooth out the compost with your hands. Fill to the brim, do not press down. Open the seed packet and slowly scatter your precious seeds. Do not press down. If the packet recommends covering, then a scattering of the compost through an old sieve will be all you will need. Now add a little water from your baby watering can. A temperature of 65F or 20C will ensure good germination.

After quite a short time your seedlings will have put on two or three proper leaves and will then be ready for pricking out.

Remove a section of the compost with plants using an old fish slice and place on the bench. Carefully separate your plants, holding them gently by the roots. Plant each of

these in one of 28 (4x7) holes in a large tray. Keep them at the same temperature and apply a little water with the can. Water the compost, not the plants, to avoid damping off. Soon you will have plants of a size to be hardened off outside and planted in your flower bed.

Remember : keep the compost moist, not soggy, and at a steady temperature. Watch out for bursts of sunshine on unshaded plants. Invest in a simple thermometer to place amongst your trays.



Funerals Oct - Dec 2023

9 October	Luca Benjamin Patel	20 days	In.CY
18 December	Rosemary Foulkes	97	SN
19 December	Eleanor Jane Thorne	85	Cr.WH
21 December	Thomas Edward Liggins	88	Bu.CY

Bu : Burial, Cr : Cremation, CY : Churchyard, In : Interment of Ashes

Churchyards & Crematoria

WH : Waseley Hills, SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church

Less Tea, Vicar?

Lent - Beyond Abstinence



DAVID ASH IS A LAY READER AT ST NICOLAS' CHURCH AND THE EDITOR OF THE KINGS NORTON PARISH MAGAZINE.

In the popular imagination, Lent, the 40-day period of reflection and preparation leading up to Easter, is sometimes trivialised as a period of abstinence, whose purpose can be summarised by the question "What are you giving up?". To see it as merely a time for self-discipline, however, is to miss its deeper significance.

Lent, which begins this year on 14th February, is an annual invitation to pause and take stock. In the words of Pope Francis, it "comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy." These six weeks are an opportunity to embark on a transformative journey, to make a little more time than usual to explore our inner lives in the search for a deeper connection with God. That search will often remind us that we cannot, need not, must not try to make it on our own. As the Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen put it, "In Lent, we are led back to essentials, to the stark reality of our sinfulness and God's mercy, to a deep recognition of our need for grace."¹

So, how might our lives look different during Lent, if we are trying to take seriously the call to

¹ Grace : in Christian teaching, the freely-given, undeserved, and unearned favour, kindness and love of God towards humanity. God's unconditional love for each of us.

deepen our dependence on God? Here are a few ideas.

Fasting

The decision to abstain from certain foods or activities during Lent is an act of self-denial with a purpose. We detach ourselves from worldly distractions in order to focus more deliberately on our spiritual lives. Above and beyond the incidental benefits for mental and physical health, fasting is designed to create space for prayer, meditation and a heightened awareness of dependence on God, while strengthening the self-discipline needed for long-term perseverance in Christian discipleship.

Some Christians view fasting as a way of identifying with the suffering of Christ, particularly during the forty days he spent in the desert before embarking on his public ministry. Many find that this kind of self-discipline brings greater mental and spiritual clarity, leading to a closer attentiveness to God's voice and a heightened sense of discernment. In addition, fasting can foster humility as we acknowledge our dependence on God. It can also bring an experience of spiritual cleansing, a kind of "detox", during which impurities are purged, addictions weakened,

attitudes challenged and adjusted.

So much for the benefits. But how do you decide what to give (or to take) up for Lent? A good starting point might be to ask yourself, "What controls me?" The answer to that question will often provide clues to the areas of life which need attention during a time of abstinence. The clichés start, of course, with caffeine, chocolate and alcohol for, traditionally, fasting focuses on food & drink. But we can be bolder than that! What about: social media; the news; television; my comfort zone; procrastination; my prejudices; my busy-ness; striving for perfection; my urge to control; gossip; comparing myself with others; buying stuff; complaining? Your conscience will be able to suggest other non-edible ideas.

Silence & Solitude

Neither are quite as high on the list of common phobias as public speaking and spiders, but a surprisingly large number of people are afraid of, and will go to great pains to avoid, silence and solitude. Yet the fact that Jesus embarked on his walk in the wilderness in search of precisely these two experiences should tell us something about what Lent is for. Saint Teresa of Calcutta wrote, "We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise

and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence; see the stars, the moon, and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls." Noise, restlessness and crowds are among the more insidious curses of our age and a conscious decision is often needed to avoid them.² Lent is the ideal time to seek out their opposites. But why bother? Henri Nouwen again: "Because, in the silence of the heart, God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you."

