

THE Beckoner

The Magazine
For Beckminster
Methodist Church

JUNE - JULY 2017

PRICELESS!



Photo 'Bumble Hole' by John Holt

*God in his love for us lent us this planet,
Gave it a purpose in time and in space:
Small as a spark from the fire of creation,
Cradle of life and the home of our race.*

F. Pratt Green

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Dear Friends

As I write this I am aware that this will be my last piece for *The Beckoner*. I sit wondering what to say and realise that at the end of a book there is usually a list of contributors or resources and, sometimes, a bit about the author. At the end of a film the credits roll. At the end of a play the curtain falls. At the end of a concert the stage goes dark. When things come to an end something always marks that ending. My last service on 23 July and buffet lunch will be that mark – which you are all invited to.

So back to my wondering I thought about when I arrived at Beckminster four years ago. I knew God had sent me and I was filled with excitement and anticipation. Over these four years we have been on a journey that has taken us to blessed moments, along rocky pathways as well as down paths of great discoveries and, in those moments, God has journeyed with us.

Then in June last year while on a retreat and in prayer, God said to me 'It is time to move on' with the words 'the truth will set you free'. So this last twelve months have been about me and you - 'the church', discovering what the truth is? Along this journey I have had the great privilege of seeing people being set free, of people growing more in faith, moments when new ways were accepted, times of daring to believe that God is faithful and, for me, I have grown in ways that brings me into a new relationship with my God that is life-giving and sustaining. So, at the end of this chapter in my ministry and yours, we can give the credits to God, the Father of love, to Jesus our risen friend and Saviour, to the Spirit that leads us into the truth.

As we mark the end of our time together, we begin a new chapter on our journeys. We have to trust in God for He has great plans for us, plans to prosper, plans to grow more like Him, plans to be rich in wisdom, plans to be His holy people.

But before I say 'goodbye' I would like to say a huge 'thank you' to all those who have held me in prayer, those who have shown me wonderful hospitality, those who have supported me through the good and not so good times, those who have trusted me, those who have shared



with me.

Ministry is a mixed bag and a tough call from God. One person cannot please a whole church but the strength of the Methodist itinerancy is that congregations get a wealth of styles and traditions, of theological persuasions, of worldly and life experiences. God did not get my appointment wrong. I have been in the right place for the right amount of time. Now, as I prepare to move on, I will pray for you as you too begin a new journey with a new minister. In God we trust.

Every blessings.

Linda

"The Editorial team, on behalf of Beckminster, would like to thank Linda for her various contributions to our magazine during the time she has been with us. We wish her well and God's blessing in her new appointment."

FINDING A WAY!

Last weekend at the beginning of May, I went back to Luton to stay with friends, which I do from time to time. It was a good weekend catching up, a day in London, going round and about and then going to church on the Sunday.



It was a church of which I was minister until I retired in 1997 – twenty years ago. May 1997 rings bells in my mind because it was the General Election when Tony Blair became Prime Minister. In our household it was a time of great rejoicing. At long last Labour had a change of fortune and it was a landslide, a time of great hope, a new dawn. Things would be different and they were for some time but at the time there was a surge of optimism. It was like that when a miracle in America happened and Barack Obama became President. Both now seem a very long time ago. The Blair Government lasted a long time and then came the Iraq war and disillusionment. The Obama Presidency is over and it seemed not to accomplish all that was hoped for. Now, here we are twenty years later with President Trump in America. We have also had the Brexit referendum with the resignation of the Cameron Government, Theresa May as Prime Minister and now another general election. This is all in a world that seems very different and much more dangerous with a much-changed political field, a great deal of uncertainty about, a lot of fear and a sense of isolationism creeping in as we want to enhance our own securities with a wariness of the other.

When I was in Luton, the preacher at the church was someone I had known for very many years from our time in London when he and a friend came from University to our church. Both were working for an organisation which sought to bring understanding and reconciliation to individuals and groups in industry, society and the church. It was good to see him again and to hear him preach about the Emmaus road experience and he linked it to our journey in the world we live in. The two

travelling to Emmaus, lost and frightened after all their hopes were dashed but joined by a stranger who tried to show them the way to go. However, they did not recognise Him until he blessed the bread and they saw his scarred hands and feet. The Risen Christ is the crucified and bears wounds,

as our world does and as we do also. Only the Jesus of the scars can help. He shares our anxieties and suffering and cares about our world.

We are in a dangerous and suffering world. We are unsure of where to go and what to do. There are deep divisions everywhere. We are lost on a journey. We need to choose a way and we do it partly as we vote in the coming election. How do we choose? We shall choose differently for we have different political views. But as a Christian community there are things that should help us all. We see the common good. All people are made in God's image and no one can be ignored when we remember that. The common good means we seek Justice for all, that we look for Peace between nations and peoples and individuals. We approach all things with compassion and look for integrity in all. We seek good, but the common good, to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God – the God who comes to us on our Emmaus road, the crucified and Risen Lord with scars on hands and feet. Of course it doesn't end at the ballot box. This Lord promises hope, the hope that comes from service and sacrifice, the hope of the coming of the Kingdom, a hope that can be realised as we share the commitment of living with those values in our society.

Rev Glennys Bamford

Steward's Musings

So much is happening around us all the time, but now seems especially challenging. As I write, a General Election coming up; a Brexit I didn't want is on the horizon; world events in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula make me shiver. Looking through the window I see the hills of Rosedale in the morning sunshine. On holiday here, I can easily forget the world's pain and concentrate on the pain in my limbs after another beautiful walk trying to catch up my wife! Yes, North Yorkshire is beautiful but so are Kashmir, Syria, Vietnam and Northern Ireland. Natural beauty is marred only by the way we behave towards our fellow humans.

Is it my imagination or are we increasingly looking back to a previous existence we think was somehow better, or at least gentler? Yesterday we walked through the village of Goathland, used as the setting for "Heartbeat," such a popular ITV series from 1992 to 2010 but set in the 1960's. On Sunday evening TV at present, we have "The Durrells" and "Grantchester" both depicting life several decades ago, periods that are gone forever.

We enjoy looking back, usually through rose-coloured spectacles. One evening last November, I sat on Doncaster station awaiting our daughter's arrival, and I thought back nostalgically to those precious days spent

trainspotting as a young teenager. I cannot emphasise sufficiently the excitement I felt as those powerful steam trains arrived from Kings Cross or Edinburgh Waverley.

No doubt we enjoy those comfortable thoughts of times in our lives when we were happy and secure (or thought we were). In reality there were always tensions and uncertainties: even on Doncaster station there were officials who occasionally came by to throw the trainspotters out. And, when I got home, my mother was always appalled at the dirt that had attached itself to me in the course of the day.

The only time that is available to us is the present. The only time that we can transform is the present. Present and gift are sometimes synonymous in our language. We must accept every day as a gift in which we can express the love of God to all we meet. We may not have the opportunity to change the course of the wider world (but we have a better chance than people who have lived before us) but we can change OUR world, we can influence our friends, our families simply by living lives of love and service and being watchful to the needs of our fellow human. As Wesley said, "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can."

And today is the day, the present, the gift.



John Ashwood

Footprints in the Sand

“My precious, precious, Child, at those low moments of your life, where you see only one set of prints, it was then that I carried you”

A few weeks ago, during the morning Café Worship, Linda gave us copies of the spiritual poem ‘Footprints in the Sand’ and it got me thinking that, although it is a very famous piece of writing, I don’t really know much about its origins.

However, it turns out that one of the world’s most famous, inspirational and healing poems has a long and sad story behind it.

The sheet Linda gave out credited a Carolyn Carty, who claims that she wrote it in 1963 when she was six years old and grieving over the passing of her beloved grandfather. It is hard to believe that a child of that age would be capable of such prose, although if Mozart could produce compositions at aged five then who are we to query it?! In fact Ms. Carty insists that she was a child prodigy with an IQ of 137 and was reading and writing by the age of four.

