

KINGS NORTON

Parish Magazine



Artificial Intelligence & Religion

Could a computer have a conscience?

Saint Nicolas' Place

What's going on? Michael Kennedy investigates.

Starting an Allotment

Tips from the Hungry Gardener on getting up & running.



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Welcome

EDITORIAL

When is a hole in the ground more than just a hole in the ground? John Adams' report on a recent visit by the Parish Men's Group to the Lickey Hills (p.14) is more than an interesting account of an early morning walk. It makes two important philosophical points as well: context is everything, and the truth is important. What you think you know ("This is just a hole in the ground") can turn out to be fundamentally wrong when you take the trouble to explore the facts ("This hole played a vital part in the aerial defence of Birmingham").

We can be too eager to jump to conclusions and to propagate them as fact on the basis of scant evidence, creating much avoidable bad feeling in the process. Which is why we owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Kennedy for his detailed research into the truth behind the currently restricted availability of two of our best loved historic buildings, Saint Nicolas' Place and The Old Grammar School (p.7). Is the parish church to blame for the current state of affairs? Many seem to have assumed so; but read Michael's article for yourself and make up your own mind. The truth may surprise you.

Though no-one is really sure who wrote it, the French are fond of the aphorism, "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner" (*To know all is to forgive all*). The point is clear: the more we know about the truth of a situation, the more likely we are to be able to respond to it with compassion and patience. It's an insight which sits comfortably with St John's understanding of God's forgiveness: "If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." Knows, and therefore does not condemn. Thank goodness for that!



David Ash

Artificial Intelligence *and Religion*

Unless you have been in outer space for a few weeks, in one of the private space flights offered by our current crop of tech billionaires perhaps, you've probably heard the fuss surrounding Artificial Intelligence or AI. It hit the headlines in April when one of its most significant scientists, Geoffrey Hinton, known as one of the three so called "Godfathers" of AI, resigned from Google because, following years of developing AI programmes, he wanted to sound the alarm that it was a danger to humanity's future. It was, he claimed, becoming so advanced that it would soon be more powerful than human beings and "the machines would take control." Does this sound like a plot from a science fiction novel?

Hinton's is not the only voice raising concerns about the rapid advancement of AI; but, like all important scientific and technological advances in

human history, AI has its detractors and its champions. What is it? Simply put, it is the advances made in the storage and retrieval of data in increasingly powerful computers which are able to emulate aspects of human intelligence such as cognitive thinking, decision making and inference, hence "artificial intelligence".

What we might call functional or narrow AI is embedded in our mobile phones and computers, cars, airplanes, factory machines and, of course, robots. In recent months, we've become aware of computer programmes which write essays and reports, poetry and puns and will even do a student's homework. AI is here and we cannot turn the clock back: it has been compared with the communications revolution sparked by the invention of the printing press in the 1450s, or



The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish

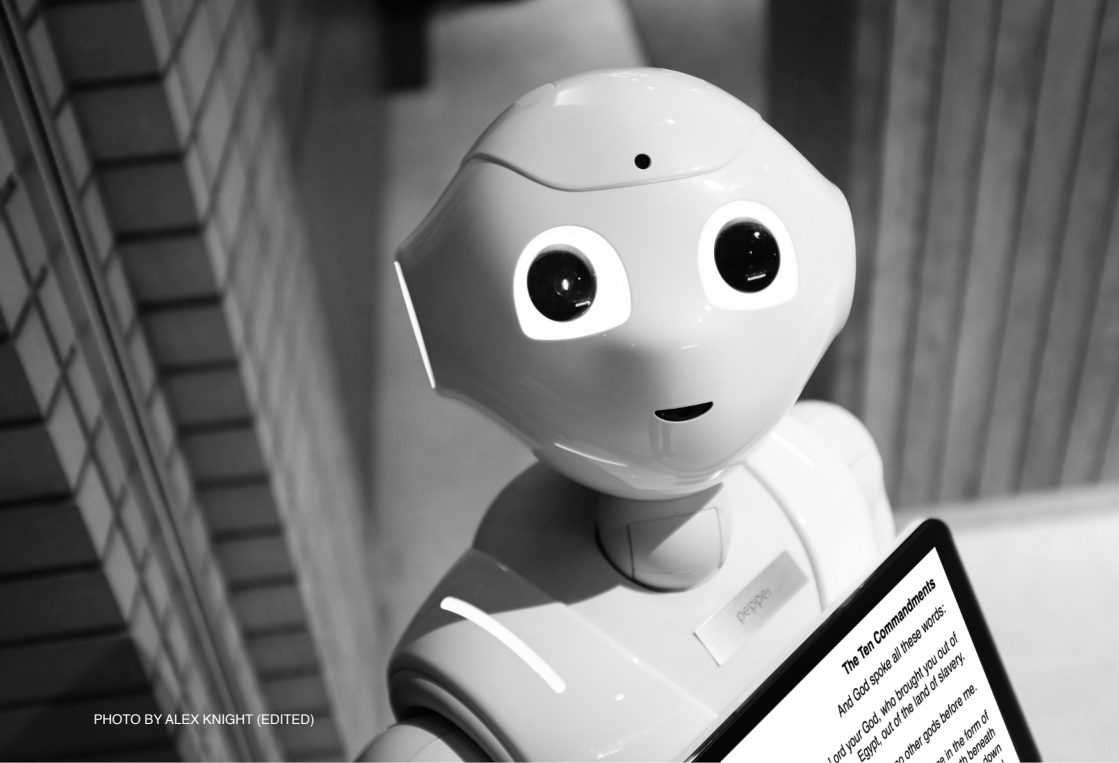


PHOTO BY ALEX KNIGHT (EDITED)

the discovery of nuclear fission in the 1940s.

What we hear less of is the implications of AI for matters of religion and belief. In a recent letter to *The Times* newspaper, I wrote, "The emergence of Artificial Intelligence may jeopardise humanity. However, we have been here before. All religions claim special knowledge relating to the apocalypse or utopia, the end or a new beginning. What AI presents is a series of options which equate to a technological future beyond the current constraints of human imagining. Religions refer to this 'beyondness' as the transcendent, the unseen

influence on our lives and futures. AI may be regarded as a scientific development but it may also be a spiritual advancement of the like we have not experienced before."

In the 1950s, it was Alan Turing, of Enigma code breaking fame, who asked the question, "What if machines could think?" From a religious viewpoint, we might ask, "What if computers and robots become so advanced, that they could not only emulate human intelligence but also develop emotions and a conscience? Could robots eventually have a faith? Could AI become a new form of religion or a means of deepening faith?" These are

questions I'll be researching over the next twelve months and I will no doubt share my thinking through the pages of the Parish Magazine.

My current area of enquiry is how we will know when a robot, computer or machine has something we could recognise as a conscience. For humans, it is our conscience which enables us to make moral and ethical choices. Also, may it be possible for robots to eventually have "feelings"? Our human emotional capacities are fundamental to our existence: our experiences of sadness and joy. Any elation due to religion (or for the non-religious, at the personal high points of their lives) is experienced because of the chemical changes which take place in our bodies and brains when we are supremely happy. A robot without such biological attributes would not experience joy in the same way. But could there be Artificial Emotion (AE) as well as AI? Could a robot feel the breeze? Marvel at a beautiful sunset? Express love?

