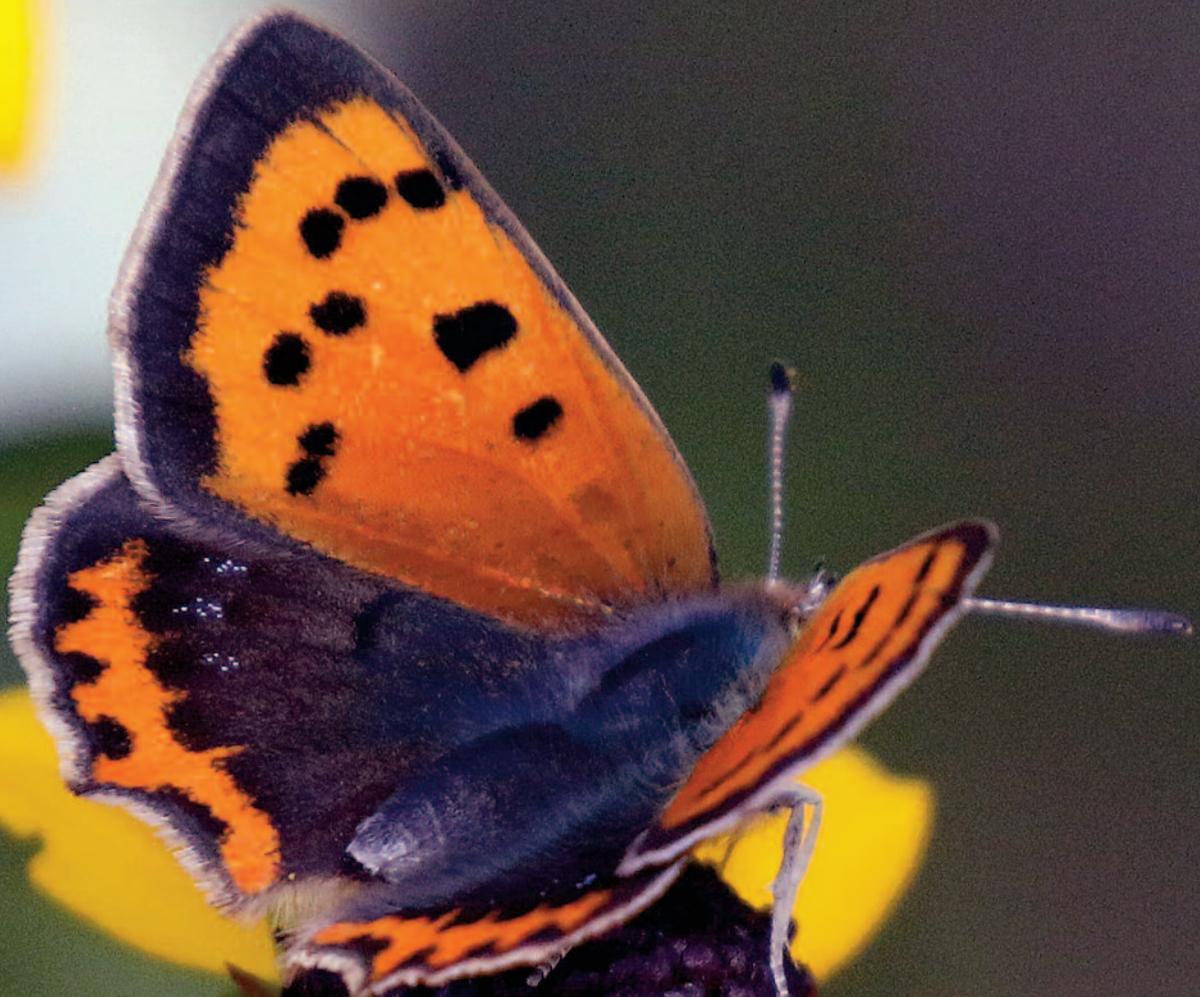




THE LINK

Sharing Faith in Jesus Christ

Summer 2020



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St Edmund Egleton
St Andrew Hambleton
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St Peter and St Paul
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You can find out more about us on our website:

www.oakhamteam.org.uk

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Education and Learning

Revd Stephen Griffiths, Team Rector

Welcome to this Summer edition of the Link.

When we think of education and learning we most probably think of schools. When I was young I really enjoyed going to the village school (Rosliston in South Derbyshire) and then Twycross House in Leicestershire. Most people spend a big proportion of their childhood and early adulthood in formal education. Our experiences, whether bad or good, tend to leave an imprint and shape our reaction to learning for the rest of our life. Thankfully there are lots of opportunities to revisit education at different times in life and there is a far greater awareness of the need for different styles of learning.

Life-long learning has already become a bit of cliché, but I think it's worth bearing in mind. There is

always something more to learn, something more to explore, something to more get to grips with. One of the reasons we might resist grappling with new things is that it might lead to change. And if we're honest most of us prefer to keep things the way we like them, whether that's our opinions, our practices, or our faith. But staying the same in God's dynamic world is impossible.

Our parish churches (we have ten beautiful examples in our Team) are a kind of embodiment of this. Some are nearly 1000 years old and seem to be the very essence of continuity. But look a little closer and you will see the lessons of each century written upon them: the remains of wall paintings, the new aisle with its Perpendicular windows, the organ

which replaced the minstrels, the empty space of the rood screen, the Reformation pulpit, the innovative Georgian or Victorian pews, the carefully concealed kitchen and toilet, the hidden wi-fi signal.

When this edition reaches you I hope we will be emerging into a new post-COVID-19 world. Some things will be the same as they ever were, but some things will never be the same. I hope the lessons we have learned during this crisis will change us for the better.

Yours in the service of Jesus Christ,



Spot The Link - prize draw!

In the days when we could still get out and about, Beryl Kirtland, who looks after the distribution of The Link to the churches of the Benefice and many other places, spotted these copies on display - can you identify where they are?



Send your entries to editor@link.otm.org.uk and the winning entry will be drawn from a hat.

Last time the magazines were in the porch of St Edmund's, Egleton, and in the front window of Caffè Nero in Oakham.

From the Editor

Ann Blackett

As I look through the contents of this issue of *The Link*, I notice that the pandemic hardly rates a mention: goodness knows what the historians of the future will make of that. And yet, although COVID-19 has dominated our world this year, and almost obliterated other things in the news, life continues, albeit under strange circumstances. So our magazine covers local history, singing, the birds in our gardens, comings and goings within the Ministry Team, what it means to be really present with something rather than seeing it on screen. There's a thread of learning and education running through some of the articles, but in general it's still the magazine we planned in early spring. I hope it comes as a bit of a break, a reminder that life's not all about trying to adjust to the 'new normal' and that some things endure.

That said, as I write in the middle of May, I'm peering cautiously into the future, conscious of you reading this in whatever's coming next. Where are we? Are we still under lockdown, or emerging into the 'new normal' or – I really hope we won't be – back under lockdown? Are children at school? Will I have had an email asking me to go back to work? This week, the way ahead is really not clear at all. It may be that we can't gather in large numbers for a while, which will have an impact on how, or even whether, we can get back to a community life. Even when the churches open again, it's likely that we won't be singing, although I think we should still have live music. For art and history and drama – at least – we could be limited to what we see on our screens. Thank goodness we're able to get out more (at present), to widen our horizons and give us a chance to wave at real people. If you're not shielding, that is, or just taking extra care.

For some people there has been blessed time for rest, more reading, taking time in the garden, walking in Rutland as the spring turns into summer, even the pleasure of being at home with fewer pressures. For some it's been a struggle for all sorts of reasons. I know I've had times of both. Whatever our experience of lockdown has been, we've had to concentrate on the day we're in, because there have been times when we had no idea how long this situation would last, how parts of our family were doing, what the world will look like by the end of 2020. We might not have seized the day, but we've certainly had to pay attention to the people, tasks and things in front of us.

Whatever we'd planned for these last weeks, our choices have been limited, sometimes removed altogether. Some of us have had our freedom to go out sharply curtailed, and have become reliant on the kindness of others to bring them shopping and medication, or for keeping-in-touch phone calls. I've been grateful for this sort of help, and I've followed on Facebook the messages, information and goodwill of the Oakham COVID-19 support group, as neighbours offered help and solutions to the

problems of life in lockdown. Within the benefice we've been able to pray with one another online, and this has opened up thoughts and discussions about what it is we do as followers of Jesus, praying alone, praying together, looking after our brothers and sisters in the community and beyond with emotional support and practical action. Calls for justice and compassion for all who are in any kind of need are being made; are they being heard where they should be?



Image by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

The Rule of St Benedict was written in the sixth century to set out guidance for groups of people trying to live in a community, with chapters on times and content of prayer, how people are to eat according to their needs, leadership and handling disagreement. My copy of the Rule has a commentary by Sr Joan Chittister, a religious sister, writer and speaker, and when she's considering chapter 72 'The good zeal of monastics' she tells this story from another tradition:

A disciple asked the Holy One:

'Where shall I look for Enlightenment?'

'Here,' the Holy One said.

'When will it happen?'

'It is happening right now,' the Holy One said.

'Then why don't I experience it?'

'Because you do not look,' the Holy One said.

'What should I look for?'

'Nothing,' the Holy One said. 'Just look.'

'At what?'

'Anything your eyes alight upon,' the Holy One said.

'Must I look in a special kind of way?'

'No,' the Holy One said. 'The ordinary way will do.'

'But don't I always look the ordinary way?'