In 2008 a lawsuit was brought by the son of the late Mary Stevenson (1922 – 1999). Basil Zangare claims that his mother wrote the poem (1936) when in her early teens as a result of all the things that had affected her young life, the worst of which was the death of her mother when she was just six. Her father was left to raise Mary and her seven siblings through very tough times including The Great Depression.

Another woman, Canadian Margaret Fishback-Powers says she wrote ‘Footprints’ in 1964 for her wedding. She and her future husband, Paul, were strolling along a beach wondering how to tell her parents about their intention to marry. Apparently Paul had had a troubled past and Margaret’s family were unhappy about it. He’d converted to Christianity on release from prison before the couple met in a bookstore. They noticed their footprints in the sand and Paul



made the comment about the Lord carrying them in times of need.

All three women took out copyright for their versions in the 1980s but it still continues to be debated. One thing they do all share is tragedy in their lives.

Add to the mix Burrell Webb who claims he wrote it in 1958 following a conversation with his Lord. Webb says that, as an orphan, he suffered years of abuse and penning the poem helped him so much that he took it to a

publisher. He deliberately left it as ‘author unknown’ so everyone could enjoy it. He then realised that was a massive mistake and in 2005 volunteered to undergo a polygraph test in a bid to prove authenticity. Apparently this confirmed Burrell Webb as the author of ‘Footprints’ although I’m quite sure how.

Another claimant is a Mr Floyd Keaton of Red Oak Iowa, who says he wrote it after fighting on Omaha Beach in 1944 during WW11 and that he copyrighted the poem in 1997, though a search for this copyright has been fruitless. In any case copyrighting is not proof of authorship.

The five people featured in this article are just the tip of the iceberg where ownership is concerned. If you think all this isn’t confusing enough try wowzone.com/fprints.htm where even they say it is too complicated to sort out. It may be that we will never know the true author of ‘Footprints in the Sand.’

Hazel Graham

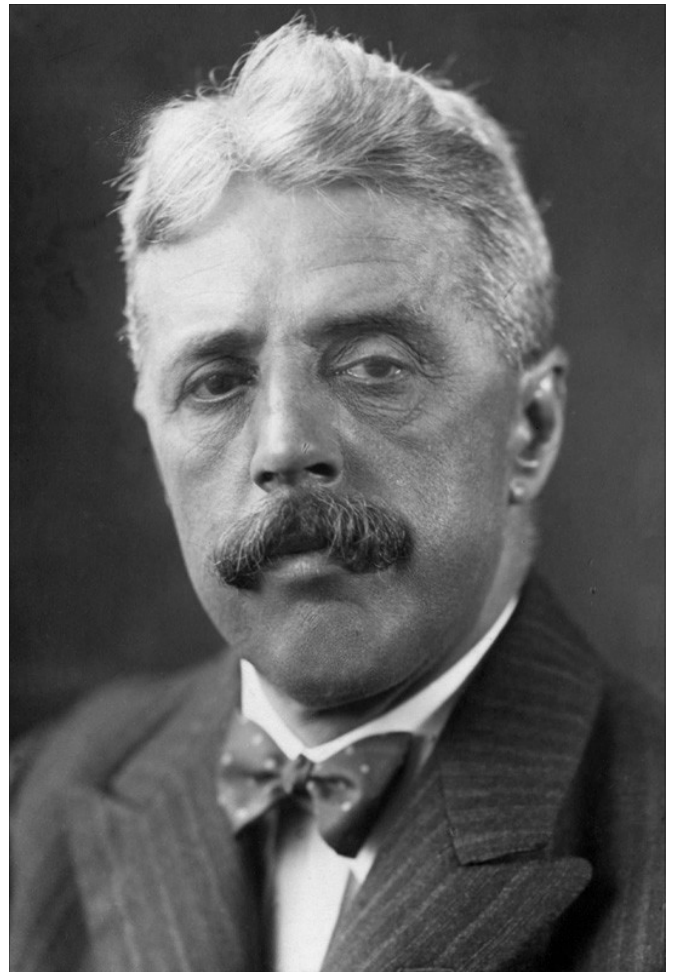
ARNOLD BENNETT

- POTTERIES AUTHOR

Whenever my wife and I go out for a meal, coming from Sheffield, she will often first check where the cutlery has been made? It usually turns out to be Taiwan, China or other Far Eastern country! Likewise people from the Stoke-on-Trent area turn over their crockery to see if it was manufactured in The Potteries? It's a simple case of civic pride in our local industries which sadly have greatly declined over the past fifty years or so – due mainly to cheaper imports from overseas.

One man who helped maintain the reputation of The Potteries was author Arnold Bennett and this year Stoke-on-Trent is marking the 150th anniversary of his birth. He was born on 27 May 1867 at a modest house in Hanley, one of the six towns joined together at the start of the 20th century to become Stoke-on-Trent. These are depicted as “the Five Towns” (with the exclusion of Fenton) in some of his novels. His father, Enoch Bennett, was a solicitor and in 1876 moved his family to a larger home between Hanley and Burslem, though his son Arnold was educated in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

After leaving school he was for a short while working for his father but the relationship did not last very long. Arnold had to resort to rent collecting and pay was very low. Therefore, in his spare time, he began to take up doing a little journalism. It was however only after he left the Potteries for London at the age of 21 to take on the role of a solicitor's clerk that he really began to make some headway as a writer. In 1889, he did, in fact, win a literary competition run by the magazine *Tit Bits* (which many of our readers may still recall) and received encouragement to take up journalism as a full-time job. Five years later, in 1894, he became assistant editor of *Woman* magazine (who would have thought that those two publications went back all those years?) However he thought material offered to *Woman* was not really very good so wrote a serial that was bought by the management for £75 (equivalent to £10,000 by today's reckonings).



He followed this up with another submission which was named *The Grand Babylon Hotel*. Four years later his novel *A Man from the North* was published to critical acclaim and, after the success of this, was offered the post of editor of the magazine. It was in 1900 that Arnold Bennett gave up the editorship and decided to become a full-time writer for newspapers, magazines and as a novelist. In 1926, at the suggestion of Lord Beaverbrook, he began writing an influential weekly article for the London newspaper *Evening Standard* (shades of former Chancellor, George Osborne MP, it's latest Editor?) One of Bennett's most popular non-fictional works was a self-help book named *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*.

At the age of 36 he moved to Paris, where he spent the next eight years writing novels and plays and was much influenced by the French

writer, Maupassant. Arnold's novel *The Old Wives Tale* had an immediate success throughout the world when it was first published in 1908. (A few years ago, just prior to my coming to the West Midlands, this particular book had been made into a TV serial entitled *Sophia and Constance*, part of which was filmed at the Black Country Museum, starring actresses Phyllis Calvert and (now Dame) Patricia Routledge (latterly the snobbish but hilarious 'Mrs. Bucket' of *Keeping Up Appearances* tv fame!). Three years later Bennett visited the United States, when on his return to England, found that *The Old Wives Tale* had been reappraised and hailed as a masterpiece.

He is undoubtedly most famous for his novels which were mainly based on his home towns in the Potteries. Arnold Bennett had soon started to become a prolific writer. *Anna of the Five Towns* (originally based on what is now the Middleport pottery factory) was the first of his novels about life in the Potteries, which first appeared in 1902. *The Clayhanger Family* and *The Old Wives Tale* also draw on experience of life in the area, as did several other novels.

Over recent years one of his other books was made into a film, *The Card*, starring Alec Guinness, (which was later turned into a musical play). Others became television mini-series such as *Anna of the Five Towns*, *Clayhanger* (one I can remember watching at the time) and also *Sophia and Constance* (*The Old Wives Tale* (which followed the lives of two sisters through the Victorian era). As a writer he went on to achieve both national and international acclaim in the literary world.

During the First World War Arnold became Director of Propaganda for France at the Ministry of Information, an appointment he was recommended for by Lord Beaverbrook and, later, became Deputy Minister of the department in 1918. Although it was offered to him, Arnold Bennett refused a knighthood.