People of faith acknowledge one creator of the universe and therefore acknowledge that everything in creation has its origin in this supreme being we call God. Our human capacity for invention is part of this creative dynamic, though each new invention may be used for

good or ill. The same is true for AI.

Those who are sceptical about AI ever becoming as sophisticated as human beings point out the millions and millions of actions of which a human brain is capable each day compared to even the biggest current super-computer's processors. Others point out how machines rely upon an energy source to function and therefore suggest that we can switch them off. But what if we are so reliant on machines running our world that we can't turn them off? How do we feel now when our wi-fi goes down, or we experience a loss of electric power for a few hours? We are already heavily dependent on machines and computers to ensure that our daily lives are comfortable and convenient.

We live among and depend upon machines. We probably take them for granted most of the time; but next time you put the kettle on, switch on the computer or set your satnav, you are conceding to technology's power over our lives, a technology which is getting smarter by the day.

(PS. This article was not written by a Chatbot – honest! - but the one on page 17 was.)

Saint Nicolas' Place

What's Going On?

As a self-appointed church historian, I am fairly often asked whether there is anything I can do to encourage the reopening of St Nicolas' Place (SNP) and the Old (Tudor) Grammar School (OGS), both nationally significant historic buildings and until recently important community facilities.

I share with so many local people the great feeling of disappointment that, on the face of it at least, those buildings seem to have been closed to public visits and community use for some three years now. It is tempting to share the view of some local people that the church has been, and continues to be, seriously neglectful in allowing this tragic situation to develop. And what about the rumours that, after all the restoration work that has been put into SNP and the OGS after the momentous success in the BBC2 Restoration competition, the condition of both buildings is now in decline? And why does it seem to be the case that offers of help and support from local voluntary organisations have been rejected?



MICHAEL
WRITES
REGULARLY
ON LOCAL
HISTORY

I decided that what I could do was to establish the facts of the current situation. I was encouraged to do so by coming to realise that, for some months now, the local Seniors' Group has resumed its weekly meetings in SNP, and



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

▲HAMPTON COURT, 8TH AUGUST 2004. THE LIVE, TELEVISED FINAL OF THE BBC2 "RESTORATION" SERIES. GRIFF RHYS JONES INTERVIEWS THE REVEREND ROB MORRIS, RECTOR OF KINGS NORTON.

that the Kings Norton History Society had also resumed its monthly meetings there. How could this be, I wondered, when, as far as I knew, the venue was no longer available, or indeed, fit for such community use, and was now being rented as office space by a single tenant, the Northfield Community Partnership (NCP)?

I decided to approach the Parochial Church Council, for many decades the owner of the historic buildings, and was briefed by its Chair, the Reverend Larry Wright. In

summary I found out several encouraging facts:

SNP and the OGS are still in good condition, with ongoing professional work being done to sustain their viability.

The two buildings continue to be available for visits by interested parties, as long as those visits fit with the daily operating routine of the principal tenants, and as long as suitable guides are available. With St Nicolas' Church itself, they were open during Birmingham Heritage Week in 2022 and arrangements have been made for all three buildings to

be open for this year's Heritage Week in September.

SNP is being used increasingly by various community organisations of different sorts and such activities may expand, provided again that those activities fit with NCP activities and there are trained people available to superintend them.

The PCC, as the owner, is actively pursuing opportunities either to sell the properties as going concerns, or to obtain comprehensive funding from appropriate national organisations. It is working particularly closely with a specialist adviser from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The offers of voluntary support which have been received have been rejected because they cannot, by their nature, address the irresistible fact that the only real long-term solution to the issue will involve a major financial commitment.

I must add that I have long held the opinion that, far from being castigated for its apparent failures, the PCC should be admired for continuing to bear for some 90 years a burden that it should never have had. It is not a heritage organisation!

The church only assumed ownership by accident. It took

on that responsibility with the best will in the world and for the sake of Kings Norton. By the 1930's, the historic Tudor merchant's residence, then known as the Saracen's Head, had become a public house, owned by Mitchells & Butlers. When the brewers decided on closure, it found no buyers so, as an alternative to having to demolish it, the company offered the building to the local church. The St Nicolas' team of the time, fearful that Kings Norton might see the historic buildings destroyed forever, took on the responsibility.

It was not a role the church wanted. The only building for which any PCC should ever have responsibility is its own church. The magnificent church of St Nicolas' is itself one of the region's most important historic buildings, but parts of it are nearly 900 years old and, for centuries, preservation and repairs have been a major drain on the PCC's budget. The last thing the Council needed were two more venerable buildings to preserve.

The Reverend Larry Wright also provided me with some important financial background. Though the BBC2 win in 2004 brought some £3 million to the church for comprehensive restoration of the two buildings, even then more than £1 million in extra



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

▲ ESSENTIAL
REPAIRS
UNDER WAY
AT ST
NICOLAS'
CHURCH,
JULY 2023.

income had to be generated by the church to complete that work. And even though the project created a superb community facility, the Restoration win only provided support for ongoing running costs for some three years. So, from 2007, the church had to find those running costs itself.

It looked promising for a while, but that fact is that SNP, however vibrant it might have become as a community facility, never covered its

running costs, let alone the ongoing costs of preservation.

In fact, the cost of sustaining SNP and the OGS over the past ten years, even though they have been closed for some of that time, has been a massive £500,000, all of which the PCC has had to find out of its own budget in a period when its priority, the church itself, has encountered such major ongoing structural problems that some £100,000 has had to be spent on fundamental repairs (*photo, left*).

There are many local people who wonder why the church, after its stated intention to try to sell SNP and the OGS, failed to do so. Their belief is that it should have been straightforward to sell such an extensively modernised and historically significant facility.

The answer is a simple one: Covid. Before the scourge overwhelmed the economy and decimated many businesses, the church had developed promising negotiations with three private organisations, each of which were examining, in principle, the prospects not only of buying the sites and running them commercially, but also of committing to the PCC's stipulation that, in taking over the buildings, any

future buyer would sustain them as historic properties.

Covid literally wrecked those possibilities. Each of the organisations involved had to pull out simply to help save their own existing businesses. So the only realistic short-term solution was for the PCC to retain ownership but to seek a tenant who would provide income while the Covid situation settled. The NCP tenancy actually does more than that: it provides office space for some 30 employees and a base for an organisation that does vital work in helping the disadvantaged.

But what about the longer term? No-one can be

confident about how the economy will recover from Covid, and whether there will ever be a private organisation financially capable of committing to the outright purchase of the properties in the way the PCC so nearly achieved before the pandemic. In fact, the PCC cannot even be confident that NCP will continue to be a tenant: it is itself reliant on Government funding and charitable income.

All the PCC can do is to continue to seek a private buyer and sustain as strong an ongoing relationship as it can with organisations that might be able to take over the buildings or at least provide ongoing financial support: the

▼ SAINT
NICOLAS'
PLACE IN
JULY 2023.



Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. The PCC is maintaining positive contact with these on a properly structured basis. For example, a briefing for English Heritage staff was held in the OGS in recent months. The Heritage Lottery Fund has provided a specialist adviser to assist the PCC in drawing up comprehensive plans ready for a major application to their funds. But it needs to be remembered that all the management effort that has to be dedicated to these efforts is reducing the manpower resources that are available for the church's core activities.

