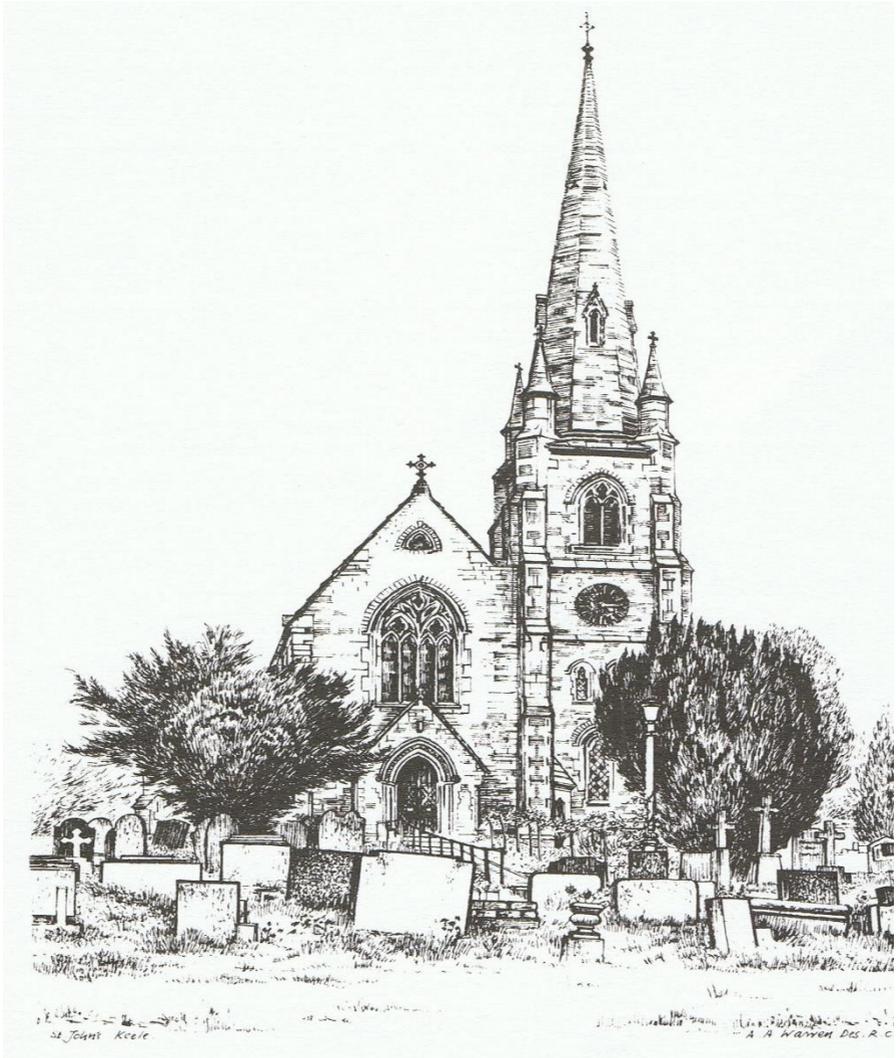


PARISH MAGAZINE



St. John the Baptist Church Keele

February 2021

50p

Worship at St John's

Please note that, from Sunday 17th January 2021 through to and including Sunday 21st February, 2021, public worship is suspended. At present this does not affect our ability to hold funeral services in Church.

We look forward to the time when we will all be able to worship together as before. Meanwhile, we hold you in our prayers always.

Stay safe

From the Vicar's Desk

As far as the Magazine is concerned, my 'desk' has been silent for several months, three of which were during my Sabbatical (the first ever leave for extended study I have asked for in over 30 years as a priest!). I want to thank those who have kept faith with what has been possible for our common life since March last year – not least (if you allow me to mention only a few) Nigel, Janet, Rick, Angela, Steve, Sandra, and Sarah. In several and different ways they have ensured that things were kept afloat, alive, and (in some way) thriving. And you too have had a part in this; so thank-you too.

It's far too early for a dullard like me to make anything approaching sensible comment on what started in this country in March 2020 and looks set to continue to and beyond this March – but you might want to place an order for +Rowan Williams' latest book of daily reflections upon the experiences of living in the midst of a pandemic: *Candles in the Dark: Faith, Hope, and Love, in a time of Pandemic*.

+Rowan never says anything that isn't worth hearing *and* listening to. I've placed my order already!