'No,' the Holy One said. 'You don't.'

'Why ever not?' the disciple demanded.

'Because to look you must be here,' the Holy One said. 'You're mostly somewhere else.'

Remember this was written for people in a particular time and situation; yet there are still people who try to live by the Rule, whether in the monastery or as lay people in the world. Whatever comes after this, I hope we don't forget our vulnerability, nor our ability to be present to one another in different ways.

Chapter 72: The good zeal of monastics
Just as there is a wicked zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal which separates from evil and leads to God and everlasting life. This, then, is the good zeal which members must foster with fervent love: 'They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other' (Romans 12.10), supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behaviour, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No monastics are to pursue what they judge better for themselves, but instead, what they judge better for someone else. Among themselves they show the pure love of sisters and brothers; to God, reverent love; to their prioress or abbot, unweighted and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to the love of Christ, and may Christ bring us all together to everlasting life.

Just as I finish writing, in comes an email from Revd Stephen, with a few indicators that we may be moving into another stage in our journey. He writes: 'Perhaps our 'phase two' bible verse could be Galatians 5.22-23, praying that God will expand in us these characteristics in all that lies ahead:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

As we reach the end of the Easter season, celebrate Pentecost and are sent out in the Spirit even though we may be still largely in our homes, God is with us. God is with us.



Leo and Charlotte Osborn moved to Oakham in the summer of 2015 from Newcastle upon Tyne, where Leo had been Methodist Chair of District and Charlotte the Lay Chaplain at Newcastle International Airport. Leo came to be Methodist Minister in Oakham, Uppingham, Empingham and Somerby, Charlotte to train for ordination on the Eastern Region Ministry Course, based in Cambridge. In 2017 Charlotte became a curate in the Oakham Team Ministry, and now having been 'signed off' and Leo entering retirement and government restrictions permitting, hope to move out of the Oakham Manse sometime in June to make way for the next Methodist Minister, Revd Bekkie Wright who will begin her ministry in September.

But move to where?!

Many will have heard us talk of our roots in North Norfolk where we have had a cottage for over 40 years, and whilst that is a hoped-for destination in the future, Charlotte is seeking to serve an incumbency somewhere within the Church of England, but until the appointment process gets under way again, we have no idea where that may be.

Please continue to hold us in your prayers as we seek God's guidance, so very thankful for all we have received and been able to offer during these happy years in Rutland.

Serving My Title

Revd Charlotte Osborn

It is a curious phrase, 'to serve one's title', yet it still conveys something which nothing else quite can.

I have had a few titles in my life: Miss – at birth and later as a teacher; Mrs – for the last 43 years; Padre – when working as a chaplain at the airport and no one really knew what to call me; and now, since my ordination in 2017, Reverend. It feels like something of a progression, a development, but I have had to earn the right to use each one.

The school 'Miss' came after years of education, professional training and classroom practice. 'Mrs' came to me first through a proposal and an invitation to a shared life, and I have earned the right to still use it through faithfulness, and love.

'Padre' came as a natural recognition of the office I held within the organisation. But 'Reverend' is a combination of them all: through study and training, through responding to an invitation with faithfulness and obedience, and as recognition of a calling within a body of people. But it is only after being 'proved' in the same way that bread rises through the action of the yeast within its formation, that I have served my title.

The curacy here within the Oakham Team Ministry is a title post. Having served that title of Curate, I am free to look to become known as Vicar or Rector or Priest-in-Charge. It is a necessary progression and I look back on these three years with great thankfulness and joy. In my gratitude for all I have experienced and learned, I am acutely aware that whilst a title must be appropriately 'earned', it is in the end all of grace.

It is often said that the parish trains the curate, just as much as the Incumbent or the curate training officer. I have experienced this to be true and am so grateful for all three components. But as we know, Training Incumbents and Curate Training Officers come and go, while the parish goes on forever!

So, the title post is especially important, and this is alluded to in clergy obituaries in the Church Times, when the commendation always begins 'x served their title in such and such a parish'. It is the foundation of ordained ministry in the Church of England.

And although some of their obituaries have thankfully yet to be written, there is an illustrious list of

those who served their title here, amongst them the Bishop of Lichfield, Rt Revd Michael Ipgrave.

In 1926 Dr James Allan wrote a poem entitled 'One Solitary Life' in which he reflects on education and preparation for ministry in which we find these words:

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness. He had no credentials but himself...

...and today Jesus is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that have ever reigned – put together – have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.

These words have long had a powerful effect on me ever since I first read them, yet whilst it is true that Jesus never went to college, he was schooled in the Scriptures. How many of us can quote the psalms from memory as He so often did? Jesus frequently quoted Scripture as He taught His disciples. In teaching, He often began with 'It is written' or 'You have heard it said,' the latter referencing scriptures His disciples would have heard read aloud at synagogue meetings. Even as a child, He amazed the scribes with His comprehension and retention of Scripture (Luke 2.46-47). As an adult, He was highly educated, to the point of the astonishment of the authorities of the time (John 7.15).

Jesus Christ was exceptionally biblically literate. Not surprising then, for after all, He is the Word of God par excellence! (John 1.1,14) But it is also the case that Jesus 'increased in wisdom' (Luke 2.52). So what does it

mean for us 'to grow in faith'? How do we deepen our faith? How might we overcome the hurdles that we imagine will be difficult to negotiate, such as what this might ask of us in terms of time, or changing our way of living, or re-ordering priorities? What about the pain of unlearning and relearning what we knew or have learned about the Bible? Or the fear that a deeply personal faith might need to be expressed publicly? Or is it simply the responsibility of the church to provide education that will promote maturity in faith?

Many believe that education is given through the sermon each Sunday, yet research shows that adult learning happens best with interaction, discussion, discovery and hands on experience: preaching typically offers none of these, although it has an important task of proclamation, of refreshment and encouragement and of challenge. The context for learning is those places and things which naturally draw us together socially, so book groups and film nights are just as important when skilfully led as Bible Study for engendering and stimulating growth in faith. And many will say that during this present global crisis or a more personal one their faith has been deepened, strengthened or grown sometimes by simply hanging on to God as though by their fingertips.

So, the context for learning is presented by life itself, as disciples growing with others and the church, the place where we gather to worship, and strengthen others' faith. And as we leave the gathered church each week, we remember how we are dismissed, reminding us of the need to be constantly deepening in wisdom and growing in faith: 'may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His son Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Moving On

A Message from Revd Iain Osborne

After nearly three years as curate in the Oakham Team, I am moving in the summer to become Rector of Ramsey in Cambridgeshire.



One of the many things I love about the Team churches is your generosity. You have given so much to me and my family while I have served here as a curate. I suspect Oakham people feel that being a training parish is normal and routine: you have always had curates, you are used to bearing them in prayer, enjoying their quirks and energy, tolerating the wonky sermons. And I have felt your satisfaction at seeing me grow in confidence. While giving in this way is something you are used to, I have not taken it for granted. You are very special – thank you.

On the basis that imitation is the best flattery, you should know that my new parish is quite similar! Ramsey is a market town of about 8,700 people, but growing fast. There is a single Anglican church in the town, dedicated to St Thomas a Becket, and I will also care for two villages on the outskirts of the town. The origins of Ramsey lie in a great Benedictine abbey, founded on an island amidst Fenland marshes in 969, and St Thomas' used to be the abbey's guest-house. I have the impression that – as in Oakham – the congregation and the town feel their deep historical roots, while also looking to change and grow.

I think the monks chose Ramsey for its isolation, out in the marshes; but

now, people commute to Huntingdon or Cambridge. The Fens are all drained now – the main street of the town used to be a wharf, but the river now runs in a tunnel underneath – and we are surrounded by rich peaty-black farmland, with agriculture being an important local employer. The Fenland landscape remains – huge skies, dead-flat roads that run towards the horizon, and then turn 90 degrees – a net of glittering ditches marking out the fields. It is quite different to



anywhere I have lived before, and I'm looking forward to exploring.

Speaking of which, do please come and visit. I understand the Fens have a strong local culture and traditions, and Ramsey itself is a lively community, with independent shops and interesting buildings. There is a heritage trail around the town, a Rural Museum to show what Fenland life used to be like, a restored walled garden, the abbey gate-house (National Trust). And, above all, a lively Christian community who would love to welcome you some Sunday.



Coming soon...

Greetings from Simon Aley, soon to be the new Assistant Curate

Hello! Writing this, I am wondering, what might you want to know about me?

Who is he?

My name is Simon Aley

Where is he from?

I live in Manton but grew up in Barnet and Potters Bar in North London/Hertfordshire.

Is he married?

Yes, to Carys.

Do they have children?

No.

What does he do?

I am a solicitor, working mostly in local government and I am also an ordinand.

What is an ordinand?

