

'KEEP IN TOUCH', Winter 2020

Copy by, but, if possible, before 1st November 2020

All contributions welcome. **Maximum** length: 500 words!

'Keep In Touch'



from a church member's garden

KEEPING YOU 'IN TOUCH' IS

Name

Address

Tel.No.

AUTUMN 2020

CHURCH & VILLAGE

BIRSTALL & WANLIP

THE PARISH OF BIRSTALL AND WANLIP

No Rector pro tem	Please ring 07570 198810 to speak to a churchwarden while the parish is in interregnum.	
Hon Asst. Priests	Revd Sheila Skidmore, 15 School Lane	2673318
	Revd Kerry Emmett, 1 Chamberlains Field	3194736
	Canon Anne Horton, 8b Copeland Road	2677942
	Revd Robin Martin, 22 Sycamore Road	07971632268
	Revd Michael Webb, 31 Bramley Road	07813144645
Churchwardens	Mr Tony Bloxam, 17 Sandgate Avenue	2675381
	Mr John Borrajo, 8 Hallam Avenue	2209289
	Mr John Ward, 28 Walker Road	2677600
	Mrs Debbie Shephard, 41 Roman Road	2672630
Licensed Readers PTO	Mr Peter Chester, 12 Oakfield Avenue	2120236
	Mrs Lesley Walton, 16 The Crossways	2674995
Pastoral Assistants	Mrs Doreen Wilson, 13 Poplar Avenue	2674680
	Mrs Gill Pope, 26 Blenheim Road	2675086
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	<i>email: stjames.birstall@btconnect.com</i> <i>SherylJupp@hotmail.co.uk</i>	
Treasurer	Mrs Nicki Wills, Church Office, Church Hill	2671797
	<i>email: stjames.birstall@btconnect.com</i>	
Tower Captain	Mr Clive Mobbs, 30 Wanlip Avenue	2677156
	<i>Practice night—Thursdays at 7pm</i>	
Wanlip Church Hall Bookings	Mr John Ward, 28 Walker Road	2677600
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The views and opinions of the authors who have submitted articles to 'Keep in Touch' belong to them alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the wider church

MESSAGE FROM SHERYL

As we are now out of Lockdown and our churches have started opening up and are holding a Sunday service in each church, I am planning on slowly returning to work in the church office from Tuesday 8th September. (Covid-19 permitting of course) As it is still early days it will probably be for a couple of hours on Tuesdays and Fridays to start off with.

The weekly Information sheets and 'Keep in Touch' will still be sent out electronically to all those for whom we have an email address. If you are not already receiving them this way, but would like to, please send an email to stjames.birstall@btconnect.com, email me directly sheryljupp@hotmail.co.uk or contact a churchwarden. Information sheets can be found on the church website (www.birstall.org).

CORONAVIRUS AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

**A Sunday service will now be held at each of our churches.
9.30 am Holy Communion at Birstall,
and 6.00pm Evensong at Wanlip.**

Face masks must be worn, seating is reduced in order to maintain safe distancing, and there is no singing.

Neither church, however, will be open at any other time.

Should the situation change, see the weekly church newsletters <https://www.birstall.org/whats-happening/weekly-news-sheet/>

Please continue to pray for each other.

**God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
In their anxiety, be their hope;
In their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

THE HELPFUL VICAR

A newly married couple went to view a house they had decided to take. After they had left, they remembered that they had not been able to find the WC in the house. They wrote to the Vicar (who had helped them get the place) to see if he could explain this. It seems that the Vicar had never heard of the term WC and thought they must mean the Wesleyan Chapel. So he wrote them this letter:

*I regret to say that the nearest WC in the area is seven miles away from this house. This is rather unfortunate if you are in the habit of going regularly. However, some people take their lunch and make a day of it. Those who can spare the time, walk. Others go by train and arrive just in time. By the way, it is made to seat 200 and the committee have now decided to have plush seats to ensure greater comfort. The last time my wife and I went was about ten years ago and she had to stand all the time. I myself never go at all. There are special facilities for the ladies presided over by the minister who goes to their assistance when required. All the children sit together and sing during the proceedings. Hoping this information will be of use to you. I remain, yours truly, The Vicar.
PS. Hymn sheets are provided and will be found hanging on the door.*

Submitted by Clive and Kathryn Mobbs

FROM THE REGISTERS

June 2020 - August 2020

Weddings

15/8 Luke Nutting & Anna Svistelnytska Wanlip Church

Funerals

2/6	Ronald Andrews	L'boro Crem
24/6	Shelagh Key	L'boro Crem
30/6	Geoffrey Duddle	L'boro Crem
13/7	Pat English	L'boro Crem
7/8	Rachel Hammond	Gilroes Crem
12/8	Jessie Wainwright	Chesterfield Crem
14/8	Jean Jackson	St James', Birstall
21/8	Paul Harding	St James', Birstall

SHOUTING AT GOD

I got that title from Bono!

