

Bishop Martin Seeley writes in Bury Free Press (May 2023)...

We are a county of shows, with the Woodbridge Horse Show at the start of May, the South Suffolk show a couple of weeks ago, the Hadleigh Show last week, the Suffolk Show next week, and the Framlingham Show in August. What is striking is that while some other county shows around the country have had to close, ours seem to be going from strength to strength. And while we are indeed as a county rather reticent about ourselves, there is a quiet Suffolk pride on modest display at each of the shows.

There is no doubt that the shows are fun, and for many coming to this year's Suffolk Show, for instance, the food and drink stands are a significant part of that fun, featuring an immense range of wonderful items from across our county, and beyond. There are plenty of activities and enticements for people of all ages, and no danger of being bored at any of our shows. And particularly as we still find ourselves emerging from the sustained disruption of the pandemic, they are another opportunity to be out together, and the chance to meet friends whom we may not have seen for some time is very welcome indeed.

As well as fun, the shows are places to learn, whether it is about farming and animals, or, depending upon the focus, about gardening, skills and crafts, the latest communications technology, or what it is like to ride in a flight simulator. In particular, I am struck how important our shows are for introducing young people to farming, to animals and to the basic question of where our food comes from. And then I think there is a third reason that people continue to come, and in growing numbers, to our shows. Somehow, even if we don't use this language, they touch something in our souls.

The heart of these events is farming – the land, food, animals. The realities of life and death. The cycle of the seasons. We are in touch with the natural world, with the rhythms of life on which our lives depend. And if we feel somehow restored – even if exhausted from a very full day – that will be why.

I remember walking with the farmer around his farm, and him telling me about the cycle of the seasons, the sense of time set by the weather as well as the time of year, and of knowing that with all the technology he could muster, his work, his life, was subject to forces beyond his control.

It gave him a perspective on what was important, and on what he cared about. That was at the heart of his spirituality, of his awareness of being part of God's creation.

It is no wonder that our farming festivals – Harvest, Lammas and Plough Sunday are some of our best attended church services. And I think for many of us the shows give us a glimpse of this spiritual dimension, and for some a compelling glimpse.

The Suffolk Show is this week coming, Wednesday and Thursday, and I encourage everyone to come. The Woodbridge Show was the first of our county shows, then the South Suffolk a few weeks ago, followed by the Hadleigh Show, and then later in August the Framlingham Show.

The Suffolk Show, always in the summer half-term, is the largest two-day event in the county, and one of the largest county shows in the country.

I am so delighted and honoured this year to be attending as President-Elect, which, amongst other responsibilities, involves judging the Art Show, as well as presenting various awards, and enjoying both days in full.

I first attended a few weeks after I started as bishop here, in 2015, and it was the best introduction to the county I could have wished for. As well as discovering what the Suffolk Trinity really was – Suffolk Sheep, Suffolk Punch horse, and Red Pol cow – and meeting them in the flesh, the show served for me as an introduction to farming in Suffolk, as well as a taster of pretty much every other aspect of our life in this county.

A great array of businesses, educational institutions, the military, charities and community organisations have stands at the show, and last year attracted nearly 90,000 visitors.

And once again I am delighted that the Church of England in Suffolk will have a marquee offering hospitality and activities for all. This year we will be creating a flock of craft sheep and we would love you to join in. Our marquee will be offering free tea, coffee and cake, seating so you can rest including sofas, puppet shows and creative activities for children of all ages, do come along and see us at stand 602.

Your donations for the refreshments at our marquee are being given to the Addington Fund, to support struggling farming families with housing solutions, disaster relief and grants.

But it is not just our bodies and our minds that will have been fed at the Show. Our spirits will have been too.