During his time in France he had married a French lady in 1921 but later fell in love with an actress Dorothy Cheston, with whom he stayed for the rest of his life. She changed her name to Bennett, although they never married. They had one child, Virginia, who was born in London in 1926.

In 1923 Bennett won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *Riceyman Steps*. He died of typhoid at the age of 63 at his home in Baker Street, London, on 27 March 1931, after returning from a visit to Paris, where, despite the advice of a waiter, he drank some tap water from a restaurant. After his death his ashes were later buried in Burslem Cemetery. He was survived by daughter, Virginia, who later became President of the Arnold Bennett Society until her own death in 2003.

There is much to recall his novels both in and around the Potteries. A number of streets in the Bradwell area of Newcastle-under-Lyme are named after places and characters which featured in Bennett's works and there are other sites connected with the author's life which can also be identified.

Two blue plaques were installed, one at his former residence in Cadogan Square in London (1958) and the second, at his childhood home on Waterloo Road in Cobridge (2014). A further brown plaque was later placed by the Arnold Bennett Society on his final residence at Chiltern Court in London. Earlier this year a two-metre high bronze statue was placed outside the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery during events marking the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Other activities taking place include the major exhibition *Arnold Bennett: In Life and Art* at the Potteries Museum, which lasts until 2 July; there will also be screenings of films of his novels at Stoke-on-Trent Film Theatre; and a new drama adaptation of *Anna of the Five Towns* being presented at the New Victoria Theatre. There will also be poetry readings and, for anyone interested, there is a self-guided tour available for visitors which can be obtained via the Tourist Information Office (Tel: 01782 236000) or direct from the Potteries Museum at Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 3DW (Tel: 01782 232323).

The continuing popularity of Arnold Bennett novels will ensure plenty of devoted readers will want to visit the area to learn more of this prolific writer who did so much to enhance and highlight the area of his birth and its industrial heritage.

Keith Cheetham

JOHN WESLEY IN THE COTSWOLDS

South-west of Coventry is that glorious swath of undulating countryside known as the Cotswolds which straddles the counties of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire and edging a little on Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. It is undoubtedly one of Britain's most beautiful regions. From the splendid architecture of Bath and Cheltenham, through the bustling market towns of Burford and Chipping Campden and pretty riverside villages such as Bourton-on-the Water and Windrush, it is undoubtedly one of the most attractive regions of England and visited by many tourists every year both from home and abroad. (It is often quite difficult to find a parking space in some of the more popular towns during summer months.)

It was an area well-known to John Wesley who often criss-crossed this region in a bid to spread the Gospel across England and he had numerous friends who lived there. There are in fact so many places in the Cotswolds which can boast as having been visited by the great evangelist to preach on at least one occasion in their church, market place or on the village green in the open air.

What is today called the 'honeypot' village of Broadway is one such centre where Wesley preached a funeral service in the old parish church of St. Eadburga for Robin Griffiths, son of the vicar. The former vicarage where he stayed was opposite the famous Lygon Arms in this beautiful village of honey-coloured



The Lygon Arms



Cotswold stone (a building, now a very up-market hotel, which is still beloved by many foreign visitors). Broadway has a handsome main street and was once an important staging post on the London to Worcester route. A new turnpike road was opened in 1736 and at one time seven coaches passed through the village every day. It is a route John Wesley would undoubtedly have made good use of in his later years, especially when he rode in a carriage after so many years of riding around the country on horseback.

On 28 August 1767 John preached at Stow-on-the-Wold, situated on the old Roman road of Fosse Way. It was once the most prosperous wool town in England, and he wrote in his Journal that he addressed "a very dull, quiet congregation". He had not been invited to preach in the church and is thought to have addressed his flock from the base of the medieval cross in the village square. However, John Wesley's visit left its mark and he was later followed by other travelling preachers. Stow-on-the-Wold has the distinction of being the highest town in the Cotswolds, at 800 ft. A popular rhyme begins, "Stow-on-the-Wold, where the wind blows cold." It had been a thriving market town since at least 1107 when it received its first royal charter. There were two annual fairs by the 15th century, later becoming famous for its horse fairs.

In Cheltenham there was once a pillared market in the centre of the High Street, opposite the Plough Hotel. It was here that John preached and also on the bowling green of the same inn where he was opposed by the rector of nearby



St Eadburga

St. Mary's church. Wesley often preached in Cheltenham en route as he was travelling to Worcester to visit his Methodist society. During the Regency period, Cheltenham Spa rivalled Bath in its splendour as the rich and fashionable came to 'take the waters'. It makes one wonder what influence John Wesley would have made on that clientele?

On the Oxfordshire side of the Cotswolds in the attractive town of Burford with its wide High Street paved with historic inns, antique shops and town houses. Wesley first preached there to nearly 1,500 people in October 1739, and on four later occasions. The local Methodist society had intended building a preaching house in Sheep Street when they discovered that an outmoded mansion house in the High Street had been put up for sale at a very low price. They bought and refurbished it and soon domestic offices in the basement were adapted for use as a Sunday School whilst the main body of the building became the chapel.

Further along the A40 towards Oxford is the busy town of Witney, where Wesley got caught in a thunderstorm on 16 July 1783 (he was then



St Mary's

an old man of eighty). It was a place he had visited many times on his way to Bristol and it became an important part of the Methodist movement. Whilst in Witney, John often stayed with friends, the Bolton family, who lived in the nearby manor house at Finstock. Over recent years Witney has become famous for blanket manufacturing and they are still made in great numbers. Weaving began here in Roman times first by hand loom and later by using the power of the River Windrush. In medieval times, Witney was a town of great importance as reflected in the size of its parish church of St. Mary's with its impressive tower and tall spire.

On 24 November 1784, Wesley preached in Banbury, famous for its cross, cakes and nursery rhyme, after receiving a hearty welcome from the Presbyterian minister who offered him the use of his meeting room. Some of the other smaller towns and villages in Oxfordshire had earlier been visited by John Wesley as an undergraduate at Christ Church and later as Fellow of Lincoln College, both in the city of Oxford. Perhaps one of the most notable visits he made was very early in his studies at Oxford when he visited St. Mary's Church in the village of Fleet Marston, isolated on a hillock two miles west of Aylesbury in nearby Buckinghamshire. The church is concealed behind a circle of trees, the village it served long having disappeared. The church was built of stone in the 12th century and consists of a nave, chancel and porch. The interior is charming with a fine chancel arch rebuilt in the 14th century and now administered by the Churches Conservation Trust. However, its link with John Wesley is that it was here that he preached his first sermon in 1725 after he had been ordained as a deacon by John Potter, Bishop of Oxford in Christ Church (cathedral).

Next time, if you happen to travel through the Cotswolds, why not keep a lookout for some of the commemorative plaques and signs, market crosses, squares, churches and village greens? For it is more than likely that John Wesley would once have been there or nearby on his journeyings as a travelling preacher around this beautiful part of England.

Keith Cheetham

Can there be such a thing as a Christian Brexit?

The main churches in Britain are running a series of online articles under the title "Reimagining Europe". Below is a slightly amended and abbreviated version of the latest article in the series written by Rt Revd Dr Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St Asaph, setting out his view of the Christian approach to this momentous decision.

The Bible has more to say about the distribution of wealth, social justice and the welfare of nations than it ever does about eternal life. In spite of this, Christianity and religion generally, have been consigned by many to the sidelines of political life. The term "Christian Brexit" therefore provokes the response "Why should there even be talk of such a thing". While the leave vote may have been partially influenced by religious extremism, Brexit is trumpeted as a clinical economic exercise so why should religion get mixed up in it.

