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# PARISH NEWS

St Michael, St Albans with St Mary, Childwick Green



November 2020

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# CONTENTS

4	Letter from the Vicarage Shed
8	The Parish News Speaks
9	Harvest Festival 2020
12	Living Advent Calendars
15	A Sermon from The Archdeacon
20	Farewell from the Parish News
22	Poem of the Month 'Pumpkin Soup'

*Cover photo: The altar at Harvest, with some of the food donations from the parish.*

# LETTER FROM THE VICARAGE SHED

Dear friends,

My letters this year have been looking at pieces of woodwork in St Michael's and St Mary's. We began with one door, the medieval portal in St Michael's porch. And we close with another - but this is a door you are unlikely ever to have seen. It an internal door in the Vicarage outhouses. I guess it was made in the nineteenth century to separate what was then the stable from the tack room. Nowadays it is nailed shut, effectively part of the ramshackle wall between my wood store and potting shed. Indeed, this door is so obscure that I had not noticed it was a door until doing some cleaning in the outhouse a few weeks ago.

Underneath the side peppered with nails and covered in the Vicar's garden tools are a series of rough incisions and pencil scribbings from the mid twentieth century. Much is now illegible or indecipherable but what can be made out is worthy of reflection. I can discern sums in old money, and what looks like an unpleasantly large head-count of rats from 1944 and 1945. One graffito announces the arrival of Molly on 10 September 1957: is this a birth, a move, a new job? Elsewhere a writer sends 'good luck' to 'BQ'. And then there is a string of adolescent pronouncements about the love interests of Bill Fillery, Jane, Sally, Jennifer, 'TG', and so on. Tina and Frances claim a mutual interest in an optimistically long list of initials. Someone even pointedly wrote a notice to ask others not to write on the door - to which a second person has predictably replied 'who do you think you are?' Maybe these scribblers served as stable hands to my equestrian predecessor Mr Harpur, or maybe they worked in the garden during the time of Mr Downward.

Looking at these etchings gets me wondering what has happened to these people since? They were young when the lines were written - which means that they are now old. Was BQ successful in his unknown endeavour? Did



Tina or Frances get lucky with any of their targets? And all this leads me to ponder about the markings we leave behind. I'm not talking here about graffiti around the Vicarage -thank goodness - but about the impact of our actions throughout our lives. What mark do we leave on the world and the lives of others? November is that time of year when we ask such questions by looking back: back to the saints whose examples illuminate our Christian path – including our own loved ones who

have died (1 November); back to the dead of past conflicts (11 November); back on the extraordinary year that is passing as we hurtle towards the fresh hope of Advent Sunday (29 November). What 'markings' do we leave behind?

The world is very different from the days when stable hands jotted their hopes and dreams in parsonage outhouses. Communication has changed beyond all recognition. Social media have replaced the need for Bill Fillery to etch his undying love inside my shed. The exceptional events of 2020 have only accelerated this process. As a parish we have shifted, at least for now, from a monthly to a weekly email. Our website is seeing more activity than ever. We have developed a Youtube channel and a Facebook page. And we are listed on a number of other websites – Trip Advisor, National Churches Trust, Enjoy St Albans, A Church Near You, etc.





Given all this activity, I am not entirely surprised that, at the time of writing, nobody has come forward to offer to continue the parish magazine by becoming its editor. Any magazine such as this is dependent on its readership for both copy and leadership, and where one or both are unforthcoming, a self-determined ending has arrived. As announced several months ago, in the absence of an editor, the November edition of the *Parish News* will be its last. This ending is something to lament: I know how much the magazine is appreciated by some. We will temporarily maintain the small surplus currently designated in the PCC's Magazine Fund as seedcorn should anyone step forward as editor. If not, the PCC will reallocate these funds to active areas of mission, probably by the end of the next financial year.

The conclusion of the magazine does not necessarily mean that its functions have ceased. Rather they have suffered a sea change. You and I, and our fellow parishioners now largely stay in touch by different means. For example, the sort of short reflective pieces which are the staple of this publication can now be shared with a worldwide audience through our [Facebook](#). I encourage you to visit this page and add to it.

I must finish with a heartfelt thankyou to all those whose hard work has sustained this excellent publication over recent years: the editorial committee, including Sandie North, Kerry Wells, John Mole, Kyna Mason, Sue Dyson, Lynn Ashmore and Peter Limebear. They have been a great team - a blessing to one another, the mission of the Church, and to each and every one of their readers.