Contemporary obsessions are said by some to show signs of placing slightly more emphasis, of course, 'the new year', but still keeps what it calls 'Christmas' with some gusto. Although the Church in this country is to a considerable extent shaped by this culture, it's worth remembering that for us, *we've only just stopped* celebrating Christmas; for Christmas, as I'm often reminded by a wise person I know, is not a day but a season. And what a season! Stretching from 25th December, the Feast of the Lord's Birth, and transforming into Epiphany from 6th January, it comes to a liturgical conclusion (but this is hardly 'an end'!) with the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple on 2nd February. On the way, it encompasses the Feast of St Stephen the Deacon ('... the feast of Stephen') on 26th December, the Fest of St John Apostle and Evangelist (i.e., composer of the Gospel according to St John), and the Holy Innocents (28th December), not to forget the very misleadingly named Feast of the 'Conversion' of St Paul. Properly observed, Christmas sticks up a firmly straightened finger at those who piously bemoan extravagance and 'materialism'; it recalls the witness even to death of the likes of Stephen; ponders on the holy wisdom of John, and the wrestling of Saul of Tarsus, *and* makes room to remember the massacre of children. In this single season there is enough for every season of human experience: joy and sorrow, exuberance and excessive generosity, and the pain of tragedy, not to mention fear and grief. What has sanitised and secular 'Christmas' got that could possible rival all this!

Very many of us, one way or another, have experienced 2020 as a walk through the valley of the shadow of death. For some,

‘Christmas’ comes variously as an unwelcome burst of ho-ho! or heady escape from pain, or perhaps as a moment of relief; but for the Christian community it is above all joy and glory. This joy and glory are no evasion of unpleasant realities (witness ‘Rachael weeping for her children’ on Holy Innocents’ day! – Jeremiah 31:15: ‘This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more".’) but a reminder that all things will be well. Even secular Christmas has a measure of sharing in this; for it **is** the inescapable truth and the unavoidable reality: that all things are made for God and that nothing will be lost – not even the likes of that traumatised Biblical mother, Rachael and others like her.

Christmas is not so much behind us as it travels with us. And as we continue in these apparently unprecedented times, it will (if we let it) sustain us as it mingles into Lent, Holy Week, and The Resurrection feast that we call ‘Easter’.

Peace!

Fr Peter Jones



From Lichfield Diocese

Different life, different church, different worship

Zoe Corney finds some have welcomed the changes to church life brought about by the pandemic.

2020... the year that churches all over the country had to close the doors on its buildings. But 2020 was also the year that we were introduced to new ways to worship, with the surge in the provision of online and telephone services. For many who find leaving the house difficult due to poor physical or mental health, this abundance of new services has meant less isolation in a time when many others were, for the first time, feeling cut off from the rest of their world.

As one in the Enabling Church network in the diocese said recently:

“The availability of online prayer, worship and study has been life changing for me and no doubt thousands of housebound people like me. I've been able to join morning prayer, evening prayer and Sunday worship once again, and am also a member of an online Christian discussion group. I'm sure that they have helped me overcome feelings of isolation and estrangement, connecting me once again with the church community which I've missed and within which I can fulfil our purpose and give and receive love.”

In a year that was different to any other, life was different, church was different, worship was different. Although the physical doors on our church buildings were shut for many months, for many Christians

new doors were opening as much of the church's life moved online; many people who are housebound, both recently and more long term, have been delighted to have access to the worship and community of the Church again. Much

energy from ministers has been put into establishing practices, developing resources and raising skill levels; and in some churches, new volunteers have come forward to resource online worship and ministry. Virtual worship has worked well for many Christians with statistics showing that one quarter of the UK population has taken part in online worship during the last year.

A survey in our own diocese in the middle of last year showed that over 60% of parishes were able to make provision for online worship during the first lockdown. And our own cathedral in Lichfield is now live-streaming services three times per day, and regularly has online congregations at morning prayer that are up to ten times the number that used to attend in person.

For many, the lockdown and the provision of online prayer and worship which have come out of it have been a major boost to spiritual life. Of course, virtual church will never replace Church but the two do sit side by side.

It's good for the church that we now know that online discipleship and fellowship is part of our life. It's good for the church that we can reach people again that we had too easily let go of.

Perhaps the challenge to pose is not one of inclusion but of integration: how will our online and offline lives fit together?

Zoe Corney is part of the diocesan Enabling Church team, who also lives with ME. The Enabling Church team is part of Transforming Communities Together, a charity formed and supported by Lichfield Diocese and Church Urban Fund, delegated to support people and communities to thrive and flourish together.org.uk

From the Church Warden

Dear Friends

As you are aware from the last article, we have been having extensive issues with the boiler. I am pleased to report that the boiler has been repaired and is hopefully still working. The engineer noted that the boiler is old, a model he had not seen before, and was producing a lot of soot and carbon build up. We have adhered to a regular servicing schedule for the boiler in the past but recently, as we are all too keenly aware, it has had its problems. Whether we continue with or look for a replacement for the boiler will be something the PCC will discuss.