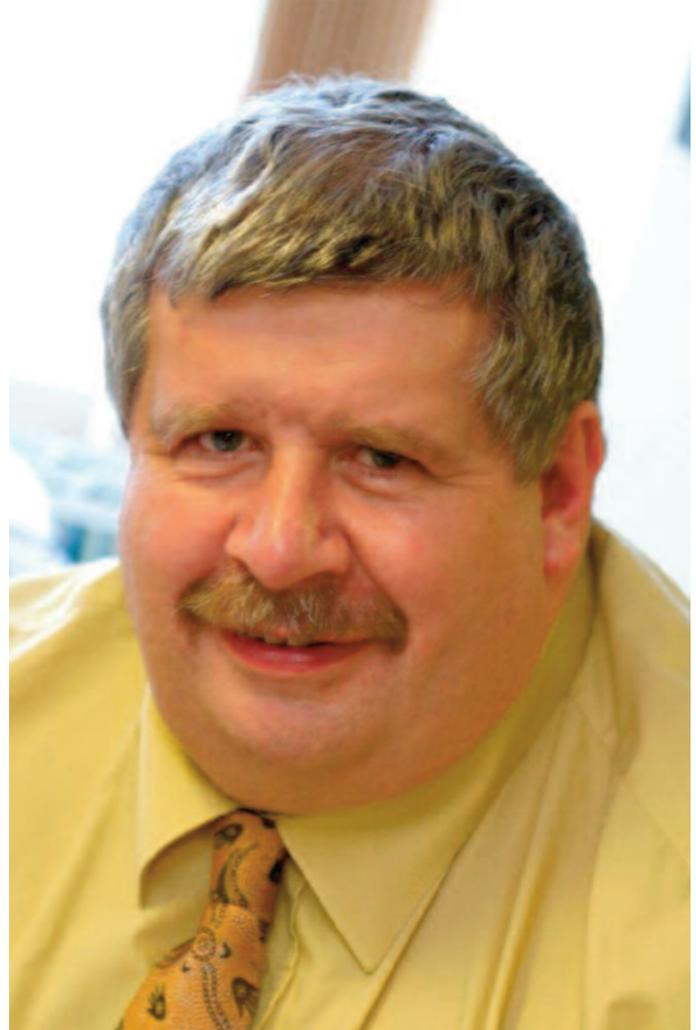
Now that's a good question, because even the spellchecker on my PC thinks that is a spelling mistake! Ordinand comes from the Latin gerundive (for language scholars) of ordinare – to put in order or put in place. So, clearly, I am someone who needs putting in order, or in place! That sounds about right – this is something I've been told that I need to be for years already! I was told I was an ordinand shortly after Bishop John rang me almost three years ago after attending a BAP in Ely that I had been recommended for training for ordination in the Church of England and was now an ordinand. Going through a BAP in Ely does not mean walking through a bread roll (oh that it did!) but attending a Bishops' Advisory Panel, a three-day experience, sponsored by the Bishops, to recommend the suitability or not of a person for training for ministry, examining their calling and suitability against criteria.

So, are you training?

Yes I am.

Where?

I am at the Eastern Regional Ministry Course, where Revd Charlotte completed her training as an ordinand. It's part of the Cambridge Theological Federation but has just become a theological institution in its own right. It serves the eastern dioceses of Norwich, Ely, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, St Albans, Chelmsford and Peterborough, oh, and the Diocese of Europe! So, unlike most ordinands who move away to live in college, we stay put, stay working, and study either at regional centres or online and attend weekends and summer schools – a bit like a theological open university. I am now finishing my final year of initial training as an ordinand with a view to being ordained at Peterborough Cathedral on 28 June. For my first year, I was linked to the Rutland Water Benefice, where Revd Jenni Duffy, sent from the Oakham Team Ministry, is now Assistant Curate, and of which Manton, my sending church, is a



part, and for the last 18 months I have been placed with the Welland Fosse Benefice in the south-eastern part of the county.

Have you always been an Anglican?

No, I have been a member and elder in the United Reformed Church, a member and deacon in Baptist churches, (yes, I was at Oakham Baptist Church for a number of years), and attended a community church. I guess that labels me more than the rest of the questions but perhaps demonstrates more a journey that we all make in our walk with Jesus Christ, serving Him and loving Him as He loves us and in response to all He has given us.

So, thank you for giving me this opportunity to continue my formative training among you under Stephen's and the rest of the Team's guidance. I look forward to meeting you all in person rather than from the words on this page.

All it takes is a few minutes each day...

Brian Chester

Whether or not we're still in lockdown, this is something you can do from your window...

Question: What can you do in the comfort of your own home that is both enjoyable and aids scientific research?

Answer: Watch the birds.

Casually watching birds in our gardens has provided an absorbing distraction for many during the past months with enjoyment gained from seeing birds at close quarters, identifying the species and experiencing the thrill of an unexpected visitor arriving at the bird table. Now the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) slogan – *A world inspired by birds and informed by science* – which, for the past 25 years has collected valuable information on the changing pattern of bird life in our gardens through its Garden BirdWatch scheme, is hoping to add to the hundreds of contributors which are spread across the country.

The BTO launched the scheme in January 1995, asking 'watchers' to send in weekly lists of birds seen. In 2003, the survey was expanded with options to include other wildlife, covering mammals, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, bumblebees and (from 2011) dragonflies. Garden BirdWatchers also record the features of their gardens, make a note of what food they put out and note any incidences of sick or dead wildlife.

The scheme is designed to find out how, when and why birds and other animals use our gardens with results being analysed by scientists working under the BTO's urban and garden ecology research programmes. The aim is to identify links between changes in wildlife populations and factors such as garden management, food, weather and urban structure. These are critical



Robin is a bird table regular

questions, says the BTO, because gardens are important for biodiversity, and will increasingly be so as the landscape becomes more urbanised.

The range of birds you can expect to see is surprisingly large, possibly running into the high teens or even more. Birds such as the Great Spotted Woodpecker can be attracted to peanuts; even a Sparrow Hawk may pay a fleeting visit although not with the contents of the feeders in mind!



Goldfinches bring much colour



House Sparrows can be frequent feeders

Regular Watching

The process of recording for the scheme need not be arduous – watching while relaxing over a cup of coffee, along with casual glances through a window during the day can often be enough. A raised awareness of the bird life around you while in the garden is also useful and rewarding. A record of species seen and individual numbers (just the highest individual figure for the week) is submitted to the BTO, preferably online but post is an option.

The attraction of the scheme is that the identification of birds can, with the aid of a basic bird book, be built up over the weeks – the BTO welcomes all reports, even those where no birds have been seen. Introducing a bird feeder can add to the number and frequency of 'visitors' to your garden; but be patient, as the birds will take a while to be happy using the feeders. Peanuts, fat balls and cereal seeds are a start offering – niger seed will attract one the most colourful of birds, the goldfinch.



A Song Thrush is always a welcome sight

The BTO says that related research has shown that garden feeding not only improves over-winter survival rates, but also impacts the subsequent condition of birds which may even affect their ability to breed successfully a few months later. However, there is much more to understand. Garden feeding can also have negative consequences for some individuals, depending upon the quality of the food put out, and particularly the hygiene associated with feeding stations.

An analysis of results since the BirdWatch began has revealed significant changes. Here are five questions to challenge your knowledge of bird population movements:

- Which bird was top of the tree in 1995 and 2019?
- Which bird has fallen from third to seventh place in the list?
- Which bird has fallen from eighth to 15th?
- Which bird climbed from 20th to eighth?
- Which bird climbed from 12th to second?



Bullfinch can be an occasional visitor if your garden edges the countryside, especially if there are fruit trees. This bird likes the buds!

By way of clues, garden bird watchers recorded falls in sightings of starling, house sparrow, greenfinch, wren and song thrush. Birds on the rise included jackdaw, coal tit, woodpigeon, goldfinch and magpie. Answers at the bottom of the page.

Normally the BTO asks for an annual subscription of £17 to join the scheme with new paying members receiving a free copy of a 220-page book *Garden Birds and Other Wildlife*. Members are also sent the *Bird Table* magazine four times a year and a regular e-newsletter. At the time of writing, the Trust, as a response to the pandemic, was offering free membership for a year to those who would like to contribute to understanding Britain's birds and get more pleasure from their garden. The BTO is not able to supply the joining pack with this offer but will provide regular emails to keep you connected.

More details of Garden BirdWatch can be found on the BTO website <https://www.bto.org/>. The site also provides details of the scheme and the changing pattern of bird populations between 1995 and 2019.

Pictures: BTO (Paul Newton, John Harding, Edmund Fellowes) and Brian Chester



Lone Blue Tit heads for a snack

Answers: Woodpigeon; Goldfinch; Greenfinch; Goldfinch; House Sparrow; Blue Tit; Woodpigeon

How 'Learning' Came to Rural Rutland: Schools in the Northern Villages

Brian Chester

There are whole histories written about Oakham School and Uppingham School, their founder and famous students. But what was happening in the villages of Rutland?