Prayer

An exploration of the place of prayer during Lent, or at any other stage of life for that matter, might start from this insight, offered by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855): "The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays." The resolve to pray more often during Lent need not mean using more words. It may, instead, mean setting time aside to listen, reflect, imagine, or just be. Listening can take many forms, including digging deeper into the Bible, that Living Word which has the mysterious power to speak to our circumstances and to open our minds to fresh insights. Reading a Biblical text slowly and reflectively, ruminating on it in much the same way as a cow chews the cud in order to extract every last drop of goodness, is a long-established tradition in some communities. Reading a book of spiritual reflections can be just as life-giving.

These are just a few aspects of what we call contemplative prayer. Others might include simply resting in God's presence, stilling our

² "In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness,' he will rest satisfied. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked, 'Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil.'" Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1980

inner voices and inviting God's Spirit to pray within us without words. Becoming more attentive to those divine nudges which feed our intuition takes practice. This is a good time to work at it.

Community & Solidarity

We live in a very individualistic culture. Lent can challenge that. It provides an opportunity, often overlooked, to embark on spiritual exploration with others, deepening friendships and strengthening community in the process. As many of the world's religions testify, shared fasting, like shared pilgrimage or corporate worship, strengthens bonds of fellowship. Friends who fast at the same time might consider pooling the time saved to meet to encourage each other on their spiritual journey. Remember what Jesus said about places where "two or three are gathered"? (Matthew 18:20).

Some churches organise Lent groups, but you don't have to wait for your clergy to take the initiative! The popular formats of the book club, the country walk or the coffee morning, to take but three examples, could easily be adapted for informal gatherings during Lent, perhaps to discuss a Christian book together, to spend time reflecting on a selection of Biblical passages, to share



PHOTO BY KEEGAN HOUSER

silence, music, personal stories or the beauty of nature. “Let us not give up meeting together,” urges the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, “but encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25). One of the best antidotes to our reluctance to step out of our comfort zone and try something new is mutual accountability, the knowledge that someone else is depending on us to turn up and join in. Which brings us, finally, to...

Spiritual Inertia

We all experience resistance to change. There are impulses

within us that balk at attempts to deepen our spiritual lives. Men and women of faith have been writing about the problem for centuries. Take one example, a 17th century Carmelite monk known as Brother Lawrence. In his spiritual classic “The Practice of the Presence of God”, he writes: “Do not be discouraged by the resistance you will encounter from your human nature; you must go against your human inclinations. Often, in the beginning, you will think that you are wasting time, but you must go on, be determined and persevere in it until death, despite all the difficulties.”

You may not feel that you wish to pursue this year’s Lenten disciplines until death! That is quite understandable. But I hope that, however you decide to approach this season, it proves to be a time of refreshment, discovery and spiritual growth, for you and for those around you.

YOUR PARISH CHURCH

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

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

THE MINISTRY TEAM

Rector The Revd Larry Wright
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

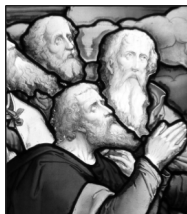
THE CHURCH WARDENS

St. Nicolas' Church..... Peter Hay & Julie Hill, Annette Dickers, 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

1 st 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

2 nd 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

3 rd 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

4 th 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)

5 th 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

100 and Still Going

The Crescent Theatre, just off Brindley Place, is a Birmingham gem. This year, 2024, marks its centenary. Though modest in size compared to the larger Birmingham and West Midlands theatres, it produces a varied and captivating programme of entertainment throughout the year.

To mark this special anniversary, they are determined to keep their standards high and their ticket prices low. For most performances ticket prices begin at £12.

Their programme for February features that modern classic *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell. It's a play about a Liverpool woman from a modest background who, through determination, hard work and against many odds, manages to get herself through university as a mature student.

The play revolves around her relationship with her tutor, whose professional and personal life are in steep decline. The contrast between his cynicism and her optimism is a key part of the drama. In the 1983 film version Julie Walters

played Rita and Michael Caine the tutor.