As for the ongoing use of SNP for community activities, though the doors to the building are usually closed to the general public, that does not mean that the facility is moribund. It is indeed the case that both the Seniors' Club and the Kings Norton History Society have resumed their regular activities there. Private providers are also holding regular specialist sessions on yoga and occupational therapy. The only limit on potential use of the facility is that there should be someone on the premises superintending any events, trained in issues such as health and safety and familiar with the operation of the facilities. At present, the sessions currently taking

place are monitored voluntarily by NCP itself.

There remains the vexatious issue of resuming visits to SNP and the OGS as historic buildings. In fact, both sites are available and visits have taken place recently, including the one to the OGS by English Heritage. SNP, obviously, can only be visited at weekends, outside the operating hours of NCP, while the OGS can be available at other times. There is one serious restriction on extending the programme of visits: the availability of guides with the knowledge to guide visitors informatively and accurately, who are also trained in appropriate issues such as health and safety. Such people are in very short supply.

Some voluntary organisations have been disappointed that proposals that they have put forward to allow the reopening of the facilities for community use and visits, including the re-establishment of the café, have been rejected by the PCC. Unfortunately, these proposals have failed to address a fundamental principle that has to underpin the PCC's current approach: that the only way of securing a viable and working future for the buildings is to find a solution that will provide guaranteed financial viability



and ensure continuity of all services provided at a professional level.

“It is a very unfortunate fact that the proposals that have been put forward by local voluntary organisations, while admirable in terms of their motivation, have simply not been robust enough to ensure the future,” explained the Reverend Larry Wright. “Voluntary support, financially and in terms of the operational involvement of individuals, can never provide the ongoing

guarantees that are, in our view, essential.

While it is proving possible, on a limited basis, for organisations to use SNP as a base, and for visits to both historic sites to take place, keeping the doors open through the day requires a permanent dedicated team of staff and a support structure. At present, this is financially impossible.”

▲ THE FORMER SARACEN'S HEAD, 15 YEARS AFTER ITS REOPENING AS SAINT NICOLAS' PLACE IN JUNE 2008.

The Men's Group Battles the Lickeys

Our 2022 planned visit to the Lickey Hills had to be cancelled at very short notice due to a Saturday morning of torrential rain. As all the preparative work and contacts had been made, we decided simply to rearrange it for June 2023. The weather would surely be much kinder; and so it turned out. June this year was hot, dry and very sunny with the occasional cloudburst.

Ten members signed up to meet early one Saturday morning to investigate the First and Second World War sites and artefacts which contributed to the defence of the realm at those times. Some, I guess, were also persuaded by the thought of the bacon baps and hot coffee that were promised when we met up at the Visitors' Centre in Warren Lane.

After a week of blisteringly hot sunny weather, I emerged from the car, as it happened, inappropriately dressed, in a t-shirt and with no coat. The heavens, of course, unexpectedly, opened up once again and it began to pour. However, after our breakfast and a quick history of the site from our ranger guide Dave, we ventured

outside and, lo and behold, the sun began to shine.

The old buildings around the Visitors' Centre date from the First World War and, to the unwary, it is not obvious what they were used for. They actually formed part of the Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range which was built towards the end of the war in late 1917 and early 1918. What on earth was that I can hear you say? They are thought to be a unique collection, consisting in the main of two proof butts for testing large field guns. Other buildings, such as a bunker, magazine, offices, guard room, pump house and barracks, were also on the site, though some are no longer visible.

Even though I lived the first 20 years of my life in the area and spent many childhood days playing on the hills, I am ashamed to say that I had no knowledge of the site's existence or use. In my defence, the gun testing took place in the Bilberry Hill quarry using the natural protection that that

provided and it was closed off to the general public.

The range was built to carry out proof tests on large guns brought back from the front for repair, which took place at the Longbridge factory.

The proof process tests a gun using an overcharged cartridge, carrying more than the normal amount of explosive, which was fired from the gun into one of two massive concrete structures called proof butts which were filled with sand to catch the shell and absorb the impact. The barrel of the gun was then inspected for any flaws or defects and the gun was ideally returned to active service on the front.

Having investigated this fascinating and little-known First World War site, we set off in glorious sunshine to the Second World War sites. Ranger Dave led the way, which was important, as I defy anyone to spot these sites in the woods unaided. In retrospect, I'd probably have trouble taking myself back there again. A half mile trek into the woods brought us to the first one, which amounted to a crescent shaped hole in the ground. Dave had been out the day before to strim the tall grass in order to make identification easier. However,

it was just a hole in the ground! What was it dug for?

It was a gun trench in which a Bren gun operator would sit looking skywards in anticipation of shooting down low-flying aircraft coming over the hill to target the Longbridge factory. I was not sure how easy that would have been in fact, and whether they actually had any "kills".

A short walk took us to the next site and, you've guessed, it was just another hole in the ground, but this time circular. This had been a listening

▼STEVE
WRIGHT
SHOWS HOW
IT WAS DONE

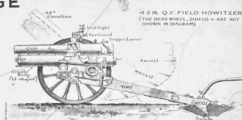


THE FIRST WORLD WAR PROOF RANGE IN THE QUARRY

The Proof process tests a gun using an overcharged cartridge, or Proof Load, which is fired through the gun in a testing range. This exposes it to pressures greater than it would normally experience, and reveals any weaknesses.

At the Bilberry Hill Proof range, both civilians and soldiers were involved in the process. The proof procedure was largely managed by civilians, whilst the field guns were handled by experienced soldiers from the Royal Garrison Artillery.

The field guns tested here were 4.5" howitzers. This range was originally built to carry out proof tests on field guns and gun carriages that had been brought back from the front for repair. It also proof tested new field guns.



The 4.5" Howitzer Field Gun
This was the standard British field gun of the First World War, having entered service in 1910. A highly mobile field gun with a high trajectory, it was last used by British forces in early 1942.



The Proof Butts

These were made of concrete, with an angled, laminated wood and metal ceiling (pictured left) and arched side openings. The butts were half filled with sand enabling shells to be retained and re-used.
The design of the structure, combined with the sand, absorbed the impact pressure and protected the butts.



- 1 Gun barrels were lifted onto a gantry by means of a chain and lowered onto the gun carriages.
- 2 Proof shells were kept in the main store of the magazine.
- 3 A reverse small store held the detonators.
- 4 The concrete 'dog leg' entrance to contain any blast in the event of an explosion.

The Magazine
This had thick concrete walls built for extra safety, into the banks of a side section of the quarry. The jagged left wall shows where part of the quarry has been demolished.
One side of the dog-leg entrance is adjacent with the broken wall of the detonator store to its right. The centre rectangle is the base of the main store, which had brick walls and a pitched roof.



5 The field guns and carriages were brought to the range from the Austin Motor Company, probably on lorries built at the factory.

6 The air-proof gas examination was conducted by qualified military or civilian inspectors. If it narrowed without change it was given a Proof Mark.



Testing the Field Guns

This photograph was taken in August 1918 - just three months before the end of the war. It is the best evidence of what was happening on site.
It shows Bombardier Hubston Roberts and a civilian in a boiler suit outside the bunker about to test a reconditioned gun. Two gantry stanchions and the back wall are clearly visible.

The Bunker

This 1900s photograph was taken shortly before it was demolished.
It was used as a necessary safety measure when firing the guns.
The two window sites were adaptations made in later years when the site was used as a small arms firing range - possibly for Home Guard training during the Second World War.