There was a time when primary education was all about the three Rs – which, taken literally, equates to reading, writing and arithmetic. And it was a dogma most ardently adhered to in the primary schools that formed a valued part of so many rural communities. I still remember that time, having arrived in this world as the Battle of Britain reached its climax, when at the age of five, I timidly entered the doors of the nearby village school. Presided over by a formidable headmistress, this was a school where, once in the 'big room', education was administered to set rules, 'justice' delivered (to boys) with a firm hand and even transgressions on the way home would be lamented the following morning. As a Church of England school, religious education was part of our week, but I can't recall it being given significant emphasis, although special occasions such as Ascension Day were celebrated with a day off! This was in Northamptonshire, but such schools could be found across the country, many stemming from the active involvement of the C of E



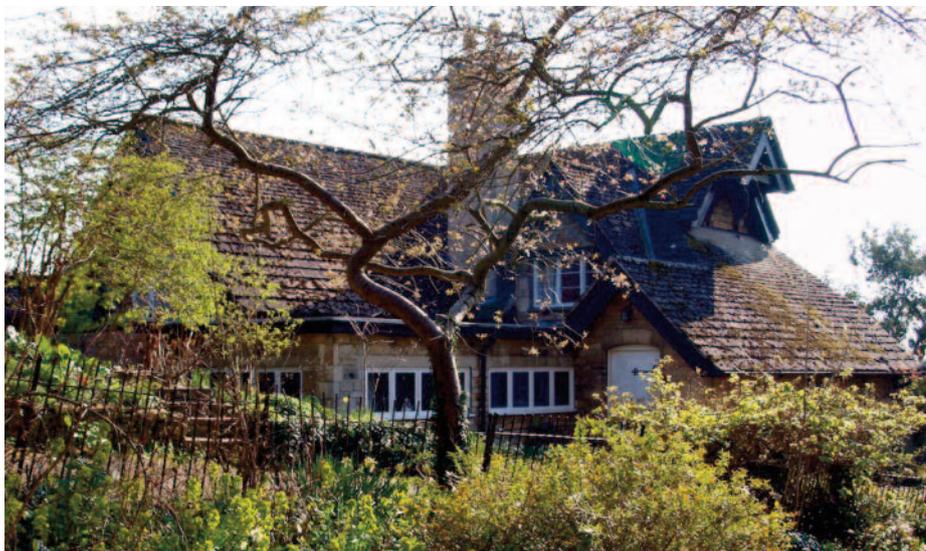
Braunston School in 1915

in education from the early 1800s. And a look back at the nature of school life in Rutland in those times – and before – reveals a telling story of the endeavours made to provide children – often described as 'poor' – with free 'learning'.

Churches and private schools had offered a limited form of education for centuries. Records show that in Langham, a school was established in

part of the church as early as 1640, and at Whissendine there is a trace of a school even earlier, in 1585. At Teigh, a peripatetic teacher named John Flower is said to have held classes in the church, while at Brooke there is a record of a Sunday School in 1862.

Most Church schools came about through the drive to provide mass provision of Christian education for the poor in the early and middle years of the 19th century. The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, now known as The National Society (Church of England) for Promoting Religious Education (or more often simply the National Society) was created in 1811 with the mission of founding a Church school in every parish in England and Wales. By the time of the national census of 1851, the Church had established more than 12,000 schools. State provision for public education came with the 1870 Education Act by supplementing the churches' provision.



The Old School, Hambleton

Village Schools in Rutland

Schools were established, in a variety of ways, in seven of the nine villages around Oakham – Teigh and Brooke were the two exceptions. Just two primary schools now remain in the northern villages – at Langham and at Whissendine. The others gradually closed as numbers reduced with changes in the pattern of education and village populations. The story of education as told by these schools shows both hardship and humour but most of all a determination to give village children rudimentary skills – even if, at times, it was a struggle.

Much of the detail in the following journey round the Oakham benefice village parishes is from the book *Old Village Schools of Rutland* by A R Traylen and printed by Spiegl Press of Stamford – still available for those who wish to delve deeper into the past.

Former school buildings still remain in several of the villages, as can be seen in Ashwell where, in the late 19th century, the celebrated architect William Butterfield – commissioned by the 7th Viscount Downe, planned a school and almshouses when engaged in a comprehensive restoration of the church. With the arrival of a structured education system in the 1800s, Ashwell recorded attendances of 39 in 1879 and 48 in 1895. An eye-opening aside makes it clear that children from Teigh were expected to walk the mile-and-a-half to Ashwell 'come hail, rain or blow'. Only when the



The Old School, Ashwell

road was blocked with 'water up to a horse's belly' were they allowed to travel by horse and cart! In 1889 the headmaster was so disturbed by late arrivals that he ordered the doors to be locked once the chimes of the bell had died away.

Schools' Inspectors were very much a feature of school life and Ashwell came in for some less than complimentary comments. In 1902 the inspector found that the junior classroom was so packed that it was impossible to move between the rows and in 1908 he was 'devastated' to find the contents of the toilet pans were level with the seat. He decreed that earth must be used and not

ashes! The school remained open until 1969.

Local 'gentry' played an influential part in the early days of village education; Braunston is an example. After references in the 16th and 17th centuries of a school in church, Augustin Burton, in about 1810, gave £5 to Sir Thomas Burton to teach 20 of the village's poorest children. The Finch family provided a room to house 100 pupils 'north of the church' in 1847, a parochial school was built by 'subscription' in 1864 and then in 1903 Mr Hanbury of the Manor House, apparently dismayed by noise of schoolchildren playing nearby, paid £1500 for a new school to be built in Knossington Road.

At Egleton, the squire at Burley-on-the Hill paid for education in the village (reference date 1773) and the Finch family built a school for 37 children in 1867 and paid for a teacher. In 1901 there were just six boys and 14 girls and the building, now the village hall, closed as a school in the 1920s.

Hambleton also benefitted from a gift by the Finch family when, following earlier instruction for nine poor children, a school for 50 children was built on land given by George Finch in 1838. By 1892 a new school had been built, financed, it appears, largely by Walter Gore Marshall as part of his many



Ashwell School in 1913

Hambleton village improvements – this one, reputedly, because the old school impeded meetings of the Hunt and the processing of horses to Hambleton Hall. In 1929, a new teacher remarked that ‘the children looked as if they had come out of a bandbox with their red riding hood cloaks provided by the Lady of the Hall, Mrs Cooper.’

In Langham there is a note of a school in the now-demolished North transept of the church in 1640; in 1692 a £10 grant from the charity of Henry Forster to enable a schoolmaster, chosen by the minister, to be employed. In 1841 the Earl of Gainsborough built a ‘British School’ for around 80 children, who paid one penny a week. The building is on the main road through Langham, on the left of the Wheatsheaf. When the school closed in 1970 it reverted to the Gainsborough estate and is now a private house. In 1843, the Vicar, Henry Mott, provided a National School for boys, but this probably later merged with the British School.

At Market Overton, education began in 1792 in a property known as The Flats in a room on the first floor accessed by a long external staircase. In 1864 numbers were put at 60 juniors and 24 infants and the school moved to a single storey building with three rooms on Berrybushes. By 1902 the totals were 18 boys, 18 girls and 19 infants. The school closed in about 1952.

The first trace of educational activity at Whissendine is recorded as 1585.



Egleton School – now the Village Hall

A fee-paying school (known as the Hacks School) is listed in 1821 followed by the school for poor children in the church funded by the Earl of Harborough and then the National School. In 1864 the Revd E L Horne gave land and built a new school to accommodate 78 juniors and 48 infants in 1866. In 1902 there were 28 boys, 25 girls and 27 infants. During part of the Second World War, the arrival of 80 evacuees and their teachers meant shared accommodation with village children in school from 8.30am to 12.30pm and the evacuees from 1pm to 5pm.

More Recent Memories



Ian Freckingham

Ashwell resident Ian Freckingham remembers his first day at the school in 1950 – setting foot on a slightly wobbly wood floor and with coke stoves in each of the two rooms giving a cosy glow. ‘I was still wearing my cap as I walked in and the teacher gently took it off to remind me not to wear it indoors’, he said.

As he progressed to the senior room, however, reminders were more painful with a ruler across the knuckles. The link with the church was strong with children attending Sunday School, joining in choir



Hambleton School in 1911

practice and enjoying trips to the seaside. Church services were a feature of most Sundays and, he recalls, with the arrival of a particularly lively vicar, attendance at evensong required chairs from the village hall to accommodate the congregation. Flush toilets came to the school in about 1956 to replace the basic 'facilities' previously provided. For boys it was a trough against a wall and open to all weathers. Mr Freckingham, whose parents lived close to the church, says that several former pupils at the school still live in the village.

Like many pupils experiencing their first day at school, Paul Grenville has a clear recollection of a pot-bellied stove giving a warm and welcoming glow as, in the late 1950s, he entered the school at Hambleton. A wooden floor also seemed to be a standard fitting that remains in the memory along with desks placed in neat rows.

Some features of the old school still remain at what is now a private house – the old school bell hanging by the door, kitchen cupboards, a walk-in store, original leaded-pane windows and part of the building which housed the loos. Paul's mother Mary, who is now 94, was headmistress at the school and remained there until it closed when she continued her teaching career at Ashwell. A former pupil visiting Mary recently, remembered her early school days at Hambleton, amid a flurry of tears, as such happy times. It was indeed, recalls Paul, a beautiful place although not without its poverty remembering the time his mother bought shoes for the children in one village family. He also remembers his mother's mode of transport – an old Austin van to



Paul Grenville with his mother Mary pupil and headmistress at Hambleton School-

travel from Cottesmore where his father was an RAF pilot.

Our thanks to Rutland County Museum for pictures from the past.

Our Schools Today

Today there are Church of England primary schools in three villages in the benefice, at Oakham, Langham and Whissendine. They're all busy and friendly, providing skills, learning, friendship and inspiration to their children, and each is a focus for families from beyond town or village boundaries. Here two of them tell us a little more about themselves.

Langham Church of England Primary School

Allyson Ford, Special Needs Co-ordinator

At Langham Church of England Primary School we love to celebrate the Christian ethos of our community as encapsulated in our school vision 'Loving learning, loving laughter, loving life in all its fullness; loving Langham!'

Our inclusive learning environment teaches our pupils to celebrate differences, help one another and promote a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. Our vision for each child is that they will work towards their personal best, in a caring atmosphere, which reflects the Christian and British values of our Academy. We encourage our pupils to be inquisitive and passionate about their learning. Christian values and practice are at the heart of our shared life as a Church of England School and they shape an enquiring mind and respectful approach to everything around us.