Way back in 2005 I bought a book called 'Revelations: Personal Responses to the Books of the Bible'. Bono was one of the contributors, and he shared his personal response to the Book of the Psalms. He wrote 'Explaining belief has always been difficult. How do you explain a love and logic at the heart of the universe when the world is so out of whack? How about the poetic versus the actual truth found in the scriptures? Has free will got us crucified? And what about the dodgy characters who inhabit the tome, known as the Bible, who claim to hear the voice of God? You have to be interested. But is God?'

One of my friends, a fellow priest, recently challenged us by what he was doing during lockdown. 'I take a psalm with me each day on my daily walkabout.' I thought that was a good idea, and I've started doing that too. It's boring walking round the block just looking at other peoples' front gardens! The good, the bad and the ugly. And believe me they are all out there! So I have started doing what Peter does, taking a psalm with me. And doing the obvious thing, beginning at the very beginning, as Maria van Trapp once sang. And as the King of Hearts also advised, albeit more gravely: 'Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end, and then stop.' I still have a long way to go!

Those of you who read the Church Times will have noticed that Malcolm Guite, in his 'Poet's Corner' (back page) has also been returning to the psalms. For more of his reflections, I refer you to his blog, <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/blog/>. As I write, July 28th, Malcolm is reflecting on Psalm 38, 'My groaning is not hid from thee'.

But, going back to Bono and U2. This was their take on Psalm 40. Some of you may remember it. *How long to sing this song?*

*I waited patiently for the Lord,
He inclined and heard my cry.
He brought me up out of the pit,
out of the mire and clay.*

*He set my feet upon a rock
and made my footsteps firm.
Many will see,
many will see and fear.*

An old friend of mine, Stephen Cherry, who was Rector of All Saints, Loughborough from 1994-2006, and is now Dean of King's College, Cambridge, has just published a lovely book entitled *Psalm Prayers*. This is his prayer for psalm 40.

*Hear our prayer, O God,
which rises from the miry swamps of our many mistakes.
Free us from the quicksand of complacency that so dangerously entraps us.
Pull us to safety, and set our feet on solid ground,
that we may embrace your will, walk in your way,
and sing your praise. Amen.*

I guess solid ground is where all of us long to be right now!
Meanwhile let's all continue shouting at God.
It's one way of keeping in touch, and God can take it.

Canon Anne

PSALMS FOR EVERY PURPOSE

Three education students living in an old Jacobean house woke one night to see what they thought was a ghost, a brown-robed monk, who walked across the room and vanished through a wall. The next day they told their story to the College Principal. She smiled, and said that there had been a monastery on the sight long ago, so they shouldn't be worried. It would be a benign spirit calmly walking through. She advised them: 'Before you go to bed each night, I suggest you read a psalm, which will be a blessing, and you will not be disturbed any more.'

So the three girls, one Jewish, two Anglican, read a psalm every night and slept in peace.

Noreen Talbot

LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE

This image of Nora Batty keeping everyone at bay with a broom handle was shared at a diocesan Zoom meeting I attended during the Summer. It made me smile, and rethink the context of what my anxiety about keeping a safe distance really means. The meeting was held to share thoughts on how the church could help those who were or have been shielding and are now feeling fearful and uncertain about getting back into the wider community.



I know I have been feeling anxious about venturing out into the 'brave new world' of socially distanced worship with face masks and hand sanitizer. It's reassuring to know that our church wardens are taking great care and attention to make sure that our buildings meet the standards required by the Church of England to keep us all safe.

We may still feel, however, that other places, outside our front doors, with which we have always been so familiar, are a real threat to our personal health and wellbeing. Life in a Covid-19 world requires us to think through a strategy for where we go and what we do. Maybe we should think of it as if we were children again, making our first steps into the great outdoors. This was always an adventure. All we need to do is to take a few steps at a time. None of us though should feel pressured into doing things with which we feel uncomfortable. We need to do things as and when we feel confident, knowing that we are supported with the prayers and practical help of friends within our church community.

A final thought, the words 'Do not be afraid' can be found 365 times in the Bible: one reference for every day of the year. An important reminder that God teaches us not to be fearful, but to put all our trust and hope in Him.

Sheila Roberts

THE LORD'S SWAN STORY



My story carries on from Autumn 2019. I stand against the bright white light of the Lord who leaves us signs and messages to follow. Shortly after the last magazine I stood in Belgrave churchyard. Before my eyes was a grave that looked like a tomb opening, with the word *Mary* on it. I knew it was very significant. He'd left a sign.



My eyes were further drawn to Kizzy above Belgrave Church and a message written on the computer. *Apocalypse: An unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling, revealed by an Angel or other heavenly body .. the bells will usher it in.* I've seen a further message with swans that are covered in dye and cooking oil along the stretch of the canal that runs along the side of Belgrave Church. We are being shown something is wrong. We have coronavirus and a second lockdown in Leicester. I am being shown Angels peering out to see if it is time to come out and saying 'no, it's not time yet'. The Lord says when people stop and start to listen, he will send the Angels out to eradicate it completely.

My heart goes out to all of you who have lost someone, or struggled in some way. Keep safe. Love to you all.

