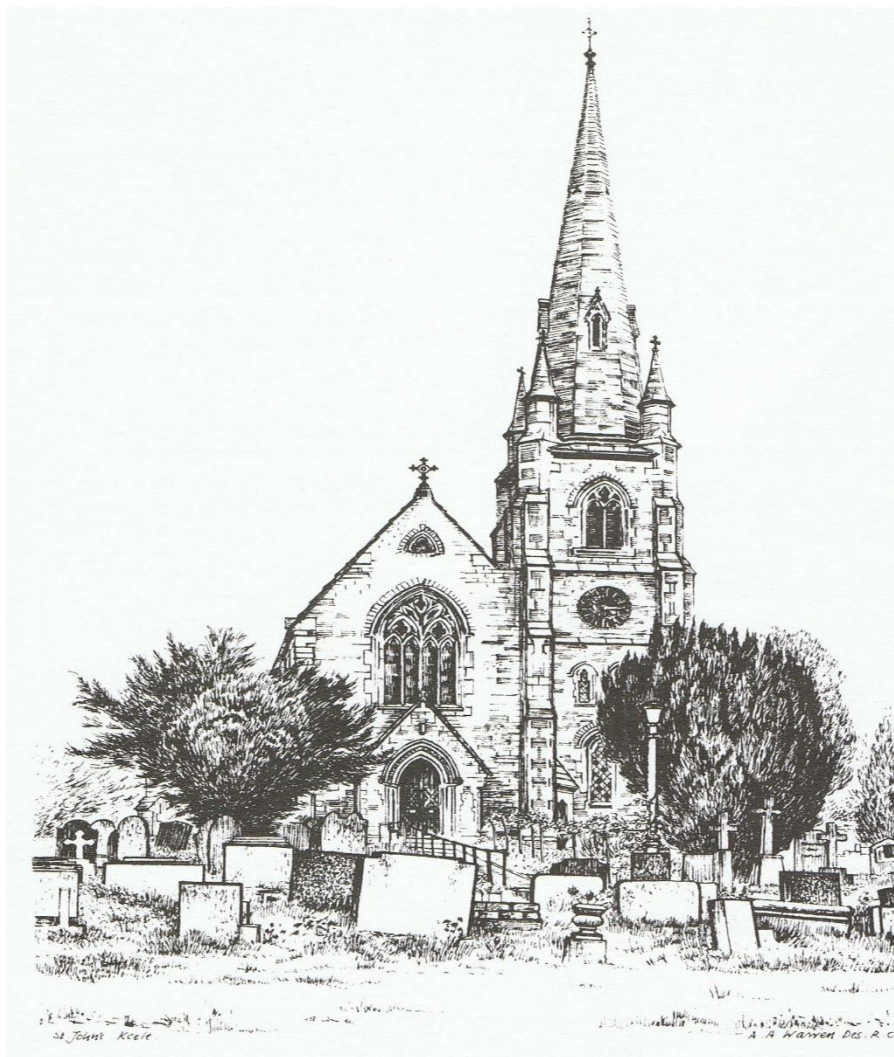


# PARISH MAGAZINE



## St. John the Baptist Church Keele

June 2020

50p

# **Worship at St John's**

**All public worship in the Church of England is currently suspended until further notice.**

**Please consult the Church of England website or the website of the Diocese of Lichfield for up-to-date information.**



**We are in this together**

**Our prayers are with you all**

# From the Vicar's Desk

*The Vicar writes ...*

Our national (not to say international) lockdown continues, though with some let-up. As our isolation continues we see the strange appearance of new experts in the fields of microbiology and virology not letting their near-total (and sometimes total lack of training in the relevant sciences) cause them to think so much as once about pontificating on matters about which they know nothing. And I hear these experts almost every day. Here are a few of the choicest gems I've been treated to recently:

*It's from China. They bred it in a lab. Someone dropped a test-tube and now it's been let loose.*

*It's because we're not buying British! We've imported it with our foreign food!*

*No good will ever come by travelling abroad.*

*Enoch was right: it's immigration what's done this*

And there are variations on these themes, as well as other vouchsafed announcements of inspired ignorance. All very predictable in a way, and all very sad, not least after – what? – more than 70 years of free education in this country! Mistaken opinions like ‘coronavirus is new’ are understandable; ‘this virus will wipe out the white race’ is unforgivable.

