

PETER'S ISOLATION FACEBOOK DIARY
FRIDAY 24 APRIL 2020

Friday 24 April

A virtual holiday in Northumberland, and we got to St Aidan's Thockrington yesterday, which is about as remote as churches come. So where to go today? Do I continue the "gravestones of Northumberland" guided tour, or do I go south to the Wall and be Roman again, or do I do a general "I will lift up my eyes to the hills" post - which would be appropriate since I used that Psalm for Nic's funeral this morning?

I have the Ordnance Survey app on my phone, so I spent a happy few minutes walking the hills. I came across to the old railway from Riccarton Junction to Hexham via Bellingham, and followed the track of that line from the Scottish border south.

Back in 1956 British Transport Films shot a film called "Any Man's Kingdom". It was a travelogue, inviting people to come and visit Northumberland by train. The film includes some lovely shots of people travelling by train from Kielder and Deadwater stations down to the Bellingham Show (still a highlight of the agricultural year in that part of the county). They showed the film at a trial screening, and some people in the audience pointed out "we closed that railway last month". They went back to Northumberland, shot some more film of people travelling to the Bellingham Show by bus - and released the film again. You can watch it at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/.../watch-any-mans-kingdom-1956-onl...> - and both versions are available on DVD.

As I travelled the line I remember visiting the church at Bellingham where the roof is built of stone - the Scots kept burning it down when it was wood. The church at Gunnerton has a railway club and a lovely window. In Chollerton I found a Roman altar made into a font, Roman pillars holding up the roof, Jacobean paneling behind the altar, a statue by Eric Gill, and a headstone with a picture of a mill.

So now you can spend the evening reading my blogs - www.northernvicar.co.uk - search for the name of the church. We can survive the closure of a railway, a bunch of marauding Scots, and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. And we can survive this!





Saturday 25 April

If our holiday had happened we would probably now be sat in the pub having taken Harry, Sarah and the Bessie the dog out for breakfast somewhere. (At least lockdown is saving me money!). The car would be groaning on its springs with all the additional books Julie would have purchased while we were away, and we'd be stopping in Yorkshire on the way home to ensure Hannah is behaving herself.

As it is, I've finished the sermon for tomorrow and that's on the website

- <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/worship-while-our-buildin...>

. It's even got pictures this week! I've also listed some of the on-line offerings my colleagues are broadcasting tomorrow, and the religious programmes on the BBC. On the front page of the website - <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/>

- you can find a church Noticesheet and the readings and prayers for tomorrow. The Allestree and Darley Magazines for May have been finished, and you can download them there as well. I need a holiday!

Then the Boss says "have you done your daily facebook rambling yet?"

Today is the Feast of St Mark (picture from the Lindisfarne Gospels). He wrote the first gospel. I don't think he had a wife who said "have you done the next chapter yet?" However, it is the shortest gospel and it ends rather abruptly. Scholars have debated why it ends as it does. My theory is that when she said, "have you finished it yet?", he said "Yes" and that was it.



Sunday 26 April

Do you remember that lovely song from 'White Christmas' "What do you do with a general when he stops being a general?" I feel a bit like that. I haven't stopped being a Vicar, but when you only work one day a week (!), to be told you can't do your job on that one day, is pretty tough. Yes, I know there is far more to my job than leading public worship, yes I know I could be all over facebook broadcasting from my garden, but that's not my skill set, others do it far better than me, and no one in either church has encouraged me to go live. I've written a sermon, and a few have been kind enough to comment on it, but I haven't looked to see if more than a handful of people have downloaded it.

I can lie in bed being depressed, or I can get up and do something. I left Julie and Selwyn asleep. Morning Prayer, then a futurelearn course on Hadrian's Wall. It's a six week course I started several years ago and got no further than the end of week 1. It's still on line, still free, so I have been working my way through it. I'm taking my time, reading widely (I still have access to online journals through Derby Uni) and spending too much on new Wall books (Cogito Books in Hexham will post them to you, please don't use Amazon). I got 26/30 in the test at the end of week 2, so started week 3 feeling upbeat.

In the last hour I have traced the route of the Wall through Newcastle and learned the difference between resistivity, ground penetrating radar and magnetometry. I have looked at the excavations at Birdoswald (that's an English Heritage site with a very nice cafe) and been back to Bremenium with Lucilla and Rufinus. Then we looked at the tombstone of Aurelia Aureliana (RIB 959), erected by her husband Ulpius Apolaris sometime in the early third century AD. It is now in the Great North Museum in Newcastle. I searched a well known blog and there she is - <https://www.northernvicar.co.uk/.../hadrians-wall-exploratio.../>. Interesting that she is carrying a bunch of poppies - I feel a Remembrance Sunday sermon illustration coming on.

I remember visiting the Museum several times when Theo was very ill as it's just down the road from the Royal Victoria Infirmary. Two lovely friends who dragged me there on one occasion are now going through a difficult time as they both need to isolate, so I must give them a ring and assure them they are loved. Further down the blog post, and there's a walk down the Ouseburn - we will be able to get out and walk again, there's a lot of Derbyshire to explore, and it will be our Christian duty to support coffee shops. Also on this post is a picture of me raising the Tyne Millennium Bridge, organised by a friend who now lives abroad, and I will reply to the email his lovely wife sent me a few days ago (she's in their apartment with two lively girls).

Then my mobile rings - it's a lovely lady called Ruth. She's in a care home, life probably coming to an end. I've visited her every few weeks for the last three years, but I can't visit now. Her daughter has been allowed to see her mum today, and one of the things they did together was phone me. Yes, that is a tear in my eye.

