

## PETER'S ISOLATION FACEBOOK DIARY WEDNESDAY 1 TO SATURDAY 11 APRIL 2020

### Wednesday 1 April

Not really in the mood for April Fools, but one has to try and keep smiling. Well done @lindisfarnemead for their one about the new refuge beside the road to the island. I did a dissertation on Lindisfarne last year. For those who don't know, it is a tidal island, and drivers regularly get caught out when they think they can drive faster than the North Sea. The refuge box (which you can see in the opening sequences of Vera) has apparently been replaced with a luxury pod, complete with showers and a hot tub.

Many years ago - mid 70s I would think - dad (Dr Jeffrey Barham) wrote one for the Cambridge Evening News. It was when ley lines were all the rage, and the places where they crossed were focal points of spiritual energy. Dad had a photo of himself on his bike with his ley line detector (a broomstick with a bucket on each end, if my memory is correct), a map of Cambridge showing the lines, and they intersected at the Public Conveniences. Perhaps one of my research friends can find me the article.

I could write about the fools in charge. The fools who have closed most of the public conveniences. The fools who say "isn't it great that air pollution has dropped" and yet we'll go straight back to our cars and planes when all this is over. The fool who didn't get his lawn mower mended last autumn, and now can't cut his grass.

Or I can give you the uplifting description of Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs  
"Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."  
I have often pointed out that Wisdom is female.

I don't have a picture of the Lindisfarne refuge, but here's the church and castle.



Thursday 2 April

I hate databases. I had the brilliant idea of getting one list together so we can post Easter Cards to our church contacts. Thanks to last year's Stewardship campaigns and the work we did on GDPR (grrrr), we have some pretty good databases - but I seem to have spent the last two days surrounded by paper lists, Excel sheets, and making phone calls that say "can I have your new address please?" My fear is that I send a card to someone I buried - so we try and get things right. The wonderful [Caroline Audley](#) has the job of printing the labels and sticking them on envelopes. I've also bulk-purchased stamps from the Royal Mail - I was tempted to stick a few first day covers on the Order and hope the church treasurer didn't notice (he would). It is at times like this that "none can hear the postman's knock without a quickening of the heart, for who can bear to think himself forgot?" (Name that poem). Thank God for our postmen and women.

The list is fascinating. People I see week in, week out. Churchwardens, PCC members, friends. Some I haven't seen since I married them or baptised their babies - and it's always lovely to hear from them/you. My day was brightened yesterday with a photo of young Dylan, who should be being baptised next month. Others are people I cannot put a face to, but they know who I am, they know they are part of the church, that we are all surrounded by God's love.

Someone tweeted a lovely quote yesterday:

'I seek to make the Christian religion an inn where all are received joyously rather than a cottage where some few friends of the family are to be received.' (Richard Hooker in 'Turned by Divine Love' by Bishop John Stroyan).

Amen to that.

I don't have many photos of Inns, so I'll stick to the postal theme. Here is a photo of a lady posting a letter on a Leeds tram (courtesy David Voice). I have a talk on "Mail by Rail" which I am happy to come and give (when all this is over), and I hope there will be time to view the exhibition at [Crich Tramway Museum](#) later in the summer on the same subject (I helped them research it)



Friday 3 April

Today is a bitter-sweet day because it would have been our Theo's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was born at the Rosie Maternity Hospital in Cambridge, after Julie had gone in to West Suffolk Hospital for a check-up. One blue-light ambulance ride, a trip to theatre, and a huge amount of the wonderful NHS over the next couple of months before we got him home. His first social engagement was a drinkies party at the Deanery. A few weeks later we moved to Northumberland, and the care of the NHS continued there. As I type this I am remembering a wonderful group of people from health and social care who were with us all the way through his short life - he died a few months short of his second birthday.