So with thanks for the markings left behind, and with prayers that we all make best use of the new doors which are opening onto the future,

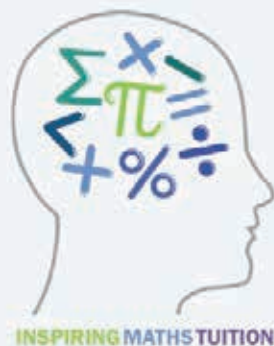
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# THE PARISH NEWS SPEAKS

Hello hello, this is your Parish News speaking as I thought the time had come to talk to you about my life.

As far as I can remember I was conceived in the leaves of some religious tract, sandwiched between monthly services sheets. There I might be still but for the actions of a lady called Ruth Pickles whom some of you may remember.

Ruth had a great love for St Michael's in all respects. She was always involved in church and village life and she saw in me the opportunity to make the Parish Magazine, which I became in 1950, I believe. She educated me to be able to print reports on all manner of Parish happenings, resulting in my circulating to many who were not church attendees. I was something she achieved single-handed despite bringing up five children and being the one official vicarage gardener at the same time! She was my first editor.

There have been many editors following her, each imparting their own personalities on me so that I have been allowed to print articles on diverse subjects, as well as incorporating entirely parochial and religious matters. I have enjoyed being held and read.

I have been circulated far afield including, I am told, to the Bishop who described me as a 'good read'!

Over the past few years I have felt rejuvenated and I had continued to hope to have a life in the future with yet another editor looking after me together with the team. Maybe one year, in the future.

*The Parish News*

*[and Peter Limebear]*



# HARVEST FESTIVAL 2020

Of course there had to be changes, but with considerable ingenuity we celebrated Harvest Festival on 11 October with traditional enthusiasm and delight. The task of decorating the church was spread over three days instead of one to avoid crowds, but it resulted in a beautiful array of floral, greenery and home grown fruit and vegetable arrangements in all parts of the church; some were purely decorative, others showing a creative theme and many incorporating items of non-perishable produce to donate to FEED.



On arrival for the 9.30 service we were greeted by the (recorded) sound of the bells. Inside the church we were limited in numbers to achieve distancing, but we were joined via video link to others gathered in the school hall. Boxes of donations to FEED were placed around the font as they could not be taken up to the altar and handed over to the clergy as would normally have been done.

Lovely live music was performed in the Chancel by Colin and a small junior choir, while the main digital choir provided a recorded rendering of a well-known harvest hymn. There could be no collecting buckets for the Bishop's harvest appeal for bee-keepers in Nepal; I hope that many of us were able to contribute on-line, but I doubt that individual parish figures can be identified.

Many thanks to all who contributed to decoration and cleaning of the church, donated much needed food and toiletries to FEED, leading the

worship in whatever way, making the live video link to the school and recording for the YouTube transmission to people unable to attend in person.

We have much for which to be thankful. Let us also reflect on how we can contribute to sustainability of food production, fairness of distribution, elimination of waste and protection of the environment.

*Anthony Taylor*







# LIVING ADVENT CALENDARS

With Advent and Christmas set to be a rather more distant affair than we have been used to (I have an unholy fear of Christmas with no Carols; can you imagine such a thing?!), I'm reminded of an Advent phenomenon that rather suits our new socially-distanced circumstances. In recent years several of the streets in St Albans, and one or two in our Parish, have organised their own Living Advent calendars.

'What on earth is a living advent calendar?' I hear you ask. A Living Advent Calendar is where a particular street or area get together to celebrate Advent by decorating the windows of their homes to celebrate the days of Advent. The street in which I live has done this over the last 3 or 4 years and the mechanics of the event work like this: a neighbour who enjoys the responsibility posts through the door (and posts on the street Facebook group) a leaflet looking for 25 houses to volunteer to be allocated a day in Advent.





When you have been assigned a date, 1 through 25, you must then prepare a seasonal window dressing, including the advent number, which you unveil on the allocated day.

Day by day the street is filled with colourful decorations and lights, all the way to Christmas. My children love the routine of checking the street early each evening to see which house has unveiled its display that night. In addition, we also arrange (on an evening toward the end of Advent), a street get-together on a green outside our homes. Our neighbours bring mulled wine and mince pies outside, and we enjoy the lights and season together. This element probably won't meet the Rule of Six criteria this year, so we'll have to jettison our party on this occasion sadly. Hoo hum.

Someone arranges a quiz for the children that sends them up and down the street looking for answers to questions such as:

Which number window includes the picture of a manger?

Or

How many candles can you count in window number 21?