Another treat is Alan Ayckbourn's dual-venue comedy *House and Garden*. Using both the Crescent's stages, the play about a marriage unravelling while the couple are hosting a garden party requires actors to race between both stages throughout the performance, one stage being the garden the other the house. Confused? Apparently, it works very well.

If tribute bands are your thing, then The Crescent is offering two in February: Take That and Barbara Streisand. Both are a must for fans and may be of interest to those who love the music but could never see a live performance by the original artists.

The Crescent also streams plays from more prestigious theatres and, during this month, they have two exceptional offerings from The National Theatre in London. *This England* is based upon the English football team and manager Gareth Southgate's efforts to reverse England's poor international record. It's an elegy to a nation and to football.



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



The second is the one-man adaptation *Vanya*, based upon Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Featuring one actor playing several parts, it was a sell out in the West End, so is definitely one to consider.

The more unusual feature in February is a screening of Steven Spielberg's 2021 highly-acclaimed film version of *West Side Story*, which is accompanied by a wine tasting. Once again, the theatre has booked the services of local wine expert Tony Elvin to provide five tasting sessions

↑ **The Crescent Theatre in Sheepcote Street, next door to the Hilton Garden Inn**



while the film is paused at appropriate points. Tickets are more expensive than usual as the audience are getting two entertainments in one night.

You can find out more by visiting the theatre's website at [crescent-theatre.co.uk](https://www.crescent-theatre.co.uk)

Good luck to The Crescent in its centenary year and may they go on for another hundred!

Beacons of Hope

I am writing this at the turn of the old year and the beginning of the new, amidst great uncertainty at home and further afield. Again, as many did at low points in both world wars, we can identify with the words from G.K.Chesterton in his great epic poem, 'The Ballad of the White Horse':

*I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.
Night shall be thrice night over you
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?*

The poem tells the story of the great Christian king and scholar Alfred, who ruled over the West Saxons in England from 871–886 AD. He introduced many beneficial reforms in the administration of the kingdom, as well as military improvements. His reign was marred by frequent Viking invasions. After a significant battle win in 878 at Edington he made an agreement with the invaders to divide England between Anglo-Saxon territory and the Viking Danelaw from York, through the northeast Midlands and to East Anglia. Alfred became the chief ruler of England, including London, and king of the Anglo-Saxons. It is said that he felt that his greatest achievement was the conversion of the Viking leader, Guthrun, to Christianity.

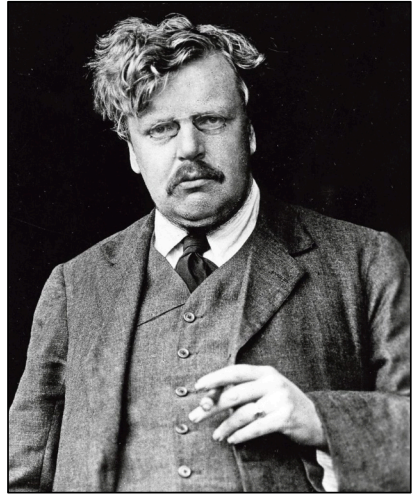
Alfred kept a beacon of light burning against the darkness, against repeated defeats, against wave after wave of invasion. The poem speaks afresh to us in our own dark times, as we see wars raging in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Sudan, Yemen and trouble in the Red Sea. The Middle East feels like a tinder keg, about to erupt. We also face unprecedented waves of abject



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

poverty and destitution around us, our waterways are open sewers and, dare I say, Covid isn't going away anywhere yet.

G.K.Chesterton saw that, when the country is in crisis, we need a renewal of joy and humility, the heart of the Christian creed. This is how we stand when the odds seem stacked against us. The heart is called to courage, sparked by what he calls in the poem, 'the joy without a cause.' In it, Alfred standing alone and defeated, has a vision of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. He asks her if he will finally have victory, a question she refuses to answer directly, which emphasises the darkness, the huge odds he is struggling against. Yet he is inspired by the vision and takes on fresh courage. Mary has displayed the goodness of heaven to inspire and encourage him.



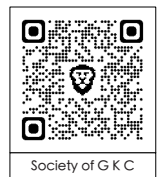
▲ GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON IN 1915

*Her face was like an open word
When brave men speak and choose,
The very colours of her coat
were better than good news.*

In 1922, Chesterton converted to Roman Catholicism, the faith of his Swiss French mother. His background was in Unitarianism and High Anglicanism, plus a dip into occultism. He created the famous character of the Roman Catholic priest and amateur sleuth Father Brown, whose adventures are set amidst the abject poverty of the East End of London in the early nineteen hundreds. These short stories bear little resemblance to the cosy afternoon mysteries set improbably in the Cotswolds on television!