Julie Watermead-Swans

'STREAMS FULL OF STARS'

During 'lockdown', many of us have been anxious to return to church services, but I think that sometimes we may forget that 'church' is more than a building, and that GOD is with us everywhere, every day, and in everything. I've been reflecting on '**Leisure**', a poem by William Henry Davies.

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

W H Davies (1871-1940) started out as an all-rounder but ended up as a respected Welsh poet. Raised by his grandparents after his father died and his mother remarried, William was inclined toward a life of adventure. He repeatedly travelled by boat to North America, but lost a leg attempting to jump a train. Returning to England, he wrote a book about his wandering years, then paid and starved his way into becoming a published poet. Eventually he gained equal standing with such contemporaries as Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats.

Davies' poem reminds us that we need to take a pause in our lives to appreciate all that is around us.

Our current unusual and not self-inflicted time of enforced social distancing is a more than opportune time to do just that, without feeling guilty of 'doing nothing', but taking the time 'to stand and stare'.

In a recent Lenten course it was pointed out that the Psalms are prayers, and might be turned to if one is finding it difficult to know where to start praying. Even Jesus' disciples needed to have guidance from their Lord on prayer. As a result we have the greatest prayer of all. Taking time to say *The Lord's Prayer* certainly centres our thoughts, and leads us, many times, to naturally formulate our next prayer.

Those of us who have had access to radio, television, smart phones or computers have been given a plethora of opportunities to join in a church service in one form or another. OK, it may not be the same as being able to attend one of our own parish churches, but we should consider the number of people across the world who, in normal circumstances, are forced to worship in secrecy and are persecuted for their faith.

Reflecting on W H Davies' poem, we have much to be thankful for if we only bother to take the time. So with all this time (!!!) on our hands, I recommend reflecting on his poem. I think you will have no difficulty in composing a prayer.

In fellowship and love,

Rita Richards



...stare as long as sheep or cows



Everything went well to start with, but the extreme heat of the day melted the prizes into a jellied lump and made them not fit for purpose. I soon discovered how unhappy children can become when promised prizes turn out to be a melted mess, and narrowly escaped a major incident involving what seemed to be most of the parents of Birstall!

Wardening is also about tradition, and part of that is the church language. I thought that vets were bad with their hypos and hypers, and isos and equis, but they have nothing on the church. There is a whole new language to try and get to grips with when it comes to cups, clothes and curtains. I was not too concerned by this and felt that in time it would fall into place, but was a bit perturbed one day when Tony Bloxam mentioned that the terrier needed seeing to. To me that meant Staffordshire, Fox or Jack Russell and I felt that if there was a warden's dog to be walked on top of everything else, then he should have told me before I took on the job. Fortunately, I misunderstood... if you don't know the term, don't worry unless you are planning on becoming a churchwarden.

In the main I have been comfortable in the job, but that was not the case when Vince Jupp our vicar called us into his study shortly after he had announced his resignation. This was an 'over to you' type meeting and was taken as a matter of course by the other three wardens, but for me it was a source of rising panic. Baptisms, marriages and funerals were all his responsibility, but now seemingly they were our responsibility. I had visions of preparing parents for their child's baptism, and interviewing couples regarding the solemnity of marriage. I was trained as a vet, and the thought of some poor couple's wedding being left in my hands horrified me. However, it turned out that we are simply a link in the chain. So don't worry if you need one of these services. I can pass you on to someone who really is competent and qualified.

At some point after the lockdown is over the wardens will come up for re-election and you may want to bear the above in mind before you offer me your support!

John Borrajo

‘My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action’. (1 John 3:18) ‘No-one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us and His love is made perfect in us. We are sure that we live in union with God and that He lives in union with us, because He has given us His Spirit’. (1 John 4:12-13). ‘Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together.’ (Ephesians 4:2-3)

‘You must all have the same attitude and the same feelings; love one another, and be kind and humble with one another. Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead, pay back with a blessing, because a blessing is what God promised to give you when he called you.’ (1 Peter 3:8-9)

Troubled times bring out the best in people, but it was God’s love that put the best into people in the first place! I came into this little church to listen to the stones crying out. I’ll sit and think for a while, and pray for a while. Then I’m going to go back out – and I’ll try to take the stones’ message with me.

David Rhodes (Barbara Rhodes’ son)

THOUGHTS FROM A CHURCHWARDEN

I’ve recently completed my first year as Churchwarden at St. James’, and it is often good at such times to reflect on how things have gone. In broad strokes I am not sure that the results are encouraging. When I started the church was in a good place, with Sunday services carrying on with smooth efficiency, and Vince Jupp directing things from the front. By December 2019 Vince had left, and by March 2020 the churches had closed and all worship within St James’ had ceased. I don’t feel that I can take full credit for these reversals, but even so they are not going to look good on my Warden’s CV when it comes to be written.

And then there was the church fete last August. I was in charge of the Hook a Duck game and didn’t feel that much could go wrong.

TAKING SPIRITUAL STOCK

I am sure you all know the saying, ‘be careful what you ask for, you might just get it.’ Well the Christian version of that saying is, ‘be careful what you pray for, you might just get it’.