For more information visit www.bilberryhill.org.uk Designed & illustrated by www.illustrationart.com



station where soldiers would sit and painstakingly strain their ears to detect the approach of enemy aircraft and to warn of their approach over the radio. They used all sorts of Heath Robinson type contraptions over their ears to enhance the sound and to enable them to give early warning to alert anti-aircraft batteries.

After a further short walk through the woods, the last site of the three was found. And yes, you've guessed, it was another hole in the ground! This time, it was deeper and, in wartime, had accommodated a large searchlight which nightly scanned the sky over the hills. It did all seem a bit Dad's Army-like, but clearly the three sites together provided early warning and some defence against any attack on Longbridge. In reality, the Longbridge site, for whatever reason, was never actually bombed during the war so

maybe these defences did play their part in keeping the area safe.

So, we'd visited three holes in the ground which, because of extensive growth of the woodland over the last 80 years, would be difficult for most people to find; but they were evidently and obviously there. You just need a Dave to find them.

As we retraced our steps to the visitors' centre, there was much talk about what we had seen, and about what some had enacted, in those holes in the ground. Above all, in some small way, we felt privileged to have been allowed, courtesy of Ranger Dave, to experience some of the hidden secrets of the hills and woods on our doorstep.

An Artificial Intelligence Replies

We uploaded Larry Wright’s article about Artificial Intelligence (p.4) to Chat GPT, the online “advanced language model”, one of the earliest forms of widely-available AI. We then asked it a question. “Do you think AI will ever develop a conscience?” Here is what it said.

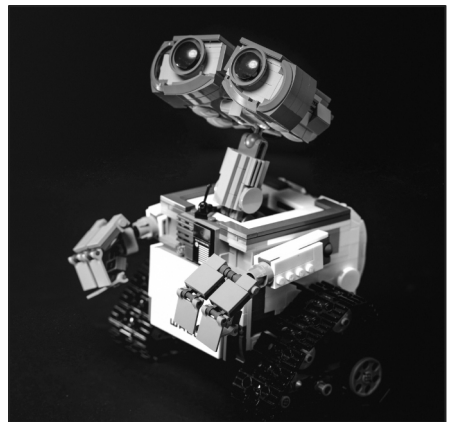
“The development of a conscience in AI is a topic of speculation and debate. As of now, AI systems do not possess consciousness or subjective experiences like humans do. They operate based on algorithms and data processing, lacking the ability to have emotions, moral reasoning, or self-awareness.

Creating an AI system with a true conscience would require a deep understanding of human consciousness, emotions, and the nature of subjective experiences, which is still a topic of ongoing scientific inquiry. It is difficult to predict with certainty whether or when AI could reach such a level of sophistication.

While AI systems can simulate certain behaviours or responses that may resemble aspects of human conscience, it is important to note that these are programmed or learned behaviours rather than genuine consciousness. AI can analyse data, make decisions, and exhibit

complex behaviours, but these processes are fundamentally different from the way human consciousness operates.

Therefore, while AI may continue to advance in its capabilities, it is uncertain whether it will ever possess a true conscience akin to that of humans. The development of consciousness in machines remains an open question that requires further scientific progress and ethical considerations.”



A Right Royal Show

Birmingham has few places or organisations which can boast the prefix "Royal". One of the most historic is The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA). It received its royal charter in 1868 but traces its origins back to 1809, when it was founded as the Birmingham Academy of Arts and held its first exhibition in 1814.

In the late Victorian era, it benefitted from its association with the famous Birmingham Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood which included artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts movement. I've a special fondness for the Pre-Raphaelites: as a youngster I would often visit the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (currently closed for major refurbishment) and stand in awe at the detail and scale of some of the glorious paintings of Burne-Jones and his contemporaries.

From its beginning, one of the main aims of the RBSA had been an educational element, so important to its founders. Many early students passed through its doors and benefitted from its tutors' skills and passion for art in our city. In 1843, when the Birmingham School of Art was founded as a separate institution, it became the main educational institution for the teaching of art and continues in this role to this day from its magnificent building in Margaret Street.

Until the 1920s, the RBSA was based in a striking neo-classical building in New Street; but increasing financial pressures meant that this building was demolished. It moved to another site in New Street, where it remained until the late 1990s. In 2000, the Society took on new premises in the Jewellery Quarter, which were opened by the then Prince Charles on 12th April 2000 as The RBSA Gallery. It is located a short walk from St Paul's Square in the Jewellery Quarter at 4 Brook Street, St. Paul's Square, B3



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



1SA (email: [rbsagallery@rbsa.org.uk](mailto:rb sagallery@rbsa.org.uk) tel: 0121 236 4353). It is open from Tuesday to Saturday from 10.30 am until 5.00 pm.

Well worth a visit, the RBSA gallery is a treasure trove of fine arts both historical and contemporary. It has an archive of about one thousand works of art dating back to its earliest days. The galleries are spacious and well lit and the changing exhibitions complement the permanent items. In addition to paintings, the gallery also has a sculpture collection and, as befits its location, a fine collection of contemporary jewellery. Each year, they have a special summer exhibition. This year's was remarkable for its range and quality. From exquisite portraits to eye-catching ceramic creations, landscapes and cityscapes, one would find something to delight in. The summer exhibition closed on 22nd July, but it's possible to see the artwork online after this date on the RBSA website.

During August, their main exhibition is entitled "Back to Nature – Landscapes from the RBSA Collection 1800 – present". This exhibition, drawn from the RBSA Collection, explores approaches to landscape from the early 19th century to the present day. With artwork as diverse as "A Motorway Near Oldbury" and a series of Cornish seascapes, visitors are in for a treat for the eyes.

If you are interested in making art rather than simply admiring it, the RBSA provides a series of one-day workshops, usually costing about £60, at which the public can enjoy the company of others with an artist while exploring certain styles of artwork and subjects. This August, they have workshops as diverse as an





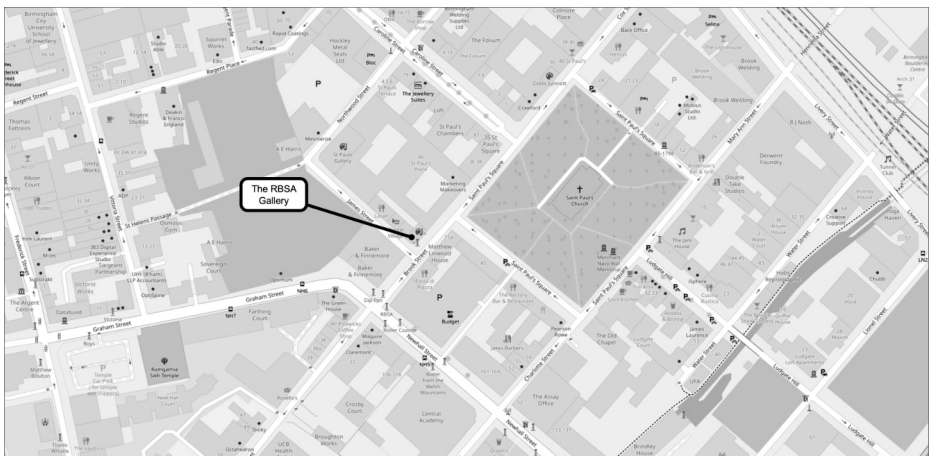
PHOTO BY ROCK DRUM

introduction to oil painting, contemporary portrait drawing, drawing nature, mindful photography and a wood engraving starter session.

I hope you find time to visit this special part of Birmingham's artistic history and to enjoy its artistic treasures.