Just as our global misfortunes have generated this burgeoning of pseudo- and barrack-room scientists, so we have witnessed (or at least I have) a veritable epidemic of people who (again, not letting their lack of training, knowledge, or understanding cause them pause) have pontificated that ‘the virus’ is God’s way of getting rid of bad people’. The drivel plays on that theme. Sometimes the focus of God’s viral wrath is unspecified (I have yet to meet someone who includes herself among the unworthy recipients of God’s viral wrath – it’s always someone else) but occasionally the usual suspects are singled out for ‘special treatment’, chief among them homosexuals.

As you know, I'm available to anyone who wants to know how all of this really is the product of fear and foolishness – seriously, I am. Barrack-room theology like barrack-room science (or barrack-room anything) arises from people isolating themselves from reason, knowledge, and understanding, taking claustrophobic refuge instead in fear, foolishness, ignorance, and the need to blame. Here, then, I want to draw just the following to your attention:

1. God is the creator – of vultures, no less than of doves; of sharks no less than of goldfish; of the beauty of microscopic viruses and bacteria. And we experience all these.
2. It is not quite the case that, once upon a time, people did not have the benefits of science, so they 'invented' gods and daemons. It isn't merely that the ancient world was at a loss to understand the world until proper science came along. What paganism suffered/suffers from is that its understanding, explanation, and response to the world is grounded in false principles. The world of natural kinds is neither a master to be feared and obeyed, nor a tool to be deployed, nor a slave to be exploited and to obey – this is the legacy of paganism, and its contemporary expressions are to be found in petty vandalisms as much as in global despoliation of the 'environment'.
3. God does not 'save' us by lifting us from the limitations and dangers of the natural world but by creating us as part of it and by endowing us with capacities by which we might live more creatively and responsibly.

Through all this pandemic we need to keep hold of a sense of the world as God-given ... and, of course, to respond to covid-19 victims with compassion and kindness – whoever they are.

Fr Peter Jones

# The Diocesan Pastoral Letter

## Archdeacon Matthew's pastoral letter for June 2020

In May the Government changed its messaging on Coronavirus from 'Stay at home' to 'Stay alert'. This new slogan has received mixed reviews. Some think it is a bracing call to common sense and personal responsibility; others that it is just vague and confusing. Needless to say, *Twitter* had strong views on the matter. I make no judgement here on all that, but I do want to commend the practice of being alert. Throughout the Scriptures, God's people are called to stay alert – not in an exhausting and fearful state of high anxiety but in a posture of prayerful attentiveness to God.

Jesus warns his disciples to be "be alert at all times" to the coming judgement of God. St Paul writes to the Corinthian church and says, "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." Christians are not only to be alert to potential threats (like a virus) but also to the challenge of faithfully living out the Gospel in the world.

So how might we need to be alert in these times of pandemic?

As those who love God with our heart, soul, strength and mind, we must be, above all, alert to what God is saying to us and to the Church and to the world.

Many of us have found ourselves re-evaluating our lives in recent days. Some of us have had our faith in God tested; others have found that we have had more time to reflect on matters of the Spirit. What has God been saying to you in, and through, the challenges of this present time? Perhaps, we will want to live differently as a result of this crisis because we have learnt afresh that our sure hope lies not in our possessions or our job or our health but in the God who is with us even to the end of the age. Perhaps we have rediscovered, in new ways, the value of the God-given gifts of family, friends and community? Is this a "teachable moment" and am I alert to what God wants to say to me?

And as those who are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves, are we alert to the ways in which this crisis is laying bare, in sharp ways, the profound inequalities that scar our society?

NHS staff, delivery drivers, care home workers, supermarket staff, cleaners - many of whom are paid a pittance and whose work is undervalued - are now revealed as essential life savers. To our shame, we are not surprised to learn that you are twice as likely to die of Covid19 if you live in an area of high deprivation. This pandemic is bad news for all of us but it is especially so if we are poor, sick, lonely or homeless. Perhaps we were not sufficiently alert to these things. Are we now? Much of what once passed for 'normal' is now exposed as cynical, cruel and unjust. Are we now alert to the possibility of creating a society that more fully anticipates the joy and hope of God's coming Kingdom?

"Stay alert!" There is nothing vague or confusing about the Biblical command to have hearts that are receptive and attentive to the movement of the Spirit. God is passionately, intimately and fully engaged with the world in this time of change and challenge.

So here's the message: Stay alert to God – love your neighbour – change the world.