In fact, whether we like it or not, Christian philosophy is woven into the very fabric of our society. It provides the basis for many of our attitudes and values, even if many now repudiate those foundations. Christianity came to us from the continent, whether through the mission of Pope Gregory or the Reformation, and binds us to the continent. Even if we have chosen to repudiate the idea of European integration, this doesn't imply a rejection of our shared European culture – which is just as well given that most of British culture is derived from a classical and Christian European past. Could there even be a Britain without Christendom and the struggles for the soul of Europe in the Napoleonic and World War conflicts?

So which Christian values should I wish to see thrive in a Britain set apart? One of the worst aspects of the Brexit vote, much commented on, was the permission unintentionally given for xenophobia. Too many immigrants (even those of the third and fourth generations) are now made to feel unwelcome; too many folk have

been given licence to be rude or violent. I want to see a Britain that affirms our humanity and the fundamental attitudes of respect and hospitality. We need a people-centred Brexit, which respects the individual choices and commitments that both immigrants and ex pats have made about their futures, in the expectation that Europe would remain border free, a situation now slipping away from us.

I want to see a Britain which reasserts its care for the weakest in its own society and for the ordinary citizens of the world; which is committed to international development and international exchange. We need a culture which is open and undiscriminatory. In such a future "British" should not stand in contradiction to "European", but incorporate an international spirit; a continual commitment to lowering barriers and not raising them.

In other words I am hoping that the values and attitudes we imbibed from the continent when Britain received the Christian Gospel are not dumped as we say goodbye to the EU.

Brexit may not be a spiritual or religious enterprise, but we do have to defend the best aspects of our national life to build a future of which to be proud. All the churches have to engage vigorously in the public debate about Brexit and our society as advocates of a Christian vision of social inclusion and people centred politics. In challenging times of change it falls to us to demonstrate what loving our neighbour really means.

Submitted by Alan Causer

METHODIST CONFERENCE

2017

The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church and has the responsibility for the government, discipline, management and administration in the life of the Church. It is also a place for worship, thanksgiving, Ordination and celebration. It meets for eight days from Thursday to the following Thursday around the last week in June. This year's dates are 22 to 29 June 2017 and the Conference is being held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole at the National Exhibition Centre.

Each year at the Methodist Conference the following year's President (always an ordained presbyter) and Vice-President (always a lay person or deacon) are elected.

John Wesley himself was the original President but after his death it was agreed that, in future, so much authority would not be placed into the hands of any one man. Instead, a President would be elected for one year only, to sit in Wesley's chair.

When lay people were first admitted to the Conference in 1878, a lay Vice-President was also elected, and the two now serve in partnership. They now follow Wesley's example in travelling the length and breadth of Great Britain and preach widely and contribute articles to Methodist press and other media. Quite frequently, the two may choose a particular emphasis or theme for the year. For instance, in 2015 the then President, Steve Wild, and Vice President, Jill Barber, both used the theme of *Heritage and Mission* during their year of office. Both the President and Vice-President represent Methodism in the wider world and are sometimes required to travel overseas.

The incoming President and Vice-President this year are the Rev. Loraine N. Mellor and Jill Baker respectively and will start their year of office when the Representative Session of the Conference meets on 24 June.

Loraine has been a presbyter since 1995 and is Chair of the Nottingham and Derby District. A



Loraine and Jill

member of the Church's Strategy and Resources Committee, she is co-ordinator of the 'Larger Than Circuit' group which is considering how the Church can best reflect the missional needs of today's Church.

"I want to encourage and enable the Church to put God back on the agenda in our communities and enthuse people to share the Good News. The Church has reached a tipping point and the time has come for us to take some risks in our mission and in our discipleship in order to help us grow" said Mrs. Mellor.

Jill Baker, the incoming Vice-President, is a local preacher and tutor in the Scotland District, exploring and leading pilgrimages. She enjoys writing and, in the past, spent eight years as a mission partner in the South Caribbean. Jill was also President of Methodist Women in Britain between 2011 and 2013.

She also said "I am thankful to the Methodist family for the prayer and for the support it offers in hard times. I am committed to working both locally and connexionally for an inclusive, just, compassionate and creative Church!"

We wish both Loraine and Jill all the very best for a fruitful, progressive and rewarding year during their time in office.

BECKMINSTERAMA

Open Way

Alternate Tuesdays at 8pm



Dates and venues to be advised in Church Notices.

Contact Hilda Evans Tel: 421777

Closed during summer months. Re-commences in September

Monday Focus

Everyone is welcome to join us at Monday Focus at 8pm on Mondays in the Beckminster Coffee Bar.

June 5 AGM followed by
Music, Music, Music
-The Pearsons

Closed during summer months. Re-commences in September

Contacts: Ann Holt Tel: 650812
Margaret Nicklin Tel: 742537

Emmaus Group

Meet Thursdays at 7.45 pm. All welcome
Contact: Janet Anderson Tel: 337404

June 15 32 Church Hill

Closed during summer months.
Recommences in September

MESSY CHURCH (I)

Monthly — Fridays
3.30 - 5.45 pm. Fun for all the family
Contact Wendy Ashwood Tel: 831637

This is a typical week in the life of Beckminster Methodist Church.

- All groups meet at the church unless otherwise stated
- New members are always welcome at any group

Sunday

10.30am Crèche and Junior Church
10.30am Morning Worship
6.30pm Evening Worship

Monday

9.30 - 12.30pm Art Group
10.30am Prayer Meeting
2.00 - 4.00pm Art Group
6.15pm Brownies
8.00pm Monday Focus

Tuesday

9.45am The Toddler Group
1.30pm Art Group
4.15pm Dinky Divas 'N' Dudes
6.15pm Brownies
8.00pm Open Way

Wednesday

11.00am Luncheon Club
5.45pm Rainbows
6.30pm 'Soaring Spirits'
7.30pm Horticultural Society
7.30pm Happy Feet Dance Group

Thursday

9.45am The Toddler Group
2.00 - 4.00pm Take a Break
5.00 - 6.00pm Tai Chi
7.45pm Emmaus Group
7.00 - 9.00pm St. John's Ambulance

Friday

3.30pm Monthly Messy Church
7.00-9.00pm Gateway Group (weekly)

Saturday

Communion Services

The sharing of bread and wine takes place on four Sundays a month, either during the morning or evening worship or as an early Sunday morning service at 9.00am on first and third Sundays. Everyone is welcome.

Girls Uniformed Organisations

Rainbows 5 – 7 yrs

Wednesdays 5.45pm

Brownies 7-10 yrs

Mondays & Tuesdays 6.15pm

Various activities according to age – include crafts, cooking, badge work, swimming, service to others, pack holidays, hikes and camps.

Contact: Julie Tonks

Tel: 01952 461006



Take a Break

Thursdays weekly during term times

2.00 – 4.00pm

Indoor bowling. For people wanting to meet new friends and try something different. All welcome.

Contact: David Jones

Tel: 762408



Crèche and Sunday Club

Whilst the crèche allows parents of very young children to worship together, Sunday Club explore the Christian faith in exciting ways appropriate to their age.

Toddlers

Tuesdays and Thursdays,

9.45 – 11.15 am.

Approx. 40 Toddlers with Mums, Dads, carers or grandparents meet for mutual support whilst toddlers play.

Contacts:

Barbara Bennett Tel: 341877 (Tuesdays)

Jennifer Cromie Tel: 338320 (Thursdays)



Luncheon Club

Wednesdays 11.00am – 3.00pm

25 housebound people and helpers meet for coffee, lunch and tea. A short entertainment and epilogue. An opportunity to meet people, chat etc to relieve loneliness. A caring service provided by volunteers (who are always needed)

Contact: Tess Davies Tel: 07789 260953

Boys Uniformed Organisations

Beavers 6 – 8 years Thursday 6.15 – 7.15 pm

Cubs 8 – 10 years Monday 6.15 – 7.45 pm

Scouts 10 – 14 years Wednesday 7.00 – 9.00 pm

All groups meet at Scout HQ in Skidmore Avenue, for badge work, crafts, games, various activities and service. Camps.