The recent snow brought down one of the small trees that line the edge of the churchyard onto the Keele road. Where it fell did impede pedestrians on the pavement, I am not sure who moved it but they beat me to it, so my thanks to whoever it was.

The loss of heating in the church and the lingering smell of fuel oil meant that the decision was taken to cancel the first service after Christmas and now Covid has again affected us. After consultation and a PCC vote it was decided that the safest course of action that we could adopt for all our sakes was to suspend worship in line with the discretionary exemption issued by the Church. Worship is now suspended until at least the end of February and closer to that date we will hope for updated direction and guidance from the diocese and we will then let you all know what is proposed. At least and this is if the boiler keeps running, we will come back to a warmer church.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” **Romans 15:13**

Regards

Nige Bostock



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Churches Count on Nature



In 2020 we were not able to get together, so we are very much looking forward to hearing about how you are celebrating churchyards in 2021. For several years we have been running a dedicated celebratory week highlighting the wildlife, heritage and history that they contain and every bit as importantly, the fantastic people who look after them. This takes place in the 2nd week of June, taking in the weekend at either end. In 2021 its **Saturday 5th till Sunday 13th June.**

The week started off as Cherishing Churchyards Week, but many cemetery Friends groups contacted us to ask if they might join in, so we changed the name to Love Your Burial Ground Week, making it clear that they could. Now we're expanding, in partnership with the **Church of England** and **A Rocha**, to include **Churches Count on Nature.**

Together we are asking that churches use **Love Your Burial Ground Week** as a springboard to start recording the wildlife within their churchyards. So, if you fancy running a wildlife spotting event then please join in.

So, what type of event should we run?

That is completely up to you, it could be a children's activity looking at leaves or bugs, a couple of birdwatchers seeing what they can spot, or a large event, with experts helping to reveal the hidden wonders of nature within your churchyard. A few years ago we ran an event of this type at St Michael's in Lichfield and as a result of this, and other surveys they now have a list of over 1,000 species found within that churchyard.

What shall we do with the lists of things we see?

Please send them to us. You can put them straight onto our Record system, send them by email or put a list in the post. Just make sure you get them to us somehow!

Why tell us in February?

Please register your interest now at www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/expression-of-interest-in-churches-count-on-nature-2021/. If you want advice or some financial support we may be able to help, so once you have an outline plan, get in touch.

All the best, Harriet Carty

Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor, harriet@cfga.org.uk,

www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk - individuals and groups in the diocese receive 20% members discount on all CfGA materials. Use the discount code Lich19

The Belfry Bat

I have just emailed Diane to ask whether this edition should be attached to the one I have just sent her. She replied that she will probably do an edition for January as printing is not an issue.

On Sunday morning December 13th I opened an email from Angela telling me that I had won a prize in the draw – Keele damson vodka. Looking forward to discovering what it is like. Ro's wobbly knee took a turn for the worse on Saturday, so we didn't risk the tricky access to the garage for ringing on Sunday morning. I went to Sainsbury's twice this week, on my own because of Ro's knee. On Wednesday I did Lyndsey's list as usual, and on Thursday I did what we hope will be our last shop before Christmas. Certainly don't want to be there next Wednesday! Also on Thursday Angela delivered the damson vodka which I had forgotten to collect. We managed to post all of our cards a day ahead of the second-class deadline – better than last year! Just a few hand deliveries remain.

On Friday December 18th I brought our Christmas tree into the house. We re-potted it earlier in the year, and it is now very heavy – almost too heavy to lift. Also today I potted on a number of acorns I had harvested which were beginning to sprout. We hope a useful number of them will become small trees in due course. The oak trees this year were unusually productive, and our drive is carpeted with acorns.

On Saturday afternoon I emailed the band to finalise arrangements for Christmas ringing on all six bells, only to have to revert to the Mellors ringing three an hour later. There was no ringing on Sunday in either location and we did not go to church. My daughter Sally had arranged to visit us on December 27th, but on she offered to come on Christmas Day instead, combining us with another visit.

On December 23rd our Wednesday ringing group had its final zoom

meeting of the year, for which I donned my Santa outfit – actually only the top half of it. Then I took Ro to collect her prescription reading glasses, which are noticeably better than the over-the-counter ones she has been using. My final task of the day was to drive to Dilhorne to collect the turkey, my longest drive for quite a while. We enjoy watching the alumni University Challenge programmes at this time of year – I can't help speculating who would be in a Keele team.

We spent a quiet Christmas Day and an even quieter Boxing Day. Our friend David Stott spent Christmas day with us, and we had a visit from my daughter and her two daughters, who we had not seen since June. We have been given a lot of books, with a good balance between fiction and non-fiction, several weeks' worth of reading.