It has become a highlight of the season for my family and has significantly enriched our experience of both our neighbourhood and our neighbours. In recent years we've invited family and friends to join us from elsewhere in St Albans and further afield. I suspect this year it will take on an additional importance when we are unable to do the up-close, indoor events we would usually enjoy during Advent. An outdoor scenario, that allows us to be distant and mask-wearing while we still enjoy each other's company will be the perfect chance to celebrate the season.

Advent begins on the 29th of November so if you're wondering how you're going to celebrate this year without our usual diary of exciting events, maybe you can start a new tradition on your street.

*Kerry Wells*

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# A SERMON FROM THE ARCHDEACON

Sunday, 20 September 2020. St Michael, St Albans

This morning we have gathered together for two reasons. Firstly, to share worship, rejoicing and giving thanks for the gift of being together. Secondly to commission Kenneth as Rural Dean.

Firstly, the gift of being together - something which was missed so much by so many during the spring of this year. And I know that it is still not normal- sitting apart; spread over 2 buildings; not being able to join in with the singing; wearing masks; with some people still not being able to be here or not feeling safe enough to join us physically. And what has been enabled in terms of worshipping physically together again, has only been achieved by an incredibly hard amount of work by Kenneth, Charles, your churchwardens and many others to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude. So my deep thanks to all who have been, and are, enabling us to worship, being physically present with one another again. What a gift it has been after our time in exile when church buildings were closed.



As well as worshipping and celebrating with you this morning, I'm also here to commission Kenneth as Rural Dean of St Albans. Kenneth has actually been doing this ministry for several months already, taking the role on in the middle of lockdown, but it is only being possible now to formally come and commission him for this role. Firstly, this is a little later than we would normally seek to commission someone, and secondly it is unusual for it to take place within a normal service on Sunday morning worship in the Rural Dean's own church. The commissioning of a Rural Dean is usually in a special service when the churches

from across the Deanery are invited to join in, or it is combined with the Deanery Synod. At the moment both of these scenarios are hard or not wise to organise, hence why I'm here this morning.

The role of Rural Dean is usually held by one of the more experienced parish clergy in the Deanery and the appointment is made following consultation with the clergy and the lay chair of the Deanery. This means that the Rural Dean is called out from amongst the Deanery, and will be someone who holds the respect of those who they serve among. Well, Kenneth is definitely an experienced priest and certainly holds the respect of those he serves alongside, and so was an obvious choice for the role

### **And so, what is the role?**

Well, essentially it is a role of care and leadership in which the Rural Dean supports and stands alongside the other parishes and clergy within the Deanery. It is a ministry of standing alongside.

I was struck by the reading from Philippians this morning, particularly verse 27.

'Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you are standing firm in one Spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the Gospel.'

'Striving side by side.'

As a church, as a body of Christians, this is what we are seeking to do - to strive side by side for the sake of the gospel, to strive side by side in our journeys of faith, to strive side by side in our ministry and vocation - whatever that ministry and vocation looks like.

St Paul encourages the Christians in Philippi to strive side by side - not individually pushing ahead, nor individually lagging behind - but together to work for the building of God's Kingdom - together to stand up to all that the world could throw at them.

And that encouragement was not just for those first Christian communities but it is for Christian communities all over the world today – it is for the Christian communities within our diocese, for the Christian communities within this Deanery, it is for the Christian community here.

In a season when we, physically, are discouraged from being side by side – in a time when we are told to keep our physical distance from one another – this encouragement to be spiritually side by side is even more important and more crucial for our lives together.

This message in our first reading today is for all of us, but I also offer it to you, Kenneth, as you exercise the ministry of Rural Dean in this Deanery. It is a ministry of standing alongside – of striving side by side – not only with your church family here, but also with the church families across the Deanery – to strive side by side in the highs and the lows, in the joys and the challenges. It is also a ministry in which you are to encourage others to strive side by side – to encourage clergy and readers to strive for the gospel side by side – to encourage representatives of the churches on the Deanery Synod to strive side by side. For the church in this place and across St Albans will be so much stronger when we strive for God's Kingdom side by side.

So our first reading this morning encourages us all to stand firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, here and with our brothers and sisters across the churches of this Deanery.

### **But then we turned to our gospel reading.**

Jesus, as he often did, used a story to try and describe what, for some, would have been an uncomfortable truth, and for others would have been a story which brought great comfort.

Jesus told a story about a landowner who owned a vineyard. He said that the landowner went out early in the morning to the marketplace to hire labourers. He did the same at 9:00 a.m., at noon, at 3:00 p.m. and at 5:00 p.m. At the end

of the day the workers came to get their pay. In the end they were all paid the same. Those who worked from early morning were not happy that they were given the same as those who'd only worked the last hour of the day. When they complained the landowner pointed out that he'd kept his word and all had received what they were promised. Jesus concluded his story with the now famous saying, 'the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

This was an uncomfortable message for those who thought they were the best, the most religious, the most important, to hear. They would be no more rewarded than those who they look down on - the outcasts, the unclean, the gentiles, the very young and the very old.