Happy viewing.

▲ THE RBSA
TODAY AT 4
BROOK STREET,
BIRMINGHAM



The Junction House

RESTORATION NEARS COMPLETION

If you've ever enjoyed a walk by the canal which runs through Kings Norton, you will be familiar with the Junction House featured on this month's front cover. A Grade II listed building built in 1796, it was the first office of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal Company and doubled as a toll house. Kings Norton Junction is where the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal meets the earlier Worcester & Birmingham Canal, built between 1791-1815.

Toll collecting points used to be placed at canal junctions like Kings Norton, or at busy flights of locks, to collect money from passing cargo boats in the days when when the canals carried much of the freight traffic during the Industrial Revolution.

Since the building was destroyed by fire in February 2019,

probably in an arson attack soon after it ceased to be a private residence, its owners, the Canal & River Trust, have been restoring it to its former glory.

Regular visitors to Kings Norton Playing Fields will know that a temporary road has also had to be built alongside the Rea Valley cycle path to give construction traffic access to a building which could previously only be reached by canal.

This summer, the restoration project, conducted by Reynolds Conservation Ltd, reaches its conclusion.

The work has included the rebuilding of the ornate timber roof, new floors throughout, repairs to the internal spiral staircase, the installation of new windows and the landscaping of the surrounding garden areas.

YOUR PARISH CHURCH

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

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

THE MINISTRY TEAM

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

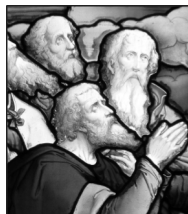
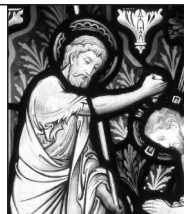
THE CHURCH WARDENS

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

OTHER CONTACTS

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

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



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

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

Holidays and Holy Days



THELMA MITCHELL IS
THE FORMER LEAD
CHAPLAIN AT
BOURNVILLE COLLEGE

Inspired by the season, I have the hymn *Summer Suns are Glowing* running through my head. It's summertime, a time for breaks, time out, time away. In other words, holiday time! The word "holiday" is derived from "Holy Day". It first appeared about 500 years ago, though a variation of it had been in use since 950, when it appeared as "haligdaeg" in the Old English Lindisfarne Gospels. Although the Bible makes no mention of Easter or Christmas, they were later added to the holy days to be celebrated alongside certain saints' days.

Holidays are very special times. They are times of physical and spiritual refreshment, as important to us as to the body. Summer becomes a time to work on ourselves and on our ability to be the light, to find meaning in life's journey, even when it seems uncertain. This is the rhythm of nature: new beginnings as we transition into a period of uncertainty.

Some southern European countries have up to 18 saints' and civic days which are celebrated as holidays. However, they have few paid holidays as a rule so, if you can attach them to a weekend, it makes a good break. In Italy they love the 1st and 2nd November, All Saints' and All Souls' Days, two days off together at least. In the USA, saints' days have been replaced by civic days – bank holidays to us – such as Labor Day, Martin Luther King Day, 4th of July (Independence Day)

and Thanksgiving. For some, these are the main or only holiday which many folks have in the year.

There's currently a movement of the moment: the Wildlife Trust's 30 Wilding Days Challenge. For 30 days, you do one wild thing a day. You are encouraged to go outside and consider an aspect of nature, for example, eating outside, considering the composition of a flower, watching the birds or butterflies or bees, going for an exploratory walk. It's all sounds a bit hippy-dippy, but I think it has some real value. As Christians, we admire, respect and celebrate God's handiwork revealed in creation all around us. Why not spend 30 days deliberately doing it?

If you are not able to go away, do take a day off, a Holy Day! Maybe take a bus to a local church which you haven't visited before, though you do need to check that it's open first. Take a picnic, which, hopefully, you will be able to eat outside. Kings Norton is blessed with a number of beautiful parks nearby and, of course, the canal, promising a lovely walk on a nice day.

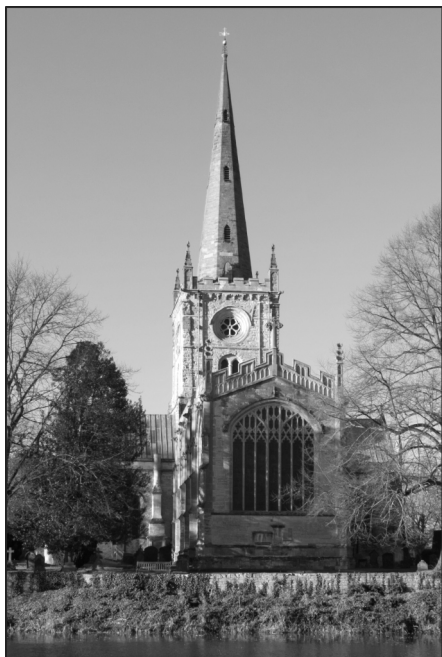
Or what about going into town to visit Birmingham Cathedral, with those amazing Burne-Jones windows? There is historic conservation work going on currently, to clean and repair them. You can watch the work being done, enjoy a tour and meet the Holy Well Glass conservators on Mondays, Tuesday and Thursdays; and on Saturdays, the Cathedral team will lead. (Do check the details and booking online before you go if you want to be part of a tour.) Even if you

have been many times there is always something new to discover and inspire there, with space to pray, and it is open every day.

A bit further afield, how about taking a train to the 12th century Collegiate Church of St. Mary the Virgin in the heart of Warwick town centre? Within it is the glorious 15th century Beauchamp Chapel, perhaps the country's finest, built to house the tomb of Richard Beauchamp. At the time, he was one of the richest and most powerful men in England. It also houses the tomb of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and close companion of Elizabeth I.

Coventry Cathedral, in the heart of the city, is not far by train either. This is the city's third cathedral. The original seventh century Saxon structure was attacked by King Canute in the eleventh century, by Henry II in the twelfth, then subsequently destroyed by Henry VIII. The fifteenth century parish church became the cathedral in 1918, and was subsequently destroyed in the devastating Luftwaffe raids of 1940, with massive loss of life and homes nearby. Later, it was decided not to rebuild it, but to create a new modern cathedral which reflects its history and symbolises peace. Designed by Basil Spence, it was consecrated in 1962. It is a wonderful, light, airy holy space where it is always a joy to visit, to walk round and to pray.

Not that far is Holy Trinity, Stratford, where a local lad you may have heard of, William Shakespeare, is buried. It is the most visited parish church in the country because of this



connection. But first and foremost, it is also a place of worship, rather than of Shakespearean pilgrimage (*photo above*). It was built in 1210 on the site of a Saxon church and is open every day until 4.00 pm. There are some beautiful stained-glass windows and 26 carved misericord seats in the chancel, amongst other special things. But if you don't want to go far, how about a wander one Wednesday or Saturday morning around St. Nicolas' Church here in Kings Norton? Say a prayer in the Lady Chapel, look more closely at the stained glass windows and read about their history. Then a picnic in the grounds or on The Green would round off the Holy Day.

So many of our village churches are just beautiful and well-kept havens. I was blessed to be able to go last

week to the flower festival at St. John the Baptist, Honiley, near Kenilworth, which is celebrating its 300th anniversary. It was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and is a small Georgian building with original box pews. The flowers celebrated the countryside. It was an inspirational treat to sit amongst them and pray. And there was home-made cake and coffee afterwards! Keep an eye out for those flower festivals, another branch of Christian ministry.