Contact: Sheila White Tel: 332134

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THE YORKSHIRE VETS

A few weeks ago I met a gentleman named Peter Wright, the senior partner at the Skeldale Veterinary Centre Surgery based in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. If Skeldale and Thirsk seem vaguely familiar, you would be right as it was once the home base of famous writer, (better known by his pen name of James Herriot). His real name was Alf Wight, who for many years both practised and wrote about his career as a Vet working with animals.



James Herriot

James Herriot certainly put Thirsk on the map with his books, films and the brilliant 70s classic TV series *All Creatures Great and Small*. Now, after about thirty years, television cameras have been back filming a recent hit TV documentary series – *The Yorkshire Vet* – on Channel 5 (The current third series is being shown on Tuesday evenings at 8.00 pm.). Alf Wight founded Skeldale Veterinary Centre which still thrives today on the edge of the town. Firstly let's look at the background of 'James Herriot'.

James Alfred Wight was born on 3 October 1916 in Sunderland, County Durham. Shortly afterwards the family moved to Glasgow in Scotland, where his father took work as both a ship's plater on the River Clyde and also a pianist for a local cinema. Alf attended Yoker Primary and Hillhead High schools and, taking after his father, became a lifelong fan of Sunderland F.C. in 1939 he qualified as a veterinary surgeon with Glasgow Veterinary College. By January 1940 he took a brief job at a veterinary practice in Sunderland but moved in July to work in a rural practice based at 23 Kirkgate in the market town of Thirsk. His work as a vet has meant he remained there for the rest of his life. On 5 November 1941, Alf married Joan Catherine Anderson Danbury (known as Helen Alderson in the books) at nearby St. Mary's parish church. The couple

had two children, Jim (who also later became a vet and was a partner in the practice) and Rosemary (who became a physician in the same practice). Alf served in the RAF in 1942 during WW2 whilst his wife moved to her parents' home during this time. On discharge from the RAF he joined her and they moved back to Kirkgate, where they stayed until 1953 before moving to a house in Topcliffe Road, opposite the secondary school. After their original home and practice had become a museum, *The World of James Herriot*, Alf

and family moved to the village of Thirlby, about four miles from Thirsk, where he resided until his death, aged 78 years. (In addition, the veterinary practice was also moved from Kirkgate to a new modern complex in York Road nearby from where it still operates).

Alf had always intended to write a book but always too busy with his work. Challenged by his wife in 1966, at the age of fifty, he began writing. After several rejections on subjects such as football and other interests, he turned to the one he knew best. In 1969 he wrote *If Only They Could Talk*, the first of a now famous series based on his life working as a vet and his training in the RAF. His first approach brought response but was advised to take a pen name, choosing 'James Herriot' after seeing Scottish goalkeeper Jim Heriot play for Birmingham City in a televised game against Manchester United.

His first book was published in 1970. At first sales were slow until a publisher in New York received a copy and duly arranged to have the first two books published as a single volume in the United States. The resulting book *All Creatures Great and Small* was a huge success, spawning numerous sequels, movies and the successful television adaptations about his animal stories. Alf Wight later, in 1979,

received an Honorary Doctorate from Herriot-Watt University.

However, in 1991 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent treatment in the Lambert Memorial Hospital in Thirsk. Sadly, he died at his home on 23 February 1995. In 2009 a locomotive was named after him in his honour and, in October 2014, a statue of Alf Wight was unveiled by actor Christopher Timothy, who played Herriot in the TV series. This now stands in the garden at 23 Kirkgate.

Although Alf Wight shunned publicity, I was told some years ago by a colleague at the Yorkshire Tourist Board that he would always make himself available for a few minutes outside his surgery every afternoon to sign autographs and copies of his books. Before their former home and surgery in Kirkgate could be turned into what is now the very successful tourist attraction, the house was restored to its 1940s appearance and one can now see the old surgery, a farriers' workshop, a Foldyard, the 1940s home, a mock-up of a TV studio and also the original Austin 7 car used in the TV series. It is well worthwhile paying a visit as we did some years ago. Kirkgate is just off the market square en route to St.Mary's parish church in Thirsk.

So – on to Peter Wright, the man I met. He is now senior partner at Skeldale Veterinary practice and was born and bred in North Yorkshire. He actually did his work experience with Alf Wight and Donald Sinclair (the original Siegfried) and later became their apprentice. Nowadays Peter is the senior vet and runs the practice with Junior partner Julian Norton, who grew up in Castleford wanting to be a vet having been influenced by the original TV series starring Robert Hardy (*Siegfried*), Christopher Timothy (*James*), Peter Davison (*Tristan*), Carol Drinkwater (*Helen*) and later, Lynda Bellingham, who took over the part.

Peter qualified from Liverpool University in 1981 and has worked at Skeldale longer than he cares to remember. He does however enjoy telling younger vets tales from his time with Alf Wight. He said he particularly enjoys small animal medicine as well as equine work, but is regularly out on farm visits. He and his veterinary partner, Julian, are well organised with modern equipment but, as Peter says “we have an old fashioned way of dealing with



things in many ways”. Yet despite their success over the past year or so with the TV programmes, both are laid back and down-to-earth dedicated hard working vets, who find their new found celebrity status rather amusing. Julian qualified from the University of Cambridge in 1996 and his passion is small animal medicine, including cardiology, ophthalmology, dermatology and obstetrics as well as soft tissue and orthopaedic surgery. In his spare time he competes in triathlons and is a world record holder for 24 hours indoor rowing! He also competes in ski mountaineering.

Peter was born in Thirsk and because of his close working with Alf Wight and Donald Sinclair over the years has special inside knowledge of those years. He told me that he now oversees both the veterinary practice and the *World of James Heriot* museum. Though at times the job as a vet can be rather stressful with never knowing what is likely to turn up next, it is an accepted part of the job. It also can at times be rather frustrating by having to work some unearthly unsociable hours whatever the season and in all weathers! However, the TV series has undoubtedly given them national exposure which could well help their business. It has also helped attract many more visitors to that area of North Yorkshire. Julian has even found time to write a book about their experiences – *Horses, Heifers and Hairy Pigs*, which in warm and compassionate tales brings to life the world of the working vet and the highs and lows they face on a daily basis. It should be well worth reading.

Keith Cheetham

Two weeks in Cuba

Throughout the period of the Cold War there were times when I wondered when and where full-scale nuclear war would start: I visited Berlin in the Sixties, saw the Wall and walked through Checkpoint Charlie; I understood something of the dangers posed by the USA involvement in Vietnam; I read of the constant likelihood of war between Middle-Eastern countries which might draw in the Superpowers. But no event caused me more anxiety than the thirteen-day confrontation in October 1962 between the USA and the USSR, which became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was a Sixth-Former at the time, and it seemed as if time stood still for 13 days, at the end of which Kennedy and Khrushchev resolved the matter and the world breathed again. Many commentators still believe that it was the closest the world ever came to nuclear war.

From that day onwards I have been fascinated by Cuba. In my mind, Fidel Castro in 1959 overthrew a corrupt government and attempted to replace it with a government of the people with immensely laudable targets relating to justice and equality. As always, the lofty aims in opposition become hard to deliver when power is achieved, but I had read about a National Health and an Education system which were superb in the context of a "third world" country. I wanted to see it with my own eyes.

Eventually after 55 years I made it: Wendy came, too. June Sperring offered me Ivor, but he declined. We may share political views but two weeks together would be too much to bear. We wondered if it was too late: Fidel Castro had died in November 2016, and we guessed changes were already happening under the Presidency of brother Raul.

Arriving at José Martí airport in Havana reminded me so much of arriving at Bucharest airport in the early Nineties. There were occasional notices to the effect that we were welcome, but we didn't feel it: the building was grim and the instructions confusing. The journey from airport to hotel gave us every impression of a poor country with decaying infrastructure. Those old American cars were on the roads in substantial numbers, surviving miraculously

since being imported in the Fifties before the Revolution. Our guides (one a SAGA rep, a lady who was British-born but living for 10 years in Cuba, one a local Cuban, who knew his facts and was very honest about his country) were very welcoming, caring well for us throughout the 2 weeks. Our hotel in Havana was most impressive at first glance, but plumbing was of mediocre quality and service was not the best.....so reminiscent of communist countries where caring for customers was never given high priority. Not that the people were in any way unfriendly: a jovial disposition and a tendency to sing and dance was a lingering memory for us of the Cuban people.