But what an amazing message for those people who spent their lives being looked down on to hear! There was still a chance for them - they were still worthy enough to receive from God. In fact, Jesus was saying that not only were they worthy of receiving from God, but in fact they would be the first in line!

This parable is a sobering reminder for us all - a reminder that no one can claim to be greater in the eyes of God than someone else - no one will be able to claim a greater reward - because God's love is deeply unfair, because it's unconditional and generous to all whether we have been Christians all our life or just exploring now, whether we have led a reasonably good life or whether we have gone completely off the rails, whether we are ordained or laity, whether we are a Curate, Rural Dean, or an Archdeacon!

### **We are all loved by God.**

And to anyone who is tempted to think they are better than anyone else, any more important in the church or to God, than anyone else, Jesus gives a stark warning - the last will be first, and the first will be last!

And that is why St Paul's encouragement to strive side by side for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of God's Kingdom, is so important. None of us are better in God's eyes than anyone else.

So Kenneth, I'm absolutely delighted to be commissioning you today as Rural Dean - it is a ministry to which you have been called and to which you have been obedient in responding to that call. I encourage you to be a supporter and a pastor, and to be a good companion to all who travel alongside not only here, but now in the wider Deanery as well. Strive, side by side, with all who are now given into your care, to continue to build God's Kingdom here on earth.

And for all of us today - hear the power of Jesus' words - his reassurance of how much each of us is valued by God - even, and particularly, if we feel we don't deserve it. And let us recommit ourselves to continue, or to find new ways, of striving side by side, so that we all can stand firm in one Spirit, finding life in all its fullness and all of its rewards

*The Venerable Dr Jane Mainwaring*  
*Archdeacon of St Albans*

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# FAREWELL FROM THE PARISH NEWS

This month marks the final edition of the St Michael's with St Mary's Parish News. I would like to thank all the people who have served on the Editorial Committee; not just over the 11 years I have been variously editing or co-editing the magazine but everyone who has served its pages in the nearly 70 years it has been recording the comings and goings of our church and around our village. I will miss your company (particularly our Christmas Parties!).

A very special thank you must also go to all those people who have contributed articles, opinions and seasonal coverage to the magazine; both when pursued by one of us over email, or accosted on their way into church with a quick 'would you mind..'; or indeed when unbidden (but very welcome). As a community publication we have always relied on contributions from our readers, so thank you to all those who have helped in this way, rather than imagining that content will always come from others.

We are lucky in our Parish to have a wealth of other platforms through which to access church and community information. If you are not yet on the mailing list for emails from the Parish office, then please send in your contact details so you can be included in the weekly church emails about events and pastoral support. Great efforts have been made to make our churches Covid-safe and so, for those who have now come back to church, the pew sheets are a great and timely source of information about the Parish's diary. I would also point people to the [Parish website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

We think particularly of those for whom these platforms are unfamiliar or inaccessible, and although their number are very few they are an important part of our Church community and if you know of anyone who can't access Parish news in these newer ways, please consider printing the weekly



correspondence perhaps and popping them through doors. All the better to check up on each other and have a chat at the same time.

Finally thank you to Kenneth and all our clergy at St Michael's and St Mary's for their unwavering support of the magazine over the years. It has meant the world to know that they have valued its place in Parish life as much as we have. Happy travels to you all.

*Kerry Wells*



# POEM OF THE MONTH

## ‘PUMPKIN SOUP’

One pumpkin of about  
the girth of a human head  
will feed eight people.  
Use left-over lanterns;  
the eyeholes and serrated mouth  
or small remains of candle soot  
won't matter in the end.

Heat your oven up to gas mark 6.  
prick the hide with a fork  
half a dozen times or so.  
then brush with oil  
to stop it shrivelling.

Three quarters of an hour  
of roasting ought to be enough  
to render its peach-coloured flesh  
so tender you can scoop it  
from the scorched cask  
of its rigid skin.

Served in broad bowls,  
in deepest winter, with buttered  
doorsteps of wholemeal bread,  
you might almost forget  
what pumpkins look like.

**Greg Smith** is a retired Technical Author and lives in Harpenden.  
He completed the MA in Writing Poetry at the Poetry School in 2018.  
He is an active member of the Ver Poets committee and is the treasurer  
and membership secretary.

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