In the Summer issue of KiT I told you about how, during lockdown, I was considering my spiritual life, what I had lost in the busy-ness of life, and what I needed to recover, change, add or indeed lose. I mentioned how I had lost and needed to recover silence and contemplation, two things which had been central to my spirituality. I also mentioned how, having reintroduced them into my life, I had to decide if I was called to make a commitment to my spirituality by becoming a member of the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer or the Companions of Julian of Norwich. An act that would bring support with the commitment. Anne kindly added the last four words to my article – ‘please pray for me’.

Well I can let you know that after a considerable amount of prayer and listening for God’s view on the matter I decided that it wouldn’t be right for me to join either. I could relax and go my own way just incorporating the silence and contemplation into my regular prayer life. I’m sure those of you, who have had the experience of God niggling you, are thinking ‘It’s not likely to be that easy, Michael.’ And you are right. Someone was praying too hard for me.

What I didn’t mention in the previous article was that on the last evening of my stay with the Community of the Glorious Ascension I was talking with one of the brothers and he ended by suggesting that what I was probably called to was an order that placed contemplation and silence at the centre of its spirituality and life. Suggesting I would be at home with the Cistercians, but the Church of England didn’t have a Cistercian order.

Coming back to the present, the day after I had decided I didn’t need to worry about committing to any group, I got a niggling thought to enter ‘Anglican Cistercians’ into a search engine. So I did.

I expected the only results to come from the USA. The very top result, however, took me to 'cistercianorder.com', which stated, 'We are an Anglican un-cloistered and dispersed religious Order of ordained and lay men: single, celibate and married, and we have been formally acknowledged by the Church of England'. It was just like the Jaws film – *just when you think it's safe*. Only it's not a shark that gets you, it's God, and, when God decides to get hold of you, it's a lot harder to get away than it is from a shark.

So I prayed about it. I got a copy of the 'Benedictine Daily Prayer – a short Breviary' (at 2032 pages I would hate to see a long one), and started using it to see if it felt right. Well it didn't just feel right, saying the offices, all seven of them, and having periods of contemplation and silence each day, I felt as if I had spiritually come home. So I took the plunge and contacted the Novice Master. Which led on to me having a zoom meeting with him earlier this week.

So what does the future hold? I am pursuing the idea of becoming a Cistercian, but the road ahead is long, and Covid-19 has made it longer. The Cistercian way is slowly and prayerfully. I have been invited to attend their next chapter meeting, but they hold their chapter meetings at Wantage and just this week they have heard that their chapter meeting in October has had to be cancelled, so their next one will be sometime next year. Covid permitting.

If I am accepted then I will complete an 18 month postulancy. If that is completed successfully, I would hopefully be invited to become a novice. The novitiate lasts for three years, after which you can petition to make your first profession known as the Simple Vows, which are renewed each year for three years. During these three years you are still at liberty to, figuratively, leave. At the end of the three years, you may make your Solemn Profession when you vow to live the life of the Order for the rest of your life. Of course, being a member of an un-cloistered and dispersed religious Order, you carry on living at home not in a monastery.

All of that is in the future and I am sure some of you are wondering what difference it makes now.

OUR LITTLE CHURCH ON A HILL

St John the Baptist, Heathfield, Devon

Our little church on a hill has been quiet for too long. Christians like to make a noise; that's why we have choirs, musicians, bellringers. But this year, our little church has been quiet for too long. When the experts from the Temple in Jerusalem told Jesus that his followers were making too much noise he said 'If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out'. (*Luke 18: 37 – 39*). Our little church on a hill has been quiet for too long, so I've come in to listen to the stones.

The tower of this little church is about 800 years old. The stones of the tower have such stories to tell! The old wooden church was already a hundred years old when the people of the parish decided to add a stone tower. The rest of the building may have come and gone and come back again, but the old tower still stands. The stones of Westminster Abbey could tell me about the baptisms of princesses, the marriages of kings and queens and the funerals of great statesmen, but the stones of our little church recall the cries of a farm girl's new baby, the laughter of a labourer's wedding guests, the tears of a traveller's burial. The stones of St Paul's Cathedral could tell me how they were built on the ashes of the Great Fire, but the tower of our little church is much, much older than that. These stones remember the pandemics of the Great Plague and the Black Death. They remember the fear and the sorrow of ordinary people in terrible times.

I wonder what the stones of the tower of this little church will remember about 2020? Will they remember when the church was so quiet that they could hear the people in the new houses down the hill? Will they remember a time when fear and uncertainty brought out the best in people? The acts of kindness, the concern for neighbours, the courage of ordinary people?

This little church on a hill has been quiet for too long, so I'm listening to the stones crying out – the stones that have heard the words of the Bible from the lips of countless preachers and parishioners over the last eight hundred years so that they know them all by heart:

Back to our boat for a leisurely four hour sail south, across Lake Tana to Bahir Dar. The lake was calm and we were never far from shore so this was a very pleasant and relaxing journey.

We stopped at Dek Island to visit Narga Siliasi Monastery. This also has some wonderfully strange wall paintings, both of Bible stories and local legends.