We strive to develop confident, creative, self-assured, positive young people who love to learn, to contribute and to achieve. We aim to produce independent thinkers and learners who are READY for 21st Century Learning – Resilient, Responsible, Resourceful, Risk Taking, Reflective and Respectful learners.

We seek high levels of attainment

and achievement in the core subjects and across a broad, creative curriculum. We also encourage a strong community spirit, with consideration and support for each other and provide a warm, caring and Christian atmosphere in which the children feel happy and secure and therefore receptive to learning. Memorable

learning experiences are at the heart of all we do. Every child deserves to be successful and our role is to help them blossom and believe everything is possible!

We recently welcomed an Inspector to our school to undertake a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS). A very interesting and productive day resulted in a great report which really reflected the Christian ethos of our school: 'Langham promotes its Christian vision effectively, cultivating a strong sense of family based upon love. The academy articulates this

vision replicating the example of Christ as a shepherd caring for the sheep, where none are forgotten or lost. Everyone is valued as a consequence of this vision and so pupils and adults become one flock at this happy academy.'

We were delighted that the inspector concluded 'As a vibrant, loving Christian family, Langham is well placed to create positive futures. Pupils are loving learning, loving laughter, loving life in all its fullness and loving Langham village. This delightful academy clearly serves the common good.'

At Langham our mission is to inspire a love of learning and discover how to make a difference in our world through Christian values, courageous advocacy and epic learning!

The underlying principles of our vision and aims are hope, aspiration and courageous advocacy. Hope that things can always get better and make progress: the power of yet; aspiration that we will be the best that we can be in every way we can; courageous advocacy to step out into the world as rounded and caring citizens fit for the 21st century.

Oakham Church of England Primary and The Parks Schools

Elaine Peel

Mary-Anne Marples, Head of Religious Education

The first Christian schools were set up as a response to the Christian ethic, living out the gospel, loving one's neighbour, fighting injustice and inequality in society – the principle that education is a necessary requirement for all. These Christian values are at the heart of Oakham C of E school today. As its website says, it is 'proud of its heritage', stating that 'love, fellowship, humility, hope and thankfulness help us on our learning journey'. Quoting from Corinthians 1, they urge their pupils to 'let all that you do be done in love'.

The school aims for an ethos of care and respect. 'It is an environment where learning flourishes', said the 2017 OFSTED report, which classed the school as 'Good'. The diocese, too, evaluates the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a church school. In its 2019 report it described the school as 'inclusive and aspirational'. It recognised that 'the school's Christian vision and values are lived out daily'.

So how does the above translate into the practical activities which the children are involved in, nurturing them in these principles of faith? They celebrate the seasonal feasts of the year. In the autumn, food is



collected and donated to the Rutland Foodbank. They come to church to thank God for the harvest and all their blessings. In the summer, at the Leavers' Service, the children acknowledge the gift of their early education and thank God for friends and teachers. The whole school community gathers to celebrate Christmas and Easter at church. Every week there is a coveted title to be won – Headteacher Award Winner – and it's lovely to see why these youngsters have been singled out for this award. One pupil is described as 'a fabulous young lady... kind, caring and empathetic.' Another young man earned his award through being 'a collaborative and cooperative learner'.



Alongside Oakham Primary School sits The Parks School, a preschool with a remit for educating under-5s with a range of special educational and medical needs such as autism and visual impairment. Whilst having its own separate facilities the school's children and staff are an integral part of the life of the main school. The little children love contact with the older group and vice versa, and facilities such as the swimming pool are enjoyed by all. The Parks children join the main school at church services and sometimes attend worship in school. Although not part of the Church of England, they have a cross and a reflective area in their classes and prayers are said during the day with the children. The Parks is seen very

much as a part of the school family and not a separate school.

It is good, as a Christian community, to support 'our school'. We are in a time of great uncertainty with most schools closed but some, including Oakham Primary and The Parks, are still open* for children of key workers and those most vulnerable, living out their vision and letting all they do be done in love. Let us keep them in our thoughts and prayers, trusting that the present difficulty is but an intermission in a long and important Christian school history

**written in April 2020*



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Ann Blackett



A reflection on having seized the day when it was still possible...

Writing from lockdown, back in April, I'm finding all sorts of exhibitions, talks and music performances online to help entertain and inspire me. From Shakespeare to Diarmuid McCulloch, Mary Chapin Carpenter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, there's plenty of choice, and the quality is quite high enough for a small screen. But... it is just a screen; it doesn't hold a candle to actually going out and seeing things for yourself. Being there is important.

About three years ago, I decided I needed to get out more, and began to make a list of exhibitions, galleries, museums, places I'd like to get to during the year ahead. Once I had the list, I was much more motivated to organise myself and plan the visits

so that I didn't forget the dates and miss out. Over three years I saw work by Henri Matisse, Eric Ravilious, Canaletto and Rembrandt, visited Venice and Saffron Walden, Rome and Hexham. I walked along the top of Hadrian's Wall and the Norfolk

coast, sketched the changing light over the fells above Coniston and found – wonderfully and unexpectedly – an exhibition about the Hubble telescope in a Venetian palace by the Grand Canal.

So I was looking forward to 2020. It began well. In January I ran off to Delft, to see an exhibition of the paintings of Pieter de Hooch. After arriving on a grey early-closing day, rather to my alarm – was this going to be like three wet days in Oakham? – the exhibition was everything I'd hoped for and more, so much so that I bought another ticket and visited again two days later.

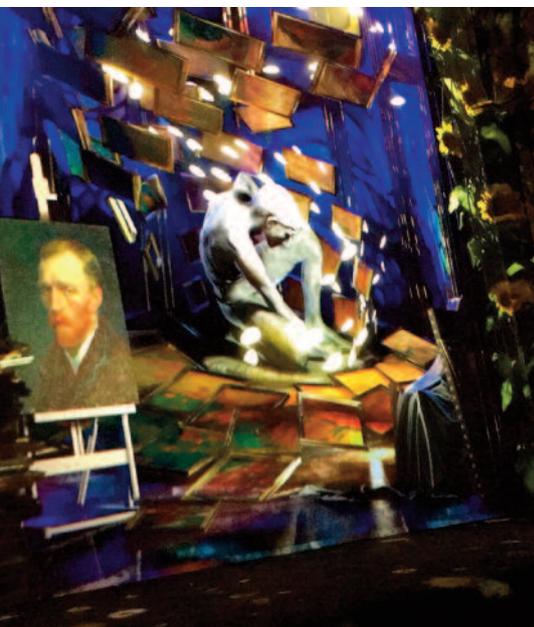
Delft was home to many painters in the 17th century, among them Vermeer – the painter of the Girl with a Pearl Earring – and Pieter de Hooch. They lived in Delft at the same time and they probably influenced one another; there are certainly similarities between some of their paintings, in subject matter and colours.



Vermeer is more famous, but De Hooch is my favourite. His style developed throughout his life, but his best-known works are domestic scenes, with lots of details of houses, furniture, clothes and utensils which tie in with my day to day work at Isaac Newton's house at Woolsthorpe, which dates from roughly the same period. There's a real sense of his paintings being glimpses into a larger life, with recognisable rooms, courtyards, Delft landmarks and even the people he used as models. Often there is a 'view through' – from a courtyard, through a passage, out into the street. You look through, to see what else is there, and there are always more details.

The frames neatly border the scenes, the people have their own lives, the painter shows what he sees, if not always in the place where it actually is – he's not taking photographs, so he can put things where they will make the best picture, or include particular buildings (slightly out of place) if he's been asked to show them by whoever commissions him. If anything, that adds to the experience, especially if you're wandering round Delft with postcards, trying to fit the scene to the buildings on the ground.

Throughout the week, the BBC World news showed scenes of China, darkly reporting on an illness coming out of Wuhan. By the time I came home, we were looking at one another on the plane, wondering, and trying not to cough.



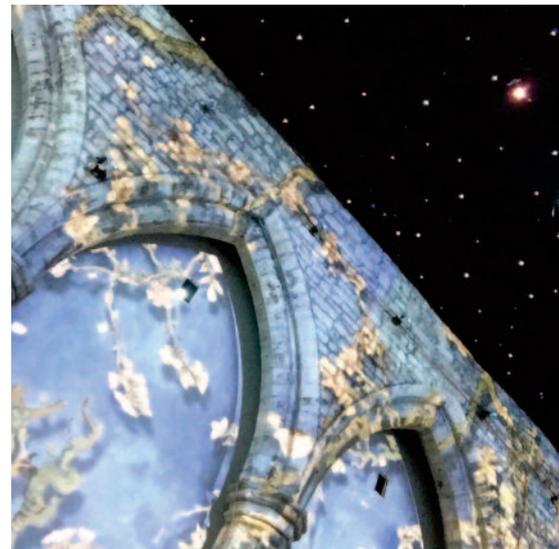
The next thing on the list was blessedly local: the 'Van Gogh Immersive Experience' at All Saints' Church in Leicester. It was clear from the website that this wouldn't be pictures hung on the wall, and so it proved.

All Saints is a redundant church, now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust and much-visited for its memorials, but for the exhibition the entrance was dimly lit and the arches of the nave filled with fabric so that the entire area could become a sort of screen for projecting – roof, walls, floor. It was like creeping into a cave full of colour.

A series of projectors in the roof sent Vincent's paintings across the walls and floors, and across the people sitting on benches at the back of the nave, and on the floor, round the walls and occasionally in the middle of the floor. The 35-minute 'show' played continuously, although there was a beginning and an end, but mostly people came in through the canvas and began to watch at any point, staying for as long as they liked, eventually creeping out through another flap.