In the comfort of a modern Chinese-built coach we explored the island from west to east. We saw Cuban cigars being hand-made; we visited museums, famous squares where Castro spoke for hours to thousands; we couldn't possibly miss out Che Guevara's Mausoleum in Santa Clara; we had a little steam train ride on a farm which produced coconuts, sugar cane and an infinite variety of fruit; there was a very busy church called Basilica del Cobre seemingly in the middle of nowhere which was visited by couples wanting to conceive and sports teams wanting to win, where the Black Madonna delivered miracles on a weekly basis; and we visited the grave of Fidel Castro, a simple rock on a gravestone, beautiful in itself but eclipsed by the tomb of Cuba's great hero José Martí. We had restful times on sunny beaches, staying in beautiful resorts built especially for foreign tourists. In temperatures around 30 degrees we swam in the warm Atlantic Ocean. On the final Thursday morning we enjoyed a ride around sunny Havana in a 1958 open-top Buick (picture provided).

We made various observations during our trip:

Firstly, despite the poverty in which Cubans live there is little evidence of begging on the scale that we have experienced in India. The most common items we were asked for in the streets were soap and pens/pencils. There is still rationing such as was experienced in Britain after the Second World War. Everyone has a ration book, which largely ensures that nobody

starves. We were taken to a ration shop where people could exchange vouchers for most staple items, especially rice. But sometimes there are shortages. We are certain that there is an underground, black economy, which enables people to live just above the breadline.



hotels, but the quality was poor. Even sending a text to members of the family to say we had arrived safely etc. was difficult and expensive.

Cubans are still immensely proud of their National Health Service, free to all (though medication is in short supply and patients staying in hospital need to

A society has been created in Cuba that does not have the extremes of poverty and wealth so prevalent in most countries. Most are poor, the reasons for this being an American embargo and a reduction in worldwide consumption of sugar and tobacco. Also, prior to the decline of the USSR' Cuba was in receipt of generous subsidies as a Marxist beacon so close to the shores of the USA. That resulted in real deprivation in the early Nineties and has only been alleviated by the generosity of Venezuela and the growth of a lucrative tourist industry.

Whatever the governments of the USA have done over the years to damage the prosperity of Cuba, we did not detect animosity towards America. We cannot understand that. Florida is, of course, very close and thanks to Presidents Obama and Raul Castro, there are now more American nationals visiting Cuba and new hotels are being built jointly by the government of Cuba and multinational corporations to accommodate increasing numbers of relatively wealthy tourists.

You may know that Cuba has two currencies, the pesos cubanos and pesos convertibles. We as tourists were limited to the convertible variety, not available outside Cuba. For us, the cost of living is pretty expensive (that's the idea, of course!) and we were grateful that the SAGA tour included most meals. Debit cards are unusable, we changed money using credit cards and regretted not taking pounds sterling with us. (We would recommend that to anyone considering a trip). Also, we had 2 weeks without internet: wi-fi was available at a cost in

supply their own sheets). Numbers of GP's per head of population are amazingly good, suggesting that there is one GP for every 150 families. The high number of qualified doctors helped a lot when oil-rich Venezuela offered financial help in exchange for medically qualified personnel. Not that these GP's are well paid: both doctors and lawyers survive on low salaries.

Lingering memories? Not Guantanamo but the song Guantanamera, almost a national anthem of the Cubans. I think we heard one musical group sing it at last once every day. Most groups played and sang to us and then attempted to sell us their CD.

Lingering images? The turkey vultures hovering above us throughout the island; the symbiotic relationship between cattle and egrets, which are invariably seen together in fields; the references to the Revolution and its heroes, seen throughout the country, both in urban and rural areas: "Hasta la Victoria Siempre!" is on billboards between Havana and Santiago and at all points in between.

At the end of a busy but most enjoyable 2 weeks we came away with almost as many questions as we took with us. Change is inevitable after Raoul relinquishes power later this year. We can only speculate.

John Ashwood

RECONCILIATION ON THE CARDS

For many of my generation, our early years were dominated not by the shadow of distant wars, but by a conflict much closer to home. With an awful, relentless predictability, our TV screens were filled night after night with images of death and destruction in Northern Ireland. And then the terror came to England; to London, Guildford, Birmingham, Brighton... Security alerts and baggage searches became a routine part of our daily lives. The political leaders on both sides of the conflict became household names, and their blood-curdling rhetoric served to emphasise the seemingly unbridgeable gap between them and between the Unionist and Nationalist positions. At the forefront were Martin McGuinness, former IRA commander, and Revd Ian Paisley, a fiery Protestant clergyman. Despite both being committed Christians, their common religion served only to divide them, being unable to see beyond their identities as Catholic and Protestant.

The Good Friday Agreement, which eventually brought peace to Northern Ireland in 1998, had many architects, none more significant than McGuinness and Paisley. The road to peace was painstaking, risky and costly. At its heart was an extraordinary challenge. Not simply to achieve the laying down of arms, but to bring about significant measure of reconciliation between deeply divided communities, so the peace would last.

Nothing symbolised the commitment more powerfully than the personal friendship that developed between McGuinness and Paisley. They set aside decades of deep animosity to work together as First Minister and Deputy Minister of Northern Ireland and got on so well that they became known as the 'Chuckle Brothers' because of their smiling camaraderie. After McGuinness' death earlier this year, Ian Paisley's son, Kyle, paid a warm tribute to him, not only reflecting on the 'great good' that the two men did together during their time in office, but also saying that the family would never forget McGuinness' 'ongoing care' for Ian Paisley during his final illness. The word reconciliation means to 'bring back

together again' that which has been broken. It is a word that was central to St. Paul's understanding of Christianity. As he writes in the letter to the Corinthians:

...“in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us...”

In an interview given shortly before his death, Martin McGuinness, said how much he had appreciated all the cards and good wishes that had been sent to him. And he said that he had been particularly moved by the many Protestants who said they were praying for him. Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley, through their commitment to the demanding and costly work of reconciliation, not only helped to 'bring back together again' the divided peoples of Northern Ireland but also helped to bring Christians back into fellowship with one another. They became ambassadors for Christ whereas once their warlike rhetoric must have made many wonder whether Christ was present in either.

Peace and reconciliation are at the heart of the identity and calling of the people of God. How might we live out this calling, as individuals and as local church? How might we play a part in transforming conflict? Canon Sarah Snyder, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Advisor for Reconciliation, is to address these questions in her forthcoming lecture 'The Local Church as an Agent for Reconciliation' to Clergy and Readers within the Wolverhampton Episcopal Area on 13 June 2017.

(This article was written and is reproduced here by kind permission of the Rt. Rev Clive Gledhill, Bishop of Wolverhampton, originally published by the Diocese of Lichfield in their bi-monthly newsletter 'Spotlight'. We are greatly indebted to Bishop Clive for allowing us to re-print this for our readers.)

Songs of Praise - BBC Lose the Contract

It was announced recently that though the BBC will still continue to broadcast Songs of Praise, the much loved church show, they will no longer produce it in house. Under the Charter agreement with the Government, BBC Studios network must now put out to tender all the shows for which they are currently responsible. Following the tender process the show will be produced for the next three years by two independent companies, Avanti Media and Nine Lives Media. The former is based in Wales and has previously been responsible for several Songs of Praise shows made in the Principality. Nine Lives Media have produced some editions of Panorama, Channel Four Dispatches and, more worryingly, Holiday Love Rats. Some 30 staff are presently employed in producing the show in Salford each week and their future is currently in doubt. The union is seeking assurances on their behalf. The only other programme which has so far been put out to tender is "Question of Sport" where the existing team succeeded in persuading BBC management to keep it in house.