We spent the night at the holiday resort of Kuriftu. For the first time we encountered mosquito nets and cockroach spray in the rooms. I got bitten by something nasty, luckily not malarial, but it took a few weeks for the itching to stop.

Day 10

Coming to the end of the holiday, our final visit was to the spectacular Blue Nile Falls. A thirty minute walk took us to the viewpoint. The river at this point is 160m wide and the water plunges down for 45 metres creating spray and rainbows. Being just after the rains the river was in full flow. It was a wonderful sight with which to end our holiday.

We took the flight from Gondar back to Addis Ababa for an overnight stay and our flight back to Heathrow.

The holiday had been very tiring! We'd had four internal flights, long hours in the minibus and visited a variety of churches. We heard much about Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, which is a unique faith. We saw many interesting historical sights and spent time in the countryside.

There is so much more I could have included in these articles, but hopefully this has given you a good overview.

It was a wonderful holiday but a pilgrimage it was not!

Gill Pope

Well, I have reorganised my day. At present I am getting up at 3:15 am. so I can say the first office, Vigils, in the dark. (Sometimes after a double espresso.) In the winter months I will obviously be able to stay in bed longer. During the time between Vigils and sunrise, I practice Lectio Divina with the Common Worship Morning Prayer readings. Any phrase that jumps out at me is made a note of to use as a starting point for that day's contemplation. At daybreak, time told me by my assistant Alexa, I say Lauds. This is followed by celebrating the Eucharist, breakfast and walking Eddie. I then read until 9 am when I say Terce, Sext at 12 noon and None at 3 pm. These three are short offices whose names come from the hours of the day, counting from 6 am – Third Hour, Sixth Hour, and Ninth Hour. I then practise contemplation until 4 pm. Vespers is said at 5pm and the day is concluded with walking Eddie before saying Compline. I am in bed before 8 pm where, so long as I'm not too tired, I allow myself to read a chapter of a novel.

So that is where lockdown, God, and your prayers have led me. Now I just have to pray that my good luck with the slowness of my MS's progress continues, so that in a couple of years I can receive my Novitiate's habit, and in some eight years time become a Solemnly Professed Cistercian.

Fr Michael



Roses from a church member's garden

THE JOYS OF ZOOM WORSHIP

What we have missed most during the Coronavirus Pandemic is seeing and talking to people. We zoom around the Greengate Estate for exercise and in the hope of seeing someone to talk to, but human beings in the street have been a rare breed in the past five months. Zooming to The Pond on Hallam Fields has become a treat, as we have watched the swan on her nest and her five little cygnets grow bigger and more curious of their surroundings.

Zoom meetings, however, are a different kettle of fish – or swans! We can sit at home in front of our computer and see and talk and listen to people wherever they are. Our first zoom meeting was with our family in Leicestershire, Stoke-on-Trent and Wales; all together at the same time, including two cats and a dog!

On Sunday 24th May, we were invited to read Psalm 145 at the Churches Together 'Thy Kingdom Come' service. Revd. Paula Hunt was in charge of Zoom and she made sure that the different people saying prayers or readings could all be heard at the right time. Lots of people were able to join in the service; singing the hymns and praying together, knowing they were worshipping with other people even if they were alone at home. When the service ended, Paula split us into small groups so that we could talk together. It was lovely. Evening Prayer was also zoomed by Revd. Paula from 22 May to 30 May, when we prayed for five people we know to come to Christ and we prayed for the world and the church.

On Sunday 31 May, John Ward began to zoom Evening Prayer using the BCP form of service. Helen found the Book of Common Prayer that was given to her on her confirmation and also the Coronation BCP given to her by St James' Church in 1953. (Things always come in handy if you keep them long enough!) We soon got used to this form of prayer and it was good to see and pray with Wanlip and Birstall folk. We are so grateful to John for zooming Evening Prayer every Sunday at 6pm. At the time of writing, churches are beginning to open, including our own. No more zoom Evening Prayer, but the real thing in the real church at 6 pm. (See page 31)

We visited the 'Royal Enclosure', a World Heritage Site consisting of six castles, the first built about 1640 by Emperor Fasilidas. Next was a visit to Fasilidas' pool. This sunken bathing pool was built for ceremony rather than recreation. *Timkat* held on 19th January, commemorates the Baptism of Christ. This festival is more important to Orthodox Christians than Christmas. The tabots, representing the Ark of the Covenant, are removed from the churches and paraded round the pool by the priest and guardians with great ceremony. Thousands of worshippers clad in white robes gather to be blessed and sprinkled with holy water. Hundreds leap into the pool to re-enact the original Baptism.



While some shopped, a few of us visited Ras Gimb, an imposing building, in continuous occupation since the 1650s with a very colourful history, being a home for high ranking military officers, a jail in the 1730s, and then a minor royal palace. In 1965 Haile Selassie hosted our Queen here. During the Red Terror campaign of 1977-9 it was used as a torture chamber. It became a museum in 2017.

Day 9

We travelled south to Gregora on Lake Tana, Ethiopia's largest lake and the source of the Blue Nile. We visited the monastery of Debre Sina Mariam. Built in the 14th Century, it is a circular building made of wood and thatch, the usual design in this area where building stone is in short supply. The outside walls of the Holy of Holies are covered in spectacular paintings from the 1620s depicting biblical stories in a unique Ethiopian style such as Salome with the head of John the Baptist.