I didn't know much more about Vincent Van Gogh than his later life: that he suffered with mental illness, cut his ear off and died after shooting himself; that like so many artists he wasn't recognised in his own lifetime. Some his pictures are seen as representing his disturbed state of mind – visions and madness in colours and swirls. Or did Vincent Van Gogh sometimes see things differently from everyone else?

All the famous paintings were there, and many lesser-known ones as well – monochrome drawings, sketches of figures, vases of flowers. A single painting would fill the whole space, sometimes reproduced many times, or extended digitally, so that a river flowing through the painting would overflow onto the floor and become a wide moving river through the nave, with those of us sitting not he floor suddenly finding our feet were in it! Sometimes landscapes were animated, with a train bustling through the picture. In a more sombre part of Vincent's story, the black crows in the cornfield took



flight and flapped ominously around the walls. A bleak drawing of a town in subdued colours darkened, then lightning flashed and rain began to fall, soaking the stones of the church, falling as huge raindrops with ripples across the floor. It was an illusion, all done with the lighting, but it was eerily real; people moved back against the walls so as not to get wet, except the children, who were out there jumping into the puddles and trying to catch the rain.

It was the same with the sunflowers blossoming across the floor, and the swirling stars escaping from their painting to surround the space and be chased by the children. A family came to sit by us, two parents and a child who might have had something like cerebral palsy; at first quite alarmed by the changing lights and images, but was suddenly entranced, she gradually emerged until she was dancing slowly across the floor among the swirling stars. She didn't seem to have any words, but the sounds she was making were unquestionably delight; and because we were with Van Gogh, who was already communicating wordlessly, it seemed to me that she was in exactly the right place, doing what many of us oldies would have liked to do.

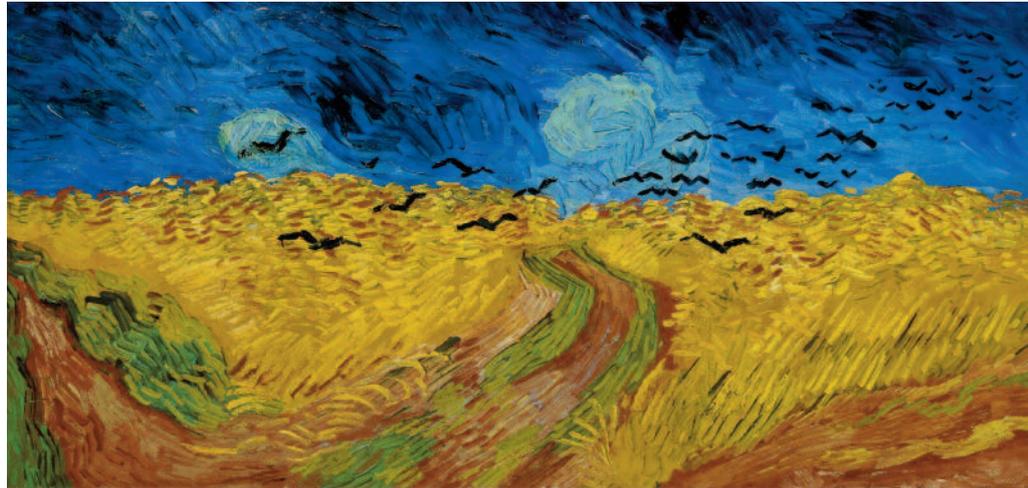
It wasn't all doom and gloom – many of Vincent's paintings are bright and vivid, because he had his times of optimism and satisfaction with what he was doing, and at one point the church was filled with the blues and pinks and whites of the cherry trees he painted when his brother's child was born. But the underlying wobble

kept emerging – images of paintings on the wall were torn out to reveal new paintings, showing a frantic body of work, and suddenly the waters flowed again, bursting out of the paintings in waves to flood the floor again. The crows broke out of their cornfield and flapped round our heads. Vincent's mental collapse was shown vividly with dollops of paint and a cascade of empty canvases. The whole thing was breathtaking, exciting and too much to take in at once, but in a good way.

The exhibition describes itself as 'the immersive experience' which is a phrase much used by people who work in exhibitions, whether art, heritage or science. It tends to mean that people will be drawn into the event through as many senses as reasonably possible, and even overwhelmed by it, as though just standing in front of a picture isn't enough. There's a place for both. For me, to see so many of Pieter de Hooch's works was overwhelming in itself, even in the buzz of a gallery full of people. The story of Van Gogh's life and the drama and energy of his work meant that even if I didn't come away from Leicester with an increased knowledge of the facts of his life (although there was also plenty of supporting information in the other parts of the exhibition), I certainly felt the excitement and beauty and despair, and found myself asking whether he saw things in a completely different way. I was bowled over.

While writing this I went back to the website, to jog my memory and to find out more about the background of the Van Gogh exhibition. It turns out that what was at Leicester (and also a church in York) is a smaller version of one in Paris during 2019, and the images of this are amazing – you can find them a review on the website of The Guardian for Tuesday 5 March 2019 'Immersive Van Gogh show opens in Paris' by Bríd Stenson (search for 'immersive Van Gogh Paris' – beware, there's another review of a different exhibition on the South Bank which the reviewer didn't like much).

The review of the Paris exhibition gives a flavour. But being in



that church in Leicester, surrounded by light and colour (and sound – there was a soundtrack of music I kept almost recognising, then losing again) was a million times better, even on a smaller scale. The internet can take us anywhere we want to go, and virtual reality headsets and audio guides can show us anything. But nothing beats the real thing, and sharing our experiences with other people.

May it be safe enough to go out again soon.

Note: *The Van Gogh Exhibition – The Immersive Experience* will run at All Saints, Leicester and St Mary's, York until 31 August 2020. For details see vangoghexpo.co.uk

Images: Vincent Van Gogh – *Wheatfield with Crows*/Wikimedia Commons (above); Pieter de Hooch – *The Courtyard of a house in Delft*/Wikimedia Commons (below); other images Ann Blackett



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Cooking With Children

Beryl Kirtland

Teaching children to cook is one of the best gifts you can give them. Where did I learn my love of cooking without any lessons at school or formal training? I have to say, 'at home'.

I was a child during wartime and the period of rationing which followed, but thankfully my mother was an excellent cook. A pioneer in working from home, she ran the Post Office and village shop from the family house. We had the benefit of produce from an allotment, chickens in part of the garden and fruit from trees and hedgerows. As we lived in a small village milk, bread and ordered essentials were delivered. Local farmers helped and shared. Meals were home cooked from basics every day and the large family sat round the table for each and every meal. Helping was not an option. Being the oldest child meant much fell to me, be it preparing vegetables, mixing a cake, rolling the pastry or tasting the gravy.

These life skills have led me to cook for many – including some of you readers – to design and deliver wholefood cookery courses for adults, help run a private cookery school, teach food and nutrition in school, become a Sainsbury's Food Advisor and Demonstrator and enjoy cooking for my own large family.

Nostalgia, yes, but, oh, what an education and what a comparison to the coronavirus lockdown! If stay-at-home school children have been lucky enough to have been taught some cooking skills, how lucky they are! Society and lifestyle has drastically changed since I was a child, and health and nutritional information and some practical skills are now widely available via schools, TV and the internet. Sharing and showing have not changed.



Try These

Here are two recipes you might like to try with children. Supervision is a must when children work with knives, the cooker and other equipment.

For cooking as part of a meal, try preparing **Couscous**. This is very easy and quick, and it can be used in many versatile ways. You will need:

- 100g couscous
- 200ml hot vegetable stock (cube is fine)
- 2 spring onions
- 1 red pepper (seeds removed)
- ½ cucumber
- 50g feta cheese
- 2tbsp pesto
- 2tbsp toasted pine nuts or chopped parsley or basil

Tip the couscous into a large bowl and pour over the hot stock. Cover and leave for 10 minutes until fluffy and all the stock has been absorbed. Meanwhile slice the onions and pepper and dice the cucumber. Add them to the couscous when it is ready and mix gently using a fork. Add the pesto, mix it through, and crumble in the feta cheese.

To finish, sprinkle over the pine nuts or chopped herbs. Can be used on its own or as an accompaniment to salad, cooked chicken breast, ham, cooked salmon, etc. It is also good for lunch boxes.

An alternative way to prepare couscous: chop a selection of vegetables (onion, garlic, carrot, peas, courgette, sweetcorn etc) and cook in the stock. Add the couscous to the pan when the veg are cooked. Take off the heat, cover the pan and leave to stand for 10 minutes or until the couscous is as you like it.

A treat! **Fork Biscuits** (makes 16–18).

- 125g (4oz) butter, softened
- 50g (2oz) caster sugar
- 1tsp vanilla essence
- 150g (5oz) self-raising flour

Heat oven to 190°C/170°C fan/gas mark 5

Put butter in bowl, gradually beat in the sugar with a wooden spoon until smooth. Add vanilla essence and gradually stir in the flour. With floured hands, divide the dough into pieces the size of a walnut and roll into balls. Put them onto two baking sheets spaced well apart. Flatten the balls out into disks using a fork dipped in water, pressing down to make a pattern. Bake 10–15 minutes until golden. Using a spatula lift the biscuits on to a wire rack to cool. If the biscuits are still soft in the middle don't worry they will harden as they cool.

Have fun!