There seems to be 'naught for our comfort' in the news bulletins but perhaps we can summon our faith until we survive the worst and come, at last, as King Alfred did, to 'the high tide and the turn'.

As Christians we hold on to our hope in our Saviour, Jesus the Lord of heaven and earth. In Hebrews we are reminded that, yesterday and today and forever, Jesus is always the same. At the other end of the Christian spectrum, Albert B. Simpson



(1843 -1919) was a Canadian preacher, theologian, author and prolific hymn writer. His hymns are now mostly lost in obscurity, but one is still popular in some churches. He belonged to an evangelical denomination with an emphasis on global evangelism, a concept which has currently fallen from fashion. He founded the Christian & Missionary Alliance, of which a number of church institutions still remain around the world, including in California, Peru, India and The Philippines. He was a strict Calvinist of Scottish Presbyterian descent and a puritan. Even if we do not identify with his approach to Christianity, nonetheless the words of this particular hymn, taken directly from Hebrews 13 verse 8, remind us of our faith in our God of hope:

*O how sweet the glorious message
simple faith may claim
Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same.
Still he loves to save the sinful,
heal the sick and lame,
Cheer the mourner, still the tempest.
Glory to His name!
Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same.
All may change but Jesus never,
Glory to His name!*

It is almost Lent, which begins this year on Wednesday 14th February. As the Old Testament prophet Elijah spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Horeb and Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the Judean desert, we could spend some time reflecting in confidence and hope upon God as we remember the past, pay close attention to the present, and imagine a better future.

(Want to know more about G K Chesterton? Visit www.chesterton.org. Editor.)

G.K.Chesterton

1874-1936

Chesterton was a prolific English author of books, poems, plays and essays, who wrote about everything and did so with great wit, verve and insight. People bought newspapers just to read his columns and bought radios just to hear his voice.

Immensely quotable (“To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it”) and immensely immense (21 stone / 136 kg), he stirred the literary world with his paradoxes (“A thing worth doing is worth doing badly”) and his puns (“The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder”).

Even though he was not a Catholic at the time, he created a beloved character in detective fiction who happened to be a Catholic priest: Father Brown. He wrote one of the last great epic poems in the English language, The Ballad of the White Horse.

He debated some of the leading intellectuals of his day: George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell and Clarence Darrow.

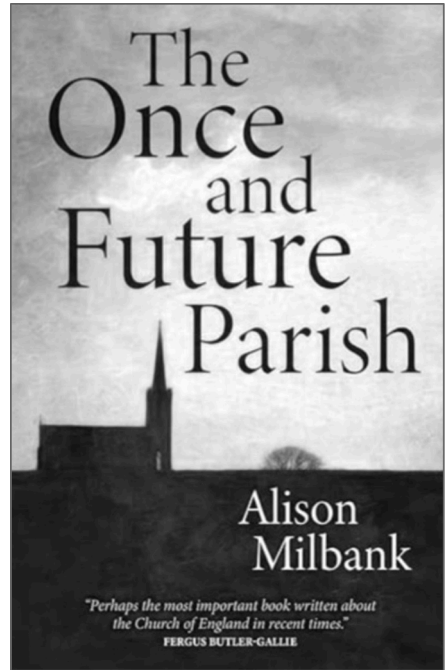
He conducted two extended speaking tours of the U.S.A. Every one of his lectures was front page news and was sold out. And he had the same success in Spain, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and the Holy Land.

Editor's Book Recommendation

'With many disturbing local examples, accompanied by eye-watering financial statistics of misspent funding, [Professor Milbank] exposes the assault on the integrity of the English parish, especially in the countryside, which is taking place under our noses, though veiled by disingenuous rhetoric to the contrary. Milbank's main targets are: the disparaging and patronising language in public church discourse of "inherited church" and "traditional church" in favour of "fresh [expressions]" and "new [Christian communities]"; the deliberate draining of clergy from rural parishes and the consequent closure of churches with the merging of parishes and of PCCs; the drive to insert church-plants in places where they are neither needed nor wanted [...]; the creation of megaparishes and of distant, impersonal, and expensive "resource churches".'