MY ETHIOPIAN PILGRIMAGE

Part 3

Day 7

After breakfast we hiked through the Simien Mountains reserve, hoping to see Gelada Baboons, ibex and wolves. The scenery was spectacular, deep gorges, forest, grassy areas. Our destination was Jimbar Falls, one of the tallest in Africa with a drop of 500m.

There was a spectacular view of the falls through the trees making the difficult climb and equally difficult descent worthwhile. Unfortunately we did not see ibex or wolf, but the grassy areas teemed with baboons. Obviously very used to people, they were happy to sit and groom while we sat and watched. I would have loved to have spent longer here. I felt closer to God here than in any of the churches we visited.



On the way to Gondar, our next destination, we stopped to visit a Jewish tabernacle, restored as a memorial to Ethiopian Jews. In the mid-19th Century up to 350,000 Jews lived in the area, but they were fiercely persecuted and their rights, such as owning land, were removed. By 2013 the last Jewish tabernacle and school were closed.

Day 8

We explored Gondar, visiting the church of Debre Berhan Selassie, the only church saved when Gondar was attacked by the Sudanese in 1880. A swarm of bees kept the soldiers back and Archangel Michael stood at the gates with his sword drawn. This church is noted for its beautiful art. Angels are an important concept in Ethiopian Christianity and the ceiling is covered in cherub faces.



It has also encouraged and delighted us to be able to see Christians from different parishes leading worship from their homes or gardens or local parks on-line. We've seen teenagers singing and playing guitars, young children leading prayers and the occasional piano being played in someone's lounge. We have sung along with traditional hymns, but have really enjoyed discovering how many wonderful worship songs have been written in the last twenty years. These services are often accessed on YouTube, either live-streamed or recorded for people to view on any day of the week. It is such a wonderful form of outreach, especially to people who don't usually set foot inside a church building.

Helen and Paul Tarry

Psalm 145

Let us enlist our lives in continuous celebration
of God's goodness and greatness.

Let us announce to the world God's presence
and proclaim his loving concern for all his creatures.

How compassionate he is to all he has created,
how tender towards his failure fraught creatures!

He will not back out on his promises to us.

His blessings are not reserved
only for those who fit obediently into his design for them.

He is just – and he is forgiving.

He gently picks up those who have fallen
and restores them to himself,

he sustains those who are wavering in weakness
and grants them his grace and strength.

He reaches into the void of empty lives
and enriches and fulfils their hungry hearts.

He is near enough to hear our every cry,
to sense our every need, to grant us whatever is necessary
to make us happy and productive, as we follow and serve him.

How incomparably glorious is our great God!

May our mouths articulate and our lives demonstrate
his ever-present love for all his creatures!

CORONAVIRUS 2020

What it means to us

Like everyone, we are shocked how everything in the world has changed. When 'Lockdown' came it made us think 'how can we carry on with a purpose, to keep sane and to help others?' We started off like everyone else, cupboards, drawers, wardrobes and clothes have all been sorted out.

Green-fingered Brenda has transformed her garden and helped Joan with advice for hers.



We made a blue and white NHS flag, and on Thursday evenings residents in Wellgate and Sandgate Avenues were summoned by youngsters by the clanging of a school bell and the flag was paraded during the 'Clap for the NHS'.

We are both members of Birstall St James' Monday Group, whose charity this year is Macmillan Nurses Leicester. Under the current circumstances we have not been able to do any fund-raising.

We decided to make aprons and knit rainbow double-knit scarves along with other items to sell for the charity.



When this magazine goes to press we will have been isolated for six months. We give thanks to our families and neighbours for their support. We hope you all keep safe and well. We will meet again one day.



Brenda Todd and Joan Folland

KIT COOK ON HOLIDAY

Well here I sit in the caravan, looking out on the rain, but not just any rain - torrential, cleansing, healing rain, mesmerising, bringing the world to brightness again. The leaves are shining, the grass stands to attention - magic. Then peace after the noise, even a clean caravan!

Out for one of our walks - vaguely planned, made up as we go along, beauty everywhere we look. The old mining pits have been transformed into a wonderful country park with many trails and tracks to meander round. Cheery hellos from cyclists and walkers - good to see people out again, beginning to enjoy themselves, but at the same time still peaceful, looking around at God's wonderful creation.

Lunchtime and what better way to spend it than on a bench eating either a homemade teacake or a piece of homemade Bran Loaf. A long walk but worth it, and only about an hour from home. Who needs to fly!



Bran Loaf

1 cup dried mixed fruit; 1/2 cup sugar, 1 cup bran sticks, 1 cup milk, 1 cup SR flour.

In a bowl mix fruit, sugar, bran and milk. Leave to soak for at least an hour. Add flour, mix thoroughly and transfer to a greased and lined 1lb loaf tin. Bake at gas mark 4 for about 45 mins or thereabouts. Check with a skewer, it should come out clean. I often double the recipe and use a 2 lb loaf tin.