Developing a New School in Kenya

Geraldine Feehally

'Education is the one thing that cannot be taken from me'
Penninah, schoolgirl, 12 years old, from the Maasai Mara.

After school closures we might read this article in a different way...
A member of All Saints Oakham reflects on a special experience.

It's 2010 and I am a volunteer teacher in an isolated primary school in the Maasai Mara among the flat-topped acacia trees, the waving grasses and astonishing wild animals, birds and flowers of the savannah that the tourists flock to experience. But by living and teaching in a small isolated rural settlement near the gates of the Maasai Mara National Game Reserve, I quickly become aware of the future drudgery and dependence that the girls in this marginalised, traditional Maasai community face.

The top class of the primary school had thirteen boys but only five girls in it – the others have already left school to be married to a man who might be two or three times their age, to bear children as 13 and 14-year-olds and to live an impoverished life on little more than \$2 a day.

How could Penninah and her school friends realise their talents and have hope for a different and better future?



Maasai girls ready to perform a traditional dance

Nelson Mandela's observation that 'Education is the greatest weapon you can use to change the world' suggests the answer: extend the possibility for these girls to be in school to complete their education to a good standard. By building a local girls' school with full boarding facilities, providing responsible teachers who mentor their students and giving the girls vocational and

social experiences that cultivate their talents, interests and skills, the students can make their own choices about their futures.

Over the past nine years as Director of Teaching and Training for Educating The Children (a small UK-based not-for-profit NGO) I have been the project manager commissioned to establish the first secondary school for girls in the Maasai Mara, using funds raised in the UK to put up the first phase of buildings.

Developing partnerships and building trust were essential from the beginning to make this a sustainable project, so listening, sharing responsibility and including representatives from wide range of community, local businesses and county government officers has been very important. Jointly made decisions are often achieved slowly using this approach but they are always good ones. Encouragement from the community and the full support of county education officers along with God-given health and energy to live and work in a low



School assembly



Volleyball

resource area of Kenya with little physical infrastructure has empowered us all. Since every meeting begins with the Maasai tradition of extended greetings followed by prayer, we have learned together to trust God as we step out

Maasai man what he thought about developing a girls' school and not a school for boys he replied, 'I want to marry an educated lady, one who is not my problem but will become my partner to make a difference to our lives.'

At Sekenani Girls' High School girls safely complete their studies and gain skills, knowledge and understanding in preparation for economically independent and healthy adult lives. Full-time boarding facilities at the school reduce the risk of genital mutilation, HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy. By living at school, the girls have sufficient food and clean water and the necessary resources for sleep and study. Students are very grateful for the chance to make something of their

lives through education, and they are able and ready to work hard for it as they make lasting friendships and supportive networks that will encourage their positive future choices.

Managing people and partnerships, community trust and expectation, is demanding but intensely satisfying. It is a special privilege to work with the local Maasai community and to see them grow as their vision is being realised. But it is also exciting to serve God knowing we are make a difference for His people in Kenya.

When at the very beginning of this project, I told a young Maasai woman that I felt I was standing at the bottom of a very steep mountain and that I might struggle to get to



the top she replied immediately, 'But you're not travelling alone, we're all coming with you, and our Most High God is leading the way.' And so He is, bringing hope and pride to Sekenani and their daughters, sisters, aunts and mothers... now and for generations to come.

with a new Sekenani community vision, loaded with difficulties and risks. God's just-in-time logistics has always delivered what we needed when we needed it and through His guidance, challenges have been resolved and wise decisions taken.

Five years after the first building phase began, Sekenani Girls' High School is a successful, sustainable school of 240 students who would not otherwise receive a secondary education. This year the pioneer girls who first entered the school took their Kenyan national exams. Five of the fifteen students achieved university places, a further seven are on university-based diploma courses and all of them are qualified for employment. When I asked a young



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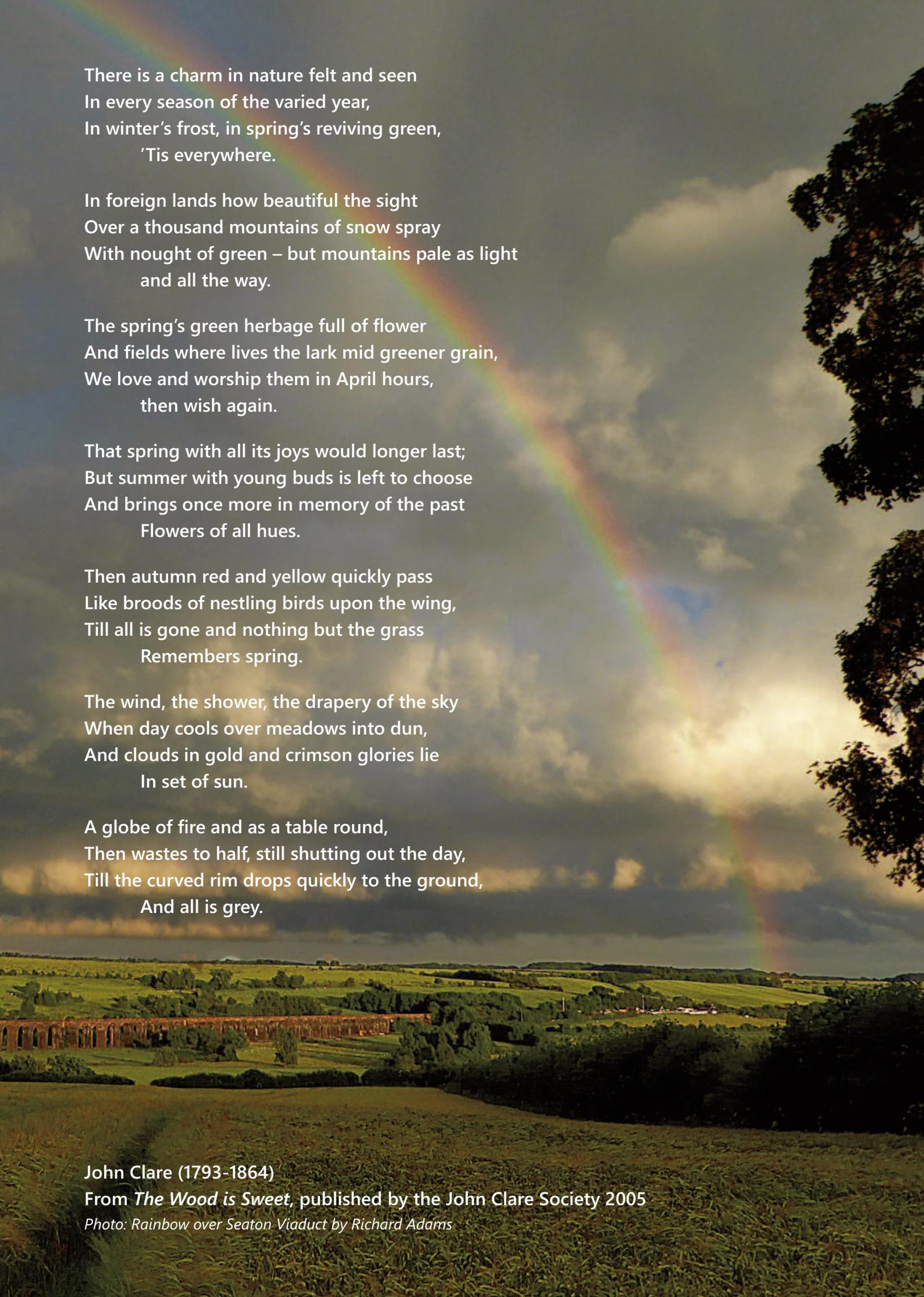
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A landscape photograph showing a valley with rolling green hills. In the foreground, there is a field of tall grass. In the middle ground, a long, low stone viaduct with many arches stretches across the valley. The background features more green hills under a dramatic sky with dark, heavy clouds and a bright rainbow arching across it. The sun is visible through the clouds, creating a golden glow. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and man-made infrastructure.

There is a charm in nature felt and seen
In every season of the varied year,
In winter's frost, in spring's reviving green,
 'Tis everywhere.

In foreign lands how beautiful the sight
Over a thousand mountains of snow spray
With nought of green – but mountains pale as light
 and all the way.

The spring's green herbage full of flower
And fields where lives the lark mid greener grain,
We love and worship them in April hours,
 then wish again.

That spring with all its joys would longer last;
But summer with young buds is left to choose
And brings once more in memory of the past
 Flowers of all hues.

Then autumn red and yellow quickly pass
Like broods of nestling birds upon the wing,
Till all is gone and nothing but the grass
 Remembers spring.

The wind, the shower, the drapery of the sky
When day cools over meadows into dun,
And clouds in gold and crimson glories lie
 In set of sun.

A globe of fire and as a table round,
Then wastes to half, still shutting out the day,
Till the curved rim drops quickly to the ground,
 And all is grey.

John Clare (1793-1864)

From *The Wood is Sweet*, published by the John Clare Society 2005

Photo: Rainbow over Seaton Viaduct by Richard Adams

Voice for Life in Langham

Margaret Foot

Have you ever been drawn to joining the choir, but can't read the dots? That can be changed – read on!

I would like 10p for each time I have heard 'Can't sing a note. Even got thrown out of the school choir' – I'd be rich by now. Nonsense! Everyone who wants to sing, can sing. One of the worst 'growlers' I ever heard asked if she could join our Benefice choir in Norfolk. Not because she wanted to sing, but because her church was unrepresented. Usually delighted to have anyone keen, this time, I was just a bit worried. She promised to sit in the choir, open her mouth and not actually sing. However, after about a year of help she was one of the best sopranos in the choir!