The hymn, *Summer Suns are Glowing*, was written by William Walsham How. He was born 200 years ago in 1823 in Shrewsbury and died in 1897 in County Mayo. An Anglican clergyman, he became the first Bishop of Wakefield. As a Suffragan Bishop in London, he was known as "the poor man's bishop" and "the children's bishop". He travelled around the diocese on the omnibus, working with the destitute in the slums of London and later with the factory workers in Yorkshire.

The theory of evolution by natural selection, set out by Charles Darwin in 1859, with its basis in previous, ancient theories, was at its zenith. How, a keen botanist, in his writings and in a plethora of hymns, endeavours to reconcile the evolutionary theory with the Biblical stories of creation. The most well-known tune, "Ruth", was composed by Samuel Smith, who died in 1917. He was a chorister at the Chapel Royal, sang at the coronation and funeral of William IV and later became the organist of Windsor parish church. The words resonate with joy, encouragement and comfort.

Summer suns are glowing
Over land and sea;
Happy light is flowing
Bountiful and free.
Everything rejoices
in its mellow rays;
All earth's thousand voices
swell the psalm of praise.

God's free mercy streameth
Over all the world,
And his banner gleameth
Everywhere unfurled.
Broad and deep and glorious,
As the heav'n above
Shines in light victorious
His eternal love.

Lord, upon our blindness
Your pure radiance pour;
For your loving-kindness
Makes us love Thee more.
And when clouds are drifting
Dark across the sky,
Then the veil uplifting,
Father, be Thou nigh.

We will never doubt Thee,
Though Thou veil Thy light;
Life is naught without Thee,
Death with Thee is bright.
Light of Light, shine o'er us
On our pilgrim way;
Go Thou still before us
To Thy endless day.

I always enjoy learning more about the backgrounds and meanings of these hymns as I write about them. But I am actually going to finish with a poem in sonnet form, written by one of my grandsons when he was a world-weary ten-year-old!

Strong signs of the summer season
urges me,

I say to it as the laughing sun rises;

"What is it that would please your face
this year?"

Greening grass, growing grain, the
bumbling bee.

Such images so strongly advertises

My need to explore, my need to escape

My dull life of daily compromises.

I question, what shall I do, where shall I
go?

The world replies, I'm full of surprises;

Strange lands afar, of rivers, hills and
dales;

Go seek, go find many awesome prizes.

Adventure becomes my dull daily load;

With knapsack on back I take to the
road.

May we all be able to escape, though
briefly, our dull lives of daily
compromises, and renew our faith on
these Holy Days. I wish you a happy
and blessed break this summer.

Shane Williams

Making Sure It All Happens

One of the nicest parts of the job for Shane Williams, the "behind the scenes" man at St Nicolas' Church, is welcoming a new bride as she arrives for her ceremony at the Lych Gate. At least, that was what he was thinking one Friday afternoon when, with the excited guests already settled in to their seats and the photographer poised by his side, he was anticipating another joyful arrival.

A ceremonial car did indeed arrive, a few minutes late, but it wasn't quite what he expected; it was a hearse, complete with coffin and cortege! Visions of Tim Burton's fantasy film *Corpse Bride* swam through his confused mind, until reason prevailed. The funeral group was in fact only stopping temporarily at St Nicolas' to pay its respects. Sure enough, the real wedding car appeared, just seconds after Shane had hustled the interlopers rapidly on their way!

For some seven years now, Shane has performed an increasingly wide range of fundamentally important duties at St Nicolas', so much so that he uses a range of titles depending on what he is doing at the time: verger, churchyard manager, facilities supervisor, and more. Overall, he's the man who opens up for the majority of the church's key activities and sees them through. Mostly he's on his own, but for larger events he does enlist voluntary support.

For weddings and funerals, he sets the church up in the required way, distributing the order of service cards that he has hopefully been sent in advance. Sometimes, the principals bring the cards with them as they actually arrive



PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

for the service, which requires some fast footing on Shane's part.

For weddings, Shane also has to set up the table, normally in the Lady Chapel, where the bride and groom sign the official marriage documents after the service, and it is his responsibility to make absolutely sure that the correct documents are in place and are signed correctly.

He greets guests informally as they arrive. Sometimes, he has to ferret them out from the Bull's Head, where many of them, including the ushers, and indeed the groom, often linger longer than they should. Only then he can wait for the bride. (The latest a bride arrived was 45 minutes: she had found a bees' nest in her hotel room). Once he has escorted her to the church's main entrance, the West Door, he can hand the conduct of the service over to the priest. But he still cannot rest. As subtly as he can, he

has to make sure that the wedding party and their guests behave with due respect to the solemnity of the occasion and the environment of the church.

Mostly, he only has to observe, but from time to time he has to deal with over-enthusiasm on the part of some guests, notably those who want their own photographs in addition to those being taken officially. "People with cameras are instructed to keep a polite distance from the principals, in the aisles to the front and side of the nave," he explains, "The professionals know and respect this, but other guests can try to get into the most inconvenient places to achieve that special shot, and have to be politely dissuaded!"

The church's sound systems are also Shane's responsibility. They they are normally reliable, but now that they are dependent on wi-fi, the occasional

"drop-out" can happen. He remembers one time when the bride arrived in a storm, which had caused the church's wi-fi signal to cut out, putting at risk the recorded music that had been selected as well as the whole of the church's audio system. Fortunately, as 200 people stared at him impatiently, it restored itself.

Shane is also responsible, both at weddings and funerals, for programming in any music that has been requested by the organisers. He has become almost too familiar with the hymns and other music that organisers specify. Privately, he confides, he would be happy never to hear again "All Things Bright and Beautiful", "Lord of the Dance" or "Give me joy in my heart (Sing Hosanna)".

Funerals are generally less demanding on Shane in terms of actions, though he finds that they can be much more emotionally affecting, especially if a child is involved. There are some different rules to apply: for example, Shane knows that he needs to open up the church rather earlier than he does for weddings, because guests tend to be older and arrive very early... and do not want to wait in the pub.

Funeral services normally follow a predictable process, but there can be exceptions. Some follow a slightly different format, with all those wishing to pay verbal tribute to the departed being encouraged to do so. That means that the proceedings can last rather longer than Shane expects. On one occasion, they went on for so long that he had to summon someone to take over from him while he collected his children from school.

One of Shane's other major responsibilities is to monitor and manage the condition of the churchyard, working with the Council teams who come regularly to cut the grass. He has another important support, St Nicolas' own team of churchyard volunteers, who attend on Monday and Thursday every week, whatever the weather, to help keep the vast acreage of the churchyard tidy. "They are the unsung heroes of our church," says Shane. The volunteers were the mainstay of the churchyard maintenance while the Covid crisis prevented Council teams from attending.

Until recently, Shane's churchyard responsibilities included making sure that new graves were dug in advance of burials. With the churchyard now full, that is a thing of the past,

though graves do still have to be dug for people who have reserved plots during their lifetimes. Shane has to brief the church's gravedigger to make sure that the right spaces are used. For the interment of ashes, Shane has to prepare the location himself, including creating space in the same plots as other relatives of the newly deceased.

But, in what is one of the largest parish churchyards in South Birmingham, systems are not always perfect. "I had prepared a site once, and was guiding the family and the priest to the location to bury the urn," explains Shane: "As I led them there, the family began to seem a little confused, looking backwards. When I asked them the problem, they explained that we had already gone past the site they were expecting!" It turned out that the site Shane had prepared was the site of the burial of someone with exactly the same name. The family waited with patient humour while a frantic Shane prepared the correct site.