The decision has precipitated a good deal of criticism, both official and in social media. The Bishop of Norwich said "It will have a knock on effect on the broadcast of worship at other times, whether it's great festivals, Remembrance Sunday or those great state occasions when a big act of worship is so much at the centre of it. It's a worry to some of us that it will be another nail in the coffin of our religious literacy as a nation".

The Bishop of Leeds also said "An independent company may bring a fresh approach to Songs of Praise but the BBC should also continue to bolster its religious output"

Comments in the social media were more mixed. While some deplored the new situation others felt the format had become a little stale, in spite of recent attempts to include more modern forms of music and worship.

There seems little doubt that religious broadcasting has been downgraded by the BBC in recent years and now has a much lower priority than it once had. When the Head of



Religion (a resounding title if there ever was one!) left last year he was not replaced and religious affairs programming was placed in the remit of the Head of Radio and Education. The experience and expertise of the present staff will very probably be lost, as even if they transfer to one of the new companies (want to move to Wales anyone?) their contract may only last for three years before the whole process will have to be gone through again, an unsettling situation for anyone.

Songs of Praise has been broadcast by the BBC since 1961 and we can only hope that the new contractors are able bring a fresh approach to it and ensure it remains on our screens for many years to come.

Alan Causer

Don't forget!
copy deadline for
Aug - Sept Issue
July 2nd 2017

HELP 'FLUSH' AWAY POVERTY

On a recent visit to 'Wesleys' café at Ludlow Methodist Church, I was surprised and somewhat amused to see by the toilet a photograph of a little hut in a field. It had a notice that read *This toilet is twinned with toilet number....?.....in Bangladesh!*

I've heard of 'town twinning' but, really, 'TOILET TWINNING'?

Further investigation led me to the Tear Fund and their toilet twinning scheme. (Toilet Twinning helps to raise funds to enable people living in poor communities to have clean water, a basic toilet and to learn about hygiene – a vital combination that helps end generational poverty.)

For the modest sum of sixty pounds, a toilet can be provided that can be a lifeline for a home or community. An existing network in various parts of the world provides information and education about the importance of hygiene and sanitation. Where possible, the local community constructs the latrine themselves with local materials and labour.

For many women the lack of a proper 'loo' means they have to venture into the bush to relieve themselves bearing in mind all the dangers that might present them from attack, snakes and animals, especially late at night. Toilets bring safety, dignity and privacy.

Privacy is particularly important for teenage girls and a toilet block (at a cost £240) in a school with a changing room for girls means that they will continue their education. At one such school 65 girls re-enrolled after having dropped out of education. The health of such communities is greatly improved and many diseases averted.

Surely in gratitude for our own toilet facilities, which we take so much for granted, we could raise enough money to twin our toilets at Beckminster with communities in need?

We are then informed exactly of the situation where our twinned' toilets are situated and sent framed photos of the ones we have provided.

Would you please support this venture and look out for further details about how we should raise this money! (See website: www.toilettwinning.org)

Jane Fuell



A few factors about the scheme

Would you believe that 2.4 billion people don't have a loo? Around a third of the world's population have to use fields, streams, rivers, railway lines, canal banks, roadsides, plastic bags, or disease-breeding buckets. Toilet Twinning raises funds to help people living in poor communities under such conditions.

Do you know, it's a fact that every minute, a child under the age of five dies because of dirty water and poor sanitation? In Africa alone half of the young girls who drop out of school do so because they need to collect water or because their school hasn't got a basic toilet.

One story we read of was of a lady named Bawili, whose husband was killed during a civil war. As a widow Biwili didn't have the money or the strength to build a toilet for her own family. However, everything changed when the community came together and formed a

Help flush away poverty!

Join the world's first Toilet Twinning



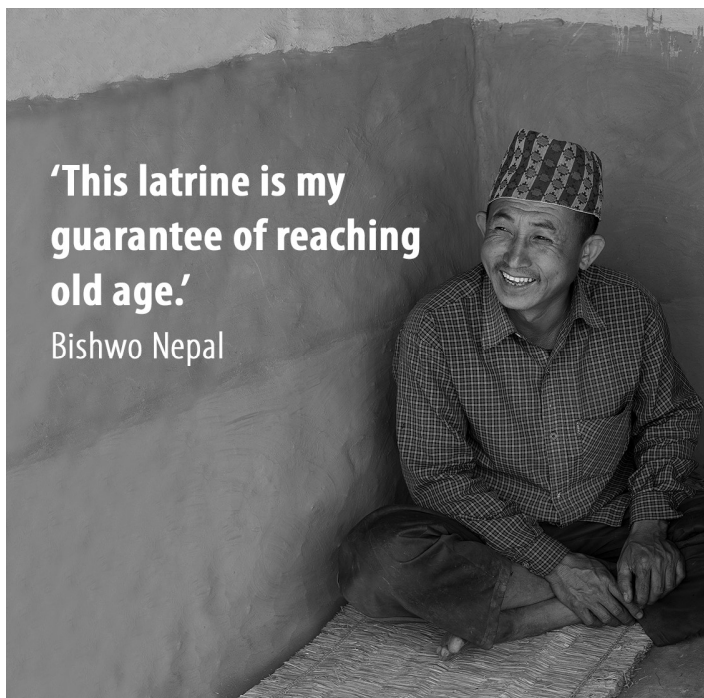
Community Health Club, and along with Toilet Twinning's support, Bawili and her neighbours learnt about sanitation but, more importantly, they learnt how to work together. When the club voted to help Bawili build a toilet, they demonstrated that love changes everything.

For every £1 spent on water and sanitation programmes, £8 is returned through reduced health costs and increased productivity.

So how does the scheme work?

For £60, one could twin our toilet(s) with a single, household latrine in an impoverished community For £240 we could twin with a school block in either Africa or Asia.

In return, we would receive a framed certificate



'This latrine is my guarantee of reaching old age.'

Bishwo Nepal

to hang in our loo(s) – featuring a photo of our toilet 'twin' overseas, the latrine's location and even its GPS co-ordinates so we could find our 'twin'(s) on line.

Toilet Twinning funds the work of international relief and development agency Tearfund. Donations are used to provide clean water, basic sanitation and hygiene education. This vital combination works together to prevent the spread of disease. The outcome is that children are healthier and able to go to school, and parents are well enough to work their land and grown enough food to feed their family. With better health and more ability to earn a living, men and women discover the potential that lies with them to bring transformation.

Just think this over, both as individuals and as a body and let's hope we can make the scheme 'flushed with success!' For further enquiries, please speak to Jane Fuell, who will be handling the project.

To date,

64,187

toilets have been built in programmes that **Toilet Twinning** has helped support



GUARDIAN ANGELS

People who say they don't believe in God generally do acknowledge the existence of powers which are not strictly physical. Even staunch atheists have to concede that the human spirit has a presence not entirely biological or chemical.

In my own case I'm absolutely certain there are 'Guardian Angels'. I know they exist as there have been several times in my life when they have swooped down into my space, disguised as ordinary humans, just routinely going about their business. Very often these are people not generally known by other people. Sometimes they are a passing human who, in a split second, can recognise the distress or danger facing a stranger whom they've probably never met before and perhaps may never meet again. I'm sure there's a very strong link here to the story of *The Good Samaritan*. Their reaction is instant and without hesitation launch into 'rescue mode' and deliver their vital help and comfort.

Once the problem is under control, they usually melt away as quickly as they arrived, without looking back and with no expectation of praise or recognition. How often do we see this in the News – an appeal for a rescuer who saved the life of a complete stranger to come forward? As it happened, one of these 'beings' swept into our lives when my wife, Jo, and I recently visited Cannock Chase Hospital.