Here we are in another time of crisis, and once again the NHS and carers are the people we need. I will applaud them, but I also want them (and the services they provide) properly funded. Good health care is expensive, and it should not just be for those who can afford it. Julie and I could never afford to pay even a small percentage of what our family must have cost in medical care over the years - and no one would ever insure us. It is one of the things that we pay our taxes for. In this current crisis I want the people caring for us to be properly protected, properly resourced and treated properly.

Even before this crisis I was afraid for families like us who need a lot of help. I doubt that all the services which were there for us a decade ago, still exist after a decade of austerity. The current crisis will only make things worse. An ITV report last week <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-28/hospices-issue-dire-warning-of-closures-as-coronavirus-sparks-cutbacks-in-end-of-life-care/> says that the average children's hospice gets 17% of its funding from the government, the rest has to be raised solely through fundraising - and that income has collapsed. Hospices are closing, care is being removed, children like Theo are suffering.

We have more than a virus to fight, we have evil and inequality to fight. We will fight, because people fought for us and fought for Theo. There were times in the two years of Theo's life that were pretty dreadful, but there was also a lot of laughter and a lot of love. We were a pretty amazing family (he says modestly). Theo had four wonderful Godparents and a lot of superb friends, we had the very best of church communities, we were surrounded by people who cared, and there are many great memories that we will treasure for the rest of our lives. I took him on a couple of steam trains, and he loved his 'Thomas the Tank Engine.' He would make a mess with messy play and was always surrounded with toys. He would sit in his pushchair fascinated by falling leaves or listening to the organ play. He was passed around his many friends and loved his cuddles.

Life is a gift, and I will always celebrate Theo's life.





### Saturday 4 April

I am staggered by the response to yesterday's post - thank you for the outpouring of love (if that doesn't sound too clichéd). We got through the day with no work (apart from one conversation with an undertaker), and watched the Hist Fest lockdown in the afternoon - [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx28fwN\\_TeDYfklgshl4m1g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx28fwN_TeDYfklgshl4m1g). We could pretend we were at a Literary/History Festival, which is something we always enjoy.

We were going to be on holiday this weekend - despite the fact that tomorrow is Palm Sunday. [Selwyn College Cambridge](#) had invited us back for our 40th anniversary of Matriculation (when we started as undergraduates) in 1980.

We last went back and stayed overnight 25 years ago (we think). Although we got married from College, they gave me a room on H staircase and Julie a room on M. We cuddled up together. We decided that Selwyn single beds were not as much fun as they had been 15 years earlier, and that one of us had put on weight.

I went and preached in College Chapel when I was at Bury St Edmund's. The most scary congregation I have ever had. The Reverend Professor Owen Chadwick (former Master and a great church historian) and The Reverend Canon Dr John Sweet (New Testament scholar) sitting listening to me?!? It didn't seem right - but they were both charming (as they always were).



Do have a look at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/.../cambridge-selwyn-college/> for some photos, and find the choir on youtube. Well worth listening to.

As I'm not away this weekend, I'll spend some time updating the church website with resources for tomorrow and for Holy Week - <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/worship-while-our-buildin...>

Keep in touch!



### Palm Sunday 5 April

I love Palm Sunday. When I was first a Vicar, a local family had two donkeys. We would walk together from Gedding to Felsham [Cockfield Benefice](#) along a Suffolk country lane. I remember the donkeys liked polo mints and joined in with the singing. At [St Edmundsbury Cathedral](#) we left the singing to the choir. I do remember the year when the donkey came into church and ended up not too far from me. That was the year the Edmund roses bloomed well - which Verger was it who was ready with the mop and bucket? [Amy said it was her]

In the north [St Mary's Church Ponteland](#) Jazz the donkey would lead us from [Richard Coates CE School](#) to St Mary's. (The picture below (2011) comes from the church website - [Tina Kelly](#), good piece of archiving!). There was one year when it was so cold that Jazz refused to leave his nice warm stable, and we were led by a guide dog puppy being trained by Clive and Alison. It was always fun. We would sing "We have a king who rides a donkey" to the tune of "What shall we do with the drunken sailor", and stand outside church saying Psalm 122 "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the House of the Lord".