Yet another responsibility that Shane has taken on recently is to help monitoring and inspecting the condition of the church, a thankless task because, in any building that dates back 900 years, there are bound to be continuing structural faults, often serious ones. "It often seems like once we have remedied one significant problem, within a few weeks another one appears," he says regretfully.

The responsibilities keep on coming. For example, Shane has recently started to co-ordinate teams for Open Church on Wednesday mornings. He also works closely with Parish Lay Minister Pauline Weaver, whose role includes responsibility (with the churchwardens) for the five buildings for which the Parochial Church Council is responsible: the church itself, Saint Nicolas' Place, the Old Grammar School, Hawkesley Church and Hawkesley Vicarage. For some time now, he has also been responsible for broadcasting the main Sunday service to the many people who watch it online.

Shane lives with walking distance of St Nicolas' with his wife Kerry and their children Elora (12) and Jake (10), both of whom sing in the church choir. It's a good thing that he lives so close, because it seems that the more Shane does, the more he has to do!

THE HUNGRY GARDENER

Starting an Allotment

Ever thought about taking on an allotment but don't know where to start? We are nearing that time of year when plots become available, this is usually at the beginning of October. When we went looking for our plot, Charles was nine months old and we had just come back from a camping trip in France. My husband Matt approached Hurst Mill allotment site in late August and we went to look at a few plots.

Choosing a plot

There are a few things to consider:

1. Size. We went for a half plot and even after all these years I've not quite managed to have all the beds fully planted up. Whole-plot allotments are huge. Be realistic about your time capacity and the size of the plot you take on. On average allotmentees spend an hour a week in winter and 2 - 6 hours a week in summer at their allotments
2. If it is overgrown, do the weeds look very lush and healthy? This could be an indication of healthy soil.
3. Which direction is it facing? Usually south- or west-facing plots are good as this should mean you have the ideal 6-7 hours of sunlight. I chose a south-facing plot and I visit it at least twice a week in summer when it is dry. This year, I am trialling the use of old hen hay as a mulch to help retain moisture in the soil in the very hot weather.
4. Drainage. I chose a slope as I thought that would be good for drainage, which it is; but when we do get a big downpour, it takes a few days to drain properly in the



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

winter. I have clay soil which holds on to water. I have dug ditches around my beds to help with drainage. Another solution could be raised beds.

5. Soil type and condition. Much of the Kings Norton area is heavy clay. Over time, this will improve with a good layer of compost applied regularly. Mulching the soil will help improve soil condition also. I use the "no dig" method of adding a thick layer of compost over the soil without disturbing the soil. This is slowly improving the condition of the soil year by year. It's much easier on your back too.

Sharing is caring. Do you have any friends who would like to have an allotment? Two families sharing a plot is easier and more fun than one. There will be times of the year when there will be sickness in the house and the allotment will not be visited for a good month or so until you have the energy to get back to tending the plot. It is also great for holiday times. If you are lucky enough to get gluts you can share the produce and the preserving.

Plot resources

There are a few resources that you will need.

Somewhere to store your tools. I have a shed but other plot holders use old children's Wendy houses. I was advised to not have a lock for my shed and not to buy expensive tools. Not having a lock means you only store things that you think wouldn't be worth stealing. If you want to

use top-quality tools, take them home. The things I store in my shed are: a spade, a fork, two hand spades, a hand fork, a dibber, a hoe, standing-up shears, a bucket, a kneeler, sun cream and gloves.

Composting bin. I have an old Dalek bin from our garden. You could make a three-bay composter out of old pallets.

A big barrel. I love my big barrel! I was lucky enough to find it on my plot and I use it to make compost teas. When I weed, I chuck the weeds in the barrel. I also grow comfrey for compost tea and I have a lovely big patch of nettles, so these go in as well. The rain fills the barrel. In the summer, I add more water. The purpose of putting weeds and beneficial plants into it is to rot them down in the water and then you water your plants with all the lovely nutrients that were stored in the weeds, including beneficial plants such as nettles and comfrey. Nettles are great for greens like kale or anything that grows a leaf. The comfrey is great for fruiting plants like tomatoes and pumpkins.

Getting Started

Carefully strim the whole plot to see what you have. When I took on my plot, it was completely overgrown and this is usually how you get a new plot. Be careful as you strim. There might be good stuff hiding behind the weeds such as raspberries or

rhubarb. I have also found oregano growing wild on my plot.

Preparing the beds. There are many ways to do this bit (opinions on Facebook allotment forums will be divided). My approach is to cover as many beds with cardboard and compost as you have the resources for. If you are buying your compost, this can be expensive. The cardboard will keep the weeds down. You will still find that couch grass, mares tail, thistle and bindweed will be slowed by the cardboard, but they will be easier to weed with this method. For the beds that you don't have the resources for yet, lay down a layer of cardboard with tarpaulin over the top. The cardboard is for the worms who will turn it into worm castings (a fantastic form of compost). I use homemade compost for my beds, which is created from kitchen peelings, old plant material and the waste material from mucking out my hens.

Planting

You will be starting a plot in October and autumn is the time of year for collecting crops and slowing down on the growing year. You probably won't have plants ready and it will be the spring sowings which will be the first time you have something in the ground.

A good way to start populating the plot is by sourcing perennials. There is a large variety of perennials that you could try. Perennials need a lot less work than annuals and I am a big fan of them. "Backyard Larder" have

documented most of the edible varieties and are a fantastic reference if you are looking for inspiration (backyardlarder.co.uk). My favourites are raspberries, fruit trees (on our plots we can have three fruit trees on a half plot and six on a full plot), asparagus, globe artichoke, Jerusalem artichoke, horseradish, Babington leek, Daubenton kale, nine-star broccoli and rhubarb. The thing I love about this approach is that you can team the annuals up with perennial neighbours in all the beds, if you like. Perennials can give you crops all year round. I often have gaps in the year with the annual crops.

Allotments are hugely rewarding and kids love playing in them. I have yet to get Charles to plant much himself. However, he thinks my hand spades and trowel are his, and that he has his own watering can at "The Faraway Garden", the wonderful name he gave to the allotment. He loves watering everything and playing with diggers in the soil. It's a wonderful place to see the seasons throughout the year. It gives you a place to unwind peacefully with the sound of birds in the trees. It helped me get rid of my weekly headaches and it feeds you! If you are thinking about it, talk to your friends and get in touch with your nearest allotment to start the ball rolling.



Adam the Gardener

Handy Tips for August

The sunniest June on record. What next? Personally, I have been seeking out drought-resistant, tolerant perennials to populate our flower bed. It tends to be dry at the best of times. I have found that, in the first year, some watering is often required. After that, the plants must look after themselves.

One robust plant which fits the bill is Nepeta. It is a form of catnip and is reputedly named after the ancient Etruscan city of Nepete. For the smaller, dry bed Nepeta racemosa "Walkers Low" is one variety with the RHS award of garden merit, but there are many others.

And now for a scientific "wow!" Leaves have microscopic cells at their surfaces. In these cells are tiny green blobs which convert sunlight and carbon dioxide into available energy: sugars. This is remarkable; but recent research has shown that this process is far more efficient than any solar cell in existence! Our plants are remarkable and miraculous.