The Revd Dr Paul Avis

The Church Times, 15 Dec 23



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THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Spring into the Not So Hungry Gap

The day after Shrove Tuesday, we will be stepping into what is traditionally known as the 'hungry gap'. The hungry gap is when Summer and Autumn fruits and vegetables have been eaten, our stored foods and preserves are starting to run out and there is the wait for the summer delights. With some careful preparation it need not be a hungry gap at all.

I am now going to take you on a virtual morning walk around our garden, I like to do this before I start my day.

The first thing I look for are the first shoots of rhubarb. By late February we will be able to enjoy this first tart fruit of the year. There are plenty of ways to enjoy rhubarb. Last year I made the best of the first eggs and rhubarb stalks with a twist on bread and butter pudding. It was divine!

Then I walk to the perennial Babbington leeks which have multiplied nicely since I first started growing them two years ago. I harvest these in February or March by cutting them with scissors at soil level.

This method leaves the roots intact and then they multiply so that we will have even more next year. The Babbington leeks are surviving well in the wetter soils at the allotment so I will be planting more of them. In the summer, they make so many bulbils on the flower heads to replant.

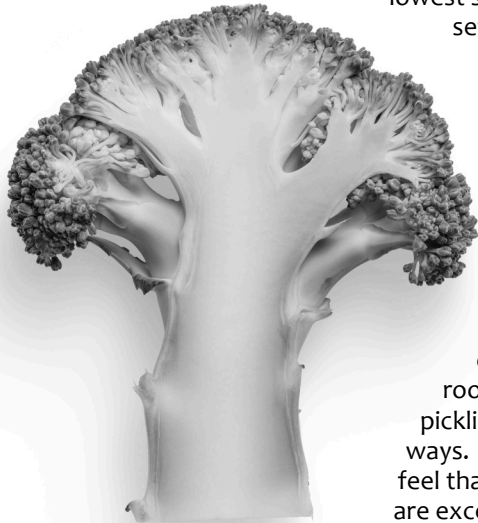
The next bed I visit is home to the Jerusalem Artichokes, which I have grown to love. I've had a good harvest already this winter and so I made a Jerusalem Artichoke kimchi. It is so easy to grow and very abundant in both the garden and



Claire is a keen kitchen gardener, ably assisted by her son Charles.

the allotment. You have to love eating them though or they will take over! My husband isn't so keen.

Onto the perennial kale next. I grow the Daubenton variety but there are many more I would like to experiment with. Maybe next year on the allotment, where our hens won't feast on it! It is excellent for adding to all manner of meals in the same way that you add cabbage. My all-time favourite is kale chips which are really super moreish. Put the kale leaves in your favourite oil with a garnish of your choice (e.g. it could be chilli flakes, garlic granules, salt, pepper, yeast flakes). Ensure that the garnish has stuck to all the leaves with the help of the oil and then dehydrate. You can use the lowest setting on your oven or the dehydrator setting on an air fryer. They are really delicious. If your children like crisps it might be a way to get them to eat more vegetables. We haven't been able to get Charles to try them yet, but I will keep trying.



Then I come to the 'roots raised bed'. Early in December, I harvested all the beetroot as they aren't frost hardy and they made a delicious roasted beetroot dish. Now we are eating the salsify, a white root that is really frost hardy. So far, I've been pickling it in kimchi. I am keen to try it in other ways. I have no doubt that it would roast well. I feel that vegetables which grow under the ground are excellent for winter sustenance as the ground protects them from harsh weather. I am looking for more root vegetables to experiment with and the next on my list to try is the earth chestnut. Amongst the roots are self-sown lambs' lettuce, which will soon be joined by the other self-sown salad, winter purslane. Winter purslane is deliciously succulent and crunchy, a lovely accompaniment for many of our late winter meals.

As my first of the spring veg, I am growing purple-sprouting broccoli, nine star broccoli and kohlrabi. These usually start cropping in March and April. When they are finished, all the other brassicas start flowering and the flower heads are

delicious when used as alternative broccolis. Excellent with fried eggs with runny yolks.