Inside the church, while we were processing, [Julie Barham](#) would read the Passion Narrative, the story of the last week of Jesus' life, his journey to the cross. Those of us who had walked would come into church (without Jazz the donkey) when she finished and we'd have Communion together.

In Derby, walking from one church to the other is easy, but I'm not going to risk a donkey and procession of people round across Palm Court island (how appropriate!) - so we have simply used the Passion narrative, read by a group of people - and that has become part of our Holy Week tradition.

St David's Cathedral in Wales have made a video of their congregation reading the Passion Narrative

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S2GpHGR0AM>

I will now go and sit in the sun and watch it.

I often commented that our procession was very different to the first. We were joining in with friends, we had nothing to fear (except a donkey relieving himself), and we knew the story ended happily. This year, I can't do the first (well not in the same way), I am afraid, and it's harder than usual to know that it all ends happily.



### Monday, 6 April

On the Monday of Holy Week four years ago, I had a day off. I knew I was shortly to leave the North East, and one job to do before I left was to walk Hadrian's Wall. I decided to start at the west and walk east - so I was on the 0728 bus from Hexham to Carlisle, and then the 0910 to Bowness. I decided I'd explore the parish church before starting to walk, only to find there was a service taking place - how dare religion get in the way!

I walked the first 8½ of the Wall - and you can follow my progress at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/.../hadrians-wall-walk-1-bown.../> I did it slowly, not finishing until the end of May. I really enjoyed it.

I went back to Bowness a week later and had an explore of St Michael's church. It stands in the centre of the Roman fort, so it may be on a pre-Christian site. The guidebook used the lovely phrase to describe the village: "poor, marshy, surrounded by water and mosses, and with long memories stretching back to Roman stones themselves."

The current crisis is challenging our country's heritage - I regularly get emails from historic sites and steam railways frightened that they are not going to survive. Closure has come at the start of the tourist season when financial reserves are at the lowest. The last few decades have seen pressure from some in the Church of England to reduce our stock of buildings - and I

have no doubt that the current emphasis on “do church differently” has an underlying message of closure from those who see no need for history, heritage, and our story of faith.

When I visited in 2016, Bowness Primary School had made some Easter stations. They had made an amphora of wine, goblets and bread to represent the Last Supper. The children have been to Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, so brought their Roman knowledge in. Another station are 30 pieces of silver. Class 4 had looked at real Roman silver coins from around AD 33 and copied the profile of Tiberius Caesar onto thin card. “When stuck to the thick circles of card and wrapped in foil the impression of the head can be seen as if it was part of the coin. Every child in Class 4 made a coin and then we arranged them so they spilled out of the over sized purse.” It was a real inspiration. Worth having a look at <https://www.eastsolwaychurches.org/history--learning-overvi...> to see how a church can do history well.

If this year members of our church family are making Easter craft, drawing Easter pictures, journeying through Holy Week in a different way, can you record it please? Take photos, keep the craft work, record your reflections. Next year we will journey through Holy Week in churches that are open, and we will remember this difficult year.



## Tuesday, 7 April

Just a short post this morning, and not a particularly cheerful one.

I had to set the alarm as I had to be at the Crematorium first thing - haven't been up this early for weeks! From the outside, everything seems normal. Man in fluorescent jacket sorting out the floral displays, cleaner making sure the chapels and the loos are spotless, the usual smart, attentive and friendly staff. Then you look at their timetable, and realise just how hard they are working - we do not live in normal times.

My funeral was one where there was no family, a funeral organised by the Council because there is no one else to arrange it. (Another of those jobs Local Government does that we all take for granted). There may only have been three of us in the Chapel, but we gave thanks to God for H's life, commended her to his love and care, and did it with the same level of love and respect as if the Chapel had been packed.

We pray for the living, for those who are ill, for those who are dying. We hold the departed and their loved ones in our prayers. We pray for the carers. Don't forget to pray for those who care when life is over.