Julie Ward



The Birstall & Wanlip Branch of the Mothers' Union has been unable to meet these past months because of the lockdown. We have been able to communicate, however, thanks to our advanced technologies.

This made me think about our founder Mary Sumner. In 1876 she had a radical plan to reach out to women of all social classes, asking them to support one another and to regard motherhood as a profession as important as men's, if not more so. Her plan focused on two ideas central to her thinking about the Mothers' Union. Christian mothers should be both a good example to their children and also a prayer centre for family life. She started with these goals in 1876. By 1896 the Mothers' Union had 169,000 members across four continents. Today there are branches in eighty-four countries.

How did the message reach out to all these women? In the early days, those dedicated women must have written so many letters. Articles were sent to the newspapers, leaflets delivered by hand, and some of the messages by word of mouth, face to face. Meetings were held in churches.

Mary addressed the women's meeting of the 1885 National Church Congress. Queen Victoria became patron of the Mothers' Union in 1897. When the Mothers' Union reached the larger cities, members would go to the slums to help destitute families, often putting themselves in danger of disease and attacks.

Now the Mothers' Union is a worldwide organisation, but still some of our members are working in dangerous situations. We, however, sit at home in safety and comfort, we pick up the phone or go to the computer and can easily communicate with and support each other. We are fortunate to have such advanced technology. Thank GOD for that. Many Blessings.

Carol Spooner

We could not let this opportunity go by without a few words about our lovely neighbour Brenda. You are an inspiration as you go along life's way. Most of you who read this will recognise Brenda as 'Speedy Gonzales' as she goes around the village on her scooter. She also makes the most fantastic pies, cakes, puddings etc. Thank you Brenda for your kindness and concern. You have certainly made the last five months easier for us to bear.

Raymond and Joan Folland

OUR LOCKDOWN PROJECTS

During 'lockdown' we have built a rose garden wall, a concrete ball water feature and a bird bath base. We have nurtured dahlias and annuals, and Sarah has made forty face masks. We have deforested the front of the rectory, taken footpath walks, and John has taken moderate length cycle rides. Most exhaustingly, we have bubbled with grand children and family for three weeks.



John and Sarah Borrajo

FRIENDSHIP

There was a splendid quotation about friendship in The Times 25 July. *A friend is simply someone we can talk to, depend on and enjoy. This can be our curriculum: learning to be the kind of person others confide in by showing genuine interest in their wellbeing; being dependable in small things like remembering birthdays and large ones like being dependable in a crisis; and making time for the shared enjoyments that first brought us together, whether jogging, quilting, or quirky films. (Sheridan Voysey)*

I know that without my friends I couldn't have survived.

Josephine Burgess

'SWEET – SOUR DAYS'

This title comes from George Herbert's poem 'Bitter-Sweet', which is included in *My Sour Sweet Days: George Herbert and the Journey of the Soul*, an anthology for Lent by Mark Oakley. We could use it for these months of lock-down since March. How have you found the experience?

BITTER-SWEET

Ah, my dear angry Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.

I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve;
And all my **sour-sweet days**
I will lament, and love.

Some of you have taken up, or returned to hobbies: such a surge in gardening, growing food, exercise, cooking, baking, learning or revising languages, crafts, knitting, sewing, art, music and reading. Some collected fabric and made PPE for local hospitals. So much **ENERGY!**

A few of us in ministry, ordained, lay or contemplative, used the time for a long God-centred **RETREAT**. It has been a time to draw closer to God in prayer, in silence or in study. Listening, reading (especially books we've always meant to read) and adopting a more disciplined way of life has helped us re-design our lives.

And what of **WORSHIP**? Television and Radio have given us new places and times to join others in attending services: cathedrals; churches; beautiful countryside; even the Archbishop's kitchen. Many churches organised weekly services on Zoom, a few rented Telephone Conference Rooms so their parishioners could meet, even without the internet. I was lucky enough to join a group of villages in the Chilterns for Sunday services and Ascension Day.

'We are shocked and devastated by the explosion today. The death toll may not be known for several days but what we do know is that in a disaster like this, children may be hurt, shocked and separated from their parents. Our Child Protection teams are ready to support the government's efforts which will almost certainly go on for several days to come. It is vital that children and their families get access to the services they urgently need, including medical care and physical and emotional protection.'

It does seem that we have plenty to occupy our minds beyond our own situation. Words from a hymn by John Henry Newman are helpful: *Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on. The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on. Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me.*

Josephine Burgess

Link Missionaries – Beirut, Lebanon

We have heard from our Link Missionaries, Audrey and Colin Gibson, who live in Beirut. They are fine – they live some miles from the area and were outside when the explosion happened. However, they are concerned for some of their colleagues who live close to the explosion; their homes have been badly damaged and, at the time of writing, they believe some may have been injured.