In our greenhouse (the summer cat house), I have carrots and parsley roots just in case we have frosts. I am also growing calabrese broccoli. It doesn't like the winter much but in the greenhouse I am starting to see a little baby broccoli head. Charles is very excited as this is one vegetable he likes! Charles is super selective of the food he will eat. Recently, I harvested the oca that I grew in the greenhouse last season. Oca is daylight sensitive and starts to make its tubers from the autumn equinox. You are able to dig for tubers around twelve weeks later. It has the added challenge of being frost tender, which is why I am growing them in the greenhouse. Its botanical name is *Oxalis tuberosa* and, in warmer climates, it is perennial. As an oxalis, it has a very lemony flavour, similar to that of sorrel. If you leave the tubers on a windowsill in the light it will sweeten and then you can chop one up and add it to a winter salad for its sweet lemony flavour and crunch. Another option you can try is to snack on them raw. They are lovely and crisp, a bit like an apple.

The last stop I make is to take a look at progress on our mushroom logs. They haven't started producing yet but I am hopeful that we will have some mushrooms by spring this year, maybe March. I will keep you posted.

If you would like to try growing some of the perennials I mentioned, I get mine from **pennardplants.com** and

otterfarm.co.uk. I get nothing from the recommendation!

There is so much to munch on in the garden. However, we mustn't forget the next season, so the seed sowing is starting in earnest. Charles is a great help and is now a bit of an expert. This month we will be sowing chillis (my husband's favourite) aubergines, tomatoes, peas and broad beans.

Winter garden kimchi

This is a kimchi recipe with all of the ingredients homegrown except for the ginger. All ingredients are measured very roughly and are what is available in the garden at the time.

Ingredients

- 500g Jerusalem artichokes
- carrots
- Babbington leeks or spring onions,
- salsify
- 20g horseradish grated
- 2 chillis (more if you like it hot)
- 1 thumb of ginger (sliced/grated)
- 1 whole garlic

1. Make a 60g salt to 1 litre water solution and leave it to dilute before you prepare the vegetables
2. Chop, slice and prepare the vegetables and load them into the jar (I use a 2 litre). I use a mandoline as I like long ribbons of vegetables.
3. Pour the brine you prepared earlier over the vegetables ensuring that

they are completely submerged. I use a glass ramekin as the weight.

4. The next stage is the fermentation. I store the jar in a cupboard so that it isn't exposed to light; or you can cover it with a tea cloth. The initial fermentation is around 5-7 days. After the fermentation slows (when it is less fizzy and not many bubbles), it is ready to eat. If you place it in the fridge it will keep its current flavour, if you leave it in the cupboard or work surface it will carry on fermenting and the flavour will continue to develop and journey to a deeper sour flavour.

I frequently eat it alongside fried eggs and homemade pancakes, however you can use it as the vegetable side dish for a variety of meals.

Rhubarb Bread and Butter Pudding

I tried adding rhubarb to a bread & butter pudding for the first time last year and I've been waiting for rhubarb season ever since. Rhubarb and custard is a very delicious combination. We make sourdough bread frequently so we often have the end of the bread to use in this recipe.

Ingredients

- half a pint of milk
- 300ml cream
- 4-6 egg yolks
- 200g sugar
- stale bread
- a few stalks of rhubarb

1. To make the custard, bring the milk and cream to a simmer and then allow to cool (otherwise it would curdle).

While it is cooling, whisk your egg yolks with 150g sugar. Save the rest of the sugar for later on. When the milk and cream have cooled, combine with the egg yolks and sugar.

2. Slice your bread and then butter it. Arrange the bread in your dish with corners sticking out. Chop your rhubarb into chunks and sprinkle them around the bread. You could do this while the milk and cream are cooling.

3. Put your oven on 180C or, if you have a fan oven, 160C. While your oven is heating, pour your custard over the bread and rhubarb. Sprinkle over the sugar.

4. Put your pudding in the oven for 20-30 minutes. I like it golden brown on top. Allow it to cool afterwards so the custard becomes firm.

This is such an exciting time of the year. We had Charles' birthday in November and Christmas is behind us, days are getting lighter and the sunlight is bringing warmth to us all. A perfect time for opportunity and new growth.



Shield Your Eyes

Six ways to look after them in 2024

The World Health Organisation estimates that over 80% of all vision impairment around the world can be prevented and even cured. Reducing the risk of eye diseases involves adopting a combination of lifestyle changes, protective measures, and regular eye care. Here are six ways to look after your eyes in 2024.

Have regular eye tests

Many eye diseases don't have symptoms, at least, initially. Glaucoma, for example, will cause irreversible damage to the eye if not picked up early enough as it damages the peripheral visual field to start with. People tend not to notice and merely compensate for this loss of peripheral vision by moving their heads more.