*The Ven Matthew Parker  
Archdeacon of Stoke*

Stay alert to God  
Love your neighbour  
Change the world

# Belfry Bat

It's been a week of sad news. In addition to Peter Jones' father, we heard on April 15th of the death of David Beckett, a ringer at Betley since the bells were restored in the 1970s. For a number of years he was a member of Newcastle Borough Council, serving as Mayor and also masterminding a spectacular improvement in recycling rates.

On the morning of April 19<sup>th</sup> we did what we always do on a Sunday morning. Just like last week, we rang the bells in our garage for five minutes. On Monday we received both good and bad news. In the morning an email from editor Diane announced that she was getting married later in the day, and in the afternoon I heard that Dan Viggars had died. He learned to ring at Silverdale when a teenager in the 1960s, but the band didn't last very long. He came back to ringing in the early 1980s as a result of meeting the St John's band in the Sneyd Arms after our practice and his working day in Hawthorns refectory. He was a loyal and valued member of the band until ill health forced him to stop ringing about ten years ago. We won't be able to ring for his funeral, but will arrange memorial ringing when we are able to. As I type this Ro has come to tell me that today's post has delivered a £25 Premium Bond prize. We sold most of our bonds a few years ago to fund our photovoltaic roof panels, which give a much more predictable return, but it's nice to get an occasional windfall from the remaining ones.

I heard last week from the organisers of the CountryFile Live event, to be held in Windsor Great Park in August, that they would like the mobile belfry to be there, but they have no budget to pay for it. We had already decided that this August would be too soon, but we are going to look at ways of raising the money for next year using the Staffordshire Show as a prototype. At this event, the two ringing societies in the county share the cost and staff the belfry for a day each, and I think that given that Windsor Great Park is at the convergence of five ringing societies, the same might be possible there.

On April 21<sup>st</sup> I started the mower for the first time in over a year, and managed to cut the back lawn before it ran out of petrol because of a leaking fuel pipe. On April 24<sup>th</sup> the replacement fuel pipe arrived, together with the new tyres I had also ordered. It could also do with a new blade.

Grandfather's hammer comes to mind! There is a story, possibly apocryphal, that clarinettist Acker Bilk, who taught himself to play while doing jankers in the army, assembled a duplicate instrument by ordering spare parts a few at a time. Not cost-effective if you have to pay for the parts, as it is well-known that manufacturers have a much higher profit margin on spares than complete items.

We rang three bells in the garage on Sunday April 26<sup>th</sup>, with a slightly more ambitious repertoire than last week as a result of some practice by me ringing two bells. Back in the autumn when we ordered three new bell ropes, we were given April as the delivery date, and they made it - just. The new ropes arrived on April 27<sup>th</sup>, but we won't need to use them for quite a while, as the current set are in good order after refurbishment last year.

April 29<sup>th</sup> was our fortnightly shopping day, with three lists – one for us, one for Lyndsey, and one for the food bank, which we now have to leave at Sainsbury's instead of Keele Chapel. The recent rain has replenished our pond slightly, but more is needed.

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, having fitted the new fuel pipe, I was able to cut grass in the orchard, but not the whole of it. We have decided to leave about half of the area uncut, with paths of short grass, in the hope that a wildflower meadow will emerge. May 1<sup>st</sup> was chainsaw day. I cut down a dead pear tree and cut up a fallen apple branch, then attacked the coppiced willow in the orchard, which was overdue for cutting. A good morning's work, which left me quite weary. On the following morning we cleared up most of the cuttings, leaving the orchard looking quite tidy. On Sunday we did our usual five minutes of ringing before I embarked on more tidying of cuttings, this time the coppiced hazel. I am bundling up the small stuff for pea sticks, and will offer them on Freecycle.

My son Simon and his wife Tina have written a book on handbell ringing, and our copy arrived in the post on Tuesday. A substantial (200 pages) book, well written, beautifully produced and sold through Amazon – they decided they didn't want their spare bedroom to be full of books. It includes photos of all three sets of handbells we have in our house – one American, one Dutch and one made by me from servants' bells. There is also a photo of a set of angklung, which are Indonesian instruments made from bamboo and sometimes used to do change ringing.



By noon on Wednesday it was once again possible, for the first time in over a week, to approach the orchard by going down the steps from the drive. On Friday I cut more grass in the orchard, which is now in better shape than at any time in living memory.