Now is the time of year for deadheading. I have found that just about every plant will benefit. Roses particularly benefit and will reward

with a second flowering. Weeding is also a timely activity.

The first autumn bulb and plant catalogue has landed on my doormat. It is full of wonderful things. The plants will be healthy and true to their description, but will usually need to be grown on in pots or trays in multi-purpose compost before planting out in the hurly burly of the flower beds.

Winter or spring pansies will soon be available from the garden centres: a great plant for your containers. Some of ours are still flowering way into July! They flower sporadically during the winter and prolifically in the spring and early summer. Water with one capful of tomato fertilizer in about 10 litres of water. If you water with a hose, feed as directed on the container.

That's it for this month. Take time out to sit in the shade and, if you are blessed to have one, enjoy your garden.



Travel With A Map

Travel With An App

As we enter the summer months, I am reminded of holidays as a child. I was thinking about this when giving directions using the **what3words** app. For those of you who haven't heard of it, it divides the world up in to three meter squares and gives each square a unique three-word reference. It is more accurate than postcodes and easier to use than grid references on a map.

When I was a child, any long journey entailed writing to the AA to get a written route from them, which someone in the car would read. Unfortunately, we often still managed to get lost and would have to go back to the car atlas to try and work out where we were and how to get to where we were going. I think it was frustrating for whoever was driving but it gave a long journey a much greater sense of adventure.

We didn't go on holiday every year. As we lived by the sea, my dad didn't see the point, so we only went away a couple of times and that was always to stay with family. My favourite was going to stay with my aunt and uncle in Somerset. I have lovely memories of long dog walks with my uncle, of milk still warm from the cow and of a bed that seemed as high as the one in the story the Princess and the Pea!

If I was really lucky I would be able to persuade my uncle to get the train set out, but usually I was happiest out walking or exploring the garden. The highlight of the day was often watching the cows being herded down the road from the field to the milking shed. Looking back, there was a



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



simplicity to those holidays and I wonder if that is why I love camping because of the memory of those earlier days.

Despite the convenience of satnav and systems such as **what3words**, I still like to travel with a map. I use the technology because it is easy and convenient, but I do still dig out the map. My car atlas is very dog-eared now and really needs replacing, but there is something very satisfying in finding hidden places and different routes without relying on technology.

Even getting lost can be fun, finding all sorts of different places and different bits of countryside. Of course, you need to make sure that you have enough petrol and a good supply of snacks. A drive isn't complete without sweets to munch (I blame this on my driving instructor, who believed that sweets helped you to concentrate. She would feed me Murray Mints as I drove!).

My aunt used to drive around the lanes in Somerset like a mad woman in a turquoise Hillman Imp, chattering away and always

with one hand on the horn ready to warn other drivers of her approach!

I wonder what you remember of childhood holidays and if you still have holiday traditions that you follow?



Life on the Streets

During my time at sea, I had the opportunity to visit many ports of call across the world, each of them with its own unique character. A variety of streets come to mind, some historical and the odd, more infamous thoroughfare!

My first recollection of a memorable street in a foreign country comes from the USA. I had to spend a night in a hotel in New Orleans before joining my ship. While I was there, I took the opportunity to visit Bourbon Street in the Old French Quarter. Its quaint, colonial buildings were constructed by French colonists in the early 18th century. It's a street full of restaurants and bars with lots of music blaring forth, mainly traditional jazz bands. A large number of tourists seemed to be enjoying the ambiance. It was quite the norm to party and you could carry your drink in a plastic glass from one venue to another. One of the most striking things I saw there was a funeral with a jazz band leading the way, the mourners taking slow steps and singing traditional spirituals and hymns as they walked.



Eddie revisits some of the streets he has encountered on his travels

Another time, some years later, my ship, the *Canberra*, spent two days in New York. I couldn't resist the urge to visit 42nd Street as I had really enjoyed the foot-tapping musical of the same name in London and owned a cassette recording of the show. Some time previously, my dear sister from Portugal had visited me in England while I was on leave. I took her to London as a treat when "42nd Street" was on at the Theatre Royal. I

remember that Catherine Zeta-Jones was the leading lady. A super occasion. However, on visiting the real 42nd Street, I found it very dilapidated, with a couple of seedy cinemas. To be honest, I was quite disappointed.

Onwards to South Korea and the port of Busan. One street there was different, to say the least. It catered for seafarers, many of whom were American soldiers and seamen. Texas Street was full of massage parlours, bars, restaurants and ... shoe shops. These factory outlets sold trainers by the hundreds since South Korea was one of the main countries where manufacturers such as Nike and Adidas based their operations. You could buy a pair of trainers for about £7, shoes which would be sold in Europe for up to £150 a pair! When visiting Busan, I would buy a few pairs for friends in Japan, where we were headed, knowing that they would be most pleased. I would not accept money in return for these shoes but I have to admit that I was treated to some sumptuous Japanese meals! Who'd have thought that you could dine out in style on a pair of shoes?

There was a dark side, though. While we were berthed in Korea, the Padre of the local branch of the Missions to Seamen told me that these trainers were made in sweat shops where workers would often work a 12-hour day for poor wages.

I am tempted to elaborate on a certain old street in Singapore, where late-night crowds gathered at bars and outdoor food stalls. Bugis

Street, as it was known, was quite infamous; but some of the goings on there could not be printed in a parish magazine, so I will have to leave them to your imagination!

Finally, back to the USA, to San Francisco and Market Street. It's a long boulevard with shops such as Penny's, Macey's and other big department stores. There are also hotels and intersections where you can board the famous cable car that takes you up and down the steep hills on which San Francisco is built. One of the events I witnessed in this port was a big parade for Thanksgiving. It travelled the whole length of Market Street. Absolutely spectacular! There is no doubt that the Americans lay on some of the best parades in the world.



PHOTO BY SEBASTIAAN STAM

ARRIVING AT CHURCH



THE BEST SEATS
WILL HAVE GONE



PRETEND YOU ARE PART
OF THE PROCESSION
AND YOU MAY WELL
GET AWAY WITH IT



THERE WILL BE
SYMPATHETIC GLANCES

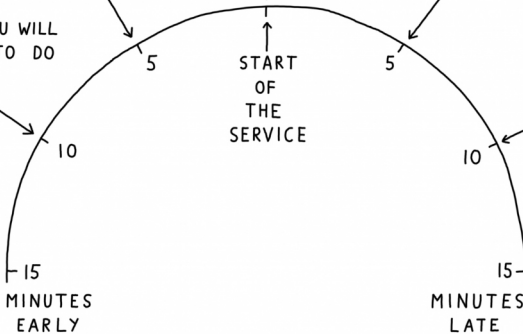
CAN YOU WEAR THIS
DURING THE PLAY?



IT IS LIKELY THAT YOU WILL
BE GIVEN A JOB TO DO



YOU WILL
RECEIVE
A HEARTY
WELCOME



PEOPLE WILL
PRETEND NOT
TO NOTICE



A BIT OF
A FROSTY
RECEPTION
IS POSSIBLE

CartoonChurch.com

Funerals June 2023

12th June	Alison Irene Carew-Cox	67	In.CY
16th June	Heather Joan Ogden	79	In.CY
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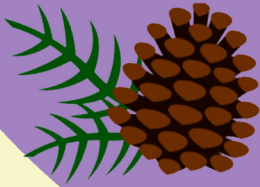


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