Eye disease linked to diabetes also causes irreversible damage to the eyes without much noticeable vision loss as it

damages the small blood vessels in the eye.

Going for an eye test with a qualified optometrist will enable them to detect eye diseases and refer you to a specialist if needed. Early detection of changes in the eye due to diabetes will reduce the risk of blindness by 60-90%.

And a visit to the optometrist does not necessarily mean you have to fork out for expensive new glasses if your vision hasn't changed. People in the UK qualify for free NHS eye tests if they are over 60 or under 18 years, have a family history of glaucoma, or receive certain state benefits.

Check your eyes at home

As most of us use both eyes at the same time, it can be difficult to know if one is not seeing so well. Try covering each eye every week and look at a number plate in the



PROFESSOR
SHAHINA
PARDHAN IS
DIRECTOR OF
VISION AND EYE
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE IN
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distance to make sure both eyes are seeing well.

Differences between the two eyes will affect your depth perception, which then ends up with you not being able to judge how far a person is when driving.

Age-related macular degeneration usually affects one eye earlier than the other. And the "wet" type, caused by tiny blood vessels at the back of the eye leaking fluid, needs to be treated as soon as possible to avoid any further damage.

Use graph paper held at a near distance, wearing near glasses if you need them, and if lines appear to be wavy or missing, seek an appointment with your optometrist.

Protect your eyes from mechanical and UV damage

Ultraviolet light can damage the macula, the most central and important part of the eye. Make sure you wear good quality sunglasses that block 100% of UVA and UVB rays to protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet radiation.

If you are a DIY enthusiast, it's really important to wear safety goggles. In the summer, gardening accidents, such as getting caught in the eye with a twig when pruning are quite

frequent and can cause permanent damage.

Playing squash and other sports without adequate protection can also cause permanent damage. A squash ball is just a bit smaller than the orbit of the eye and this can cause a lot of damage to the soft tissues within the eye as the orbital wall cannot stop the ball's entry into the eye.

Reduce digital eye strain

Excessive exposure to computers and smartphones can lead to eyestrain. While eyestrain does not normally cause permanent damage or affect your glasses prescription, it can be very uncomfortable.

Most people forget to blink when they are working on screens, and this leads to dry eyes. To reduce this discomfort, try consciously blinking more often during screen time.

It helps keep your eyes moist and reduces that tired, dry feeling. You can set a reminder on your phone for blinking exercises where you forcibly blink at least ten times every hour.

Regular breaks will not only give your eyes a rest but will also give your back a rest, too. Remember the 20-20-20 rule:

every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break, and look at something 20 feet away.

Have a good diet

While many of us know that vitamin A from carrots is good for the eyes, our eyes need more than vitamin A to function healthily.

Vitamin C found in citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers and broccoli helps protect the eyes from oxidative damage as does vitamin E found in nuts, seeds, spinach and fortified cereals.

Green leafy vegetables have been shown to reduce the risk of macular damage, which is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly.

A healthy diet is also linked to good control of diabetes, and poor control of diabetes will lead to a much higher risk of blindness from diabetic-related eye disease.

Quit smoking and be more active

Smoking is a significant risk factor for most systemic diseases in the body including the eyes. Smoking increases the risk of macular degeneration and cataracts. Quitting can be tough, but your

eyes will appreciate it in the long run.

Exercise is not only important for the rest of the body but also for the eyes. Outdoor activity is a significant protective factor against the progression of myopia (shortsightedness) in children.

Physical activity increases blood circulation to the eyes, which is essential for delivering oxygen and nutrients to the eyes and removing waste products. It has also been linked to reducing the risk of age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.

Physical activity is also essential for controlling diabetes, which reduces the risk of blindness in patients with this condition. It is important to note that physical activity is not just about joining a gym. It can involve free activities, including brisk walking, which would be a wonderful opportunity to spend time with family and reduce the progression of myopia in our children.

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Traditions

I'm writing this as we approach Twelfth Night and as we recover from Christmas. I was thinking about putting the decorations away and about how we each have our own way of doing so. I know some people who take them down on Boxing Day. I prefer to take them down gradually after New Year's Day, leaving the tree and the cribs until last so that the Magi can join the others at the manger.