Our welcome into Langham church eight years ago was wonderful. But, to my disappointment there was no longer a choir there. At first I tried dividing myself between Langham services and Oakham choir, but one day a discussion over coffee at Langham resulted in several of the congregation saying they would join a choir – if there were one. Having run a benefice choir in Norfolk for decades, the challenge was irresistible. I'm not musically trained as such, but have played piano and

flute and sung in church choirs for ever. I took up the organ when we had a dearth of organists, learning under a scheme in Norwich, and attended a Saturday course in conducting at the University. Here in Langham, we started with six ladies, all able to sing in tune, and a bass. Cash-strapped as are most churches, our robes were initially from a pile of disused ones in my cupboard. At first, I feared – unnecessarily as it turned out – the choir would interfere with worship. After a couple of years, Kevin, Team Choir Director, covered for me when on holiday and from there the choir started working as part of the Oakham Team.

We needed new robes, anthem and hymn books. A couple of years of hard fund-raising bore fruit. We now have all three and enough for other needs. Neville Favell, a gifted pianist, kindly did a concert in Langham sharing the proceeds with the Methodists. We did a breakfast, a number of teas and refreshments for the Street Fair and many church events. Fortunately we have some good cooks! Also we won first prize for best tree in the Christmas Tree festival.

The voices in the choir were good, really good, but our knowledge of music theory more mixed. For those of us brought up with it, written music is easy to read; otherwise it could be Polynesian Greek. However, even a little knowledge helps a lot, and there is a lot of help available, including the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) which has an excellent training scheme available to all Christian denominations

Voice for Life is a training programme based in a series of books, which is dedicated to improving the quality of singing, progressing as far as the individual choir member would like. Completion of each stage is marked by a medal and ribbon coloured according to the level completed. Absolute beginners can start *Voice for Life* with white and progress through pale blue, dark blue, red, and yellow, although a singer can join the scheme at any level. There are also RSCM Singer's Awards, with a different medal: Bronze (green ribbon), Silver (purple ribbon) and Gold (red ribbon). The *Voice for Life* levels are assessed within the Team choir, usually by Kevin, making it more of an achievement. Bronze and Silver are assessed by an independent professional musician in a regional venue. Gold is tested at a national centre and is outstanding. Why on earth, one asks, put adults through such hoops? Does it really help? The answer is a resounding 'yes'. Just looking at the blank faces when the director says 'It's just a minor third,' or 'it's B flat' – or any one of the myriad small music directions which are so natural to a music reader, shows how much it helps to know a little. But above all the experience gives confidence and the voices improve so much. Our original six all worked at singing, theory and musical understanding, combined with a knowledge of the



history and use of church music. They all were awarded their pale blue ribbons. It helped us to tackle different music and each one found it so much easier to learn new hymns and anthems.

Inevitably since then some have retired due to illness and age. Others have joined and have welcomed the *Voice for Life* course. We still have a robust choir. A good way of recruiting new members is to ask any newcomer if they like singing. It works! Currently this is difficult as our church was without heating all winter and combined with the COVID-19 closures we have not been meeting potential new choir members.

Another choir member had sung in another place – he was a ‘growler’ probably a couple of octaves below anyone else, but he had no idea at all of how to follow music. Once he understood what all the Polynesian Greek on the page actually meant he rapidly moved forward and is now a

very competent bass both in Langham and in the Team choir. He achieved his dark blue ribbon quickly and is now working for the Bronze Award – which will give him a lot of work but no problems. Two members already have this. It involves an advanced knowledge of theory, an ability to sing partly unaccompanied a hymn, a psalm and an anthem, an understanding in detail of composers, appropriate music for services and being a useful member of one’s own choir. We are also proud to have the only red ribbon now in the Team. This demands a very high understanding of the theory of music, voice production and a good ear. She is now working for her yellow ribbon and the Silver Award.

The choir has a social life - in normal times we have a coffee/training day each month where other members of the Team have joined us to move forward in both in learning and

confidence.

No article about Langham choir would be complete without reference to the Team choir ‘Laudamus’, made up of members from Langham, Market Overton, Oakham and Whissendine choirs. Many of us attend both our own practice and the Team practice weekly. We all sing together on fifth Sundays, a monthly Evensong, special occasions such as Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, funerals, weddings and carol services. Kevin Slingsby is responsible for the Team Choir. Other team members also have ribbons and three have Bronze medals.

Singing in church is to worship, whether in congregation or choir. The choir’s remit is to assist the congregation in worship, not to perform. We hope and pray we will continue to fulfil this role and others will join us.

Photograph of Langham Choir by Susan Holford

Rob Anderson

Churchwarden of All Saints’ Church Braunston

Beryl Kirtland

Getting to know a churchwarden was certainly more of a challenge during the COVID-19 lockdown. Fortunately I chose a person competent with technology and so I am able to bring you something of the life and work of the valued churchwarden of All Saints’ Church, Braunston, Rob Anderson.

Rob was born and grew up in the small town of Horsforth, a few miles west of Leeds. Due to the fact that Rob’s father had come from Northern Ireland at the age of eleven with very clear memories of the religious situation there, he was not inclined to be involved in a church. Hence Rob’s main childhood contact with religion was the daily assembly at primary school and then at state Grammar School, both of which had little impact on him.

Enjoying Grammar School immensely, with a leaning to maths and science and the support of his

chemistry teacher, Rob got a place at Christ’s College, Cambridge, to read Engineering. In the late 60s, Rob’s time in the sixth form was particularly enjoyable, not least because he started going out with Pat, the girl who was to become his wife. Christianity passed him by at Cambridge.

Married and working for a major British oil company, Pat and Rob lived in the large village of Swanland, near Hull. When their first daughter was born they wanted to have her christened but without really understanding what it meant. They went to visit the local vicar who explained what it did mean and suggested that they might like to do a course at the church. Through that and with understanding they committed their lives to Christ.

Three of their four children were born in East Yorkshire, with the family belonging to a growing church of



about 200 members. Rob led a youth group. Pat became a home group leader and took a lead in a toddler group. For two years Rob became a churchwarden, during which time he experienced an interregnum. For seven or eight years they enjoyed a fantastic time of fellowship in Swanland with the vicar who led them to Christ, being one of the most influential people in the development of his spiritual life and who is a lifelong friend.

Rob's career has taken him, Pat and the children to many places: East Sussex for four years, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia for five years, Windlesham in Surrey for two years, and Jakarta in Indonesia. They worshipped in local churches and in a really active International Church where they made friends from all over the world. Their growing children needed to have a stable education, so Rob and Pat considered a UK boarding school as considered to be the best option – hence the start of the association with Oakham School and the local area.

A job in London involved much international travel, so the family based themselves in Stamford for five years, where they became regular worshippers at St George's and made many local friends. However, life abroad had not ended! A posting to Stavanger in Norway led to three idyllic years with everyone being able to enjoy summer hill walking, fjords and beaches and winter skiing but plenty of travelling back and forth for Pat to see children still at school here in Oakham.

In 2004, they sold their house in the UK and found and moved into their current house in Braunston whilst still in Norway! Rob continued to travel quite a lot and Pat became involved in the church. 2007–2010 saw an interesting time in Russia for both Rob and Pat, but the second Russian winter meant that Pat decided it was time for her to spend more time in the UK. Back in Braunston, she soon went onto the PCC, taking on the role of treasurer, a role she still fulfils to this day. By 2010, Rob decided to retire into a more settled lifestyle in Braunston. Increasingly involved in the church, he took over as one of the churchwardens in 2015. By attending church, via the pub and Village Hall events the family have made many friends in the welcoming village.

Rob's favourite service happens once a year, the Christmas Eve village nativity, Journey to Jesus. All Saints' Church is absolutely packed with standing room only and most of the village is there. There is a real sense of expectancy signalling the start of Christmas creating a true perspective on what the festival is all about. The event moves from the church to the (village) inn, via the shepherds in fields and Herod's palace, to the stable at the Village Hall where a real baby seems to be available every year!

With an engineering and project management background it has been easy for Rob to pursue some of the projects needed for the church, both fundraising and repairs. A major issue has been

dealing with the sudden massive migration of bats into the church threatening to make the church unusable. Working with the other churchwarden, Sue Willetts, to research the national situation they were able to join the Heritage Lottery funded 'Bats in Churches project'. Three years later, after much documentation and physical work, the sponsorship has enabled the 600–700 bats in the church roof to coexist with the life of the church (or vice versa)!

Another challenge during the last three to four years, over what has effectively been an extended period of interregnum, has been how to keep church activities going.

Away from his churchwarden and trustee of Braunston and Brooke Village Hall commitments, Rob enjoys golf, hill walking, theatre, travel (now preferring the UK and Europe) and cooking. All of the four children are now married with five grandchildren

demanding plenty of time. A forever busy person!

I enquired with whom Rob would most like to have dinner. His response was Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who he considered was one of the greatest and most pioneering engineer and project manager of all time. Another guest would be Capability Brown – Rob would love to hear about all of the commissions he had and how he visualised the landscapes he created. Reflecting the saying, 'you are nearest to God in a garden', Rob felt there is some truth in that.

To summarise such an interesting person's life, their journey with Christ, working and living round the world, bringing up a family and now being an effective part of village life in rural Rutland does not do the man justice, a man I have yet to meet face to face. Thank you Rob for making this article possible in the strange times in which we are currently living.



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