We set off for a 7.30 a.m. appointment to have an injection into her hip – part of an elimination process to work out why she was experiencing such excruciating pain and inability to walk or move around. The extreme pain and mobility issues had gradually worsened to the point where even 'big guns' pain relievers had little or no effect.

The hospital is twelve miles from our house, about a 25-minute drive in the car. It actually took us one hour 38 minutes as we had to divert to avoid an enormous queue outside

Featherstone (we later discovered this was caused by an incident on the M6). Despite the 'state of art' suspension in our car, Jo winced and gasped at every blemish in the road surface. She just couldn't manoeuvre herself into a comfortable position and was in severe pain for the whole journey. Very anxious and distressed, we arrived late and managed to park right outside the hospital. However, Jo was unable to get out of the car as it was far too painful for her to try and move. After about fifteen minutes she just had to attempt to go, despite the excruciating pain and, after a great effort, we managed to get her into a wheelchair. When we checked in, staff told us being late didn't matter because, due to the type of procedure that Jo would be having, she was actually last on the surgeon's list and would probably be seen around 12 o'clock. Very soon, a Sister in dark blue uniform called us from the reception and I wheeled Jo into a consulting room for a pre-surgical appraisal. Let's call this Sister 'Sally'!

"It was while she was checking Jo's health background that she gradually shifted roles from Ward Sister to Guardian Angel!"

As soon as she saw Jo's pain, 'Sally' arranged we stay in the room (as Jo was last on the list, the room was now free). Other staff were also called to help her into bed. She happened to notice there were 27 separate medications on her list of repeat prescriptions and a whole catalogue of existing and previous medical conditions – including Type 1 diabetes, heart attacks, DVT's sepsis and cancer. Later, she explained that severe pain often shows in the face.

While we waited in that room, 'Sally' cared with great compassion for Jo's condition and comfort levels. She found ingenious ways to carry out the necessary pre-operative checks without causing excessive pain or suffering. Whilst this was taking place, I waited in the male family room. Suddenly 'Sally' beckoned to me and I



followed her into the hallway. There, walking along the hall, without sticks, frames or other support was Jo, shadowed by 'Sally', arms outstretched, and ready to catch her if she lost her balance or fell!

The procedure had instantly and completely eradicated her pain and Jo was walking unaided!

It was obvious that 'Sally' was elated and excited as we were. After months of incredible pain and immobility Jo was walking almost normally – and with no pain! Naturally, all three of us were in tears and 'Sally' reckoned the procedure had wiped at least ten years of Jo's face!

The discharge papers were prepared and explained and the physios bought two walking frames for us to take home. 'Sally' walked us to the exit and explained future actions on the way, wishing us well with the final solution to Jo's medical issue.

That Wednesday 'Sally' swooped in and rescued Jo from extreme pain and suffering, shared our joy and emotion at the success of the procedure – then just melted away back to her other patients and duties!

So who do we think sent her to us on that day? Were we at a private hospital paying directly for our care? No! O.K., then are we celebrities that, due to our status, we might receive special treatment? No! We are just Andrew and Jo from Wolverhampton – just standard NHS patients. Was 'Sally' sent by the Hospital Manager or perhaps Jeremy Hunt – well officially 'yes' one or both of those. No, it was actually the Ward Sister who hadn't had a pay rise in three years. The person who turned up to see us was actually our own *Guardian Angel* but where did she come from and who sent her?

Andrew Clothier

Editorial note:

Have any of our readers had similar experiences of their own 'guardian angels' - not necessarily over a health problem? Why not let us know to tell others about your experiences. We're sure they'll be pleased to hear! Have a word with any of our editorial team to discuss the idea, especially if you would need any help in putting together a few words.

AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

MY POEM

WHY THE LONG STARE?
IS IT A REALITY CHECK FOR YOU
TO TELL ME
AGAIN
THAT I CLASH WITH YOU

DO YOU HUMILIATE ME,
FOR THE PRIDE AND PLEASURE
OF YOUR OWN
POPULARITY
DO YOU GAIN ANOTHER LAUGH

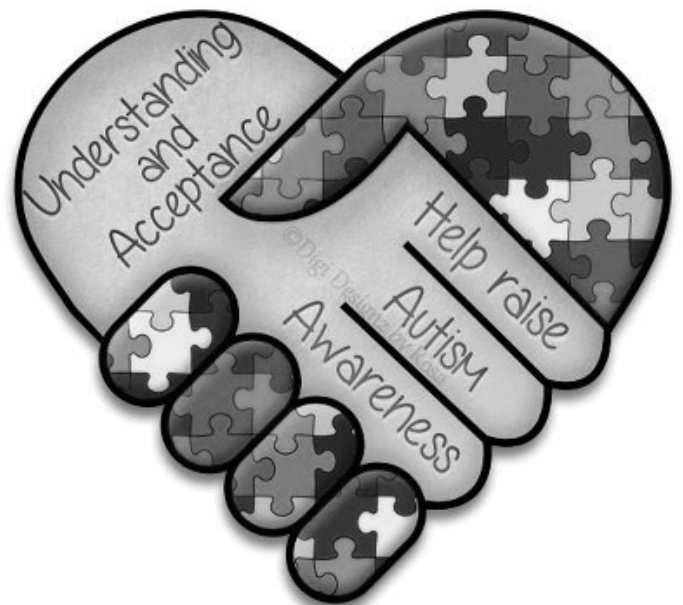
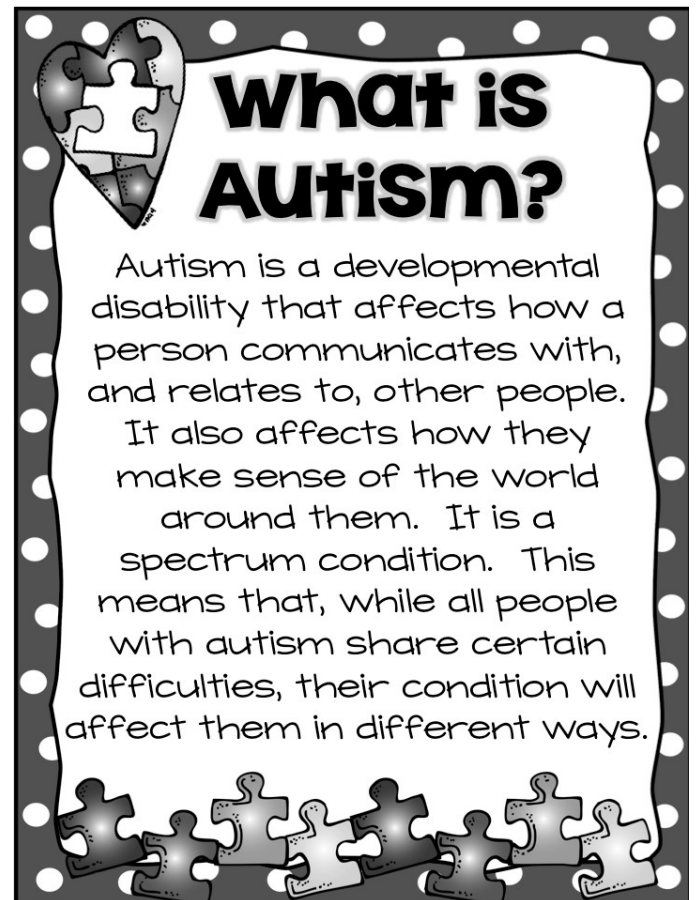
WHEN I OUTRAGE,
I SEE YOU GOSSIP
OUT OF THE LEFT HALF CLOSED CORNER
OF MY HOWLING BLOODSHOT EYE
YOU STILL SMIRK

WHEN YOU GO OUT
AND ANXIETY ATTACKS ME
I SHAKE CONSTANTLY, WORRYING
WHILE YOU SHARE IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

YOU JUST DON'T GET 'THAT I WON'T CHANGE'
--

TO BE LIKE YOU.

Written by Elspeth Davies, 14 years, who has a younger brother who is on the Autism spectrum. He has suffered from bullying at school.



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