Actually, the idea that leaving the decorations up past Epiphany brings bad luck is a bit of a myth. Many places leave them in place, or at least the crib itself, until Candlemas on the 2nd February. I prefer the gradual approach as everywhere looks so plain and dull once the decorations are down.

Alongside this, I have been preparing a special service for the air cadet squadron of which I am the chaplain. The service is an opportunity for them to 'lodge' their old squadron banner and to dedicate the new one. Military flags (there are different types with different names, but for ease I'm going to call them flags) have lots of meaning and history and there are lots of protocols to follow. I've had to do lots of checking to make sure we get everything right. This type of flag is 'lodged in the house of God' and not 'laid up' like others so that it can be used again in the future if needed. It is quite fascinating. Did you know that, once a flag becomes so fragile that it begins to fall apart, it must either be burned and the ashes scattered or buried in consecrated ground?

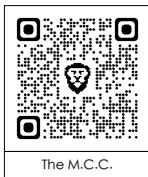
All this made me wonder how these traditions start, why they continue and how new traditions begin. I was also thinking about where some of these traditions sit in the modern world and what they might mean to younger people. Just because we have always done something in a certain



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way doesn't make it the right thing to do and it is good to look at them again with fresh eyes. But others are worth keeping and honouring still. The lodging and dedicating of a banner is one of them, because the banner is symbol of a set of values that unite people: duty, service, loyalty, truth, justice, peace, honour and love are all referenced in the words used during the service. It's a set of values which we want to embrace and which our young people can follow as they go out into the world.

I wonder if you have a particular tradition that you would like to see revived (hog roast at the Mop perhaps?) or one which you would like to get rid of. Let me know.



While we're talking about traditions, 80 million Easter eggs are given in the UK every year. Only one is Fairtrade and includes a copy of the Easter story in the box. As Easter comes early this year (31st March), the Real Easter Egg is going on sale in February. Find out more on the website of the Meaningful Chocolate Company.

meaningfulchocolate.co.uk



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Acupuncture
by Jennifer Kathryn

Food at Sea

One of the most important aspects of life at sea, on both liners and cargo vessels, has always been food. I first learned this lesson many years ago, when I was a mere lad. I had joined my first ship, the P&O liner *SS Stratheden*, as a bell boy. Though the passengers ate well, the food for the crew was really poor and we lads were always on the cadge for chocolate biscuits and the like. We were often quite hungry all day.

Luckily for us, there were a few radicals amongst the crew who organised a protest. The men staged a demonstration, holding plates of the slop that was supposed to be their lunch. The poor Chef had to take refuge his office and call for help. Strangely, after all the uproar, the crew's food became quite edible!

For passengers on cruise liners, especially Americans, the food can be a big attraction. The cruises on which I served tended to attract large numbers of, shall we say, waddling passengers, who liked to eat all day. On a cruise liner, given the number of food venues, you really can! Wise customers learned to eat carefully. But not all were able to control their appetites.



**Eddie
reminisces
about food at
sea**

My regular readers will know that I used to work on the *SS Canberra* and will have read my stories of the so-called Ten Pound Poms, British citizens who migrated to Australia after the Second World War, having paid a fee of just £10 to the

Australian government in order to start a new life Down Under.

On one particular cruise, the Canberra was carrying over seven hundred such £10 emigrants. I worked in the Alice Springs Bar, which opened onto the swimming pool, and I had a good view of the poor souls, who sat sweating on their deck chairs as we sailed into hot weather. Many became unwell. The crew were actually quite frequently asked, “Why don’t you lads get sick?”

One day, the ship’s doctor decided to make an announcement over the Tannoy system. He explained that much of the illness was caused by over-indulgence: passengers were eating three meals a day and had

virtually gone through the entire menu, despite the high temperatures. His advice: eat more salad.

Well, this caused chaos in the galley. Hundreds of people started to order salads ... sometimes in addition to other courses! I don’t think salad with Irish stew is a very good idea, do you? Our emigrants were learning how to cope with a hot climate the hard way, far from their domestic lives in temperate, rural Britain.



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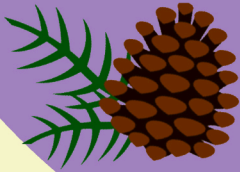
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The Kings Norton Parish Magazine is
edited on an Apple Mac using Affinity
Publisher. It is printed by L.G.Davis
(Stationers) Ltd, 46 Warstock Rd,
Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 4TS.
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