They ask that we pray for those that are injured, for the emergency services and for a sense of calm among the chaos. Audrey and Colin have been saying, for some time, how poorly the Lebanese economy has been performing. *Save the Children*, who are actively working in Lebanon, sum up the difficulties now being faced: *The incident could not have occurred at a worse time and has hit communities who were already suffering from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the economic deterioration. Beirut's main port, now completely damaged, is vital for much of the food, grains and fuel that Lebanon imports, and families will immediately feel the shortage in basic needs as a result of this tragedy.* Let's pray for all those affected, for the immediate, and longer term, for the relief of suffering, and for peace, despite the inevitable chaos.

Peter Chester

BEYOND OUR OWN SITUATION

Like many people I have found the separation from friends particularly hard, not sharing meals either in my home or in other's homes very difficult, but, in more rational moments, when considering my lot compared with others, I have nothing to complain about, which is why I feel we all should be looking at the issues which surround Leicester and overseas.

As many people know, I volunteer for *Save the Children*, so regularly receive up to date information and fascinating case histories of brave and inspired children: girls striving to avoid early marriages in order that they can continue their education even while living in refugee camps, or boys like Daniel who, when he was 14 years old, fled from his village when it was attacked by the militia. He walked for three days to get to Uganda with no shoes and no possessions ... except for a science book rescued from his school because 'I need the book because I want to be a scientist'. I am sure we all can find examples of stories that will inspire us to donate to our chosen charities.

Our churches usually support Disasters Emergency Committee Appeals, but hopefully parishioners have done their own thing. So far, the DEC campaign has raised over £20 million! This is made up of £10 million of donations, £5 million that was committed to by the UK government from the start, and an additional £5 million of government funding. Here are just some of the ways this money will help change children's futures:

£10 could provide 20 bars of handwashing soap to help prevent the spread of the virus in a refugee camp such as Cox's Bazaar

£39 could buy handwashing kits to families to help protect themselves against Covid-19

£50 could provide PPE for one frontline health worker for two months in Syria

As I was writing this, we were advised of the tragic situation in the Lebanon, and, as you can imagine, Save the Children are there. Jad Sakr, Save the Children's Country Director in Lebanon, said:

Listening to their chatter before and after the service I got to know them, like us, in an interregnum, but led by their one retired priest, and enabled by one churchwarden. Two of us from Birstall were made so welcome.

I heard that Birstall Methodist Church has been providing worship and worship material to every member, keeping in touch with each of them. At St Theresa's Roman Catholic Church, funerals are taking place in the car park. Weekly newsletters are being delivered by email and personal delivery. In our own benefice, John Ward has enabled weekly Zoom Evensongs on Sundays. This sort of **CONNECTIVITY** is perhaps the best thing to come from our time of isolation. One lady told me she was now in touch with old friends she had missed for years. The telephone has re-connected so many friends, family and new acquaintances. My own ministry, changed from monthly sermons to calling one parishioner, one relation or friend and one retired (or less active) priest or minister a day, has proved such a **RICH AND REWARDING** experience.

So many were lonely, felt ignored, and said that my call was the first they had. Their gratitude was over-whelming and humbling. Strangely, I felt I got to know people better than by meeting them briefly in church; so much patience and creativity; such **INTERESTING, WONDERFUL PEOPLE!**

I hope you enjoyed a similar growth in connectivity, service to others and nearness to God. Our reward will be a new and better **WAY OF LIFE**, as we emerge re-inspired.

Noreen Talbot



A LABYRINTH FOR BIRSTALL

This title might raise two questions – a labyrinth – what’s one of those? And is there one in Birstall?



When I first came across labyrinths I thought they were a bit weird, a bit way out, a bit odd, probably related to the ancient religions, not something for a 20th or 21st century Christian. Then I discovered there was one in Chartres Cathedral and one in the grounds of Launde Abbey. Time for a re-think.

The weekend after my sister died, I was on a retreat at Launde Abbey and read their guidance about using the labyrinth. One of the methods of walking it really resonated with me. So I walked their labyrinth.

I don't know what the guidance actually said, but I walked it thinking about the past – life with my sister, the good bits and the bad – I stood at the centre with God, in the present – in the reality of bereavement – and I walked out into the future without my sister but very much with God. I found it such a healing time. It gave me strength to face the reality I had to face.

So, what is a labyrinth? Firstly it's not a maze. A definition I found was: It's a pattern of pathways that weave in a circle around a central point. You walk through the pathways to get to the centre.

Labyrinths are about the journey, at least as much as the destination. They can be calming, as they slow you down while you wind your way through the path. And is there one in Birstall? I hope that there might be by the time you are reading this!

At the start of the initial lockdown, I was passing the church lawn regularly on Food Hub business. It struck me that it would be an ideal place for a labyrinth. This idea just kept coming back until we were released from lockdown (the first). So then I gained permission from our churchwardens to set about creating one.

The plan is to have a poster displayed alongside the labyrinth giving some guidelines, and there will be some more information on the church website (www.birstall.org). In normal times we will also have leaflets for you to use and take away with you.

I pray that this may be a sacred space. A place where people of faith, any faith, or none at all can walk and think or pray and find peace, direction, solutions – whatever they need.

I believe that it could be an important place for us to work through what has happened due to Covid-19 since March, to work out where we are now, and to step into the future with hope. I pray it may become a special place for the people of Birstall.

Gill Chester