On Sunday December 27th we had a phone call from our friend Dave Alden, who I first knew when he was a Keele undergraduate. He went on to do a PhD at Keele, and was then on the staff. During this time we taught him and his partner Elaine to ring, although their ringing career was cut short by a move to Australia, where they still live. Now retired, they have bought a hundred-acre plot of land near Dunedin in New Zealand, where they are building a holiday home and carrying out a range of environmental projects. I think we have left it a bit late to pay them a visit, but we will follow their progress with interest, and I may even tell them that there are bells in Dunedin.

When we woke up to a white landscape on December 28th, I was reminded of the 1962-63 winter, when it snowed at Christmas and lasted for two months. My parents' farm had a power cut which lasted for two days and made milking difficult. About twenty-five years ago, on the last occasion we were in Somerset at Christmas, we had a magical drive over Mendip with the ice-bound trees sparkling in the early morning sun.

I was surprised by the depth of snow I had to clear from the car before doing our usual fortnightly shopping on December 30th but pleased by the state of the roads, although Quarry Bank was still quite icy. As usual, we didn't stay up to see in the new year – by the time you read this will it be too late to wish you all a happy one? Monday January 5th brought a phone call from Mitchell, who works for clockmakers Smiths of Derby. He asked if I could let him into the tower on Tuesday to do the annual maintenance on the clock. Only a few years ago this was being done in the summer!

We have stopped feeding the hedgehogs, as I have been told that they go into hibernation when the temperature drops below five degrees. We do not know whether they are hibernating in the houses I made for them.

On Saturday January 9th we were visited by Martin from STS tree surgeons. I had asked him to come and look at three trees in our orchard with a view to pollarding them. Two apples and a pear, they are probably as old as the house, nearly a hundred years, and I think they will be improved if cut back to the main trunks and allowed to sprout. In summer, two of them support our hammock, so we don't want to lose them. He hopes to be able to do the work in the next few weeks.

Phil Gay



The Garden Guild

IN MEMORY OF PETER HOUGH

On the 16th January 2021 Peter Hough, husband of Jill Hough passed away after a long and painful illness. Peter and Jill have been members of Keele Garden Guild for many years. In addition they had both been hardworking members of the Village Hall Management Committee, during which time they participated in making many major improvements to the Hall's facilities.

Peter was what is often described as a pillar of the community, this was certainly the case with the Garden Guild. Prior to the start of each month's meeting or event, Peter aided by Jill would arrive early, to put out the tables and chairs as needed, ensure the cups and saucers were laid out ready for the evening's refreshments and ensure the heating was switched on ready for the members' arrival. Then at the end of the evening Peter would be one of the last to leave, ensuring that everywhere was left as it was found.

At meetings, Peter who took the minutes, was always ready with apposite questions for the speaker, to enable the speaker to both expand on what had been said, as well as develop ideas.

The Speakers were the responsibility of Peter, who acted as Programme Secretary. Over the years he had produced a range of talks, which were diverse and interesting. They covered such gardening topics as, how to feed a family from a 6ft x 12ft plot, to the canals of the Marches. In many ways the style and content of the programme was a reflection of a Garden Guild which combined the themes of gardening with a social gathering for our village community.

Through Peter, members enjoyed Visits to Gardens which he had planned and organised. Though such outings were not without their own events, we have on more than one occasion lost members, who while setting off, never arrived at the venue – though I would confirm such members did come to subsequent meetings. In addition he

organised the Garden Guild Buffet Suppers and Christmas Dinners. While the fare of such events was not always up to expectations, they were constantly enjoyed by all.

Peter liked to produce Quizzes, which were always a challenge. I recall on one memorable occasion a quiz which he had produced proved to be particularly testing, and members had produced a wide range of answers. Unfortunately on the collection of the sheets for marking, Peter had lost the answer sheet furthermore he could not remember the answers – but in true Keele style, all were declared winners! Humour and reliability – an unbeatable combination.

Peter was an asset not just to Keele Garden Guild, but to Keele Village, and he will be sadly and sorely missed.

As Chairman and Treasurer of the Garden Guild, I depended greatly on Peter's input and enthusiasm, as well as his support at the meetings. For me, I have lost a dear friend, someone who I could rely on and trust, his passing leaves a hole in my life.

Barrie Wardell

Peter Hough

Peter learned to ring as a teenager at Knutsford, almost certainly encouraged by his uncle, Sid Hough, who was a well-known ringer in Cheshire and further afield. Like many youngsters, he stopped ringing when he went to university, but unlike many, he returned later. He started ringing again when he was vicar of Silverdale, and continued in his retirement at Keele. His attendance in the tower was occasional rather than regular, but he had a knack of knowing when we were going to be thin on the ground, so his attendance always made a difference, usually enabling us to ring more bells. We shall miss him.

Phil Gay

Church Officers

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