A reminder that if you want something to help your Holy Week Journey, I've put some meditations on the poetry of George Herbert at <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/holy-week-2020-george-her...>

(yes, I know I misspelt George)

## Wednesday 8 April

A beautiful morning, so I've been in the garden. I can garden for a bit, catch up on the emails, garden a bit more, answer the phone, garden a bit more, write facebook.

Firstly, let's publicise a good opportunity to sing tomorrow. [Alexander Binns](#) is the Cathedral's Director of Music, and has the pleasure(?) of directing Julie and I in the Derventio choir. Join him, 11 am tomorrow on [Derby Cathedral](#) facebook page. Thanks for organising this.

Secondly, enjoy my tulips. One of my favourite flowers, though I don't seem to have many blooming this year. (Memo to self: plant more). Originally cultivated in Istanbul and across the Persia Empire, they came to the attention of Europeans in the Sixteenth Century. I've read about Tulip mania in Holland, and every Spring I say "I really must go and see the tulip fields."

Apparently, the thirteenth century Persian Poet Musharrifu'd-din Saadi, described a visionary garden paradise with "The murmur of a cool stream / bird song, ripe fruit in plenty / bright multicoloured tulips and fragrant roses..." - yes, he got that right.

The 2017 film "Tulip Fever" was one I was looking forward to - but it was a great disappointment. It was expected to earn \$25 million dollars, and managed about \$8. When I'm worried about church finances, I shall remind myself that losing \$17 million dollars on one film should put my fears into perspective.





### Maundy Thursday, 9 April

Maundy Thursday morning, and Cathedrals host the Chrism Mass, the service for the Renewal of Ordination Vows. For several years I was involved in the organisation of the one in St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Always a bit of a pain - congregation full of clergy who thought they could have done it better! Then, when I went back to parish ministry, I became one of those clerics.

I missed the service the year that Harry was doing his GCSEs. He wasn't much good at German, so we arranged to take him to Germany on Easter Monday. On the Wednesday of Holy Week I got round to finding my passport, and it had expired. The passport office at

Peterborough could issue me a new one on Thursday, so I phoned the Dean and asked if I could miss the big service. He thought it was hilarious his Canon Pastor was so inefficient.

I got to Peterborough, handed over my paperwork and a large amount of money, and was told to come back at 12. What to do in Peterborough on Maundy Thursday morning? I rolled up to their service, and the Dean said "What are you doing here? Wrong Cathedral. Let me guess ... passport." Obviously I wasn't the only gormless cleric in the Church of England.

Today's funeral was for Esther. She was a lovely lady. Last time I saw her I took her communion at home, There is always something special about a home communion, and they are a privilege of my job.

Hexham Abbey in Northumberland has a small Anglo-Saxon chalice. About a thousand years ago, a man like me was using it. When all this is over, I'll be able to go back to that part of my vocation.



### Good Friday, 10 April

In Melbourne church - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/.../melbourne-derbyshire-st-m.../>  
- I came across a painting called 'The Red Cup' by Michael Cook. Yesterday I found it on twitter, and the artist has said I can his image (which is better than mine). Thank you. The servant clearing up after the Last Supper finds the cup that Jesus used.

My great granddad was a baker. Every day was an early start, but on Good Friday he would bake his Hot Cross Buns. They were not made on any other day of the year, just today. I may have purchased mine yesterday, but they are to be eaten today.

Before we had kids, we spent several Good Fridays in the Cambridgeshire Village of Swaffham Prior. The Baptist Chapel had a Walk of Witness around the village in the afternoon, then tea, then an Evening Service. It was a beautiful drive across the Fens, a lovely Spring walk, nice people, and an amazing tea. (Baptists knew how to do good teas, and in those days I hadn't heard of calories). One of their deacons was a baker, and his hot cross buns were to die for - the trouble was you'd eat to excess, and then be expected to preach on the crucifixion.