Like I suspect many of you, I have been doing quite a lot of reading including a number of murder mysteries by Ngaio March and Gladys Mitchell, both new to me. Then this week I bought Mike Brearley's *On Cricket*, a collection of essays covering players, matches and controversies. It is excellent, and by the time you read this, will be available to be borrowed. VE Day should have been an occasion for commemorative ringing, but not much was done. A few churches tolled a single bell, usually 75 blows. The latest guidance from dioceses on what is permitted is not entirely consistent, but Lichfield is clear that only the incumbent, or a churchwarden if there is no incumbent, may enter the church.

The rain on Saturday evening was very welcome, and our water butts and pond are now brim full. On Sunday morning we did our usual Sunday ringing, and later in the morning the first bundle of pea sticks was collected. All six have been taken.

Phil Gay





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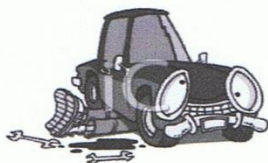
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## Toad in a Hole!

We think of June as the month for flowers and butterflies but spare a thought for the amphibians which may rely on your churchyard. Wait a minute, amphibians; frogs, toads and newts, don't they live in ponds?

No, they don't, they breed in ponds, laying the distinctive jelly-covered spawn, but actually spend much of the year on land. Unlike reptiles, amphibians need to keep their skin moist so you may find them sheltering in shaded areas, perhaps under deadwood or amongst old leaves. The base of a stone wall is a great place to look for amphibians and also slowworms, hunting in longer vegetation for slugs, snails, beetles, worms and other invertebrates.

Frogs have such a porous skin that they can change colour depending on their surroundings. A frog which has hibernated in an area of clay will emerge in spring coloured quite a bright orange.

Churchyards are brilliant for amphibians as they contain lots of nooks and crannies for them to shelter in and hunt for food. Walls, shaded wooded areas, rotting leaves and also the gaps that appear beside monuments or the cracks within chest tombs or other larger memorials. In addition, they are free of the burden of garden and farmland chemicals such as slug killers, insecticides and fertilisers that are so commonly used elsewhere. These affect the animals via the food they eat and also get absorbed by their sensitive skin.

To help amphibians, try not to be too tidy! Keep some areas of long and tussocky grassland, pile up dead wood and loose stones into heaps. A compost bay is a great source of food and shelter.

All the best

Harriet Carty,

*Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor, [harriet@cfga.org.uk](mailto:harriet@cfga.org.uk)*

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# Greetings from Arizona

Dear all,

Yes I'm still here! Luckily, I tolerate hot weather which is just as well as we are experiencing temperatures of 100 F and rising. A few days ago we hit 104 F (40 C) and we're expecting it to reach 108 F over the next few days.

Currently there is a very warm breeze blowing which puts me in mind of an African Sirocco!

Eating out on the terrace, (rear deck!) in the evenings is a treat. Not just because of the warmth and good food but being able to gaze up at the stars in the clear night sky. I'm getting quite keen on astrology and am improving at recognising individual stars as well as the constellations.

Still plenty of wild life to keep a sharp look out for but so far, all I've seen of the rattlesnakes is the imprints they leave in the sandy soil. About a month ago, before the temperature rose significantly, we did find some of the non-venomous variety within the walled garden. We were catching about one a day then releasing them so that they could carry on with their job of keeping the rodent population down! Most of the critters are keeping out of the sun now, though the rabbits and jack rabbits still seem to be around quit a bit. And the Coyotes of course – they are still plentiful and making quite a racket at night!

The birds are well worth watching on the feeders. Among the ones that I have only seen here are the Hummingbirds, Red Birds, Mockingbirds etc. to name but a few, but the most striking has been the Indigo bunting that certainly lives up to its name when you see it (though apparently it is all black until the sun shines on it!) Also, the Blue Grosbeak, which is similar to the bunting but with brown stripes on its wings. Our resident Curved-bill Thrashers are on their third brood this year. They nest in the Cholla cactus by the front door and so far they have reared two sets of twins and now they have triplets that hatched a few days ago. The Quail continue to amuse us with their 'clockwork' legs, as do the roadrunners always chasing lizards etc. Apparently, they also catch and eat Rattlesnakes!

Social distancing is pretty easy here as everyone on this road has an 8 acre plot and there are only twelve houses – all at least 100 ft away from their property lines! We keep in touch with friends and neighbours by phone regularly, and by Zoom and facetime with family. Isn't technology amazing!

Love to you all, Diane

## Church Officers

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**NB Articles for the magazine should be sent to the editor by the 12th of the preceding month.**