The last word needs to go to 'White Christmas'

Phil Davis: How much is "wow"?

Bob Wallace: It's right in between, uh, between "ouch" and "boing".

Keep smiling - and may all your Christmases be white.



Monday 27 April

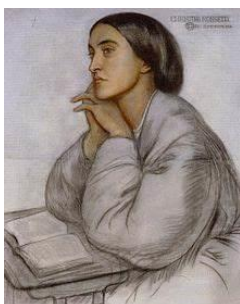
A grey morning, so I'm in the study rather than the garden. Today the Church commemorates Christina Rossetti. According to 'Exciting holiness' "Her elder sister became an Anglican Religious. Christina's own fame rests upon her poetry, which dealt mainly with religious subjects but also the sadness of unrequited or disappointed love." I can't help thinking if I was the elder sister, I might wonder why it is my little sister they remember and not me! (I'm glad to say Maria Francesca Rossetti does have her own Wikipedia page, so you can look her up.)

Christina's most famous poem is "In the bleak midwinter". It's not a carol I can sing in public any more - "what can I give him ... give my heart" is too close to home when your son had a heart transplant just before Christmas (a blubbering Vicar doesn't spread Christmas cheer). The other one that I know is "Remember", again a good poem, but not very cheerful for a grey Monday morning in the time of Covid19.

This is rather more cheerful - the first 8 lines of "Birthday"

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

No fruit on the Vicarage apple tree yet, but the blossom bodes well. We will have an apple picking afternoon when all this is over.



Tuesday 28 April

Twitter tells me that today is the 800th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of Salisbury Cathedral.

Many years ago I went to Salisbury for a conference, and ended up with a free afternoon. The Cathedral was offering a spire tour, so I booked my place, returned at 2 pm, and found I was the only person. It was being led by the Clerk of Works and I said "you don't have to spend the afternoon taking me up if I'm the only one." "You're not getting out of it that easily", he said, "and I've got a few things I need to check while we're up there."

It was a superb afternoon. We didn't stick to the tour route, he showed me wonderful things, and for many years I had a "I climbed Salisbury spire" badge which they sold you at the top. (Once again, I can remember nothing about the conference!).

Julie and I went back in 2014, and you can read the blog -

<http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/20.../19/salisbury-cathedral/>

Thank you Elias of Dereham for such a wonderful Cathedral, He was the Canon in charge of the building project.

I know how much work there is when they are building a Cathedral around you. When we were building the tower at St Edmundsbury I went over one Saturday afternoon to take a wedding. The builders never worked on a Saturday, but that day they were banging and crashing overhead. I went out, in full clerical wear, to remonstrate. There was no one in the site hut, they were all on the roof. I shouted "is there any one up there?" A passing visitor said "well if you don't know Father, who does?" Such fun!

Have a look at the Cathedral's website - <https://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/>
- you can even join in the virtual celebrations. It looks like a very special service.



Wednesday 29 April

Wednesday morning is usually mid week Communion morning. 12-15 people in St Edmund's, half hour service, coffee and biscuits (or cake). A core of regulars, sometimes a visitor or two. Always a pleasure.

When I was a Curate we had a similar service. One couple who came were a retired Major and his wife. Very military, he would tell stories of the days of serving in India, elephant shooting on the Khyber Pass, that sort of thing. He died, and his wife kept coming. She gave the impression that everything was fine - British stiff upper lip and all that.

One day we had no electricity, so we couldn't have coffee afterwards. She said she had power in her house just down the road so I said (in my normal cheeky way) that we were all going back to hers'. One of the other ladies went to help in the kitchen, and found a huge pile of bills and money paperwork on the table. A gentle conversation found that the Major had always done the money, and she hadn't got a clue. More gentle love and care (not from me I hasten to add - I only heard weeks later) and it was sorted.

I'm missing these services - and I've just had an email from a teacher who tells me she understands, she's missing standing in front of a class. If you want to have a smile, have a look at <https://www.facebook.com/walterevansschool> and enjoy their video - the staff of our lovely Church School in all their glory!

Thursday 30 April

Working through the pile of books beside the bed, I came upon this slim volume, "The Parish Church" by E.A. Greening Lamborn. The first edition was 1929, mine is the 1944 reprint. Rather good, with some gorgeous little drawings.

Mr Greening Lamborn has a blue plaque in Oxford. Apparently he "began a career in education as a pupil teacher, rising to be headmaster of St Mary Magdalen Boys' School at Gloucester Green and becoming head of East Oxford Council Boys' School, Collins Street, at the age of 30. He presided there 1909-44, famous as a formidable headmaster and inspirational teacher." In Who Was Who (1940) he gives as one of his recreations "the education of education officials" - he sounds like my dad!

In the preface to the book he writes:

"The most precious inheritance of the English is their poetry and their parish churches. These are our unique possessions, our peculiar treasures; and no Englishman can take a just pride in his race or country who has not learned to appreciate and love them. The parish church is hallowed not merely by its purpose but by its age-old associations. Thirty generations have worked upon its fabric and revealed in their work their needs in this life and their ideas of another; it has been associated not merely with the great crises of their lives, with baptisms, marriages and burials, but with the daily round, the common task, the common amusement; its bells measured out their days and called them to work and rest as well as to prayer."

I was musing how quaint that sounded, how ancient that sounded, how out of step with where our country is in 2020. Then the news is full of the Prime Minister pretending to be Churchill, and how we've got to put the bunting up next week and sing along with Dame Vera.

Perhaps a man from Oxford has something to teach us (and that's not a phrase this Cambridge man thought he would ever write!)