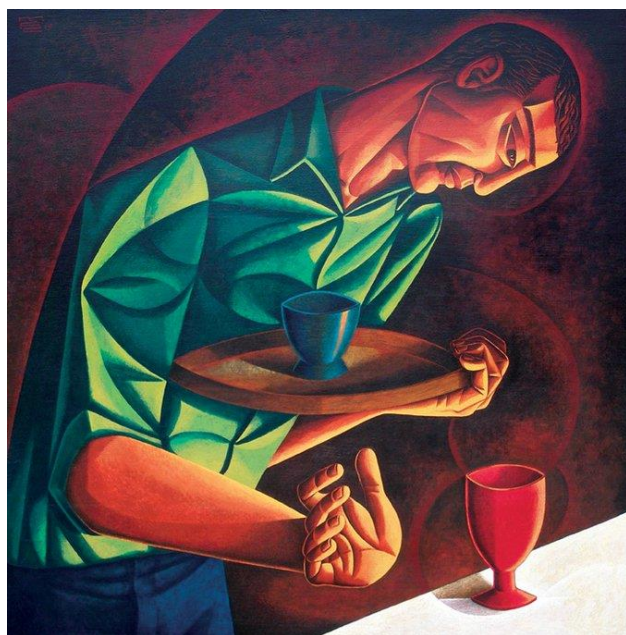


Since I became an Anglican, there has been more religion and less food on Good Friday. In Cathedral days we'd start at 9, then a Walk of Witness, 3 hours at the cross, and a Choral Meditation in the evening. In these parishes, Morning Prayer, Churches Together, afternoon service, evening Choral. (Perhaps I'll go back to food this year!)

Being older, and having been present with death on quite a few occasions, my Good Friday focus has changed. I know what it is like to watch two sons die, and for me the message of Good Friday is that God shares that same suffering. The intellect struggles to make sense of today - I doubt I'd preach the same sermon I preached when young - but the emotions understand it far better.

Too many people have died this last week. I am (physically) separate from people I love. I can't make myself busy leading worship. Today does not feel 'good' - and the pain is not going away any time soon.

All I can do is keep going. When we left the hospital and got home, first we looked after each other, but within a few hours there were people caring for us and that's what got us through. I wonder if the servant who had cleared up after the Last Supper was also the one who said to Mary and the other women "I'll make you something to eat".



### Holy Saturday, 11 April

Holy Saturday, the Feast Day of Flower Arrangers. In a normal year they will have arrived soon after breakfast and the churches will be fully of busy-ness. I believe there may be the occasional spatt ("Mrs Smith always does that windowsill"), but I learned that all a Vicar has to do is appear at some point, do his Young Mr Grace impersonation ("You're all doing very well"), and leave (ideally for a ride on a steam train). When I go over to say Compline in the evening, everything will be ready, ready for Easter Sunday. Thank you.

Yesterday I read in the garden (I also slept - thanks Julie for this photo). My bookmark reminds me of "The Crowning Glory" Flower Festival we had in [St Edmundsbury Cathedral](#) - was it really 17 years ago? It was "The Crowning Glory" because we were celebrating the completion of the Cathedral tower. I managed to put it in the magazine as "The Crowing Glory". That was not deliberate, but I came very close to being found dead with a chrysanthemum through my heart.

To all our lovely flower arrangers who cannot do their annual Easter task today - I wish I could hug you all. To florists and nurseries and garden centres who are seeing their businesses collapse - my heart goes out to you. The trade in flowers is world-wide - the crisis in Europe means people in Africa are out of work. Today is a day of grief and sadness, and little I can do will make a difference.

The easiest Flower Festival I ever organised was at Fornham St Martin when the West Suffolk Fuchsia Club came and filled the church for a weekend. All the church people had to do was make the tea, supply the cake, and be welcoming. In the words of the Meerkat "Simples". I had a christening on the Sunday, and the baby's name was "Daisy". I stood next to the font and tried to persuade the family we could call their child "Fuchsia". I wonder if the power of facebook can find the lass, she must be about 25 - [St Martin's, Fornham St Martin](#)

